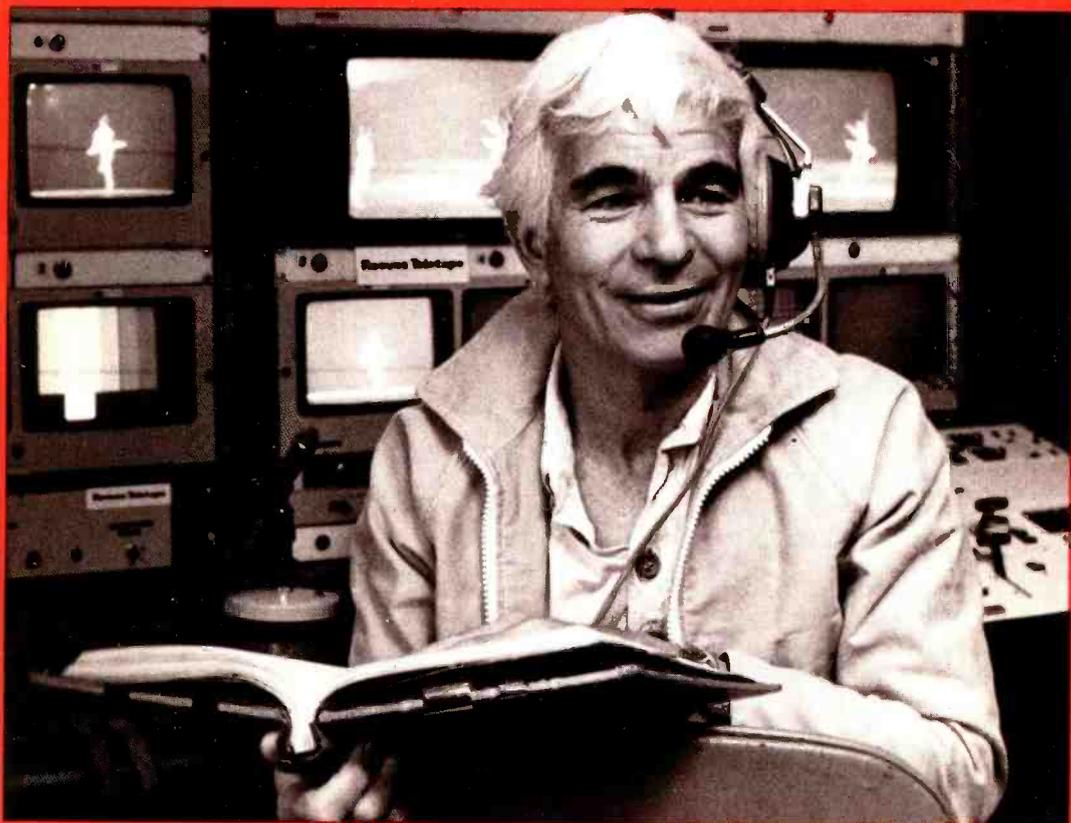


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DIRECTING AT THE MET: Kirk Browning
FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS: Bob Packwood
THE DOCUDRAMA DILEMMA: Douglas Brode
GRENADA AND THE MEDIA: John Chancellor

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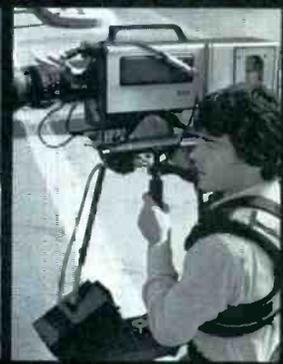
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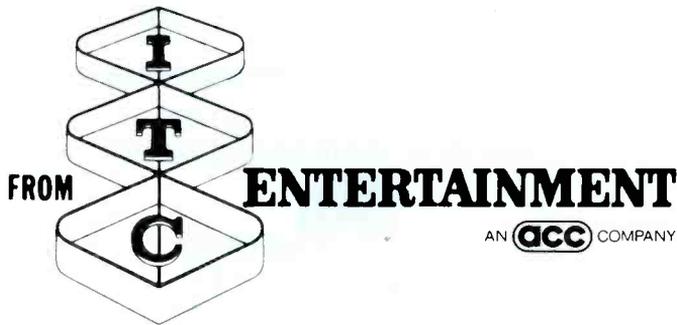
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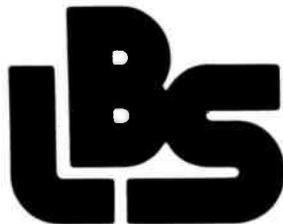
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VIDEO VERITÉ: DEFINING THE DOCUDRAMA

The docudrama is an increasingly popular television format. Does it hype history and distort reality? Is it really an art form?

BY DOUGLAS BRODE

On April 10, 1980, the London *Daily Mail* carried a front page banner reading: "Saudi Arabia threatening to break off diplomatic relations with Britain." To head off a crisis, foreign Secretary Lord Carrington recalled from vacation England's ambassador to that country and sent him to Jeddah to appease King Khaled, while Carrington himself mailed personal messages of apology to the monarch. Despite such precautions, word spread that Saudi Arabia planned to halt oil supplied to Britain and embargo English imports. Within two weeks, Saudi Arabia had recalled all members of its royal family from England, requested the immediate withdrawal of the British ambassador, and banned flying of British Airways Concorde over Saudi territory. Finally, after more than three months of diplomatic negotiations, the two countries announced they had achieved an 'amicable settlement' and were restoring full diplomatic relations.

But an amicable settlement to *what*? One might guess the spark that ignited such an international explosion to be something on the order of a political assassination, an economic upheaval, or a military incident. In fact, it was none of these: it was the broadcast on April 9 of *Death of a Princess*, Anthony Thomas' film for television about the real-life execution several years earlier of a royal Saudi woman, ostensibly as a result of

her love affair with a commoner. The Saudis charged the film falsified the situation, fabricated 'witnesses,' and failed to convey the strict religious framework within which the princess had been tried and executed.

Thomas insisted he had researched thoroughly before shooting a single foot of film, changed the names of Saudi interviewees only to protect the people from governmental retaliation, and ultimately assumed as his interpretation that the princess had been executed not for sexual misconduct, but for her anti-Establishment, Antigone-like flaunting of her crime, purposefully drawing attention to it rather than hiding her actions, after being affected by the Western feminist movement. But the significant point remains that it was the dramatization of an actual incident in documentary-style that produced the outrageously escalating political and economic tensions.

For now, *Death of a Princess* may represent the extreme example of controversy surrounding a television docudrama, but the kind of debate the genre kindles is indigenous to the form. In fact, when *Princess* was exported to the United States for broadcast on PBS, it also caused a lot of flack and fury.

As *Communications Review* noted: "PBS was heavily pressured by private industry and citizen groups. Exxon and Mobil, both partners in an Arabian-American oil company, contacted PBS. The two firms, multi-million dollar contributors to public television, urged that the 'extremely unfortunate' program-

ming decision to broadcast the show be 'reviewed'. Citizen groups, working through the U.S. Courts alternately sought to block or force the showing of the program. . . ." The U.S. State Department also tried to influence PBS not to air the program.

Princess and the other British examples of this form are more correctly referred to as "dramatized-documentary"; the thrust of these English programs is to make a documentary but, since there are certain incidents that obviously cannot receive on-the-spot documentation, the 'documentary film' can only be completed if that scene is dramatized after the fact. On the other hand, in the case of the American cousin (where the hybrid form is popularly known as "docudrama") what we experience is, essentially, a work of drama, though owing both to its content (reality) and technique (video-journalism) the reversal of adjective and noun is necessary.

Besides, if the American counterpart often seems more balanced than the British, it is largely because our commercially produced, ratings-conscious filmmakers and the networks shy away from the strong partisan positions ("progressive realism" is the term critic John Caughey coined to describe the British dramatized-documentaries) that have been the basis of so many British productions. For instance, when *Days of Hope* on the BBC in 1975 portrayed World War I conscientious objectors being tied to posts in no man's land during heavy enemy fire, screen-writer Jim Allen found himself at the center of a furious national controversy.

However, when *The Execution of Private Eddie Slovik* on NBC in 1974 depicted the only American soldier shot for refusing to fight during WWII, the network received no significant negative reaction, although there were many compliments about the high quality of this television movie. American viewers are not more tolerant than the British: in fact, the writers of *Slovik* concluded that

an American audience would not tolerate a film about the execution unless the show was cleverly contrived to spark no controversy, while still leaving the audience with the impression it had seen a film which dared to face a serious issue.

To achieve this end, Eddie Slovik was characterized (by Martin Sheen) as a loser who self-destructively brings about his own death sentence by failing to legally argue for his life with any great passion. The military officers in the case are depicted as weighing Slovik's case with deep concern. At the end, then, we feel none of the anger toward the system which killed Slovik that we do, say, toward virtually the same kind of system when it executes three soldiers at the end of Stanley Kubrick's theatrical film *Paths of Glory* (1957).

Kubrick portrayed his victims as desperate to live, the officers as callous and cynical. The ending of that film angered and upset audiences; in *Slovik*, the character's death comes as a kind of relief. Likewise, *Slovik* continually emphasizes the fact that the execution was the only one of its kind, thereby reducing the case to an aberration within the system rather than as a source for condemnation of a corrupt system, as *Paths of Glory* did.

Jim Allen's *Days of Hope* took an opposite approach to that of *The Execution of Private Slovik*: dramatizing what was, in fact, an aberration of the British military as though it had been a frequent occurrence. Such treatment of conscientious objectors did occur in World War I, but rarely, and the officers in charge were investigated—a fact Allen's film ignores. Ultimately, Allen's way winds up angering half his audience at the military system, the other half at his film.

Whether it's the frequently passionate, often politicalized (slanted?) British dramatized documentary or the more neutral (timid?) American docudrama, on both sides of the Atlantic the *Video Verité* format continues to flourish—each with its own virtues, each with its own limitations, differences largely gener-

ated by the contrasting British and American systems of broadcasting, as well as cultural differences and traditions.

The American boom in docudrama parallels the continuing expansion of news programming on the networks and especially by local stations, starting in the late 1960s when Mort Sahl first quipped that the Vietnam War would soon qualify as the longest running show on television. First Watergate, then the Iran hostage situation added to the impression that we live in fascinating if frightening times: no fictions that programmers might manufacture could match the remarkable truths of our explosively complex world. In the past decade, the surprise success of "reality

The docudrama with its exploitation of pop sociology and instant history and Peeping Tom appeal carries its built-in promotional values.

programming" as diverse as the probing *Sixty Minutes* or as superficial and exploitive as the vacuously voyeuristic *Real People* confirm the public's increasing interest in actuality.

Scanning the front pages of magazines and newspapers for story material, producers of made-for-television films developed a bargain format for grinding out quickie movies: a reality-based film with its immediately recognizable names, events, and themes depends less on stars and is a cheaper, easier, more dependable way of attracting a large audience and ratings than relying on fiction or original screenplays. With its exploitation of pop sociology, instant history, and Peeping Tom appeal, the docudrama carries with it built-in promotional values.

On television, at least, the public appears to prefer dramas rooted in fact. The fantastic seems more at home in the movies, where films like *Star Wars* and

Star Trek—The Movie immediately shot onto the list of all-time box office champs. But TV equivalents to those films, such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers*, just as quickly faded. Movies were the place for far-out mythologizing; television, the realm of reality. The unexpectedly high ratings of such reality-based shows as *Roots*, *Holocaust*, and even *Elvis* (up against *Gone with the Wind*, no less!) convinced many producers the announcement a made-for-TV movie was based on truth would ensure it extra ratings points.

In England, British filmmaker Caryl Doncaster went so far as to claim "The dramatized-story documentary is one of the few art forms pioneered by television."

In fact, the word 'pioneer' is incorrect. After all, the early moviemaking by France's famed Lumiere Brothers consisted of 'actualities': ten to twenty second slices of real life (a train pulling into a station, a mother feeding her baby) captured by the camera at the turn of the century. Even in this basic state, the documentary was not for long free from dramatization. Filming a snowball fight in a Paris street, the brothers felt the need to add an element of entertainment by having a passing bicyclist pummeled by snowballs. This was not reality 'caught in the raw' but a contrivance of the filmmakers, carefully rehearsed to make the scene more entertaining. What we see, then, is a hybrid of dramatics and documentation.

In America, a similar merging of the dramatic and the documentary was immediately in evidence. The first true American motion picture is usually thought to be *Fred Ott's Sneeze*, shot in Thomas Edison's Black Maria Studio by Bill Dickson in 1889. This 4½ second film features one of Edison's employees doing exactly what the title says. But the movie is less a 'document' of his sneeze than it is a crude 'docu-drama': Ott had sneezed moments earlier and was en-

couraged by Edison to recreate it for the camera.

When Edwin S. Porter produced what is often considered the first 'story' film, *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903, it, too, was a forerunner of docudrama: a meticulous recreation of an actual Old West incident, photographed in the wilds of New Jersey with several former frontier outlaws (recently released from jail) hired as historical consultants to insure accuracy. Finally, the first feature-length motion picture, D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1914), provided the first great controversy concerning the emerging medium's power by accurately depicting certain elements of history, altering others unforgivably, and slighting others altogether in order to present a powerful (and dangerous) romanticized, but convincing, image of the early Ku Klux Klan.

Griffith held to a personal, interpretive, totally subjective "truth"—and portrayed it in his film so vividly—and with such a detailed and precise historical accuracy for the surfaces of events—that he generated the problem of impressionable viewers accepting his work of art as actuality, a problem which still plagues TV docudrama makers today.

Hollywood eventually would look to journalism's front pages for inspiration: *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, and *Scarface* were among the social-realist films of the thirties that borrowed heavily from contemporary history; similarly, biographical pictures as diverse as Paul Muni in *The Life of Emile Zola* and Errol Flynn as General Custer in *They Died With Their Boots On* found a middle-ground between reality and invention.

Ultimately, the docudrama as we now know it has less in common with such Hollywood movies than it does with those films by Sergei Eisenstein in the years following the Russian Revolution. *Battleship Potemkin* (made in 1925, about an incident from the failed 1905 revolution) and *October: Ten Days That Shook The World* (a 1927 film about the 1917 Soviet revolution) recreated relatively recent

historical events, but, significantly, did so in documentary filmmaking technique. Gone were the conventional characterizations, dramatic motivations, and narrative lines Griffith had adapted from the stage and the novel.

Eisenstein proved painstaking in his recreation of an authentic look and feel for his varied subjects, journeying to the actual port of Odessa for the sequence depicting the massacre of workers by Cossacks on the steps; talking the Czar's former servants into playing themselves in *October*. Yet his approach was something other than 'I Am A Camera,' for his films are far from objective. Eisenstein was both a creative artist and (at the time) a political hardliner: this combination of qualities caused him to overstate points, to exaggerate incidents.

The danger of his films is that they appear like newsreels. Even more than in Griffith's case, where there is at least a melodramatic storyline to remind us it's only a movie, viewers experience the film as documented reality; we tend to overlook the 'dramatic' aspect of Eisenstein and over-emphasize the 'documentary' quality, when in fact we should do precisely the opposite.

At the same time Eisenstein was fashioning his propagandistic masterpieces, the American Robert Flaherty created what came to be thought of as the 'pure' documentary tradition. Yet beginning with his first major project, *Nanook of the North* (1926), Flaherty sensed the need to 'dramatize' the subject he had supposedly set out to 'document.' One early sequence in which the Eskimo children take castor oil for upset stomachs, then lick their lips with pleasure, is staged—the children having been 'directed' to make their enjoyment 'more visual' for the camera. When the great hunter Nanook wanders across the ice, searching for a seal hole, then discovers one directly in front of the camera and attempts to catch it, the sequence is of course staged: Nanook had earlier found the hole, waited patiently while Flaherty set up his camera, then acted out the bit of business as Flaherty captured

the restaged reality. Importantly, this was not done to distort reality but to capture the essence of an Eskimo's real life as it could never have been captured by random shooting.

The blurring of fact and fiction into 'faction' appears less an invention of the TV docudrama than a marked shift in story-telling style over the course of this century.

Flaherty's attitude toward the mixing of documentary and drama would thereafter reign supreme. In his famed *Why We Fight* Armed Forces film on the Pearl Harbor attack, John Ford recreated those scenes he did not have sufficient news footage of, though his film purports to be pure documentary.

Actually, the movement toward docudrama can be traced in other than cinematic works. For example, John Dos Passos in his novel, *U.S.A.* attempts a fusion of fact and fiction in print form. Going far beyond the boundaries of conventional historical novels, Dos Passos not only created fictional characters and set them against factual backgrounds; he also attempted to break the limitations of normal novelistic tradition by creating a kind of multi-media experience: part journalistic reportage, but imaginative speculation.

Recently, writing by novelists such as Truman Capote (*In Cold Blood*) and Norman Mailer (*The Executioner's Song*) have further blurred the distinction between fact and fiction, just as the work of the New Journalists like Hunter S. Thompson (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*) and Tom Wolfe (*The Right Stuff*) make use of traditions and techniques associated with fiction. Ultimately, the blurring of fact and fiction into 'faction' appears less an invention of the TV docudrama in the 1970s and '80s than part of a marked shift in storytelling style over the course of

this century.

If Doncaster is wrong however, in asserting that television 'pioneered' the form, there can be no question that TV has perfected it—thanks to a natural affinity of this medium to docudrama technique. In addition to kitchen-sink melodramas like *Marty*, the 'golden age' TV playhouses also presented such docudramas as *The Plot to Kill Joe Stalin*. And long before the made-for-TV movie was a staple, the *You Are There* series (CBS 1953–57) paved the way for TV docudrama by 'reporting' famous moments in history as they might have been viewed by a news-team doing straightforward coverage of the incident.

Today, *You Are There* is recalled as a charming curiosity from television's formative years. Actually, it is one of the rare programs which completely captures the notion of TV as a medium. Although it was preceded by a radio version, it was the TV version that clicked: the notion of a modern news crew carrying their equipment onto Boston Harbor to interview colonists or stopping Wyatt Earp on his way into the O.K. Corral for a few questions is basic to the television experience. *You Are There* was the first great example of pure television, a dramatic storytelling form that made use of the new medium's essential properties.

Because of the small screen, television programming is drawn to subjects that are intimate in scope; because of the importance of the television news programming that has always preceded the evening's entertainment, prime time viewers experience a carry-over effect: the entertainment becomes on some level inseparable from the preceding news program. In a way, there is a natural tendency, then, to run the two together, and the docudrama is an extension of this principle. Conversely, Hollywood motion pictures that try to operate in a docudrama manner have been few and far between. Jack Webb's feature movie -30- (about one evening in the life of a

major newspaper) and his *D.I.* (a marine corps drill instructor's method of training raw recruits) were flops, but Webb's similar docudrama TV series (*Dragnet*, *Emergency*, etc.) proved extraordinarily successful. *Dragnet* was TV's first smash hit police series, in part because it abandoned earlier formats (which were imitations of radio and movie police tales) for a low-key, understated, docudrama style, and a remarkable early understanding of the television form; Webb's subsequent failure to shift his docudrama format to theatrical films indicates the public's (if not the producer's) implicit understanding that docudrama is more at home on TV, then in the movie theatres.

True, the recent popularity of the docudrama form on TV has had a certain carry-over effect to theatrical films (the current *Right Stuff* and *Silkwood* being obvious examples), though most often the results have been mixed. The most extreme case is *All the President's Men* (1976), Alan Pakula's version of the Watergate investigation featuring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman as *Washington Post* newsmen Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Pakula scrupulously followed the docudrama approach of total authenticity. The problem with the movie is that, although it perfectly duplicates the surface of events, *President's Men* fails to capture the essence of Watergate-era America. It is as much a failure at artistically communicating the mood of paranoia at that time as it is successful at realistically recreating the manner in which two reporters track down a complex story. Besides, there is a decided disappointment in seeing Redford and Hoffman (superb actors as well as major movie stars) never allowed to 'act' but rather forced to do low-key impersonations.

It makes sense that *President's Men* plays far better on television than it did in the theatres. However, Warren Beatty's *Reds* (1982) offers the perfect example of a theatrical release that borrows from the TV docudrama approach but effectively reinterprets this for a theatrical

film. In telling the story of John Reed (Beatty) and his love affair with Louise Bryant (Diane Keaton), set against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution,

Like it or not, the creator of docudrama, whether he sees himself as an entertainer, a journalist, or both, is an historian.

Beatty and his scriptwriters combined the factual material with imaginatively created scenes, interspersing all this with 'testimonies' of actual witnesses, blending it all into a larger-than-life vision which comfortably filled the wide-screen. Instead of the hard-edged newsreel look Pakula seized upon for *President's Men*, *Reds* is high-style, Hollywood gloss—historical drama laced with comedy, engaging entertainment with an 'up-cry' at the end. Understandably, *Reds* plays less effectively on cable TV than does *President's Men*: sometimes a TV broadcast can only harm the effect of a true theatrical film.

Whether we are exploring the theatrical motion picture or the made-for-television movies, how are we ultimately to define the docudrama? Inevitably, the search for definition cannot focus only on technique. It must confront the ethical problem of the docudrama: how it deals with facts, with reality, with history.

As A. Bennett Whaley and his colleagues point out in their recent article on docudrama in *The Journal of Broadcasting* "Docudrama raises practical and ethical issues: practical because producers and directors must rely on imaginative sources which are selective in perception and interpretation; ethical, because the burden of proof of the docudrama's documentary side of production struggles against the use of embellishment which seemingly is inherent in drama."

The writers and producers of docudrama must face up to their awesome responsibility. They have an accountability to reality. How much can situations, characters and events be changed for the sake of drama—of entertainment? How much is too much?

Like it or not, the creator of docudrama—whether he sees himself as an entertainer, a journalist, or both—is an historian; a pop historian perhaps, but nevertheless an historian.

The British critic Carl Gardener calls the docudrama “an attempt to humanize history. . .” Maurice Wiggin writing in the *Modern Times* says it is “reporting raised to the level of an art. . .”

Others fear the form. Lord Carrington, who spearheaded the attack on *Death of a Princess* claims “. . . the new form formula of mixing fact with fiction, dramatization masquerading as documentary . . . can be dangerous and misleading.”

Even Anthony Thomas, author of *Death of a Princess* is worried. In the *Daily Telegraph* he warns of the peril of the docudrama (not *his*, but *others!*) He criticizes “. . . that artistically promising, but factually treacherous class of dramatized documentaries, where authors, losing themselves on real events, assume a freedom to elaborate on the facts in order to improve the entertainment, sharpen the drama or point a moral. . .”

Historian Lawrence Said, in the *Washington Post* asks “To what extent . . . does dramatic license excuse errors of facts and distortions of historical record in docudramas? Since *Roots* blitzed the nation in 1977, historians, media critics and producers have debated the level of truth required in productions purporting to tell it the way it really was . . . More and more, people’s perceptions of subjects such as Watergate, the Holocaust and the Presidents and the Vietnam war come from watching history according to television.”

David Wolper, producer of *Roots*, *Blind Ambition* and the feature film *Bridge at Remagen*, disagrees. He believes that docudramas should provide “an overall truth” and that audiences can go to the

history books for details. As Walper sees it, history on television has a limited role; it is “supposed to give an emotional feeling and a sense of what it was like . . .”

Historian Eric Foner in the *Nation* also questions the docudrama approach to history. He finds that docudrama filmmakers “begin with the laudable intention of illuminating an aspect of the past”, but too often “. . . allow fiction to masquerade as history” since writers “play fast and loose with the facts while retaining the veneer of historical authenticity.”

This leads to a situation, Foner adds, in which writers “. . . want the creative freedom of the artist, but also the imprimatur of the historian, an air of authenticity without the full responsibility that goes along with it.”



Although the challenge by historians is valuable because it illuminates the continuing ethical responsibility of the makers of docudrama, it is not especially helpful in the attempt to evolve a definition of the docudrama as a genre.

The British critics Andrew Goodwin and Paul Kern have a simple definition “. . . the combination of dramatic and documentary convention.” But this is too broad, and would include everything from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to Truffaut’s *Jules and Jim*.

In his perceptive book of essays about the TV medium, Michael Arlen the TV critic of the *New Yorker*, writes that “This hybrid form is too various to be described by . . . exact definition, but generally speaking a docudrama is a story whose energy and focus has shifted from fiction to what is supposed to have actually happened.”

An excellent starting point, though under so broad a concept, the docudrama label could be applied equally to *Roots*, *The Missiles of October*, and *The Jayne Mansfield Story*. What’s needed now is to pare down the possibilities; to agree on a more limited and limiting definition that will formally establish the

docudrama as a specific and legitimate genre. For this purpose, we need to ascertain a series of basic qualities common to all examples of the docudrama form:

□

1) Because a TV movie is essentially 'realistic' in approach does not necessarily qualify it as docudrama. From the 'fourth wall' theatre plays of Ibsen and Strindberg created at the turn of the century to the Neorealist films fashioned in post World War II Italy by DeSica and Rossellini, the realist/naturalist tradition has been marked by liberal-societal slice-of-life dramatizations of the common man's plight. Most often, this has been achieved by creating a fictional character who symbolizes the working of his time: Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, Terry Malloy in *On The Waterfront*. On television, made-for-TV movies like *A Great American Tragedy* (1972), with George Kennedy as a middle-aged aerospace engineer who loses his job, speaks to and for the many who experience such problems. *The Morning After* (1974), with self-confessed alcoholic Dick Van Dyke as a man unable to come to terms with his craving for the bottle, similarly made its singular character into a universal symbol of his type. Both are striking examples of TV movies that work in the realistic/naturalist tradition, though neither are docudramas.

□

2) The docudrama, in its present form, concerns itself with relatively 'contemporary' history. It is, of course, ridiculous to set rigid limitations, although, as a general rule, any program which reaches back beyond fifty years or so for its material should be considered less a docudrama than a period-piece historical play. *The Last Ride of the Dalton Gang* (1979) may have recreated the incident in which those wild west 19th Century outlaws were demolished in Coffeyville with far more authenticity than *The Royal*

Wedding of Charles and Diana (1982) represented the romance of the Prince of Wales and his bride, but under this condition, the latter would still be easier to acknowledge as a docudrama (its quality of course open to debate) than the former. An interesting problem is posed by *Roots: Roots I*, with its study of eighteenth and nineteenth century slavery, would best be considered an historical drama; *Roots II, The Next Generation*, which takes the story through the twentieth century and concludes with a confrontation between author Alex Haley (James Earl Jones) and American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell (Marlon Brando) qualifies as docudrama.

□

3) A key distinction between docudrama and contemporary history play resides in the intended meaning of the work. Shakespeare's plays on British historical subjects are sometimes cited as antecedents of the docudrama form, but in fact, Shakespeare worked in another manner entirely: freely interpreting history, imaginatively exaggerating events and personalities to use history as a conveyor of his own personal themes. A writer of docudrama might, like Shakespeare, compress the time scheme of events in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, but he would be wrong to over-emphasize Richard II's failures or Henry V's accomplishments in order to make those men handy symbols for wicked or idealized royal behavior; a docudrama filmmaker would not invent a hunched back to make Richard III's villainy physically obvious.

Clearly, history can still be revived for the purpose of contemporary commentary: *Little Big Man* (1970) is ultimately less interested in Custer and the Indians than in employing them for a statement about Vietnam. But a true docudrama is less concerned in using history to make a statement about today than in presenting an 'open' vision of an historical incident which audiences are relatively free to interpret. *The Day America Died*

(1979), an overview of the effect of the 1929 stock market crash, fits the bill.



4) *The docudrama must attempt some semblance of objectivity.* Not the kind of rigidly even-handed balance and timid neutrality the American networks usually favor in dealing with controversial concepts. Rather, the true docudrama must necessarily investigate various aspects of its subject. Intriguingly, it is a non-network show—*Operation Prime Time's* syndicated *Blood Feud*—that is one of the best examples. In recreating the animosity between Bobby Kennedy and Jimmy Hoffa, the TV movie manages to make both men fascinating if flawed individuals, each sympathetic but in entirely different, even complementary, ways: Kennedy ruthless and naive, Hoffa ruthless and street smart; Kennedy classy, spoiled, idealistic; Hoffa rough hewn, self-made, realistic. The two-part film chronicles the need for Kennedy's 'get tough' attitude toward organized crime but also the lack of insight and

While maintaining a sense of objectivity, a docudrama must address some social issue that is still relevant, even controversial.

judgment with which he approached his mission; it illuminated the extent of Hoffa's corruption while also portraying him as a victim of a system which pre-existed his entrance into it.

Blood Feud presented this clash of Kennedy and Hoffa not as a battle between right and wrong but of mutually exclusive characters, drawn into conflict by each man's strange combination of animosity and admiration for his polar opposite. It is this objective overview of the feud, accompanied by an informed vision of its complexity, that makes *Blood Feud* an example of the docudrama form

at its highest level.

On the other hand, *Sadat*, although it won rave reviews for its striking production values and a superb performance by Lew Gossett, Jr., troubled some critics because of its lack of objectivity.

Harriet Van Horne in *Newsday* commented "Historians are bound to note that this biodrama is a gloss. We are not told that Sadat's sympathies were with the Nazis in World War II. . . ."1



5) *The true docudrama is not a biographical film, but must concern itself with one specific instance, however brief or long its span of time, while studying this incident from as broad a spectrum of views as possible.* For instance, *Kent State* (a 1982 TV movie about the 1970 campus demonstration that ended in the shooting of several students by national guardsmen) and *Death of a Princess* fit into this definition of docudrama, while *Marilyn: The Untold Story* (a collection of dramatized, unrelated episodes from Monroe's life) and *Graziano* (a hokey Hollywoodization of the original Rocky's life) should rather be considered TV biopics, a separate (though not unrelated) genre. *The Missiles of October* (with Martin Sheen as Bobby Kennedy) is a docudrama; *Kennedy* (with Sheen as Jack Kennedy) is a biopic. In the former, the focus is on an incident while, in the latter, it is on the man.

Golda which impressively conveys the impact of Golda Meir's life is a fine biopic; *Franklin and Eleanor*, an effective dramatization of the relationship between FDR and his wife, is docudrama. The excellent, carefully crafted *Raid on Entebbe* and the sloppy, slapdash *Victory at Entebbe*, both qualify as docudrama, however different their quality.



6) *While maintaining a sense of objectivity, a docudrama must deal with some social issue that is still relevant, even controversial. Kill Me If You Can*

(1977) with Alan Alda as death row veteran Caryl Chessman rates as docudrama rather than biopic because the film raises, then explores, the capital punishment issue, through a study of Chessman's plight. But the two-parter *Murder in Texas* (1980), starring Sam Elliott as a real-life doctor who murdered his wife, does not qualify, settling for melodramatizing (very effectively, in fact) the more sensational elements of the tale without developing any of the issues inherent in the story.

□

7) *To be a docudrama, the film must whenever possible keep the original names intact.* This concept is often rendered difficult by legislation involving the rights of privacy: anyone who is dead is considered fair game, but a living person can only be dramatized (without permission) if he is considered a 'public personage.' Thus, the *Death of a Centerfold* film could dramatize magazine publisher Hugh M. Hefner (played by Mitch Ryan), while slain Playmate Dorothy R. Stratton's (Jamie Lee Curtis) lover, director Peter Bogdanovich, was not thought to be in the public domain and, refusing to cooperate with the project, could not be portrayed. Instead, Stratton becomes involved with an older, taller, more ruggedly handsome film director (played by Robert Reed) with a fabricated name. This left the program a strange, unsatisfying amalgam of authenticity and invention, rendered stranger still considering that Bogdanovich is one of the few film directors who is in fact a public celebrity: what other movie director, other than Orson Welles, has ever hosted *The Tonight Show* for a vacationing Johnny Carson?

□

8) *If forced to choose between specific facts and overall truth, the docudrama must opt for facts.* Certainly, the film of John Dean's *Blind Ambition* is a docudrama, but *Washington: Behind Closed*

Doors (1978) presented the events leading to the Watergate break-in in a much more flamboyant form. The president, played by Jason Robards, is here called Richard Milhouse Monkton while every character in the mini-series is fictionalized. The filmmakers were thus free to invent various romantic and sexual liaisons with no basis in truth, which made the otherwise overly-politicized drama far more appealing on the level of soap opera. Despite this, *Washington* still had a distinct advantage over *Blind Ambition* in capturing the overall truth (just as it operated at a disadvantage in presenting facts). None of this is new: *roman-à-clef* was developed as a literary device centuries ago to allow writers to capture the essence of an experience while taking liberties with specific facts. The writing of a docudrama is something else entirely; as Norman Swallow said in *Sight and Sound*: "the person responsible for the text is not a 'dramatist' or even an 'author,' but an 'editor' or 'compiler' of factual information."

□

9) *Though it is permissible (even necessary) for docudramas to combine certain characters for the sake of space and time and simplification, a show cannot be considered a docudrama if the main characters are fictitious, no matter how factually accurate the portrayals of their time-frame may be.* The perfect example would be *Holocaust* (1980), NBC's powerful study of the German slaughter of the Jews. The central family was an appropriately representational one, but since they were fictional, *Holocaust* is best viewed as a television counterpart to contemporary historical-fiction, which also employs a fictional melodramatic plot to increase our emotional involvement with history.

The powerful *Playing For Time*, a film inspired by the true story of concentration camp inmates who used their musical talents to avoid execution, was so thoroughly dramatized for television—some characters were based on real

persons, others invented—that it must be considered a history-based drama, rather than docudrama.



10) *The performances in a docudrama must not be 'acting' in any sense of creative characterization, but rather a heightened form of impersonation.* This does not mean the performance should be mimicry on the most superficial level, but rather that it is part of an entirely special aesthetic, quite apart from conventional acting. The performers may not be doubles for the real-life people in question, but will not be far from them in terms of type; even key mannerisms. Their talent must be applied to capturing the surface of the front page or historical characters as the public viewed them. Rip Torn as Richard Milhouse Nixon in *Blind Ambition* offered what is perhaps the finest example so far of the docudrama performance, whereas Jason Robards's role as Richard Milhouse Monkton in *Washington: Behind Closed Doors* is an equally fine example of more conventional acting: the creating of an entirely new character, based on a real-life personage.



11) *To succeed, a docudrama must throughout maintain a sharp sense of focus.* An example of one that fails to do this is *Ike: The War Years* (1979). Attempting opportunistically to attract both the male portion of the audience (always up for a good war story) and the female (who supposedly still prefer a romance), the writers attempted to blend and balance General Eisenhower's (Robert Duvall) involvement with strategy deployments and military rivalries with his alleged affair with his British driver Kay Summersby (Lee Remick). But the two plot elements have so little to do with one another than the film never created the necessary point of focus. This is not to say the public and private can't be blended to striking effect. Indeed, the

focal concept of the Kennedy mini-series is that President Kennedy's complex relationships with family and friends directly effected his dealings in the Oval Office, so the inclusion of both elements is essential to the show's vision of his presidency.



12) *The docudrama label applies to form as well as content, and must be viewed as a storytelling technique as well as a tendency toward certain kinds of stories.* *Friendly Fire* (1970), acclaimed as one of the finest TV movies, centered on the actual attempt of two parents (played by Carol Burnett and Ned Beatty) to break through the cover-up surrounding the death of their son (Timothy Hutton) in Vietnam; *Death of a Princess* concerns a British journalist's attempt to discover why a young Saudi woman was beheaded. Although the American film deals with material as historical as that in the British film, it is not true docudrama because its style owes nothing to the *cinema-verité* concept of hand-held camera movement, which can invest a commercial feature-length movie with the quality of a TV news program's capturing of reality in the raw.

Friendly Fire, however, stands more in the classic tradition of Hollywood craftsmanship; even the choice of two name stars for the leads signals the viewer that this is a drama based on contemporary history and not a docudrama, in which we should be unaware there is any acting going on, and instead share in the illusion—best achieved through lesser known performers—that we are viewing the actual people. With its unknown performers and lowkey style, *Princess* more comfortably fits into the docudrama category. One might well expand the concept beyond made-for-TV movies to include certain series as well. The police show *Hill Street Blues* and the medical series *St. Elsewhere* both owe a great debt to the docudrama, although no one would ever say the same for *Kojak* or *General Hospital*.

By having various characters speak directly to the camera, as if being interviewed by a TV news team, a heightened sense of reality was achieved recently for *Choices of the Heart*, built around the tragic story of the lay missionary Jean Donahue (Melissa Gilbert) and three American nuns murdered by National Guardsmen in El Salvador in 1980. This sensitive human drama was also noteworthy for taking an uncompromising political stance, siding with the rebels and against the existing government; this is the sort of forthrightness we find sometimes in theatrical motion pictures like *Under Fire*, but rarely in TV movies.

Peter Goodchild, who produced the *Oppenheimer* series, insists the verité style is "only the use of a particular 'reality technique' to involve your audience." Others would argue it represents a deceptive means of presenting drama that has the impact of document. Both defenders and detractors of the form implicitly agree that form and content, style and subject, should not—indeed, cannot—be separated: thus, the *meaning* of a docudrama exists less in any individual story being told than in the way docudrama tells a story.



The twelve points presented above are meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive: they are intended as avenues to open up our awareness of an individual program's intentions, not to narrow the perimeters of what is possible. Just as there are works of fiction that cannot be easily categorized (often, the most experimental and intriguing fiction), existing somewhere between poetry and prose, narrative or drama, so too, will certain TV films confuse us: *Tail Gunner Joe* (1977) is a biopic to the degree that it dramatically retraces the life of Senator Joe McCarthy (Peter Boyle), a docudrama to the degree that it recreates the process by which a contemporary reporter (Heather Menzies) investigates the McCarthy story.

Indeed, this film boldly announces in its opening credits that in order to consolidate the wealth of information on its subject without totally confusing an audience, diverse real-life characters have been consolidated into composite figures: the newspapermen who covered the rise and fall of McCarthy are represented by a single character, played by John Forsythe.

This of course again raises the crucial issue that must be explored in any serious discussion of the docudrama form: *responsibility*. The writers insist they cut and consolidate only to eliminate the audience confusion that would result if the full canvas of life were depicted on-screen in all its complexity; critics argue that merely by selecting what is to be left in and out, the makers of a docudrama predetermine the audience's emotional and intellectual reactions to the material; the danger is that we experience the illusion of objective reality, which convinces us we are seeing the unstructured truth.

Understandably, then, England's David Edgar in his essay *In Defense of Drama-Documentaries*, writes: "I think it is . . . highly patronising and elitist to argue that, while clever, educated people are able to recognize a thesis when they read it in a book or journal, ordinary television viewers can somehow be fooled into accepting an argument as objective fact and will, to quote one critic, for ever afterwards view Churchill and Eden through (filmmaker) Ian Curtis's eyes." But Edgar's assertion misses the key point about television as a further extension of what Robert Warshaw once defined as the basic appeal of film: *The Immediate Experience*.

While reading a newspaper column few people of intelligence have difficulty comprehending that they are being influenced by another person's thoughts, put into words that may possibly sway them about an issue. Yet watching film or video, we tend to believe that what we see is closer to truth; something captured on-the-fly by a camera—however false this impression may be.

Eisenstein, when casting his 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*, reflecting how little was known about the physical appearance of that ancient czar, decided, "If I choose a large actor, then Nevsky will be large . . . and if I choose a small actor, he will be small . . . forever." By the same token, an American artist, commissioned to do a portrait of Daniel Boone for a Washington, D.C. exhibition, found that no matter how hard he tried, he could produce nothing except a painting of Fess Parker.

With this in mind, we can look at Penelope Mortimer's April, 1980, comment in *The New Statesman* and see the answer to what confused her about the

The docudrama combines television's informational and entertainment elements in a way that is as natural to the medium as it is fraught with moral questions of responsibility.

Death of a Princess controversy: "The story of Princess Misha's execution was published in full in *The Observer* of 22 January 1978, complete with every detail in the film . . . It's hard to see why the film of such a story that has been public property for over two years should cause such a fuss . . ." Not so hard, perhaps, if one recalls that when Edward Emerson Hough published his historical novel *The Covered Wagon*, the surviving family of real-life mountain man Jim Bridger offered no serious objection to his depiction as a drunkard; when the movie version was released in 1923, they sued.

Such is the impact of the movie medium; today, television has extended the potentials and the power, as well as the dangers and the dynamics, of this situation. As a people, we do believe what we seen on television, whether we consider those soap opera fans who, on the street, assault actresses cast as villai-

nesses, or the viewers of the evening news who, according to research, rely more on the networks for their news than on newspapers. The docudrama combines television's informational and entertainment elements in a way that is as natural to the medium as it is fraught with moral questions of responsibility which defy an easy attempt at an answer.

What's next for video verité? Several significant 1983 shows suggest that the American docudrama may be moving in the direction of the British dramatized-documentary, as well as experimenting with provocative techniques. *Special Bulletin*, broadcast one Sunday spring evening by NBC, presented a fictional account of the nuking of Charleston, South Carolina by a terrorist group, treating the incident as though we were watching TV news-coverage of an actual event in progress. Although Jean Firstenberg hailed the show as "something truly 'new'" in the pages of *American Film*, *Special Bulletin* has its roots in the classic Orson Welles radio broadcast of 1938, *War of the Worlds*, as well as Peter Watkins' British film *The War Game* (1966), which portrayed the fictional atomic bombing of London with such terrifying realism that, after commissioning the film, the BBC then refused to show it—and still does!

Whether NBC's decision to air *Special Bulletin* grows out of a courageous attitude to confront controversial issues with new techniques that have the most immediate impact, or only from an attempt by that network to capture bigger ratings through a programming ploy, is open to debate.

One of the most unusual docudramas of 1983 was the product of a local television station—a rare event, because local broadcasters rarely attempt to produce the complex and expensive docudrama format. *The Saving of the President* was produced and first broadcast by WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C. Later, it was also aired nationally on ABC's

20/20. It was impressive—and controversial.

This new-form docudrama opens with a reenactment of the shooting of President Reagan, with actors portraying the President and the secret service agents. But when the scene shifts to the hospital, all those pictured working on the President are the actual orderlies, nurses and doctors who were there at the time (although an actor again plays Reagan in these scenes). In a sequence which is not part of the dramatization, President Reagan himself appears at the end of the program in a specially filmed bit at the White House, in which he asks questions of the doctors who saved him.

Tom Shales, the *Washington Post* TV critic praises this hybrid film highly, although he is disturbed about its implications: "The docudrama raises questions of propriety and journalistic license and the proverbial right-to-know; but such questions crumble into nuisance when balanced against the excellence and impact of the film . . . There are discomfiting aspects to the production, and the whole concept of reenacting such an event using many vested interests involved."

Another novel 1983 documentary which also raised questions about the validity of its production concept was *The Plane That Fell From The Sky*, the CBS Reports special on the near crash of TWA Flight 481 on April 4, 1979. The interviews with the pilots, who blamed the Boeing 727's sudden direct drop on the manufacturers, but feel they have been made the scapegoats by both the airline and the manufacturer, are not any different from any other CBS Reports investigative piece. What is different is the dramatized simulation of the near crash itself, with the real pilots and passengers portraying themselves. Indeed, in style this program not only approaches the British dramatized-documentaries but in a way it is more controversial because of its source: the English films may boast a verité look because they are often writ-

ten, produced and directed by former newpeople, but this American film is the work of the network's own news department.

The result is a landmark although TV critic Marvin Kitman in *Newsday* argued that "It's a dangerous trend. What if this exciting, dramatic recreation gets a high rating? Will the acting out of the news be credited? Will real news, documentary reporting, old-fashioned boring investigative digging that turns up dull facts—all of which defy re-creation—tend not to get done?"

What Kitman fails to acknowledge is that, following the relatively brief simulation of a situation, which of course could not be documented, the majority of the program's running time was given over to what Kitman calls an "old fashioned boring investigative" bit of digging into who was in actuality responsible for the near-tragedy; the early sequence of simulation is justifiable if one considers that viewers first had to be made to experience the incident itself in the most immediate and compelling manner possible before they could be expected to sit through that "boring" investigation.

Richard Witkin, writing in the *New York Times*, defended *The Plane* not so much in terms of the moral question of its right to exist, but rather for its effective and accurate simulation: "This technique was a gamble that could have produced a cascade of amateurish histrionics. But it did not . . . it is an uncannily real recreation . . . an absorbing, innovative, intensely human docudrama." By assuming such a stance—by accepting the film's premise and judging the work in terms of how successfully it lived up to its intended effect—Witkin made a judgment on an example of an emerging genre instead of arguing whether a genre that *does exist should exist*. After all, call it docudrama or dramatized documentary, the *video-verité* form is, above all else, an inevitable product of TV technology, a natural blending of the form and content of television. Let's not forget that several hundred years ago,

there were critics who complained about the very existence of that 'degenerate' new literary form called the novel, while others began writing serious criticism of various examples of the new genre.

Today, the debate over whether the video-verité form has a right to exist should be put to rest. Instead, there ought to emerge new debates about whether individual docudramas treat their subjects sensitively or superficially. And when we analyze the moral question of responsibility in terms of the docudrama in relationship to reality, we must cease facile judgments about the irresponsibility of an entire form and rather analyze the degree to which a specific example of that form achieves a proper balance between the need to inform and the need to entertain. ■

¹The controversy on *Sadat* continues. Egypt recently banned it, and all films distributed or produced by Columbia Pictures, producers of the mini-series. The Minister of Culture claimed the film contained "historical errors that distort the accomplishments of the Egyptian people." *The New York Times* correspondent also reported that Americans in Cairo who saw a preview noted that the film "... did not show Mr. Sadat's sweeping crackdown on dissidents. ..." nor "... the widespread corruption tolerated by his regime."

Douglas Brode, a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, teaches film and writes about the movies, and television. His most recent book is a biography of Dustin Hoffman. He is currently completing a history of the made-for-television movie.

QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

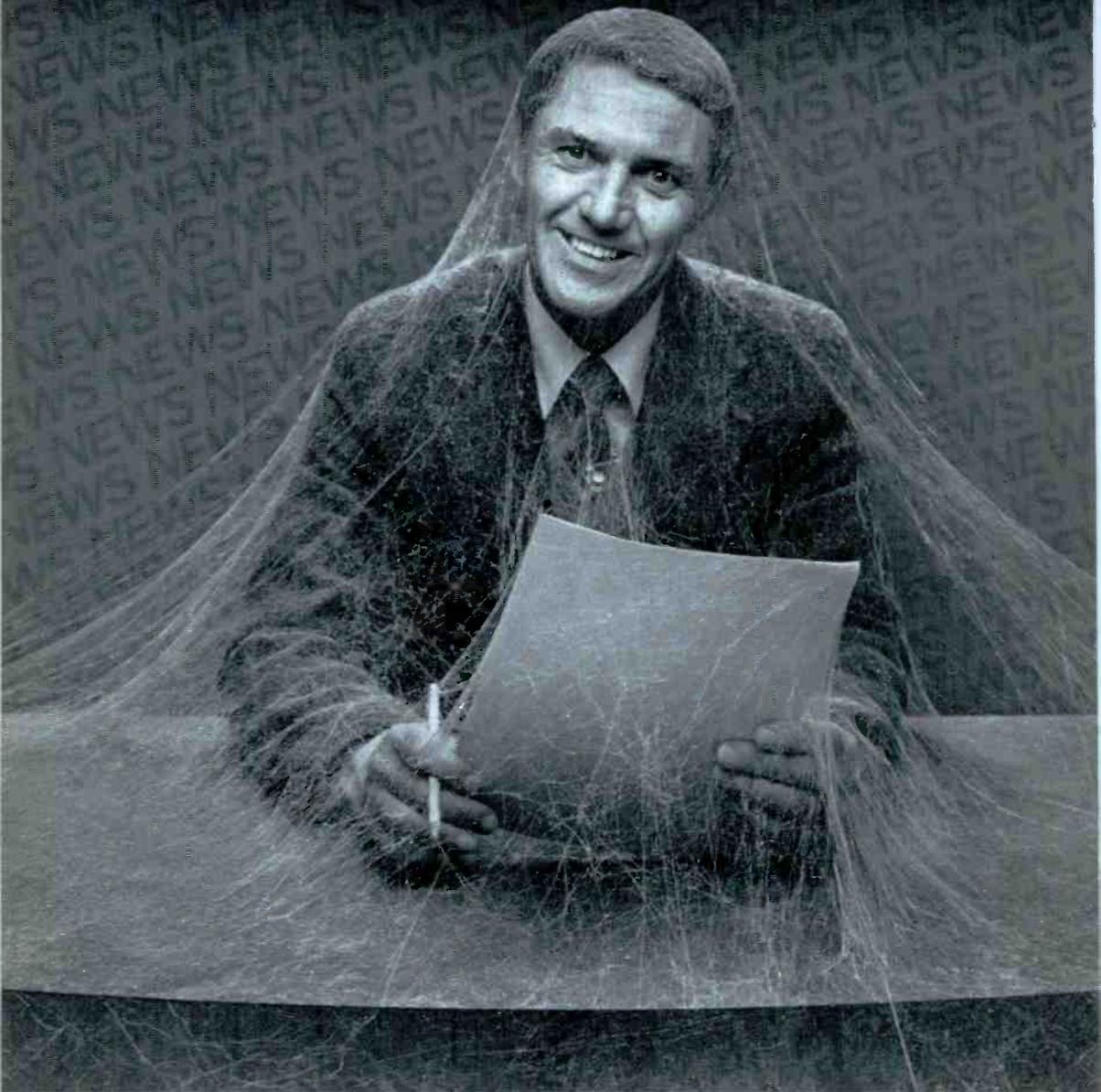
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It is a mistake to spend too much time dancing on the heads of two pins labelled 'performance' and 'content'. In the media as in politics people have to learn to express themselves effectively, in speeches and in writing. Some will have greater natural gifts than others. . . I have no reservations at all that persuasiveness, or advocacy, is a necessary part of politics, as it always has been. Nor do I believe that television has, as was once feared, led to politically irresponsible but telegenic charlatans hogging the screen. ”

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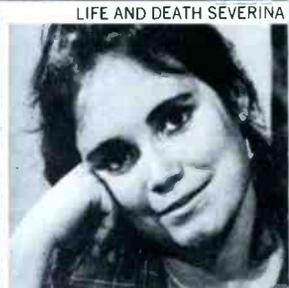
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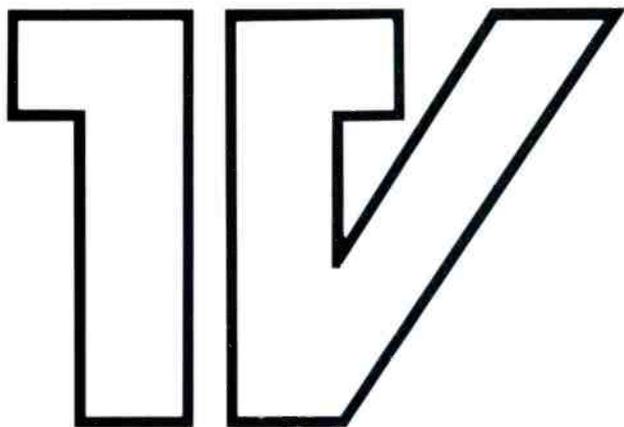
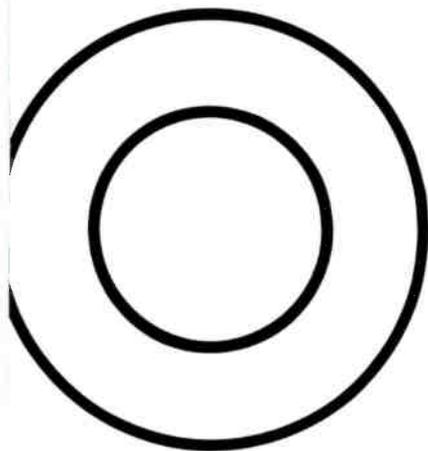
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- the '79 Ondas Award from the Spanish Broadcasting Society and Radio Barcelona bestowed on the series "Malu, Woman."

- 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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THE MEDIA AND THE INVASION OF GRENADA: FACTS AND FALLACIES

BY JOHN CHANCELLOR

I think if Chet Huntley had been here tonight, he would have wanted to talk about the press and the invasion of Grenada. One of the reasons we gather each year to memorialize Chet is that he understood what press freedom was all about, and fought for it whenever he could.

He would be as upset as the rest of us by the exclusion of the press from the fighting on Grenada. His partner of many years, David Brinkley, testified against those press restrictions in Washington, and so did I.

Let me say that this talk is not about the substance of the Grenadian operation. Reasonable people can argue about that. It may turn out to have been in the best interests of the United States and the hemisphere. It may not.

But there is no argument on one important point: The United States government kept the press from observing, firsthand, an important moment in the country's history and the American people cheered. Not everybody, to be sure, but the overwhelming majority thought that keeping the press out was a good idea.

I thought that's what we ought to examine. . . .

Letter #1

Fresno, California—"Dear John, Ordinarily I would ignore what you said about the President curbing the press, but I think you should know

where I was when I heard you. I was at my golf club with a scotch and soda in my hand, along with about fifty other guys. When you said what you did about the administration doing things behind the back of the people, some guy yelled, 'well, you dumb bastard, what do you think we elected Reagan for? It's damned sure you were never elected.' "

Letter #2

From a minister who prepared a sermon defending the press in Waynesboro, Virginia—"I was sure that no one would take offense if I defended the Constitution and its guarantees of freedom of the press. I was wrong. In a gathering of our officers recently, I found that there is a strong feeling against the press. There is an anger that would deny the press the right to cover wars because of the coverage in Viet Nam. They were angry at seeing so many wounded. They were angry at seeing the My Lai Massacre. In their anger, they seem willing to deny the press, and themselves, the basic rights that are guaranteed in our constitution.' "

Those two letters represent different points of view, but they both accurately reflect the mood of the country.

Who elected the press?

The answer, I suppose, is that the people who wrote the Constitution elected the press. It is more than just the First

Amendment; the framers of the Constitution were explicit in their belief that the way to keep the United States free was to keep its press free. In another way, nobody elected the press and that's the way it should be. The press is not part of the political process; journalists are not politicians; the press represents different points of view. What makes this a free country is that its citizens have access to those different viewpoints.

Letter #3

Grand Rapids, Michigan—"I am a moderate, sir, but I consider our government to be the representatives of the American people, be they embodied in our diplomatic corps or in the U.S. Marines. If we don't agree with the administration's policies, we vote them out."

But on what basis do we vote them out? On what information does an electorate depend for its judgements on any administration? There was a widespread belief in this country that the Johnson administration wasn't telling the whole truth about Viet Nam (although in my view there was an effort to tell the truth in Viet Nam); Mr. Nixon certainly didn't want certain things made public about the Watergate scandals. The Kennedy administration just lied about the Bay of Pigs.

I don't believe the press caused Lyndon Johnson to decide not to run for reelection; he was stuck with a tragic policy in Viet Nam and he knew it. I don't think the press was the factor that caused Mr. Nixon to resign; he was about to be impeached, and he knew it. But in both of those cases the press played a role, for it was through the press that the people were able to make their own judgements.

Letter #4

Austin, Texas—"I fully believe the surprise element in the Grenada invasion of the multinational forces saved many lives—the Grenadians, the students and the military per-

sonnel. Giving the press advance notice of this operation would have jeopardized these people."

Letter #5

Lima, Ohio—"... Completely free coverage even at this initial crucial point in military tactics is in error."

The struggle between the press and the government over the invasion of Grenada has really nothing to do with "completely free coverage". There is a tradition in this country and in most of our sister democracies that when an invasion is planned, the press is "given advance notice."

Here's how that works: When a country is planning to invade another country, a military operation requiring thousands of troops, the civilian military authorities, the ministry of defense or the department of defense, make up a pool of reporters and camera people, often only fifteen or twenty.

Pool reporters are responsible to both colleagues and employers. Radio pool reporters share their reportage and their audio tapes with other radio reporters. A pool cameraman shares film or videotape with photo agencies or other networks. Newspaper 'poolers' (as these reporters are called) share their notes and observations with other newspaper people. A pool reporter is a representative of the press, who is obliged to share information with the press.

Pools are made up when there isn't room for everybody to go along on the story. It's an old practice. The White House press corps would be impossible to handle if everybody got to go to everything on a presidential trip, so the press is divided into pools. Those members of what we might call the invasion pool are told to pack their bags, but they are not initially told where they are going. And when they are transported to the scene of the fighting, they are supervised by the military which also controls all the communications.

Generally, but not always, they are not among the first to land on the beach.

But they are there soon enough after to do their work; they see the fighting. And only then, when surprise is no longer a factor, are they allowed to file their dispatches and send back their pictures. In wartime, a further point of control is added through field censorship. Nobody in the press wanted the American government to announce the invasion of Grenada in advance. The press wanted access to the story with the understanding that surprise and secrecy would be maintained. That not only saves the lives of military personnel; it also saves the lives of the press.

The press is less hostile to censorship and to the safety of troops than our critics believe. During World War Two, when Edward R. Murrow was broadcasting live from the rooftops of London during the Blitz, he had a military censor standing at his side. If the censor thought that Murrow might be heading into an area of sensitive description of what he was reporting, the efficiency of the searchlights or the location of anti-aircraft guns, he would tap Murrow on the wrist and Murrow would start talking about something else.

During the Second World War, General George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, had regular briefings for the senior editors and columnists in Washington. He would call them in, sit them down, and tell them absolutely everything. There was never a disclosure. The only thing he didn't tell them was the actual date of the Normandy invasion. But General Eisenhower shared that vital piece of information with the pool reporters assigned to his headquarters in England.

Some will say, but that was the Second World War; the press is less trustworthy today. Yet, in 1980, when the Iranians were holding Americans hostage, a number of us in the press learned that in Teheran, a few American diplomats had managed to get out of the Embassy and were in hiding in a friendly embassy in Teheran. That story wasn't printed or broadcast until the Americans

got out of Iran. There was no disclosure.

Letter #6

Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania—
"Surely when you talked about censorship you must have understood that within one or two days the media would have access to all the news that was necessary."

Two days after the invasion, fifteen press people were allowed on Grenada under close supervision for a few hours; three days after, 24 were allowed during the day; four days after, 50 were brought in during the day. That sounds good, but the problem is that the significant events in Grenada took place during the first two days when there was no press allowed on the island.

Had there been television crews on the island during those first 48 hours, the American public would have seen pictures of the dead and wounded; but the public would also have seen pictures of brave American soldiers in combat. My guess is, considering how popular the invasion was with the public, the Administration would have strengthened its case by letting the press be in at the beginning. Those pictures might have been a day or two late, but they would have had a powerful effect. By keeping the press out, the Administration weakened its case, and even the Republican-controlled Senate passed a resolution by 53 to 18, asking that press restrictions be halted.

Letter #7

Glendale, Arizona—"Oops, John, you forgot to mention that President Carter didn't include journalists when he sent troops to try to free American hostages in Iran. Didn't President Ford leave journalists off the boat when he sent Marines to take the *Mayaguez* from the Cambodians?"

Quite right. Both of those, the rescue attempt in Iran and the battle for the *Mayaguez* were pure and simple rescue

operations. They had to be done in a hurry and there was no time to assemble a press pool or even a single representative of the press. The point in these cases is that nobody in the press or in the Congress complained that the press was excluded. One was a highly-secret desert mission in which every seat was needed operationally; the other was a response to a surprise pirate raid. In Grenada, the United States sent 6,000 troops ashore with plenty of time to assemble some press pools. Incidentally, I'm sorry that the press wasn't present in the Iranian desert or at the *Mayaguez* fight, because there are still arguments and disputes about what really happened. An observer from the press might have been able to set the record straight.

Letter #8

Concord, Ohio—"Did the Israelis include you on their mission to Uganda?"

No, but that was another in-and-out rescue mission. I don't recall if the Israelis sent pool reporters and camera people, but if they didn't their argument could have been that it was such a swift strike that the press would only have got in the way. On Grenada it wasn't that way at all.

Letter #9

Toledo, Ohio—"President Truman did not call in the press in advance of the bombing of Hiroshima or Nagasaki . . ."

There was no representative of the American press at the bombing of Hiroshima, but there was a member of the press aboard the plane which dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. The American government wanted an outside observer to be there, and a distinguished science reporter for *The New York Times*, William L. Laurencé, rode in the plane and watched them drop the atomic bomb.

Letter #10

Troy, New York—"The media did not

accompany the Bay of Pigs invasion."

No. But some publications knew part of the story and didn't run it. The *New Republic* had part of the story and didn't run it when asked not to by President Kennedy. *The New York Times* had a good part of the story, and, again, didn't run it at the request of the President. But elements of the story did get out. And that infuriated Kennedy. Kennedy had good relations with the press, but the Bay of Pigs was not only a military disaster; it was an informational debacle. Among those who were not told in advance were Pierre Salinger, Mr. Kennedy's press secretary, and Adlai Stevenson, his representative at the United Nations.

Government press officers in the field were even worse. American reporters in Miami, once the invasion had begun, were told that an invading force of five thousand was involved. Actually, only a thousand had gone ashore, but the American press officers wanted the Cuban people to believe that a giant force had landed so they would rebel against the Castro government. Then, when the invading force got in trouble, the American briefers changed their story and said the force wasn't five thousand after all, only a few hundred who had landed anti-Castro supplies.

Sometimes you can't believe your own government. And, as most of us know, Kennedy later said to the *Times*, "If you had printed more about [the Bay of Pigs] you would have saved us from a colossal mistake. I wish you had run everything on Cuba." Incidentally, *The New York Times* had advance word on the Cuban missile crisis, as well, and, again at the request of President Kennedy, held up its story.

Letter #11

Phoenix, Arizona—" . . . The British government did not make press access availability in a timely manner during the Falklands war . . . the British government knew full well that the press had the power to make

or break the success of the war through public sentiment after exposure of the horror of the war through pictures. They remembered well from the Vietnam experience of the Johnson administration."

That's true. When the Royal Navy task force was being put together to sail to the Falklands, the Navy decided not to take any members of the press at all. Prime Minister Thatcher insisted that the press go along, and a pool of correspondents and camera people was assembled, 26, in all. (Not a large number, for a country going to war; the United States could have assembled a smaller pool for the invasion of Grenada.)

But the British government did take Viet Nam into account, and every effort was made to impede and delay pictures going back to Britain. Television pictures took two weeks to reach London, an amazing delay these days. An official of the Ministry of Defense told a friend of mine that the British government was not going to have home-front morale sapped by pictures of dead British soldiers on the telly every evening.

Viet Nam haunts us all.

Letter #12

Leeds, Alabama—"It is doubtful that any government ever again will allow media coverage of a war, while it is going on, to the extent that such was permitted in Viet Nam. There will always be reporters who sympathize with the other side or who, for one reason or another, oppose their own government's involvement in the conflict. If those people are allowed free reign in the war zone, especially with television cameras, they can have a devastating effect on the morale of our troops and of the people back home."

Did the coverage in Viet Nam have a devastating effect on the morale of our troops and the people at home?

The American government issued about 2,000 credentials in Viet Nam to

American and non-American press. Only six were revoked because their holders broke the rules. And for years in Viet Nam the pictures and stories, especially the television pictures, didn't seem to have had much effect on either support for the war at home or the morale of the troops in the field. No war is ever popular with the troops, and Viet Nam was an example of that principle; yet the public opinion polls here at home didn't show a falling off in support until after the enemy's Tet offensive in 1968.

Tet was the great turning point of the Viet Nam war, and pictures of that uprising had a lot to do with its impact. At that time in the war, things were going well for the South Vietnamese and the United States. When the Tet offensive began, it came as a complete surprise; main force and guerilla enemy units fighting all across South Viet Nam, invading, briefly, the compound of the American Embassy in Saigon, capturing, for a bloody interval, the city of Hue.

Tet '68 was a tactical failure for the enemy. The South Vietnamese communists lost so many people that they were never again the decisive force in South Viet Nam. Their losses insured that the North Vietnamese would henceforth run the show in the South. But Tet '68 was a strategic victory for Hanoi. The pictures of our invaded Embassy grounds in Saigon had a stunning impact here at home; so did the graphic coverage of the uprising in many South Vietnamese cities. The street fighting in Hue looked like World War Two at its worst.

Tet made it look at home as though the United States was up against a much tougher and more resilient enemy than anyone, including the American military, had believed. The American government had accurately reported on battlefield success before Tet. After Tet, some senior American officials, including uniformed officers, were stunned by the ability of the enemy to coordinate, in total secrecy, an attack of the size of the Tet offensive.

While the Americans were issuing press releases about the great failure of

the communists, the Pentagon suddenly sought an increase in strength of 206,000 men in the armed forces. After Tet, in General Westmoreland's words to Washington, it was "a new ball game". Tet was in 1968. Richard Nixon was elected in 1969. The policy of Vietnami- zation, turning the war over to the Vietnamese, began soon after. Ameri- ca's role in Viet Nam had changed.

I go into this in some detail to counter a myth: the myth that the news organi- zations in Viet Nam changed a defeat for the enemy in Tet '68 into a victory. What really happened is that the stories and pictures of that offensive were accurate, that the press reported what the press observed. The symbolism of the Tet of- fensive was more important than the body counts. In its mindless way, the press coverage got the story right.

The press coverage of the fighting did amplify the psychological effect of the Tet offensive. But the American people were growing tired of the long war, and Tet made it seem that the war would have no end. Dean Rusk, then the hard- line Secretary of State, talked about Tet many years later with Stanley Karnow, author of *Vietnam: A History*: Rusk said that his relatives in Cherokee County, Georgia, told him after the offensive, "Dean, if you can't tell us when this war is going to end, well then maybe we just ought to chuck it." So I think it is a myth to say that the press got the Tet story wrong and unwittingly damaged the war effort.

The press did what it always does: it reported what it was able to observe. And that goes to what we are discussing here.

One of the best and most thoughtful books on Viet Nam was written by Harry G. Summers, Jr., a colonel of infantry who now teaches at the army war col- lege. It is called *On Strategy—A Critical Analysis of the Viet Nam War*. He writes, "There is a tendency in the military to blame our problems with public support on the media. This is too easy an an-

swer. . . . The majority of the on-the-scene reporting was factual—that is, the re- porters honestly reported what they had seen, firsthand. Much of what they saw was horrible, for that is the nature of war. It was this horror, not the reporting, that so influenced the American peo- ple."

There we have the heart of it: the re- porting isn't the problem, the problem is the intrinsic horror of war itself. In ear- lier conflicts, the horror of war was fil- tered to the public through ministries of propaganda, softened by censorship, delayed by slow technology. That is not true in today's world of instant commu- nication. War reported by quill pens was more bearable to the folks at home than living-room wars brought to us on vid- eotape by satellite. And we have been learning that when civilians at home watch the intrinsic horrors of war on their television sets they don't like what they see. Parents, husbands, brothers and sisters get upset when they see the dead and wounded.

This is handled in the totalitarian countries by eliminating a free press. But for the democracies, which depend on an informed citizenry, it is a unique problem. How should a government deal with the public's right to know if that right to know erodes the support the pub- lic gives the government?

Some of our most respected democra- cies have been turning to forms of cen- sorship as an answer: Great Britain, Israel, the United States. We might not be surprised if this had been done in the Philippines or in South Korea, but it's being done, democratically-speaking, in the best places. And it is being done, here at home, at a time when some of our fundamental attitudes about war, the public and the press have been changed.

The United States no longer declares war. It didn't in the Korean conflict, in which almost 8,000,000 Americans served and 54,000 died; it didn't declare war in Viet Nam, a conflict in which almost 9,000,000 Americans served and 58,000 died.

The Constitution says the Congress

"shall have power . . . to declare war." The fact that over 100,000 Americans died in two undeclared wars caused the Congress to pass the War Powers Resolution, which restores some war-declaring power to the legislative branch—but since the passage of that resolution, every president has opposed it. Declaring war has gone out of style. Yet, a formal declaration of war has some advantages, not the least of them being that unless there is clear justification for a war, the Congress will not declare it.

One of those advantages is censorship of the press. Censorship is not a pleasant experience for the press, but when it was been legally invoked by the American government it has, in the main, been fairly administered and obeyed by the press. Censorship in World War Two, when it was last in effect, gave the public a reasonable picture of the war.

Could the American government and the American press agree today on an arrangement which would satisfy the government's requirements for security, secrecy and surprise, and the press's requirements for access to the story, within bounds, while it's happening?

That might not be easy. It would be extremely difficult in places like Lebanon, where the press comes from many countries, some of them hostile to the United States. It would be hard to do in Central America. But it could be arranged in cases where American reporters and camera people are covering American forces. Grenada is such an example, and it could have been arranged there.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is setting up a panel of the military and the press to look into all of this, and we can only wish it well. The military, more than many civilians think, understands its relationship with the press, and in my view (the curiosities of the Grenada invasion notwithstanding) the military has behaved well toward the press. We may be an irritant, but our responsibilities are understood.

The fact is, we all need one another if this system of ours is going to work. The

government needs the support of the public; the military needs the support of the public; the press, if it is to serve its function of independently informing the public, needs the cooperation of the government and the military.

Things get dangerous in a country when the government takes unto itself the function of informing the public. It is dangerous because every government likes to put its best face forward, and because no government likes to admit its mistakes. When your friendly government press agent, military or civilian, is your only source of information, you ought to be worried.

A free press is, by definition, imperfect, contradictory, and inefficient. But it is infinitely preferable to a flow of information which comes solely from the government.

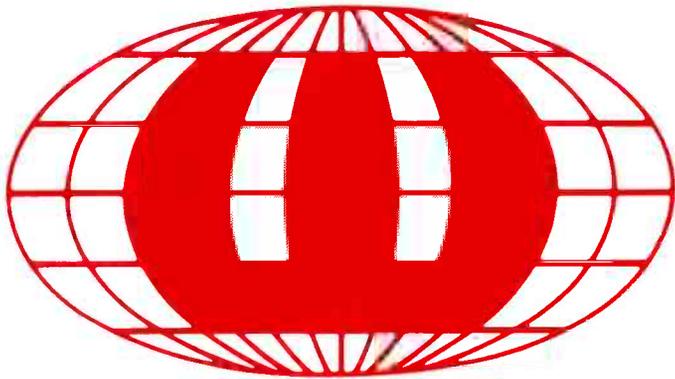
America may not declare war anymore, but uniformed Americans are still being killed, as we have seen recently in both Lebanon and Grenada. In Lebanon, there was nothing the American government could do to keep the public from being exposed to the horror of war, as it affected Americans. In Grenada, it was possible to keep the deaths off television, which decreased their impact from the visual to the statistical.

Government policy in Lebanon is unpopular; government policy in Grenada is popular.

For governments, that's a lesson.

For citizens of the democracies, it is a warning of what may happen in the future. ■

This article is the text of the fourth annual Chet Huntley Memorial Lecture delivered recently by John Chancellor at New York University. The series was inaugurated by NYU to honor Chet Huntley, and to reinforce the moral and ethical standards of journalism that guided Huntley's life and work. John Chancellor, now commentator for the *NBC Nightly News*, was for 12 years the program's anchorman. For *NBC News* he has also been a foreign correspondent, host of the *Today* program, and chief White House correspondent



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BEFORE THERE WAS "AFTER," THERE WAS . . .

Once upon a time there was a television drama written and produced about what would happen in a small midwestern community if a nuclear strike were ever launched against the United States. But almost no one ever saw the program. Wait a minute, you say, obviously I haven't read the Nielsen's. *The Day After* drew a rating in the fifties. Oh, but this was long before that program. Twenty-four years before.

BY JOHN O'TOOLE

On June 8, 1959, some two hundred people gathered in an auditorium in Atlantic City. The occasion was the annual American Medical Association Convention; the audience, mostly physicians, a few spouses, a sprinkling of military. The colonels and majors were there because the audience was about to view *Strike*, a 90-minute television drama on the aftermath of a nuclear attack on the United States. Less than two months later, *The New York Times* television critic Jack Gould would call the program "perhaps the most powerful editorial drama yet designed for television." Gould was one of a handful of Americans who would see *Strike*. Within three weeks of its first screening, all prints of the program had been seized by the U.S. Army. I'm sure you never heard of *Strike*. I know something about it, because I wrote it.

The play is Strike by John O'Toole. It is a gripping, intense, and hard-hitting account of the ordeal of survival for a "pocket" of Americans who are not instantly wiped out when 100 enemy nuclear missiles are dropped on the country. —The New York Times, Sunday, 7/26/59

Strike begins with two remarkable people, Paul and Carol Schafer. A physician and nurse, respectively, they were civilians working for the U.S. Army Medical Corps. They were educators and media pioneers. They were, also, adept at miracles.

Somehow, the Schafers had persuaded the army to set up a television division at the army's Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Instead of being content to broadcast open-heart surgery to a few thousand military physicians, this energetic couple began producing dramas on problems in army psychiatry, and what we might now call holistic medicine. Note, I said "dramas." Not content to assemble a production unit of some fifty talented draftees (remember the draft?) to man cameras and video, the Schafers insisted they needed professional writers and directors. Somehow, they conned the army into providing a modest budget to do it. That's where I came in.

Sitting in my cold-water flat at Seventy-seventh and York, I was enjoying my first year as a free-lance writer. It was November, and cold, and I was tired of showering in my mother's house in Queens, and having canned soup for dinner. When I was offered a job in this mysterious place, I grabbed it. I

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music written by:

RICHARD HYMAN

lighting:

DAVE MYATT

assistant director:

TONY VERDI

technical director:

BOB STOJINSKI

music performed by:

THE UNITED STATES ARMY BAND

kinerecording by:

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PROGRAM NOTE: *STRIKE* is a dramatization of something which has never happened—something we pray never will happen—a major nuclear weapons strike on this nation—one hundred major target complexes hit without warning. To portray this fantastic reality we have substituted individual human beings for numbers—emotions for charts—perhaps sometimes sacrificing the strict accuracy of the lecture for the emotional validity of life. The people in this play make mistakes—they do not have all the answers.

STRIKE is not a "how-to-do-it" for humanity. It merely shows what we *think* might happen. All we hope is that it will make you *think*.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The action is established in Redfield at the Chicago suburban home of the McDermott family some of whom become part of a survival pocket at Fort Kendall, an Army post some distance from the city.

ACT ONE Begins in the McDermott home and progresses to Fort Kendall between December 24-26.

ACT TWO Fort Kendall from December 29 to the middle of January.

ACT THREE Fort Kendall between March and September.

(A brief panel discussion will follow the presentation of each act of the play. Participants are listed on reverse side.)

CENTRAL CHARACTERS
(in order of their appearance)

Lt Col Alan McDermott Executive Officer, Fort Merrill Hospital	Chet Learning
Sheila McDermott his wife	Sally Chamberlain
Fred Burkhardt his brother-in-law, a building contractor	Leo Penn
Claire Burkhardt Alan's sister, a nurse	Mary Jo Randall
Dr Harry McDermott Alan's father, a semi-retired physician	Guy Spaul
Brig Gen Alexander Clay Commanding Officer, Fort Kendall	Tom Gorman
Col Elton Corel Commanding Officer, Fort Kendall Army Hospital	Phil Foster
Lt Col Donald Bixby Radiologist, Fort Kendall Army Hospital	Ben Hammer

AMA 1959 ANNUAL MEETING
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2 p.m.—Room A—Convention Hall

imagined I'd spend my time writing documentaries on the history of the stethoscope, but at least I'd have a radiator. I got far more than I bargained for.

I found myself furiously penning dramas on all sorts of complex human issues which *happened* to involve military personnel, everything from childbirth to racial relations. More exciting, I got to see the scripts competently mounted and produced (in color, yet!) in a small but adequate studio, with real professional actors. After a year of such invaluable experience, I was ready for anything and everything (you think that way when you're twenty-six) and that's about what I got. The Schafers told me we were going to produce a drama on how military physicians would attempt to cope with a nuclear attack on the United States. In short, we would think about the unthinkable and I would get to describe something which had never happened, but had been giving me nightmares.

Some of you younger readers may think that nuclear sabre-rattling began with the Reagan Administration. Permit me to introduce you to John Foster Dulles.

This was in the days when that name meant something more ominous than an airport.

... there is no local defense which alone will contain the mighty land power of the Communist world. Local defense must be reinforced by the further deterrent of massive retaliatory power.

... The ability to get to the verge without getting into the war is the necessary art. If you try to run away from it, if you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost.

—John Foster Dulles

I had come to adulthood with the rhetoric of nuclear brinksmanship echoing in my ears. I had sometimes wondered if I would live to see thirty. But I was not, I hasten to add, what some high ranking officials call "politically naive." I did not (and do not) think that the Soviets were a peace-loving bunch who were just aching to get into the plough-share business. I simply have never understood how it helps us to have crazy people on both sides of the negotiating table.

My Dulles-phobia notwithstanding, I approached the research on *Strike* painstakingly. Shepherded by Carol Schafer, who was in charge of the writers, I attended meetings, read reports, questioned experts, and was gradually immersed in the best and most thorough information (short of classified material) that the army's medical experts could offer. As the months went by, Carol Schafer and I were getting used to being stunned.

It was much worse than we had imagined. It was much worse than most of the individual physicians grasped. Many of them focussed on one small aspect of the cataclysm. This man talked about radiation; this man about the phenomenon of pneumonia; this one talked about the poisoning of the water supply; that one about psychological trauma. But as we made our rounds, we were beginning to see something which the individual expert seldom saw; we were beginning to see the *whole picture*. It was horrific almost beyond imagination. But it had to be imagined *and dramatized*.

(THOUGHTFULLY)

FRED: One doctor for every two thousand—That's not so bad. The pioneers had it worse . . . We'll just have to be tough.

ALAN: But that's not two thousand people with normal complaints. Fred. Maybe a thousand of them could be fractures and burns . . .

(QUIETLY)

SHEILA: Yes, burns are bad. I remember during the Blitz . . . and don't forget people hysterical, just out of their heads. I've seen that—that's the worst.

We did not rush into the writing or production of *Strike*. As a sort of dry run, we first wrote and produced four separate one-hour dramatizations on aspects of the nuclear attack dealing with radiation, trauma, etc. While I wrestled with ways to come up with a suitable microcosm, the production people were becoming increasingly skillful at simulating radiation burns and infected wounds.

MP SGT TACK: Say, Lieutenant Evans, these civilians keep coming in, and I think we need some kind of help—I mean a bigger set-up—they're milling around.

(CUT TO: CLAY AND EVANS.)

CLAY: How many has he gotten?

(CUT TO: MP SGT.)

MP SGT TACK: So far? All together? Close to a thousand—No! I'm not kidding! . . .

(LOWERING VOICE)

In April, we decided to go for the definitive version, a ninety-minute drama dealing with the whole story. We would zero in on a prototypical military hospital near a mythical town called Redfield, Illinois. We would try to show what would happen to the military *and* civilians living around the base in the event of a nuclear strike. In about a month, I had finished the script.

(CUT TO: BIXBY & CORPSMAN MOORE)

BIXBY: You've got to find blankets! We can save some of these people, but not if they die of pneumonia.

MOORE: (WEARILY) I'll try, sir. But there ain't any.

(HE TURNS TO GO)

BIXBY: Sergeant—

(HE TURNS, BIXBY HESITATES)

I'm going to start using yellow tags on people with over a thousand r . . . No blankets for those people . . .

(THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER. THE SGT NODS)

Actors were being brought down from New York, and our director, Norman Morgan, began kinescoping (no, kids, there was no color videotape then) the hundreds of scenes. There was no way that we could do the show "live" in story sequence. Our small studio couldn't begin to accommodate the dozens of sets, and fifty or so performers we would use. It was shot like a motion picture, except that for reasons of economy, we did long takes without stopping, and no retakes unless something went disastrously wrong.

JORGENSEN: (TO BIXBY) Are - you - a doctor?

BIXBY: That's right we'll take care of you now . . .

JORGENSEN: Why - do - I keep - vomiting?

BIXBY: It'll pass - you'll feel better tomorrow . . .

(HE HESITATES, THEN TIES A YELLOW TAG TO JORGENSEN'S WRIST)

When we had finished, I knew we had something quite powerful. But I'd been inside the story for so long. It would be a while before I appreciated just how powerful.

" . . . the play stands as a memorable theatrical challenge to the folly of mankind toying with nuclear suicide."

—N.Y. TIMES

I've been asked whether *Strike* was done in secret, whether it was somehow "sneaked by" the military medical advisors? Quite the contrary. The script was seen by a dozen advisors. Some were in the control room for various scenes. Some were at screenings. Why did no one blow the whistle? To start with, these were decent men, none of whom perceived the program we were preparing as a threat to national security. Some of our questions perplexed them, or made them uneasy. But even when they saw their answers turned into dialogue, the implications escaped them; even when they saw segments being produced in the studio, they couldn't project beyond their own military-expert mindset to visualize the impact of those scenes on people outside the circle.

(CUT TO: CLAY AND COREL AT FIELD TABLE, EXAMINING DIAGRAM.)

COREL (O.C.): It's really quite simple.

(CUT TO: CHART.)

The CBR men separate them at the gate into "hot" and "cold"—then the hot ones go to the showers, clothes burnt—

CLAY: Those showers are using a hell of a lot of water—

COREL: I've ordered *strict economy*—then they go to Bixby for treatment . . . We've

really got a system working now. If we only had twenty more doctors . . .

By the end of April, all the scenes had been shot. Sometime during the editing process, some of our military medical advisors did begin to grasp the potential for controversy *Strike* presented, but the commitment to the American Medical Association had already been made. The Schafers were increasingly protective of the program, alternately rebuffing inquiries, and reassuring frightened superiors. Paul and Carol Schafer understood far more than any of us what was at stake. Certainly, their careers were in jeopardy. This husband and wife team never flinched. They knew how important *Strike's* message was. The program notes described what was to come in a deceptively low-key fashion:

"The action is established in Redfield at the Chicago suburban home of the McDermott family, some of whom become part of a survival pocket at Fort Kendall, an Army post some distance from that city."

By the time arrangements were made for the AMA screening in June, there was certainly concern among army physicians in charge of the project that the program not be "misunderstood." Not only would there be a panel discussion about *Strike*, there would be *three*, one after each act. Of the eleven panelists, nine were military.

What they saw was a typical middle-class family gathered for the Christmas holidays. Oh, I stacked the deck with doctors for obvious reasons, and made the eldest son an army physician, at that. We were out to show the medical nightmare presented by a nuclear attack. But there were farmers, businessmen, mechanics, parents, children, the American family extended.

. . . I believe in one instance here where the mother gave birth to the premature infant that they should know that all pregnant women who are survivors of

the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blast that none of their offsprings have developed leukemia and I don't think there have been any monsters recorded among them either. And it takes two people to develop a monster. It takes the egg and sperm both as a rule.

Panelist: Rear Admiral Wendel G. Scott

As the program unfolded that day in Atlantic City, it was clear that we would have no trouble holding the audience. but as the cumulative effect of the destruction was perceived, those on the panel who had misgivings grew more and more vocal.

... if this nation is going to survive a thermonuclear attack and recover, then we must have national leadership and this word must get down to these isolated communities; some word of encouragement, give them something to look forward to. Certainly the medical problem is not the only problem, transportation, signal communications, banking facilities. I didn't see a single check cashed in this film . . .

Panelist: Colonel James T. McGibony

... if there be a sound framework for establishment of a civil defense effort and if despite this the medical profession as a whole is apathetic, which I doubt, then this film might have some value. Otherwise, I think the thing should be canned and never more seen.

Panelist: Colonel Robert L. Hullinghorst

By the time the heated panel discussion was halted, there were a lot of worried-looking colonels around. There had been numerous pointed suggestions from the panel that it would be better if the public never saw *Strike*. One of the show's more indignant critics made the mistake of asking for a show of hands from the audience. How many would ever want to see such a thing again? To his surprise, the show of hands from the floor was *pro-Strike*. On this discomfiting note, Brigadier General Harold C. Leuth, Mc, USAR, closed the session with com-

plaints of the critics ringing in his ears.

... You know much of our activity in the United States is under scrutiny by people who are not friendly to us in other countries. And vehicles of the type of this sort are just made for reproduction one way or another and displayed as a reaction of American people under circumstances in which they would be expected to act differently . . .

Panelist: Waltman Walters, M.D.

... the author of this film completely portrayed the American as being so lacking in capabilities or imagination, that he can't meet situations that are presented to him for the first time. I have great faith in all Americans to meet unusual situations. We see it every day. There is nothing more interesting than to watch youngsters, be they in grade school, high school, or college, the way they develop combined programs. And you can't tell me that even in a refugee or civilian camp some of these things wouldn't come out.

Panelist: Brig. Gen. Richard L. Meiling



Events after that blurred, as discomfiture rapidly moved to disapproval to—disappearance. Before the AMA screening, the plan had been to show *Strike* to the medical audiences around the country, and not just military medical audiences, either. Now, there was talk of revision, or re-evaluation, of review at higher levels. The Schafers read the signals and went into high gear, contacting people in television whom they believed would be sympathetic to the program's message. That message was in the program notes:

Strike is not a "how-to-do-it" for humanity. It merely shows what we think might happen. All we hope is that it will make you think.

As we raced around New York with one of the few existing prints, we found an amazing array of communications people eager to help. In a week of

hurried meetings, people such as the distinguished director, Fielder Cook, and the late Fred Coe of live-television fame, arranged screenings for people as diverse as *The Saturday Review's* Norman Cousins, film producer Dore Schary and Channel Thirteen's Ely Landau. Lewis Freedman of Channel Thirteen/WNTA screened it, wondering if they might not shoe-horn it into their *Play Of The Week* series. All of this frantic activity culminated in a screening arranged by Coe for the television critic of *The New York Times*, Jack Gould. It was clear at the end that Gould was impressed. How impressed we would discover in the Wednesday morning edition of *The New York Times* on July 22, 1959. It began:

"An absorbing and chilling television drama of a 'pocket' of survivors of an enemy missile attack on the United States has been prepared by the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington."

The *Times* story goes on to synopsise the story I wrote better than I could:

"Strike, which was seen yesterday at a private screening, deals with life at an Army post upon which the civilian population descends after 100 nuclear missiles have fallen on major cities and military targets. Through the account is woven the individual fates of members of the family of an elderly doctor.

The drama shows the need for marking an "X" on some of the cards worn around the wrist by survivors. This means they had no chance of recovery and indicated that medicines that were in short supply should not be wasted on them.

At first clothes are burned or buried to avoid radiation poisoning; later they are required for warmth because there is not enough fuel for heat.

In Strike there is no suggestion that conditions of extreme hardship might last only a few days; the crisis goes on for months. With most cities wiped out and military forces preoccupied in the emergency, outside help is out of the question.

Dysentery, tuberculosis and influenza spread. People in the cramped, cold and makeshift quarters grow careless over sanitary conditions. Freshly dug wells that may be uncontaminated by radiation are spoiled. In hunger animals are eaten, in thirst faces are bathed in radioactive puddles of water.

As time passes, the civilians begin to yearn for some sense of purpose. On the Army colonel who is a surgeon has fallen the administrative responsibility of trying to cope with those not accustomed to rigorous discipline for their own good."

The Schafer's strategy was clear: make sure that *Strike* could not be made to disappear quietly into the bowels of the bureaucracy. They had gone public with the *Times* piece. On Sunday, Jack Gould drove the message home with a three-column spread right next to a picture of Jack Paar celebrating his second anniversary as host of the *Tonight* show. After a brief synopsis, Gould launched into a plea for the program's survival. The Schafers had been skillfully arguing that *Strike* was, after all, useful as an argument for a more realistic civil defense policy. The *Times'* television critic picked that up and carried it much further.

"But so skillfully is the work's basic informational data incorporated in the body of the drama that Strike is fully as much a towering theatrical accomplishment. With vividness, compassion, and insight it never forgets to relate the individual human element to the agony of a society that must begin all over again the task of living.

As such, Strike is perhaps the most forceful editorial drama yet designed for TV. If the need for adequate home defense is made painfully clear, at the same time the play stands as a memorable theatrical challenge to the folly of mankind in toying with nuclear suicide. If commercial TV wonders what can be accomplished within the dramatic form, let it consult Walter Reed Medical Center.

Ultimately Strike, which runs approximately ninety minutes, should be tele-

vised on a network. Thus far it has had only limited screenings, primarily for a group of members of the American Medical Association. But, with the addition of perhaps only a few explanatory notes for a lay audience, the work could go on the air as is. Unquestionably, it would receive consideration for prizes."

Strike did not win any prizes. Nor were there to be any airings or showings. One by one, the less than a handful of prints were seized by the Army. The Schafers argued forcefully but to no avail. The programs were government property and we were light-years from the Freedom of Information Act. The last copy of *Strike* was taken from the Schafers at their home by a team of U.S. Military Police.

... it puts the military in a very unfavorable light. It does not build confidence in our Armed Forces or for command, or how to act under situations such as this. It is filled with a complete list of bad manners, and conduct unbecoming officers of the United States Armed Forces. I would hate to have the Russians see it and to think that we would act in such a way—it embarrasses me. It does not stimulate me, it disgusts me.

Panelist: Rear Admiral Wendel G. Scott



In the next few months there were efforts to persuade the U.S. Army Medical Corps to reconsider and return some of the prints. They would not, of course, admit that they were suppressing it. *Strike* was being evaluated, reconsidered, analyzed, etc. So was the Walter Reed Television Division! The word filtered down that budget cuts would be used to squeeze the Schafers and their trouble-making writers out. It took about two years to turn this vibrant educational center into a place that broadcast dentistry in color. The Feds call it attrition.

There was an interesting coda to the *Strike* story. A publicist who had read the Gould review put me in touch with Talent Associates, the agents, in Au-

gust. They promptly hired me to write a script on the nuclear aftermath for *Armstrong Circle Theatre*. During August and September, I labored to turn the same message into the very specific docudrama format of this highly respected network series. Conferring with script editor Barbara Schultz, I created another "pocket of survivors" in a town called Princefield, Douglas Edwards' opening narration layed it out for the audience.

EDWARDS: Good evening, everybody coast to coast. Douglas Edward speaking.—Here is a map familiar to all of us.

(HE X'S TO MAP OF U.S.A. LARGE CITIES SHOW AS BLACK DOTS WITH ROADS, RIVERS, RAILROAD TRACKS CRISS-CROSSING FROM THEM)

We have studied it in school, seen it in a thousand newspapers and magazines . . . here is an unfamiliar map and a frightening one.

(HE X'S TO ANOTHER COPY OF SAME MAP, EXCEPT THAT WHERE THE BLACK DOTS FOR CITIES WERE, THERE ARE NOW BLANK CIRCLES. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF THESE BLANKS, LEAVING A TANGLE OF BROKEN LINES)

It shows a country which we hope will never exist—a United States without Chicago . . .

(HE POINTS)

... without Atlanta . . .

(POINTS)

... without Los Angeles . . .

(POINTS)

... without New York . . . Tonight we bring you a program on an important subject—survival—In just a few moments . . . "D IS FOR DOOMSDAY" . . .

SUPER FILM: ARMSTRONG OPENING . . . on the ARMSTRONG CIRCLE THEATRE.

In spite of the title *D Is For Doomsday*, my new script was no more pessimistic than *Strike* had been. Humankind was not wiped out. There was hope for the future, albeit an incredibly grim future.

ACT THREE

FADE IN: (FILM: AERIAL VIEW OF H-BOMB CRATER) EDWARDS: (VO)

Plus three weeks. The first efforts to assay the damage and repair it.

CUT TO: (AERIAL VIEW OF GUTTED CITY AND SUBURBS)

One quarter of all private homes destroyed. More than twenty one million buildings badly damaged

CUT TO: (AERIAL VIEW OF SCORCHED FORESTS)

Forests, crops destroyed or contaminated. Rail and telegraph lines broken.

The script was accepted, the parts all cast, a talented young director, Paul Bogart, assigned to direct. At the end of the second day of rehearsal, it was cancelled. I was told that the sponsor found it "too gloomy."

Was that the end, until *The Day After*? Well, yes and no. We did not turn defeat into victory back in 1959. This was, after all, still the era of Papa Eisenhower, and dissent was, by today's standards, decorous. There was a series of small gestures of defiance over the years, none very effective. In 1961, the December 26 edition of the *Washington Evening Star* re-told the story of *Strike*, but nothing came of it. A year later, the Schafers, their jobs abolished, staff scattered, opened a private production firm, vowing to produce a new version. Their venture into commerce was, alas, unsuccessful.

In 1965, I was by then a producer and writer of syndicated documentaries in New York. I managed to produce a low-budget documentary on nuclear war for the series *Perspective On Greatness*, focussing on Robert Oppenheimer and Edward Teller. But by now, the nation's attention was not on Armageddon but on a little country called Vietnam.

In 1967, I was an Executive Producer for a PBS series, and those in charge of the series became interested in the story of *Strike*. Through their efforts, Senator Hubert Humphrey's office was persuaded to make inquiries. Humphrey's staff ran into a brick wall.

When the publicity began for the recent ABC special, I began to hear from

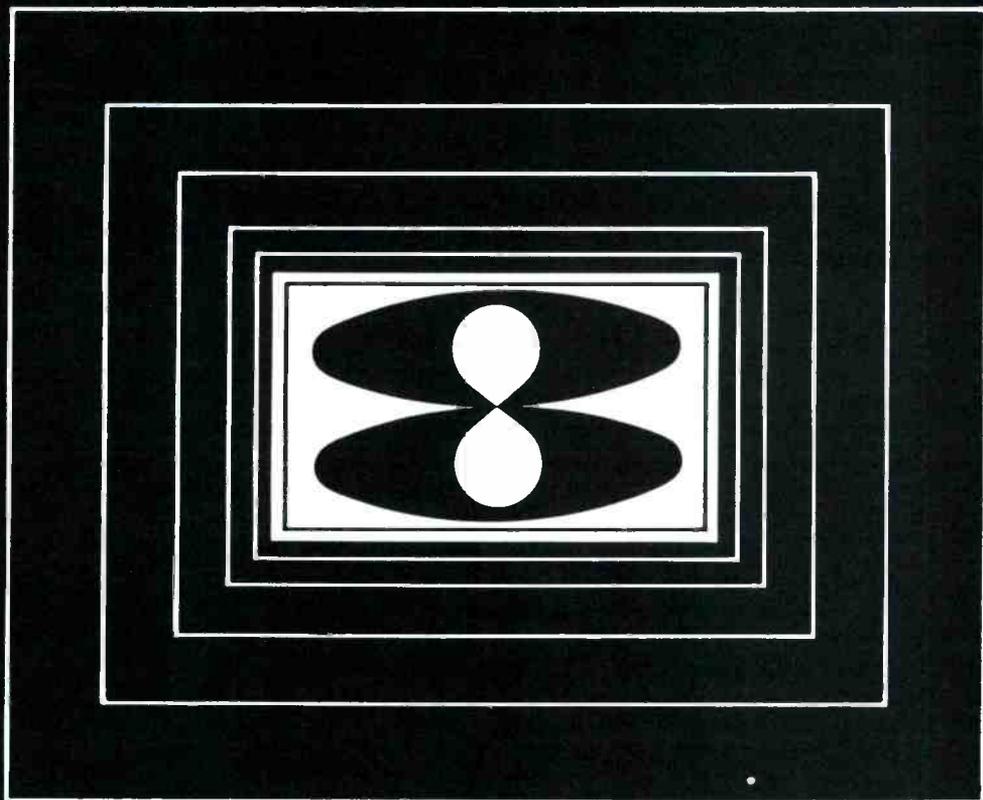
people who remembered the *Strike* experience. As I write this, they are once again searching for a print. I hope someone finds it, but in the end *Strike* is not really important in itself. We'd probably find it woefully old-fashioned, and it would certainly contain some inaccuracies after more than twenty years. What is important is that something be done by television to begin to focus public debate on the terrifying problem of nuclear arms escalation. I believe the ABC program was a step in that direction, and should have been applauded for that reason alone.

Was *The Day After* better than *Strike*? That's the question I have been asked most often. Well, they revealed a remarkably similar story line, but that's because the bomb writes the story. The ABC production values were of course more elaborate. I do think we did a better job of avoiding a preachy tone. Neither program is or was perfect, nor could be. What's important is that we need more such efforts. Many more. Three sentences close the *Strike* program notes. After twenty-four years they still sum it up pretty well:

***Strike* is not a "how-to-do-it" for humanity. It merely shows what we think might happen. All we hope is that it will make you think.** ■

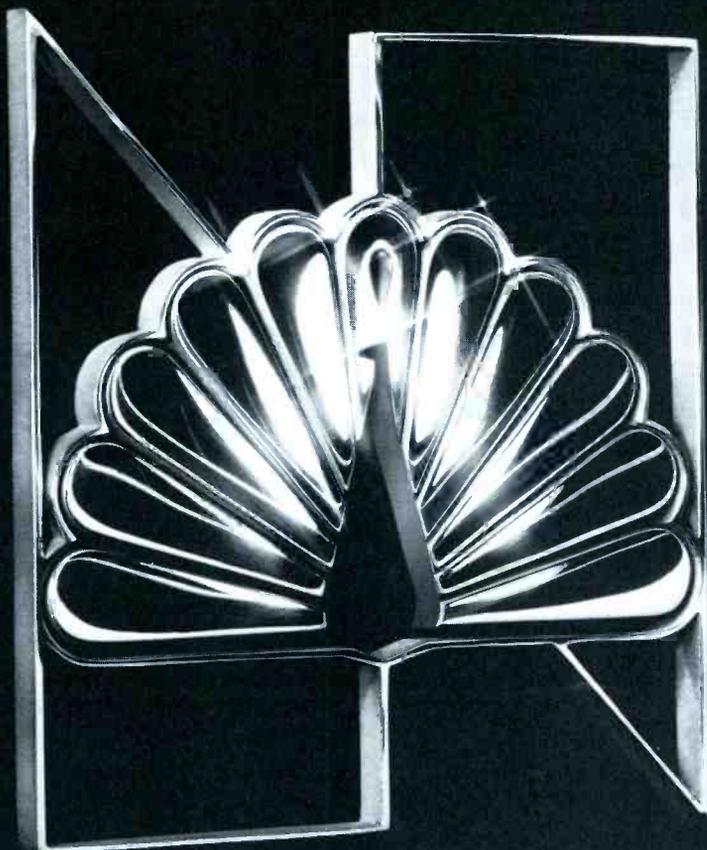
John O'Toole has followed up his frustrating, but revealing, experience with *Strike*, with many years of writing for television, radio and film. For PBS, he has contributed a notable adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, as well as scripts for *Kennedy Center Tonight*, *NPR's All Things Considered Special*, and the current *Smithsonian World*. He has also written specials and other programs for the commercial networks. His films have won many awards, including twelve for his documentary about the creation of the Hirshhorn Museum.

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PROTECTING FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS IN THE AGE OF THE ELECTRONIC REVOLUTION

A leading advocate of deregulation argues the case for repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and equal time for political candidates.

**BY SENATOR
BOB PACKWOOD**

The First Amendment is the crown jewel in the treasure house of American liberty. Most political thinkers in the country cite the Amendment as the foundation of all of our freedoms. They understand that the Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1791 to protect free thought from government intrusion. They understand that the nation's Founders sought to prevent the kind of press censorship that had dominated England and the Colonies prior to the Revolution. And despite certain aberrations, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts (1798-1801), and the suspension of Habeas Corpus in wartime, America has consistently returned to the ideal of our Founders when it comes to protecting free speech.

That is why every journalist ought to be deeply concerned by the extent to which the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and press are being eroded now. Journalists, though their stake in press freedom is obvious, will not be the only losers if we let the Amendment's purpose be smothered in well-intentioned but potentially dangerous government regulation of electronic communications.

Indeed, the real losers will be the American people both as information

consumers and as decision makers in a free society. The democratic system they established is rooted in the right of free expression. Take that freedom away and all the others will go with it.

I am often asked why I have taken up the fight for First Amendment rights and why I am so adamant about it. There are many reasons. First, deregulation has always been high on my legislative agenda because I believe an open marketplace encourages research, promotes development, refines products and provides consumers with high quality at low cost. Second, throughout my career I have fought for individual rights because they are essential to creativity and the advance of the social order. But most important, are the historic precedents which clearly demonstrate that the restriction of freedom of expression leads to the restriction of other rights and the eventual fall of the republic. Where speech is not free, the society decays.

The First Amendment has served this nation well. No doubt it would have continued to serve to the end of time were it not for the genius of our inventors. The electronic technologies they have given us have transformed communications and will continue to do so. Imagine the possibilities we face in the near future: 100 channels of cable-delivered news and entertainment; doing your shopping at home over your television; paying bills on your personal computer without

having to write a check. In fact, it is becoming more and more possible to live in total independence of the outside world: Teletext will put newspapers and other information on our television screens; videotex will allow us to interact with the outside world without leaving our living room.

But the revolution in information processing and home services is only the tip of the iceberg. Fiber optics, microwave broadcasting, cellular radio and integrated digital networks will remake the telecommunications industry into one of the most powerful, efficient and multifaceted in the world. The impact of this electronic revolution upon society, though clearly enormous, is only now beginning to be felt. It could produce a new sense of individualism and independence as well as a new feudalism wherein the consumer becomes lord of a self sufficient, computerized manor.

As Americans are served by new technologies and discover their potential benefits for society, they must ensure that freedom is enhanced rather than inhibited by outdated regulations. Eventually, we will have to write into our most sacred document of liberty—the Constitution—language that will guarantee that expression among citizens is to be free of government control. But at the present time, it is critical that we provide statutory relief for those whose editorial and news content is being regulated by the federal government.

That's why I am seeking support for repeal of certain sections of the Communications Act—mainly Sections 315 and 312a—through Senate bill S. 1917. Repeal of these sections would eliminate the statutory basis for the Federal Communications Commission's enforcement of the "Fairness Doctrine," inclusive of the right of reply and the personal attack rule. It would eliminate the equal time requirement for political candidates that is imposed on broadcasters as well as the low rate requirement for airtime. It would also eliminate the only language in the Communications Act which specifically gives the

FCC authority over the content of cable.

On first blush, these regulatory provisions may sound reasonable. Starting with the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1910

Even if these First Amendment restrictions were justified in the 1930's, they certainly have no basis today.

and proceeding through the Communications Act of 1912, the Dill-White Radio Act of 1927, and the Communications Act of 1934 as amended by subsequent Congresses, legislators have tried to preserve scarce airwaves and guarantee two-sided news coverage, editorial comment, and equal access by candidates for public office. In the period preceding World War II, these measures may have seemed rational. Television broadcasting was primitive and scarce. Newspapers had tended to support Republican candidates over Democrats, and so the New Deal sought parity in the electronic media.

But even if these First Amendment restrictions were justified in the 1930's, they certainly have no basis today. Their application has severely restricted the public's access to both candidates and issues. If the Republican and Democratic candidates are given air time in a debate, then all other *filed* candidates must be given equal time, regardless of the size of their following. This means that broadcasters have to give free time to as many candidates as have filed for a single race regardless of their qualifications or number of supporters. (The FCC has wisely suspended this rule for 1984 but could reimpose it at any time.)

If the broadcaster takes an editorial stand on a local issue, the "other side" must be given a chance to respond. But who determines who the other side is and that there is *only one* other side? If a corporation wishes to discuss an issue

in its commercials rather than advertise a product, then some provision may have to be made to provide free time for a response. Given these rules, broadcasters often choose to avoid the problem altogether by granting no time to any person on any controversial issues, by not televising political debates, and by turning down corporate advertising that might "rock the boat."

I have no illusions about the difficulty of getting this reform legislation passed. Some broadcasters like to hide behind the "Fairness Doctrine" and use it as an excuse to avoid advocacy advertising or discussion of controversial issues. Some politicians prefer a law that prevents debate, limits issue discussion, and favors incumbents.

Already such organizations as the Society of Professional Journalists, the Association for Education in Journalism, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the American Newspaper Publishers Association have called for the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine.

That is why it is important to be realistic in approaching this type of deregulation. It may take five or more years to create a First Amendment environment for broadcasters because with each Congress new legislation must be written, shepherded through appropriate committees, debated on the floors of Senate and House, and then fought for in Conference. And yet I'm hopeful that a great deal can be accomplished in 1984. The Administration is committed to deregulation, and a majority on the FCC, led by its Chairman, Mark Fowler, has pledged itself to do all it can to remove rules and regulations not clearly spelled out in statute.

When the truth is known, my bet is that opinion leaders in this country will support legislative reform. Already such organizations as the Society of Professional Journalists, the Association for Education in Journalism, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the American Newspaper Publishers Association have called for the repeal of the "Fairness Doctrine."

These facts, and their traditional fight for First Amendment rights, have activated the print media as never before in their fight for reform. Print journalists are no longer indifferent to the plight of their colleagues in the electronic media. With the help of organizations like the Freedom of Expression Foundation, the two groups are being made aware of their mutual needs.

As *New York Times* columnist William Safire noted (*Times*, November 11, 1982), "Where you stand, depends on where you sit." And he rightly noted that broadcasters and print journalists now are sitting at the same table. It is "better that our (press) freedom protection rub off on you (broadcasters) than your fairness requirement rub off on us."

Until recently, newspapers and magazines were guaranteed First Amendment rights of free press. In the *Miami Herald* case, the Supreme Court overturned a Florida law which required equal space for political response. (The law, on the books since early in this century, had been upheld unanimously by the Florida Supreme Court in 1970.) But today, newspapers and magazines may be surrendering those First Amendment protections as they take advantage of the cost-savings and other competitive benefits of satellites, microwaves and other communications technologies which are substantially regulated by the federal government. Their intimate involvement with cable, which is burdened with "must carry" and programming regulations, also opens the print media to regulation.

This nation's broadcasters have endured the sometimes noxious intervention of governmental regulation for a long

time. It is true that such well-meaning regulatory devices as the "Fairness Doctrine" and the "equal time rule" generally have been applied as fairly by the Federal Communications Commission as is possible. And there is no question that some regulation is essential. Technological regulation is still needed to keep frequencies untangled and to insure high quality of signal. The Prime Time Access Rule, which stimulates competition, should be untouched by current efforts to reform. Libel, slander, and pornography must be controlled by state and local laws.

The fact remains, however, that even "fair" application of news and editorial content regulations has had a chilling impact upon electronic publishers. Why should a television station risk its license or an expensive legal battle before the F.C.C. when these trials can be avoided by simply refusing any programming that someone may think is offensive? Why should a radio station broadcast a political debate between the leading candidates when they will have to give equal time to *all* other filed candidates no matter how esoteric? Why should a broadcaster televise a commercial that endorses the free enterprise system when such action may result in having to give away free time to someone endorsing socialism? The losers in this overly regulated environment are the viewers and listeners. They are deprived of informed opinion, the right to hear qualified candidates, and the kind of aggressive and lively commentary that is permitted in the press.

Fairness in journalism, be it print or broadcast, is a noble goal and one that professional journalists ought to pursue. In a free and open society, competition among the media is the best guarantee that all sides will have a voice, that the truth will emerge, and that distortion or misrepresentation will be pointed out. But again, to use Safire's words:

" . . . either we must extend Fairness—the right of access, with government as the ultimate editor—to newspapers, or

we must extend Freedom of the Press to broadcasters. But it's really a Hobson's choice, because there is no choice at all: freedom is in the Constitution and fairness is not."

If "fairness" were to be written into the Constitution, government regulators would decide not only what is seen and heard in the land, but also what is read.

Given a choice between government regulators and the journalistic judgments of free men and women, we must choose the latter, or we court tyranny.

And regulators are of necessity censors. History will not allow us to view even the most well-meaning governmental interference in free expression as anything but the beginning of the end for liberty.

Our founders sought to rectify the abuses the colonies had suffered under British rule. They were denied the right to express grievances to Parliament. They were denied the right to assemble to voice their complaints. They were forced to endure the censorship of the British crown as well as limitations of their right of free expression imposed by the British Parliament.

Our own national memory, if refreshed by a few examples, ought to give sufficient cause to reconsider faith in Congress, the President, or the courts as protectors of free speech. In 1798, it was Congress which acted to abridge our liberties by passing the Alien and Sedition Acts, under which newspaper publishers were jailed. In the 1830's, it was President Andrew Jackson who abused our liberties by prohibiting the mailing of abolitionist tracts into the South.

In this century, we've seen the courts uphold the internment of native-born

American citizens of Japanese ancestry. We've seen a United States Senator run roughshod over the liberties of artists, actors, and writers. We've seen a President and members of his administration threaten the media with reprisals for their criticism of him.

Given a choice between government regulators and the journalistic judgments of free men and women, we must choose the latter, or we court tyranny.

And the only way to guarantee freedom of expression is to pursue with all of our energy every means at our disposal to diminish and finally eliminate governmental intervention in communications.

Our founders gave us full freedom to the only forms of mass communications known to them when they wrote and adopted the First Amendment to our Constitution. Had they known of satellites, microwaves and lasers, I do not doubt they would have granted them equal protection with speech and press. Their goal was to guarantee freedom of expression. We must follow their example if we are to be good stewards of the freedom they entrusted to us, and if we are to pass that freedom on to our children more secure than we found it. ■

Bob Packwood (R), the junior U.S. Senator from Oregon, at age 36 was the youngest Senator when elected in 1969. He is chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, and a leader in a continuing campaign to de-regulate federal controls on the communications industry. Senator Packwood recently helped organize the Freedom of Expression Foundation, which is dedicated to extending First Amendment rights to the electronic media.

VIEWPOINT

Is Mr. T Progress?

While I am certain that Mr. T is a genuinely nice and well-meaning individual, I am concerned whether the character he plays is the best possible role model for children. I am also dismayed that he is quite possibly the most visible black person on television today. Why does an industry that studiously avoids portraying the pantheon of black heroes which spans this country's history choose to make a folk hero for our children out of Mr. T?

In the 50's and 60's, America's folk heroes were Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and the Cartwrights of *Bonanza*. There were no black heroes. In the '70's we had Kojak, Baretta and Starsky and Hutch, not to mention Charlie's Angels. Again, no black heroes. Now in the '80s we have Mr. T. I guess Hollywood would call that progress.

—Rep. Micky Leland (D) of Texas

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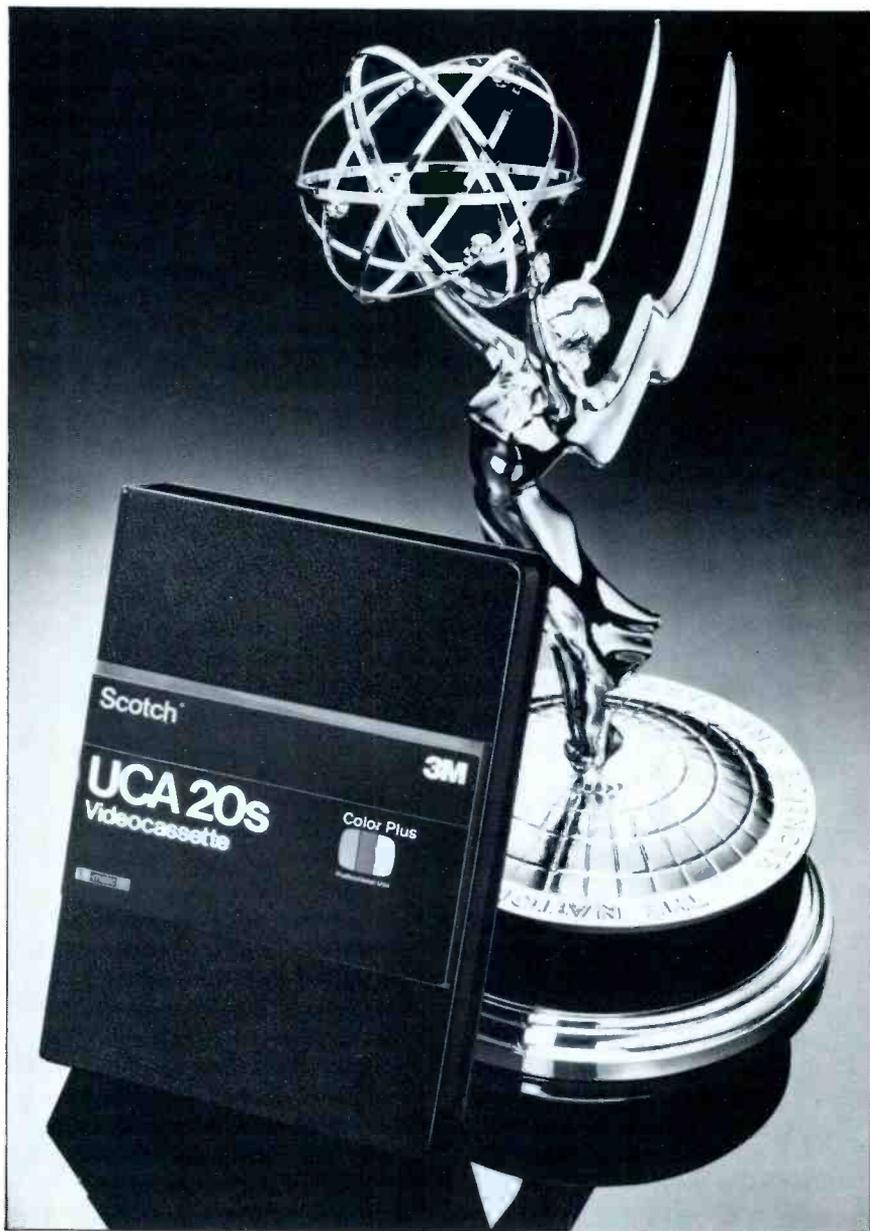
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METROMEDIA TELEVISION

THE "CRANIOLOGY" OF THE 20th CENTURY: RESEARCH ON TELEVISION'S EFFECTS

A critic charges that some TV research is a travesty, about as scientific as old theories of intelligence based on measuring skulls.

BY JIB FOWLES

A report billed as "the largest follow-up study ever done on aggressive behavior" was released recently, to be greeted cordially by scholars and indifferently by television professionals. Both groups could have predicted the findings in advance. The research team, headed by Professor Leonard Eron of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, had studied hundreds of children when they were 8 years old in 1960, and then studied the same people again when they reached age 30. No surprises: the higher the violence level of the television programs the child had watched, the more likely he was to be violent and criminal later in life.

Two colleagues at the university where I teach, knowing of my uncommon stance on these matters, independently sent me clippings about this study through the interoffice mail. They wanted to make sure I took note of the latest indictment of the medium.

The Eron study gets stacked on an enormous pile of television research reports with condemnatory findings. A second pile of studies with no statistical conclusions one way or the other about television is much, much smaller, while the pile of studies with proof that the medium has positive effects is so tiny as to hardly exist. Taken together, the three piles comprise one of the larger literatures in the behavioral sciences.

A thorough-going bibliographic survey of all the published research into television's effects, conducted in the early 1970's by the Rand Corporation, identified 2,300 studies. Apparently the number has doubled since then; another bibliography published in 1981 and concentrating on research done during the 70's lists 2,500 titles.

As the amount of television research expands, however, the proportions of studies with negative, neutral, and positive findings remains about the same. A rough index of these proportions comes from a review published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* which summarizes just the violence studies. Over 75% of these studies supposedly found that viewing television mayhem led to subsequent aggression; 20% of the studies came to no definite conclusion; only 4% discovered media violence to have a positive effect and reduce viewer hostility. There is near-consensus in the academic community about the harmful influence of television.

My thesis is that this body of research—extensive, avid, and seemingly decisive about the effects of watching television—is one of the grandest travesties in the uneven history of social science. In my judgment this literature is consigned to oblivion. To understand this position regarding television research, it is helpful to look at another false science—the science of *craniology*, which flourished in the 19th century. This analogy is distant enough in time that we may be able to look at it

more or less objectively, and use it to shed light on present circumstances. Both craniology and television research are ostensibly impartial, yet both are open to charges of pre-determined findings.

Craniology is not to be confused with its contemporary, phrenology. Phrenology occurred when someone in flowing robes pressed fingers on your skull, felt around the bone, and then on the basis of your bumps and hollows, declaimed vaguely on your personality. Craniology was different. As the discipline of accurately calibrating skull sizes or brain weights, craniology was thoroughly scientific in its pretensions. Skulls from different groups would be examined, and their average sizes would be ranked, in the interest of establishing a ladder of mental superiority and inferiority. The craniologists were so sure of their work, and so meticulous as scientists, that many preserved their raw data. Over a hundred years later, their calculations can be refigured.

An early leading craniologist was Philadelphia surgeon and scientist Samuel George Morton (1799–1851). Having amassed a collection of skulls representing several races, he set out to measure their volumes. His first method was to pour in mustard seed, but the seed proved compressible enough to give inconsistent readings, so he switched to lead shot. One by one, he calculated and recorded the size of his skulls. Then he made appropriate numerical adjustments and figured the means. Whites, he said, had the largest cranial cavities, Indians were next, and blacks were on the bottom.

Recently Harvard University scientist Stephen Jay Gould has tried to replicate Morton's analysis. He did not have Morton's original skulls, but he did have Morton's recorded measurements. Reworking this data, Gould was surprised to find that there was no significant difference in skull sizes between the races. Gould reports, "In short, and to put it bluntly, Morton's summaries are a

patchwork of fudging and finagling in the clear interest of controlling a priori convictions. Yet—and this is the most intriguing aspect of the case—I could find no evidence of conscious fraud . . ."

Sexual differences were the subject of another scrupulous craniologist, Paul Broca (1824–1880), a French professor of clinical surgery and founder of the Anthropological Society of Paris. Broca, a stellar scientist, felt that brain weight rather than cranial size was a more telling measure, especially for the brains he himself had carefully removed and weighed in the Parisian hospitals where he conducted autopsies. He calculated an average weight of 1,325 grams for 292 males, and the lesser average of 1,144 grams for 140 females. The 181 gram difference, he felt, confirmed the inferiority of women.

As well as recording brain weights, Broca also set down height and age for his cadavers. With this information Stephen Jay Gould was able to carry out a reappraisal. Brain weight is known to increase with height, and Broca's males averaged six inches taller than the females. Professor Gould statistically discounted for height in his recalculations. Brain weight decreases with age, and Broca's female subjects had outlasted the males by years. Taking these two factors into account, Gould found that the real difference was not 181 grams but 113.

Gould went on to speculate about additional dampening factors, ones for which he had no data, in his book *The Mismeasure of Man*. Cause of death, for instance: a degenerative disease will sharply reduce brain weight. Since Broca's females were markedly older, they had probably died less traumatically and had smaller brains as a result. "Thus, the corrected 113 gram difference is surely too large; the true figure is probably closer to zero and may as well favor women as men," says Gould. "In short, Broca's data do not permit any confident claim that men have bigger brains than women."

Craniologists like Samuel George Morton and Paul Broca were two highly

accomplished scientists who saluted objectivity no less resolutely than modern day researchers. To all appearances they and other craniologists were out to get the facts and nothing more. Yet somehow, ingenuously, their conclusions perfectly matched their preconceptions. They asserted that white males had larger brains than females, Indians, and blacks, when this is demonstrably not the case. Craniologists now lay exposed to us in part because values have shifted over a century, and the cultural rankings which they accepted as self-evident we no longer do. At our remove, we can see what craniologists were really doing: under the guise of conducting science, they were simply elaborating the biases of their day.

Television researchers can be as tentative as craniologists were. Just as craniologists started out in the sure knowledge that some groups were inherently inferior, so television researchers begin with an underlying belief that the programming is somehow reprehensible. Just as craniologists managed to prove that other cultures were beneath their own, so television researchers manage to prove that broadcast popular culture is contemptible if not dangerous.

To the best of my knowledge, television researchers are not frauds, any more than craniologists were. But the majority of behavioral scientists studying television are the captive of the prestige system in place, as their 19th century predecessors were. Both groups of scientists have in effect generated support for the status quo. "Appeals to reason," shrewdly observes Professor Gould, "have been used throughout history to enshrine existing hierarchies as proper and inevitable."

Facetiously I used to teach my students how to construct a piece of research that would be totally above board yet have the guaranteed result of "proving" that television violence causes real world hostility. My intention was to let

the students see how well-meaning social scientists could innocently structure a study to come out "right." In one or several of its aspects, my bogus study resembled almost all of the early work done by television researchers.



1. *Do a laboratory study instead of a field study*, I would instruct the class. Going out into the field, and collecting data from people's normal social contexts and normal viewing situations, can produce some unexpected and unwanted results. UCLA psychology professor Seymour Feshbach, for example, did a field study (reported in his book *Television and Aggression*) which demonstrated that viewing violent shows reduced the hostility of teen-age boys. You wouldn't want to risk getting such findings. Do a study in a laboratory setting instead. This will make your subjects uncomfortable about their viewing, and more likely to take subtle clues from you about the "correct" responses.



2. *Use subjects who have no psychological need for violent fantasy*. This is the key to indicting television action/adventure shows. Subjects who are a little hostile when exposed to a violent show will use the fantasy content to discharge aggressive feelings, and in post-tests will reveal a drop in hostility levels, according to an early study by Seymour Feshbach. But the same study also disclosed that subjects with low levels of harbored aggression at the outset were stirred up by the filmed violence. So try to get people who are calm and collected for your experiment, as opposed to people who are in the fraught state of mind that viewers often are when they turn to rip-'em-up programs or football games. These cooler subjects are bound to test higher on aggression after seeing your violent stimulus. The best trick here is to use a lot of females in your subject population. Females are socialized away from the use of violent entertainment; what makes them anxious

and snappish will often relax males.



3. *As a stimulus, use violent content which looks more like reality footage than fantasy footage.* Shots of actual battle-field firefights will get almost anyone apprehensive and riled up. On the other hand, violence perceived as non-threatening fantasy will tend to have the opposite effect. So pick footage as gruesome and realistic as possible. James Bond won't suit your purposes well.



4. *Make sure your subjects see only violent segments of a show, and not the dramatic resolution.* Don't take any chances that your subjects will experience closure and catharsis by seeing the end of the program. Apologize for not having enough time to show the entire half-hour or hour program. Show just the amount that will stimulate a viewer's hostile feelings but not allow for their discharge.

Do these things, I would tell my students, and the results will take care of themselves; television will be denounced once again. As a teacher's ploy, this four-part injunction served my purposes well. But television research has evolved beyond the point where the bulk of the studies are done in the laboratory. Nowadays it is large field studies which receive the most attention. Such a study was the one we began with, done by Leonard Eron and his associates.

There is no questioning the extensiveness of Professor Eron's field study. He studied 875 third graders in 1960, then studied the 427 of them he could find ten years later. Of the original group 409 were tracked down for a third study in 1981. Since I am not able to replicate the study (a function not only of the lack of funding, but the lack of a time machine—there is no way to get back to 1960), I have no just reason to doubt the data. Professor Eron and his colleagues show every sign of being very careful scientists.

The major finding of the longitudinal study makes intuitive sense: "For males, it appears that those subjects who were seen as more aggressive at age 8 rated themselves as more aggressive at age 30, were rated by their wives as more aggressive, had more convictions by the Criminal Justice System, committed more serious crimes, and had more moving traffic violations, and more convictions for driving while intoxicated," Dr. Eron reported at the 1983 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. In other words, the aggressive child becomes an aggressive adult.

My reservations begin when Eron delves into the causes of this consistent aggression. A high correlation was found between self-reported frequency of television viewing, especially of violent shows, and various measures of aggressive behavior. On the basis of this correlation Eron is comfortable saying, "The evidence seems compelling that excessive violence viewing is a cause of increased aggression."

He may be comfortable asserting this, but I am not. A correlation does not a cause make. A much more likely explanation, in my view, is that children growing up in pressured and punitive households will turn to television violence for vicarious relief of the retaliative anger which they cannot discharge directly at the adults in their lives. Television fantasy may ease their burdens but it cannot remove them; these children will still be hostile in later life. And in fact Eron's data reveal a correlation between a harsh family life and subsequent aggression.

The data themselves do not compel Eron to jump to his conclusion about television viewing and aggression. There are other interpretations. But this leap he makes by choice. It is a choice dictated, I believe, by preconceived views.

Other behavioral scientists are giving up the effort to irrefutably link television violence with real-world violence, and instead are searching for

different noxious effects. Chief among them is Professor George Gerbner, dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania and perhaps the most widely known television researcher. Annually Dr. Gerbner and his collaborators release counts of the violent acts on a representative week of prime-time television (labeled "Violence Profiles") as well as reports ("Cultivation Analyses") on the relationship between viewing hours and viewers' fearful misperceptions of reality.

The Violence Profiles need not concern us here, as they are probably accurate accounts of violent video deeds as defined by the Annenberg group. The Cultivation Analyses (named for the purported ability of television mayhem to "cultivate" feelings of victimization among viewers) are of greater interest, since they supposedly offer quantitative proof of television's effects.

In the construction of a Cultivation Analysis, Professor Gerbner correlates respondent's category of viewing time—Light (less than 2 hours per day), Medium (2 to 4 hours), and Heavy (over 4)—with answers to questions designed to reveal the person's degree of fearfulness and apprehension. Supposedly, heavy viewers are more likely to find the world a mean place to live; the assumption is one of cause and effect.

The data for a Cultivation Analysis are not generated by Gerbner himself, but for the most part are drawn from the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) annual General Social Survey. Administered to a representative sample of the American population, the NORC surveys are obtainable by any interested researcher. Because of their availability, Professor Paul M. Hirsch of the Graduate School of Business at the University of Chicago has been able to reanalyze Gerbner's statistics.

In a two-part article published in the journal *Communication Research*, Hirsch disclosed troublesome inconsistencies in Gerbner's Cultivation Analysis. If the relationship Gerbner asserts between

viewing and fearfulness were true, then shouldn't non-viewers be the least fearful of all? But Hirsch discovered that non-viewers (whom Gerbner had apparently left out of his presentation) were among the most fearful, paranoid, and suicidal. If the relationship Gerbner asserts between viewing and fearfulness were true, then extreme viewers (over 8 hours a day) should be more fearful than heavy viewers (4 to 8). But they aren't; extreme viewers are less perturbed than heavy viewers.

In short, Hirsch discovered there was no statistical relationship between extent of viewing time and degree of fearfulness. Hirsch ended with scholarly reserve, "We therefore conclude acceptance of the cultivation hypothesis as anything more than an interesting but unsupported speculation is premature and unwarranted at this time." Let me venture what Hirsch was reluctant to: no doubt unconsciously, Gerbner has manipulated his categories so as to mask contradictory evidence and to substantiate his own values about television.

Several years have passed since this statistical debunking was published, yet Hirsch's reanalysis remains largely ignored, while Gerbner's reputation soars. *Newsweek* in 1982 referred to Gerbner as "the nation's foremost authority on the social impact of television." Why does this situation exist, we have to ask ourselves? The reason, I presume, is that academics and those that listen to academics are determined to prove that television is bad, no matter what, and Gerbner is their champion. They are the minions of their prejudices, like cran-ologists.

In truth, the largest conceivable experiment has already been done—thirty years of exposure to the medium by virtually the total American population. My challenge to my colleagues in academia is that there exists absolutely no evidence of widespread social damage. The two most frequent charges—those of rising crime rates and dropping

reading scores—simply do not hold up. Let's look briefly at these two.

After a century-long slide, crime rates in the United States began a dramatic rise in the 1960's. Annual homicide rates, which stood at 4.7 per 100,000 in 1960, rose to 8.3 in 1970. The start of this unhappy ascent coincides with the near-total penetration of television into American homes. Was the violence-filled programming behind the rise in social violence? Many social analysts assumed so.

The real answer to the zooming crime rates turns out to be a deceptively simple one. Statistically speaking, crime is the handiwork of the young. Teenagers and males in their twenties get arrested at rates five and ten times those for older age brackets. What a demographer would see as the greatest change occurring in the 60's was the arrival into adolescence of an unprecedented hoard of baby-boom children. The sheer numbers of this particular group was enough to make the general crime rates take off.

It is the odd post-World War II demographic profile of the United States that lies behind the acceleration of crime statistics, and not the arrival of television. The resolution of this is easy to predict. As the baby boom cohort ages, and passes into its 30's and 40's over the next few years, the crime rates will subside. This has already begun; reported crime dropped 3% in 1982 and 5% in the first half of 1983. Assuming practices of crime reporting stay constant, crime rates promise to decline steeply by the end of the 1980's. Will those who were quick to associate television with rising crime turn about and credit it with the decline? Unlikely.

In a similar way, the issue of reading scores cannot be used to support an anti-television position. Almost everyone assumes that reading abilities are eroding, but the truth appears to be the opposite. In 1965 the state of Iowa administered to all elementary school children the same diagnostic test that had

been used with pre-video age children in 1940. The differences were substantial—not only were the 1965 students' abilities at reading and comprehension much higher than those of 1940, but so were skills at conceptualizing, handling abstract symbols, and reasoning. In Indiana the statewide reading scores for sixth- and tenth-grade students in 1976 were compared to those of 1944; the findings were of unmistakable improvement in reading skills for children of the television generation.

"The nation as a whole is concerned today's children do not read well," remarked Dr. Roger Farr, who conducted the analysis at Indiana University. "Any well-done study such as this is evidence to the contrary. Children are reading as well as in 1944-45—actually, reading far better."

Scores on national reading tests carried out during the 1970's also confirm the unfaltering reading abilities of American youngsters. Funded by the federal government, National Assessments of Reading were conducted in 1970, 1975, and 1980. They disclosed that 13-year olds and 17-year olds did not slip at all over the course of the decade, while in the 9-year old category, significant gains were registered. Nine-year olds at the end of the decade were reading much better than 9-year olds at the beginning.

The most-cited evidence in support of the view that reading abilities are on the decline comes from the standardized College Board tests given to college aspirants. These language scores began their long-term drop in 1963. Why is there a discrepancy between the College Board results and those of Iowa, Indiana, and the National Assessments of Reading? The problem lies not with the tests themselves; their scores are accurate enough. The difference is mainly accounted for by the nature of the pools of students being examined. The ethnic and income-level composition of the Iowa and Indiana schools, as well as the national school-age population, has remained relatively stable over time, permitting valid comparisons. But from the early

60's on, the College Boards were increasingly taken by kinds of students who previously did not finish high school, much less aspire to university education.

In 1975 the College Entrance Examination Board itself convened a special advisory group of 23 experts to discover why the scores had been dropping. Their report, made public in 1977, cited the "notable extension and expansion of educational opportunity in the United States." The dropping College Board scores told not of a dip in reading abilities, but of the recent opening of higher education to groups previously discouraged. It is ironic, but the flagging scores reveal social progress, and not the reverse.

Again, it is easy to forecast the outcome. Once the composition of the college-bound population becomes stable, the scores will level off. Apparently this process has begun, starting in 1981. In time a modest rise is predictable.

So neither crime rates nor reading scores can be used to condemn television. The remarkable thing about the medium is not that it has so much negative influence, but that it has so little. Given the vastness of the audience and the enormity of the programming (something over 5 million hours of broadcasting annually), it is interesting that there is so little traceable impact upon the nation. Even the number of reported untoward incidences—when an impressionable viewer imitates something seen on a show with damaging results—cannot be more than a few dozen a year. The trade-off for our highway system is about 40,000 lives yearly, but television comes virtually without adverse costs.

Just as 19th century craniologists attempted to confirm the social prejudices of their day, so 20th century television researchers attempt to confirm the cultural prejudices of our times. Adopting a patrician posture, they conjure evidence to deride plebian culture. Dubious experiments, questionable ma-

nipulations of data, spurious deductions from correlations, improper inferences, a misappropriation of social statistics—it is an unholy record. In service to preconceived ideas, scientific minds have been misguided if not corrupted.

The truth of the matter is that the discernible effects of television are minor and innocuous. What the medium does is nothing more or less than relax viewers. Survey after survey has discovered that when Americans are asked with an open-ended question why they watch television, the most frequent response is to rest and relax.

One of the few innovative and informative studies in the literature on television was published recently by a University of Chicago social scientist. He outfitted 104 adults with beepers, and had them paged at random times during the course of a week, to find out what they were doing and what their mood was. "Most notable among the findings is that TV watching is experienced as the most relaxing of all activities," he reports. Television-viewing, the most freely chosen and most desired of his respondents' activities, was linked by most of them to feelings of drowsiness.

I wish I could forecast that the anti-television crusade of academic researchers is going to end because their faulty premises have been exposed (as I have been trying to do here). The crusade will end, but unfortunately not for this reason. Truth counts only slightly more in the conduct of social science than in the conduct of our daily lives.

How and why will television get off the hook? Again, history provides insights. In his *Theories of Mass Communication*, Melvin DeFleur notes something in passing that is pertinent here: "History reveals that public outcries against the harmful effects attributed to violent media content tend to focus on the newest mass medium."

It is the newest mass medium which serves as a whipping boy; perhaps this is something like a rite of passage, by which the medium wins acceptance into its social context. Penny newspapers,

dime novels, movies, and radio have each in turn been subjected to the sort of chastisement which in television's case has come in the form of social science. As time marches on, however, attention will shift to newer media—video games, videocassettes, and certain cable channels.

When this happens, academics will begin to treat television much more kindly, in the way they now embrace old movies and 30's radio serials. Television research will be stripped of its moral tone and condescension. And the literature on television's effects which was produced from the 50's to the 80's will look as foolish and dated as craniology does now. "How," we will wonder to ourselves, "could such good scientists have been so misled?" ■

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QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

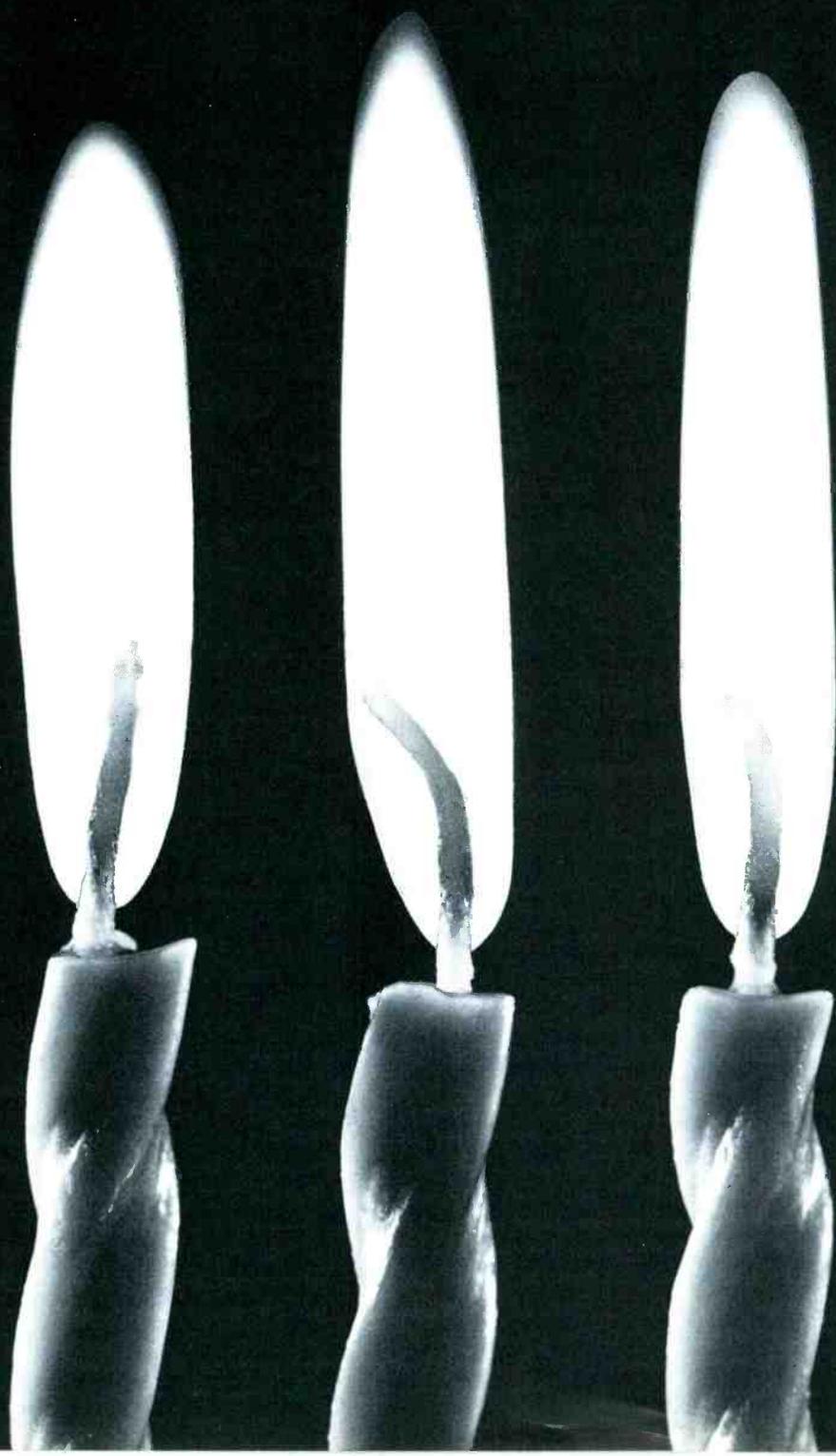
“ Sports are only one of the voltaic piles that generate teletrivia. Others, just as tireless, are the non-athletic games—tune-guessing, price-matching, blind-dating and all the rest. Innocent enough fun, and enjoyed by enough people to warrant their existence—but so many games? . . .

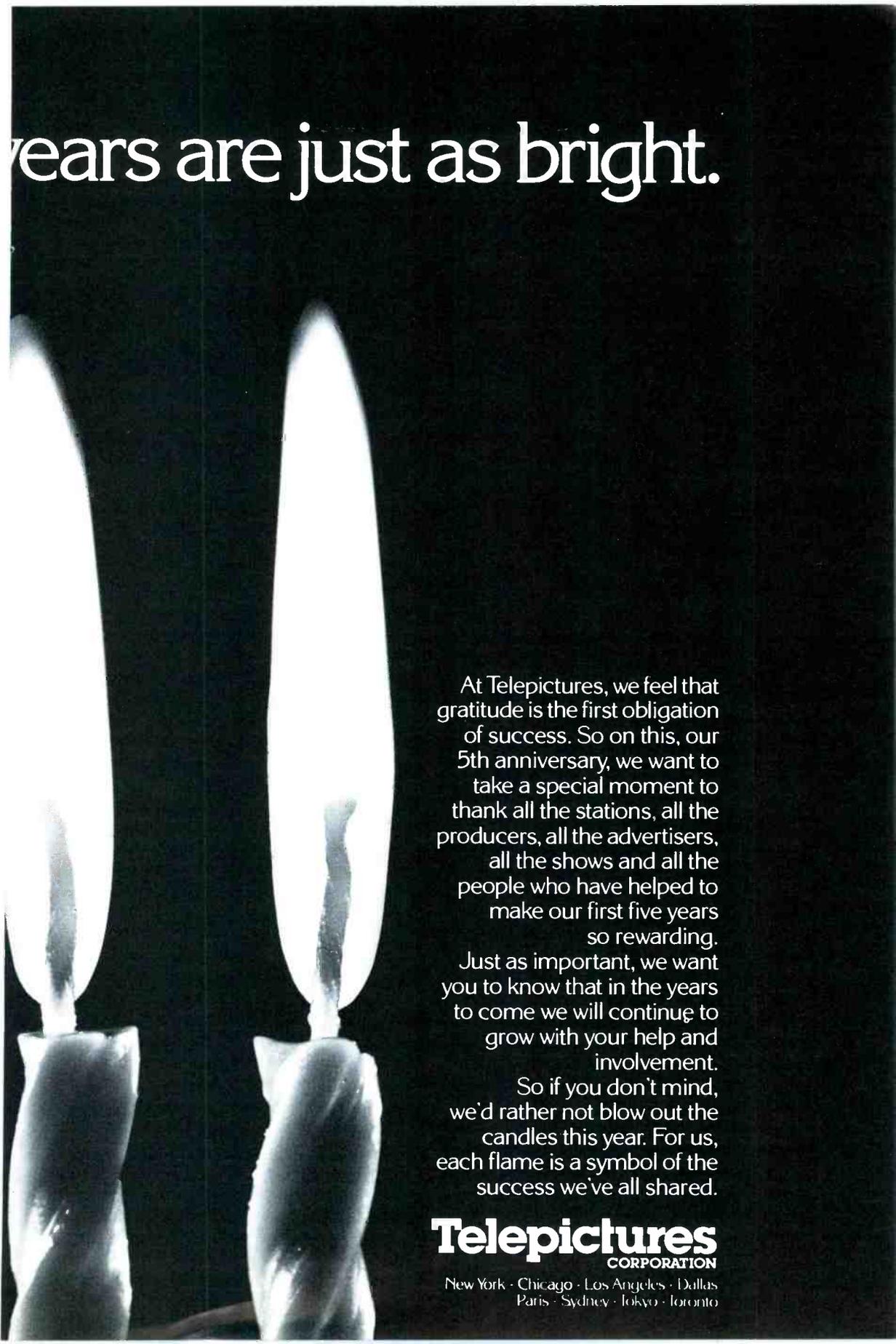
Giveaway programs in general are like sweet-flavored gelatinous cultures on which greed and hysteria colonize like bacteria. The hysteria is visible to the viewer, but the greed is not so obvious. Not lightly to be forgotten are the quiz scandals of the late 50's, which ended in grand jury indictments. There have been no frauds since then (at least none has been disclosed) but big money, princely prizes, paroxysms of delight at winning, childlike dismay at guessing wrong answers to fribbling questions, tears, shrieks, kisses, ringing bells, rasping buzzers, hours of production and transmission, all come together to fill the public's time with pa- blum. ”

—Norman Corwin, *Trivializing America.*



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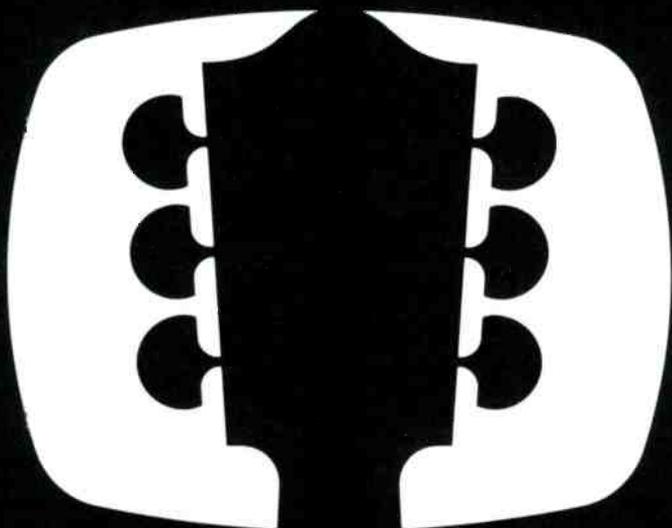
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TELEVISION

CALLING THE SHOTS AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

KIRK BROWNING INTERVIEWED BY JACK KUNEY

The Metropolitan Opera is now celebrating its one hundredth anniversary, so this seems an appropriate time to spotlight the life and works of the television director who has made the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts an event in millions of homes across the nation—Kirk Browning. Although to many he is best known for programs like Great Performances, Live From Lincoln Center, and the Met, Browning is one of the great all-around directors, and has also been responsible for many outstanding dramatic programs, variety shows, and specials.

Here he discusses his ideas and his career with a fellow director, Jack KuneY, in this exclusive interview for Television Quarterly.

KUNEY: *I've heard you described as one of the few members of the DGA who is not tone deaf. Is that true? I mean, just how musical are you? Do you play an instrument, do you read a score?*

BROWNING: Well, I'm not a musician, but I am musical. And I attribute about 80 percent of whatever I've been able to achieve, not only in the musical line, but in everything I direct, to that musicality. I think any director, basically, has to be musical. George Roy Hill is the most

musical director I know and he does almost no musical shows. But there's music in everything he touches. And I'm fortunate to have been born very musical. I have a response to music, I understand music, I feel music, I feel textures and rhythms and dynamics—whatever strengths I have as a director come out of those—out of that sense of orchestration. I did write music at one time, music with Pat Tanner, who wrote *Auntie Mame*. He was my lyric writer. Pat Dennis, he called himself then, but it was Pat Tanner. And Pat and I wrote some songs for the *Blue Angel* right after the war, and then I got married, and went out to the country to become a farmer.

I had an egg route and I sold eggs to the music director for NBC, Samuel Chotzinoff. He and I became great friends. He was interested that I had opted for egg farming, because he rather liked the music I wrote and he tried to promote it.

Did you play the piano?

BROWNING: I had studied the piano when I was a kid and I had an extraordinarily good musical memory. I could go to a movie of the thirties and forties, and come home and play the whole score. But I never learned to read music because I was so good at picking up everything by ear. As a matter of fact, I once had a job playing pop music at the cocktail lounge in the Savoy Plaza.

So how did you get into television?

BROWNING: It was Chotzinoff—after a

while he said, "Kirk, how long are you gonna stay out here in the country?" And my wife, dear Barbara, she was dying to get back to the city. Anyway, Chotzy said, "Why don't you come into television?" He brought me into the NBC music library, and I was there for maybe a month or two sort of biding by time. That was 1948, and I broke into TV in '49 as a stage manager, and I did a number of shows, and one of the principal shows that I stage-managed was the first *NBC Opera*, which had started around then.

Just what was that first opera?

BROWNING: Minotti's *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, commissioned as a radio opera in the late 30's by NBC. It had its first television production in '49, and then we did *Down in the Valley*, by Kurt Weill. And the first opera that I directed was *Monsieur Choufleury*, a one-act Offenbach opera in 1950.

It all sounds so easy.

BROWNING: Well, it was. It was extraordinary in those days how cavalier people were about television. Now, it was just as true at CBS, but CBS had much more respect for TV. NBC was still largely radio oriented. The day I started there, they also hired an elevator operator and a member of the page staff. A page, an elevator operator, an egg farmer, all eventually became television directors!

You were a nephew of one of the great television pioneers, Worthington Miner, producer of Studio One. Did he guide you or help you?

BROWNING: Somewhere along the line I went to talk to Tony and he discouraged me. He thought that I didn't have the credentials to work in television. He said, "You just can't. This wanting to get into TV isn't enough. You've got to know something, you've got to have something to give, something to say, and then you can use television to say it. But at the moment, you have no reason to be there, other than the fact that you just want to do it."

Anything you can tell us about those early years? Was it easy? Did you catch on quick?

BROWNING: Well, I had the advantage of being assigned to shows that were down my alley. *Bell Telephone Hour*, *Toscanini Symphony broadcasts*, *Hurok's Producer's Showcase*, and the *NBC Opera*. In those days, it was mostly a question of learning the craft, of manipulating and managing all that live television meant. The logistics of how to work cameras, booms and pictures all at once in any kind of consecutive, sensible order. Now that's something any reasonably bright person can learn; it's not a question of art. Obviously, there's some degree of selection, and I had the basic talent to put those things together and get us on and off the air.

Fortunately, I knew how to handle the musical part of it. The moment I heard those pieces of music, I instinctively knew what to do. I had a little show called *Recital Hall*, which was nothing more than a single artist coming out in the studio and playing for half an hour. Well, I could listen to what they were playing or singing just once, and know basically how to make pictures out of what I was hearing. Some people haven't the remotest idea how to make pictures out of music.

Did I ever tell you how I got to be the director of the NBC Symphony concerts with Toscanini? They had a sports director doing them because it was a remote, out of the studio, in Carnegie Hall. He'd read on the program that one of the selections was going to be "The Girl With the Flaxen Hair," by Debussy. At the time I was working with Chotzinoff. I don't think I was any more than an A.D. at the time, but anyhow, I was watching the program on a monitor at Carnegie Hall with Chotzy as it was going on live—I'm looking at this picture of the maestro, Toscanini, conducting, and all of a sudden, supered over the maestro's face, is this picture of a girl, sitting in front of a mirrored lily pond combing her hair with a brush!

Chotzy turned to me and he said, "Kirk,

from here on, you're directing the Toscanini shows. I don't care what you do with the picture—just never be on anything but Toscanini."

So that's how I started doing the NBC Symphony!

Didn't you ever shoot the orchestra?

BROWNING: Not without Toscanini in the picture. There was never a single shot that didn't include Toscanini in it.

The first thing I did was to move all my cameras behind the orchestra. In those days, you didn't have zoom lenses, so the only way I could get various pictures of the maestro, without his back, was to move everything around. That really started the whole technique of shooting the reverse angle. In Europe, they're still shooting TV concerts the way an audience sees them—sections of the orchestra, and the conductor from the side or the back. But the whole idea of shooting over instruments into the conductor, was something unique.

I recently saw the first show I ever did with Toscanini—it's at the Museum of Broadcasting. I wouldn't change it today. The miracle of the whole thing is that the constraints of the medium of that time were just right for Toscanini. You couldn't move the camera, and you had to have enormously long takes. Today I just cut and move. I never stand still. But the maestro was one of those extraordinary people. The more you stayed on him, the better the picture.

I always tell my students that. Don't cut unless you have a reason to cut.

BROWNING: The main reason in those days was the size of the cameras, the size of the equipment.

Describe one of those cameras for us.

BROWNING: The pedestal of the camera weighed, I don't know, five, six hundred pounds, and the camera itself weighed two or three hundred pounds. Eight or nine hundred pounds total weight. The camera had a turret with four lenses. You usually had a 35 mm which was your wide-angle lens, then a 50 mm, a 75 mm,

and a 135 mm. I used the 50 quite a lot, because you could move very easily with a 50. From 75 on up, it was difficult to make moves because it was hard to maintain focus. Then, to get close-ups, I would skip the 90 and I'd go to a 135. The 35 was your picture shot, and showed you everything, and your 50 was for getting a little tighter. But the cameras worked right up against the people, because those early cameras were gigantic.

How big were they?

BROWNING: About six feet from the tip of the lens to the eyepiece of the cameraman.

Could the cameraman move it by himself?

BROWNING: Well, some cameramen were wonderful at moving those huge monsters. It wasn't a question of moving the camera, because they were counter-balanced, and the floors were wonderful, and all the gears worked. But the cables were maybe an inch and a half in diameter—well, you can imagine three of them bound together. Every three feet of cable, you had to have a man pulling them. It became an enormously complicated thing to move cameras, because you couldn't cross cables.

And then your booms had to be in between your cameras, so they couldn't cross. Finally, you had those monstrous cranes that would give your movement, but to try to relate them to all the other equipment, it was—well, challenging, to say the least.

You were talking the other day about picture sequences, about building picture sequences. How far ahead do you plan your shooting? Not only in your blocking, but the way you envision something.

BROWNING: It depends on the degree of control I have. If I cover an opera at the Met, most of it has already been done. All I have to do is to photograph it. Now, obviously, I'm trying to do several things in reporting this whole business with my

cameras, I'm trying to keep the audience oriented to what's happening.

When you talk about audience, I assume you're talking about the television audience.

BROWNING: Yes, I'm trying to let the TV audience see what the house audience is seeing, so that they have some feeling of sharing something—a common language.

My main interest is people. I think one of the strengths of working out of some place like the Metropolitan Opera House is that you are able to exhibit—put right up front—Pavarotti and Domingo, and Sutherland. There may be five . . . ten . . . twenty other people doing something interesting on the stage, but if there's a Pavarotti or a Sutherland or a Domingo, I'll find some way of keeping the reference on them almost the entire time. Simply because that's what the audience is interested in.

When I used to work with Beverly Sills, if Beverly came out on stage, I didn't care what anybody else was doing, I was on Beverly. Because that's what everyone tuned in to look at.

When the Met calls and says they want you to do this or that performance, are you ever brought in early enough to influence that performance, or the way the singers perform?

BROWNING: No.

It is always a matter of reproducing someone else's work?

BROWNING: I have been asked to look at something and comment—do you think this will work on television? But once the Met makes the decision to produce an opera, it's done without regard for the cameras. Now, I'm not saying that adjustments aren't made, but they're not made for me. They're just made because they make sense. Obviously, you don't put in five scrim into a show that you want to televise. Or if you do have a scrim, you find out if there's a way that you can get rid of it for television and not ruin it for the opera house.

Well, let's say the Met plans four operas a year as potential television productions . . . Do you then have the opportunity to sit down with the stage designer and make changes for television?

BROWNING: In theory, that could happen. In practice, up to now, it hasn't. For TV, usually they schedule an opera which has already been in the repertory that is either being brought back, or revised. Now, for example, we're doing the Verdi *Ernani* for next year. They've asked me to go up and look at the plans and see what problems they present. I suppose if I saw a problem that would make it difficult from a television standpoint, and I came up with some sort of suggestion that was reasonable, I could influence the production a little—that is, if it didn't make any difference to the designer.

Well, I would assume then, it's a very rare stage director at the Met who is conversant with the workings of television. He's there dealing with his audience.

BROWNING: That's right.

So then how do you transfer what has been staged for an opera performance to television?

BROWNING: There are two things that I try to do. One is, obviously, when they're doing a production featuring some superstar, like Pavarotti, I will anchor—in terms of emphasis and picture, and what's happening—on that star.

Well, that loses one camera for you.

BROWNING: I don't really mean it in that sense, but I will design my shoot so that that person is related to almost everything that's happening. In other words, that's my intent. Now it isn't always possible, because the person there with his back turned or facing the wall, or standing there not doing anything, and then you just forget it, and get on with the rest of the production.

How many cameras do you normally use to cover an opera? And where do you place them?

BROWNING: At the Met, I ordinarily use six cameras. I use four cameras from basically low positions, either eyeline or under eyeline along the front of the house.

When you say eyeline, do you mean the singer's eyeline?

BROWNING: The singer's eyeline, yes. Two cameras are at the extreme ends of the orchestra pit, left and right house. And two are either side of the conductor, almost lower than the stage level, not to impinge on sightlines from the audience, because we can't clear the audience out. But they're very low angle, as low as I can get them and still see the stage. That gives me four cameras across the front, and I have two more cameras rather far back and a bit higher up on the side boxes. I don't use the center box ordinarily, unless I'm working with Franco Zeffirelli. When I did *La Boheme* for Zeffirelli, he said, "Kirk, you can do anything you want, but please give me a center shot of the set—it's the one thing I want."

So I gave it to him, I just put a camera in the center box, simply to show him each of the sets head on. But ordinarily I don't bother to do that. It's not one of the main priorities, to show the set head on. That's not what the audience is really going to remember.

I assume that most of what you do then is cross-shooting?

BROWNING: Yes. I know it must sound heretical, but I found that the most interesting and theatrical way to shoot grand opera singers is off the full face, from the side and rather low. They seem to retain their kind of larger-than-life persona that way. I don't go for the high shot that a lot of the European opera houses use, the box shots that show a lot of floor, and the singers, you know, from overhead. . . . I've always thought it was demeaning to the performer. It just makes him look unimportant, uninteresting.

You're always zooming in?

BROWNING: I think I do a little too much,

but if I'm going to err on any side, I'm going to err on the side of what I would call an active camera. In a way, you see, it's as though the camera were a committed member of the audience. It gives you a point of view about what's going on. If you sit too long on a frozen shot, with the camera totally passive, what you're doing stops being subjective. I'm trying to use a subjective camera in the sense that the camera is one person exploring everything. And when you explore, you are active, you don't just sit there.

The thing about television is, if you think of it as a set of eyes looking at a piece of material, and somehow transmitted to an audience, the director's psyche is such that he can see a wide shot or a closeup, a medium shot, or he can pan. He can do all these things, individually, yet there's a continual psychic activity. You know, your involvement in what is going on ahead of you. What you do is always in the context of an overall framework so that you don't really think of each shot as being an interrupted series of impressions.

One thing that occurred to me as you were saying this is that people don't watch television to watch cameras at work.

BROWNING: That's right.

They want to get involved in the show. They want to participate in whatever they're viewing.

BROWNING: You're absolutely right. That's the paradox of our business. It would appear as though it's simply self-aggrandisement on the director's part to assume all those judgments about when you should be close and when you should be far. Well, the point is, that if you're clever enough about it, it should look like the judgment of the home viewer. It should look as though it's what the home viewer needs to see, and it's not the director being gratuitous.

You can't possibly please every viewer, because they each come with different perceptions. If I were doing an orchestra

show for a convention of timpani players, obviously they want to see what the timpani's doing. So, if I know that, I'd probably structure the show so that I'm 80 percent of the time on the timpani. There's no easy answer to how you treat these things. I'm basically trying to appeal to a lay audience who has no particular predisposition for any one aspect of this. They simply want an experience which is not going to bore them, and so I work very much for a general audience. I do what I think the general audience will respond to.

Do you think that imposing television limitations on a staged performance hurts or helps the performance, and the performers?

BROWNING: In opera I think it helps.

But I don't think the theater has been equally successful. More often than not, shooting a play off the stage is disaster time.

BROWNING: I totally agree with you. I'm presently working on *Alice in Wonderland* and I'm taking it out of the theater milieu, and putting it into a studio. I'm doing a whole new version of it.

Do you try and make pretty pictures? In other words, are there any aesthetic principles that you apply? Or is it just a question of eyeballing something and saying that this or that looks good, or looks bad, and should be rejected.

BROWNING: I don't discredit the medium in terms of its ability to be pictorially interesting and attractive and appealing, but I think it's a very low dynamic in the spectrum of television's qualities. I think the focus of the picture is always what people are interested in, and pretty pictures, if that's what you're talking about, mean very little in terms of television's environment.

I may be wrong, you know. For example, I did *Rosenkavalier*. The biggest single moment in *Rosenkavalier* is the presentation of the rose. You have this enormous silver-white mylar set, with about 500 people on stage, all dressed

in brocade and there's an enormous amount of fanfare, and people coming in and servants running around, and then you have Sophie about to accept the rose, and you have Octavian coming in with the rose, and the doors are thrown open. Musically, it works up to the biggest climax in the entire opera. You have about five chords . . . Da da da da da . . . and on those five chords, which is where everything is happening on stage, I cut to a closeup of Octavian's hand holding the rose. Now, obviously, that is a liberty that I'm taking because I must weigh, in all honesty, that for someone sitting in the house, you are not going to really single out the hand with the rose at that moment. I mean, it is obviously stretching a point, but somehow you have something called *Rosenkavalier* and you've been singing about this damn rose for two acts, and suddenly, the guy comes in and presents it. I just thought, well, this is what the opera's all about. This is the key moment, so it ought to be on the rose. Nobody complained, but I think people were aware of the fact of what I was doing. You know, the director is imposing his judgment on all this.

In the process of shooting opera, you have operas with different styles and different intensities: Strauss, Mozart, we have Verdi, we have the Wagner. In other words, a wide selection. Is TV coverage different for each? Are you shooting differently for Mozart than you would for Verdi?

BROWNING: Yes, I think the music does impose a different way of shooting on each opera. A Mozart quintet, where we have five people singing is quite different from the Verdi. There's a totally different rhythm, and as a result, there's a different way of telling the story. I mean, it's really built into the piece. So I imagine I would do it differently. I don't know to what degree, but some degree.

What happens when you start an opera from scratch? Like in the old NBC Opera days, for example. How much do

you participate in the pre-production planning?

BROWNING: At that time, that was entirely up to me. For good or worse, it really started with the director. God, I even used to do all the sets.

Did you start with the score as a play script?

BROWNING: When I started to do an opera, I really knew very little about opera, so I really started with it as I would with a play.

With the libretto?

BROWNING: That's right. I started with the libretto. And since I hadn't been pre-conditioned too much to a lot of stage performances that I'd seen, I built from there. Fortunately, I had material that I was basically in tune with. I didn't try impossible operas. I had things like *Bohème*. You know, Puccini is especially gratifying for a director who's starting out because he is so theatrical. He leads you so comfortably into what's right. If I had started with *Parsifal*, I wouldn't have known what in the world to do with it, or this *Ring* that I just saw that Chereau did on PBS. I think he's a genius, but I wouldn't have had any idea what to have done—if I'd been given Wagner in the beginning of my directing career.

Let's explore the manner and the degree of your participation as the opera is being readied for the opera house. Design. To what degree do you get involved with design?

BROWNING: Quite a bit. I try to get the overall shape of the piece, where people are, what they have to do, the area in which they have to function. You have so many opportunities in television that you don't have on the proscenium stage; a director's just missing the boat if he thinks literally in stage terms. Of course a lot depends on the amount of money you've been given. But I don't think opera, unless you're a great, great artist like Zeffirelli or Ponelle, should try to go out and shoot on location, because there's something about a totally realistic en-

vironment, that seems so silly for people when they're singing opera. But Ponelle and Zeffirelli are great enough artists so that they take realism, and then they make it theatrical; they make it a metaphor for something.

They are such extraordinary directors, their eye is so right, they know how to make a meadowland look like something besides a meadowland, when someone has to come out and sing in it. But if you're not careful, you can get into the terrible trap of style. . . .

So, yes, in design, the director has more to say than the designer on television. It's a thankless job for the designer, because you end up, unfortunately, not seeing too much of what he does anyway. It all becomes background.

Lighting. . . .

BROWNING: I'm not terribly sensitive to lighting nuance. I don't think in terms of exact lighting tone or lighting texture. That's one of my weaknesses, that I don't pay enough attention to lighting. I think a director should.

Rehearsing the music, the orchestra, the singers? . . .

BROWNING: When it touches performance, yes. Obviously a conductor works within a certain framework that he controls. But when it comes to certain movements, particularly in recitative, where there's some flexibility in the musical line, where you can have long *firmatas*. How long should the *firmata* be? What do you want to do? Do you want five closeups before the next thing happens? On the stage you've got to keep it going, because very often there's nowhere else to go, but on camera, you have the possibility for some detail which will take some extra time. Now, basically, the conductor controls it, but the stage director should have some input.

And the conductor? Is there any conflict between you and the conductor?

BROWNING: Some, but he starts right from scratch like I do, and it's usually resolved.

He rehearses the singers, but you do the blocking and staging?

BROWNING: Yes. The translation is something that both the conductor and the director should be involved in. If you translate.

Now, you've participated all the way down the line with this. Does your vision come through on the screen?

BROWNING: I don't think my vision ever comes through. When you're doing it, you think it does, but when you look back on it, it's always less than you think it should have been.

Do you ever do any picture research? I've seen some directors who go to the library when they're about to start a production, and they'll get period pictures out of the library, and start to get some notions of what something should look like.

BROWNING: Obviously if I'm doing Boris Gudonov I've got to know a little bit about what the Kremlin looked like, you know. When we did "Boris" we did a hell of a lot of research on the architecture and the design of that period, because even though you don't see a lot on the screen, you've got to get the characters with something around them, and it better be something that represents the truth. But on the other hand, I must say I think it's a terrible waste of money to try to be super realistic on television.

I know there are some productions like *Brideshead Revisited* that have been enormous triumphs because of their production values, and I'm not saying that television shouldn't do it occasionally, but if you have a limited budget, it's mis-spent if you spend a lot of money on production detail, and scenic detail. I come from the old school that thinks you should get your money's worth. I'd rather work in limbo with a couple of good hand props, and get good performances, and that's what the audience sees and appreciates. All the other stuff is just background.

How much preparatory work do you do on a show? How much homework?

BROWNING: Well, I have to be very well prepared. There are some directors that can come in and try to build as they're going along. I just am not secure, unless I'm totally prepared. But I hope I've learned over the years to be very open to change. In other words, you come to the studio with an idea of what you want to do every single moment of the time, but then you should be ready to throw it out if you don't like it and change. But I would be terrified if I didn't know in advance what I wanted to do at a certain moment. I can't do that. I have to have a plan.

What is the nature of that preparation?

BROWNING: I have to have a scenario, which, in my mind, is a finished show, when I go into the studio.

A marked script?

BROWNING: A marked script!

Every camera? Every shot?

BROWNING: Every camera. Every shot. Every single one. Now, obviously, there are things that you have to see before you can know what you're going to do. You know, there may be a certain sequence, some trick that you have to work with—so you go in and fiddle around with it, and imagine how you're going to do it—piece it together. But basically, my overall plan is to have something there, when I first start rehearsal. I won't say I have every camera shot, but I will have every scene in mind, so that I know how it can be shot.

Do you mark any shots during rehearsals?

BROWNING: During the day I usually just rehearse, and then I go home that night, and on the strength of what I've seen, in rehearsal, knowing what the actors are doing, I finish marking my script.

I seem to discern a new wave in TV direction, influenced, initially, I believe

by the look of rock concerts, now somewhat more by the success of MTV . . . it seems to feed off light flares and star filters, oddball shooting, distortion. Do you think this kind of thing will influence your work in any way?

BROWNING: No. I don't quibble with the content, but the rest is all packaging. It's not content. I don't demean it, but I do think, considering that the material itself doesn't have that much substance, you might as well go for lots of flash. I think I'd be lost in that area. Some of it's very inventive, but ultimately, when you tell an audience all things are possible, and they realize that all things are possible in terms of style, it's very hard to keep any interest going. You've opened up such an enormous thing, there's no discipline.

You can do anything, you know, just to be kooky. Turn pictures upside down, you can rotate them . . . you can color faces purple. After you do that for 30 seconds, unless you're a great artist, unless you impose some discipline its' going to be just another visual gimmick.

I would assume then that you would feel the same way about digital effects?

BROWNING: I'm bored to death by them. I think they're fascinating to look at and I mean, I look at these commercials where a flat plane becomes a three-dimensional car, and then it turns into a refrigerator, and I absolutely don't know how they do it. But I don't know that the audience really cares after a while because they know, well, it's possible. But you know, and I know that machines can do anything, so what's so great? What are you supposed to feel about it? It doesn't have any emotional or thought quality, which is where the strength of the medium lies.

Do you stay aware of the new technology?

BROWNING: Oh, I see it, but I don't care about it. If they talk about it, I don't know what they're talking about most of the time. I mean, I went up to the survey for *Alice in Wonderland*, and they say, we

got to . . . look now, we've installed a D3-35 in here, and you have 547's over here, and I haven't the remotest idea what they're talking about. I say, well, you know, as long as I can do my show, and I can get pictures, I'm happy. But I don't know what the hell they're talking about most of the time. They say, what kind of camera—you want a TK-76 or a TK-83? And I say, look, I want a camera that's about this big, that looks like this, and it sends out pictures. I don't give a damn what the number of the camera is.

Really are there any changes in directing techniques that you are aware of, and that might be influencing your work?

BROWNING: I haven't seen them yet. I'm really terribly grounded in the old values of the closeup, the face, the feeling. I know I'm probably missing the boat in some of these areas, but I just don't see any of these advances doing more than superficially glossing up the material.

Where do you think TV, as you have known it, is going? I mean, what's in the future for us, not only in the coverage of opera and music, but in television as a whole?

BROWNING: I think where it's going depends on what happens in the technology. I really don't care where it's going, if it simply stays as a little kind of appliance in the living room, where it has no authority, where the audience has all the authority. Where you come in, slip it on, turn it off, and even walk by it, if you choose. But I'm afraid the technology will get to the point where you're going to have wall-sized screens and it's going to have its own strength, bigger than we are.

Two thousand line picture definition?

BROWNING: Let's hope it will be something that will make you appreciate what's inside that screen. Right now, I don't have any great hope that peoples' perception will grow with the medium. I think you can do good programs and you can do bad programs, but I don't

think you're going to make a great dent on the great public perception of television, until television gives them something brand new in the way of how the picture is received in the home.

You're kind of in conflict with yourself then. You say you don't want to know about the new technology, yet in a sense you're preaching for the acceptance of some new technology.

BROWNING: I am preaching in terms of audience. I don't care what they do in terms of methodology, in terms of how to make television happen. But I just wish they'd do something so that audiences had a little bit better opportunity to respond to the content of the show. I think it's awfully difficult to care about what's on television today, with the low definition on that small set in our living rooms. ■

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Kirk Browning's most recent *Live From Lincoln Center* broadcast was the special concert featuring James Galway with the New York Philharmonic. In March, he directs a satellite transmission from Europe for the Metropolitan Opera of Verdi's *Forza del Destino* with Leontyne Price for airing this Spring. The recent production of *You Can't Take It With You* on Showtime was also directed by him. This summer, he'll supervise the taping of *Tales From Hoffman* with Dame Joan Sutherland at the Sydney Opera House.

Jack Kuney, a veteran TV director and producer, is an Associate Professor in the radio/TV department at Brooklyn College. This interview is one of ten he has done with top TV directors; these will be the basis of a book.

REPLAY

Convention Coverage

The voracious demands of television must not be allowed to reach the fundamental institutions of our politics. I find it regrettable, for instance, that the national nominating convention is being written off by many people as an anachronism, as a bore, as too long and unnecessary. I don't agree with that at all. In my own view, the national nominating convention is something like the grass in the praries. It is a part of the way our parties have developed and our federal system and the great ethnic divisions of the country, as well as the great geographic divisions. I think that the national convention is something that is as natural in our system as the Presidency itself.

—Tom Wicker, *Television Quarterly*,
Winter 1966.

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REVIEW AND COMMENT

Editor's Note: *This section is usually devoted to reviews of books about television, but with this issue we depart from our usual format to review a television program; we plan to do this occasionally, and to take a critical look at a program of significance, and possible influence. TV criticism in the newspapers and weekly magazines usually centers around the first program of a new series, a practice that is not always fair. Usually it takes quite a while for a new show to find itself, to develop its style and format. Often ultimate success is built upon early flaws and failures, the courage to try the new and to give up what doesn't work. For an in-depth look at this new in-depth news program, Television Quarterly assigned three news professionals of different backgrounds to sample the program frequently, starting with its first week in early September of 1983, and to base their reports on several months of watching.* R.M.P.

MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR

Executive Editor: Robert MacNeil. **Associate Editor:** Jim Lehrer. **Executive Producer:** Lester M. Crystal. **Correspondents:** Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Judy Woodruff, Kwame Holman.

A production of WNET/THIRTEEN, New York. WETA/26, Washington, D.C. and MacNeil-Lehrer-Gannett Productions. Funded by AT&T, Public Television stations and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

BRAVOS FOR MACNEIL/LEHRER

BY BERNARD S. REDMONT

The good news about the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* is that it's more than twice as good as the old half-hour Report.

Those who can wean themselves away from the snap-crackle-and-pop diet of the commercial network news are rewarded with serious, nutritious adult fare, livelier and more creative than the previous version. It may take some getting used to, like *nouvelle cuisine*, but it's possible to eschew the fast-food pablum of CBS, NBC and ABC, if you are so inclined.

No longer is MacNeil/Lehrer only a supplement. It is a genuine alternative, and a good one, despite its imperfections. As promised in the promotional ads, "Now you can get the news where you got the analysis." The news summary headlines are there, and so are the stories in depth.

The viewer gets headlines at the start and the end. The middle has time to breathe and expand, as needed. Discussions are planned and organized, but it happens that they take off, free wheeling, if going well. They are not strait-jacketed to the split-second, as with the networks. It's even possible to forego your newspaper on occasion and be well informed, which is more than you can say about the product of the networks.

At last, a one-hour (actually 57:48 minutes except at "pledge time" when it's 52:58) news program is offered nightly in early-evening prime time. If only for this first, courageous plunge, by beating the non-cable TV networks to the punch, MacNeil/Lehrer deserves our cheers.

Of course, the plaudits need to be qualified with some minor reservations. MacNeil/Lehrer still lacks enough of its own field reports. Much of the time, it depends heavily on "talking heads." But, talking heads are better than talking hairdos.

We have, at the least, two rare major TV anchors who regularly practice journalism, ask good questions, listen to the answers and thus keep us well informed, instead of just reading the news.

It may be argued that MacNeil/Lehrer can sometimes be dull and gray. Assuredly, the program calls for a different audience mind-set than the "disco beat" to which the commercial network viewer is attuned, by visual razzle-dazzle, breakneck pace, flashiness and superficiality.

The *NewsHour* has what MacNeil calls "an appreciation of complexity, a willingness to entertain complexity." Here at last is something for those who, in MacNeil's words, "want to use TV for its information, are repelled by or dissatisfied by the commercial product: the brevity, the hype, the sensationalism, the emphasis on catastrophe and violence, the lack of explanation or context."

If the commercial networks were ever to persuade their affiliates to give the news a full hour, the chances are they would probably increase the number of action-oriented stories, rather than give more time to individual items or add analysis and depth. MacNeil/Lehrer is giving us two to four stories in reasonable depth every night, exploring and probing them, not just with celebrities, but with those people who can best inform and edify us.

Much of what's wrong with commercial TV news can be ascribed to the pre-

dominance of show-business-oriented producers—many of them lacking news training—over correspondents and reporters. The original MacNeil/Lehrer Report had far more reporters than producers, and the expanded *NewsHour* has an equal balance of the two. At MacNeil/Lehrer, the reporters usually tell the producers where to go, not the other way around.

From the debut of the *NewsHour* in September, a comparative analysis proved rewarding. Both MacNeil/Lehrer and the CBS Evening News took off from Labor Day celebrations to examine the state of the labor unions. CBS gave the piece two minutes. MacNeil/Lehrer took 17, interviewing top union and government officials and doing an on-scene report on labor strategy for the election year to come.

When Interior Secretary James Watt resigned, the *NewsHour* devoted 15 minutes, not so much to his foot-in-his-mouth gaffes, but to the larger issue of his environmental policies.

When Barbara McClintock received the Nobel Prize for Medicine, the big networks briefly clipped her news conference and mentioned her genetic research. MacNeil/Lehrer interviewed her biographer, analyzing the importance of her research, and exploring why it took so long for the 81-year-old winner to be recognized.

The day after *The Day After*, most news programs examined the fallout and covered the West German Parliament's vote to approve new intermediate missiles. The *NewsHour*, with the aid of Judy Woodruff, probed more deeply into the feelings of two average families, and set up a lively and penetrating debate among articulate experts which surpassed the longer, but thinner, ABC Nightline discussion the night before.

The *NewsHour* could not match the network's action pictures of demonstrations in West Germany, although it did have some vivid footage from Lebanon, with a voiceover by a BBC reporter.

One of MacNeil/Lehrer's problems is its penury in pictures. It does make use

of the BBC, CBC, Viznews, West German and Japanese TV, as well as other sources including its own, but it can't skip around the globe at will. It has no foreign crews of its own, and thus lives with a shortage of action news footage.

Nevertheless, it has done some great overseas reporting, with stories from El Salvador by Charles Krause and a piece by Ann Medina of CBC on two Lebanese villages, one Druse and the other Christian. On December 5, a discussion by specialists on Lebanon did far more to illuminate the problems of that unhappy land than all the "bang-bang" of the big networks. A Moscow news conference by Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov, followed by a penetrating interview with a Council on Foreign Relations expert, Robert Legvold, did more than any commercial network to clarify the state of U.S.-Soviet relations.

MacNeil/Lehrer viewers may be disconcerted on a day of bombings in Lebanon and Jerusalem, to have more air time—15 minutes in each case—devoted to U.S. race discrimination and affirmative action and to warnings of communal violence among the Sikhs of India, a simmering, little-known but important issue beautifully done by Gavin Hewitt of CBC, but both were significant stories.

NBC *Nightly News* had an excellent story one evening with Garrick Utley looking at stalled land reform in El Salvador, but the *NewsHour* had a more remarkable 20-minute package that included coverage of President Reagan's Commission on Central America, a profile of the president of El Salvador by Charles Krause and an interview with rebel leader, Ruben Zamora.

A mini-documentary by Charlayne Hunter-Gault on teen-age suicides was memorable.

Although more leisurely than the galloping pace of the networks, the *NewsHour* was still nimble and flexible enough to cover the return of the Columbia space shuttle early in the program

and then get it landing, live, for the end-piece.

MacNeil/Lehrer's analysis of the meaning of the historic agreement bringing employees of Eastern Airlines into the business was far better than anything ABC, CBS or NBC were capable of doing in a few minutes.

But you can't say there's never a dull moment. A case in point was a long monologue on the World Series by Roger Angell and an interview with Nepal's Ambassador to the U.S.

Nevertheless, the *NewsHour* proves that Americans don't necessarily have a child's attention span. The prominence given to live interviews, clarifying discussions of vital issues, has provided us with television's best, most responsible news and public affairs coverage.

Ratings have improved since the expansion, although sponsors of the program feel that is not an essential consideration.

The show's scheduling represents a problem in some locations. In Boston, viewers are privileged to be able to get MacNeil/Lehrer in its entirety from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., with CBS, NBC and ABC following at 7:00 to 7:30 p.m., an opportunity for those who want to compare and watch both. A repeat of the *NewsHour* is even available in Boston at 11:00 p.m. In New York, however, MacNeil/Lehrer airs opposite and overlaps the network newscasts, posing the dilemma of choice for half of the time. One radio station in Los Angeles likes MacNeil/Lehrer so much it has simulcast it on radio drive time.

All in all, the judgment from this seat is: Bravos to Robin MacNeil, Jim Lehrer, Al Vecchione, Executive Producer Les Crystal, correspondents Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Judy Woodruff! You won't outdraw the networks, but you've given us a choice, an excellent one. ■

Bernard S. Redmont is a former correspondent for CBS News in Moscow and Paris. He is now Dean at Boston University's School of Public Communication.

NOT A BREAKTHROUGH . . .

BY JIM SNYDER

When MacNeil/Lehrer expanded from a half hour to an hour, Robert MacNeil told the *New York Times* "We sense a hunger for an alternative to the network news, a place where the news can breathe." Jonathan Friendly of the *Times* called the *NewsHour* "a venture that could blaze new trails for PBS and for network television news."

So the program and one of its best friends, the television department of the *Times*, invited comparison with the evening network news shows. It seems to be an obsession around PBS news efforts, constantly to seek praise at the expense of those crass information compacters at the networks. MacNeil has gone on record many times, as a stern critic of network news—a stance unlikely to alienate all those print critics who thrive on regular assaults on the network news folk.

Recently, I asked for a reaction to *NewsHour* from a top network news executive who has been around longer than most. He said of the show:

1. "We don't see anything in it for us. It's not causing any waves around here, very little conversation
2. Most nights the show has a slow pace we would not accept.
3. They operate on a different set of standards than we do. If we in commercial TV news committed some of their production flaws, the critics would tear us apart. But they seem to get a pass from the newspaper critics."

I think MacNeil and company play a dangerous game in inviting comparison with the networks now that they are doing an hour. Their old half hour show built each night around one interview session on a hot news topic often with heavy-hitter articulate guests, was great for comparison . . . "look at us we gave 19 minutes to the top story of the day and those sleazy old networks kissed it off

with two and a half minutes." But when you have an hour to fill one big interview is not enough, and the *NewsHour* efforts to fill the rest of the time with additional interviews, correspondent packages and gleanings from the CBC and *Viz News* points up the greatest strength of the commercial networks.

Day in day out those network news operations deploy hundreds of people all over the world to do the work, take the physical risks, spend the money, take the chances, and generate the enterprise that has to be there if you are going to compete. They've been doing it for years with unflagging commitment, while their critics ignore it and concentrate on whether 22 minutes is enough time to cover the news. MacNeil/Lehrer just does not have that kind of back up, and it shows in the *NewsHour*. That's one of the reasons network news people are not finding any inspiration in the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*.

MacNeil/Lehrer are most effective when there is a major Washington or international development which breaks early in the day so they have time to develop a solid background report. The two anchors rise to their best when they have a top drawer guest who has not been already worked over by other interviewers. Their program gets good marks for staying on top of the news and at times anticipating major changes in the news agenda. But most times when you switch over to the network news you find they have not been scooped by MacNeil/Lehrer and CBS, NBC and ABC always have better spot coverage.

That gets us to the basic question confronting MacNeil/Lehrer: "if you are an alternative to the network news what is you are doing that is so innovative, compelling, or enterprising to make your program must viewing for a major portion of the American news audience?"

I don't think "more time for stories" is an answer. "Breathing room for the news" doesn't do it either when some correspondent packages would not survive the

scrutiny of most network news producers. Some I have seen have been downright pedestrian.

I think another major problem with the MacNeil/Lehrer program is its commitment to live interviews. Too many of the interviews I have seen in recent months have brought the program to a screeching halt. Live interviews every night expose you to various hazards, including inundation in self-serving statements and unadulterated filibustering. In this age of everyone-gets-on-tv-sooner-or-later, many of the government types, think-tank stars and business world spokesmen have been screened, trained and packaged to prevent the interviewer from ever extracting a spontaneous answer. There have been nights when some of the interviews on MacNeil/Lehrer have induced sleep, or encouraged one to shout back at the screen.

Part of the problem is the polite interview style on the program. One night I found myself fantasizing how good it would be to have Ted Koppel appear as guest interviewer on MacNeil/Lehrer just to have him say occasionally "sir, that is outrageous" or "sir, that is particularly self-serving" or "gentlemen, we are not developing any real information here." Too often, MacNeil/Lehrer are willing to give 8 or 10 or 12 minutes to people who should be cut off at three minutes.

I also have fantasized on what can be done to reduce the earnestness quotient of the program. John Carmody, the TV columnist of the *Washington Post* has described MacNeil and Lehrer as "sobersides," a polite way of saying the program desperately needs more change of pace not only in its content but in its anchors' style. Maybe they ought to have Charles Kuralt sit in on a few nights to encourage everyone else on the program to display just a touch more humanity.

When she first appeared, I thought Judy Woodruff was the answer. It was during her first week when she actually ad-libbed a comeback line to something that had been said by the other anchors. It was effective and welcome. However, I

assumed Judy was scolded by the other anchors, or someone, because she has been married to the script ever since and has kept those dangerous smiles to a minimum.

Judy is a valuable addition to the program. Her presence is an opportunity to show the commercial networks how a woman anchor can be effective in prime time news programs. But to date the rigid, earnest, sobersides approach of the *NewsHour* has prevented Ms. Woodruff from breaking any new anchoring ground.

To sum up, MacNeil/Lehrer is a program that is not a breakthrough in television news; is not teaching the network news programs new tricks; is unlikely to build much upon the loyal audience it had as a half hour, and is still struggling with the hard truth that more is not necessarily better. ■

Jim Snyder has been Vice President of News for the Post-Newsweek Stations since 1969. From 1965 to 1969 he was a news producer for CBS News, including two and a half years as Washington producer for the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite.

A MIXED BAG

BY GEORGE ROSEN

In the beginning it was acclaimed as perhaps the most prestigious of TV news programs, corralling, as if by a miracle, day to day and within 24-hour notice, the expertise needed for the in-depth analysis of the day's top news event. After several seasons they must have figured that twice as long should be twice as good, and thus the Robert MacNeil-Jim Lehrer report became the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* on the Public Broadcasting Service. They couldn't have been more wrong. In fact, it's been such a major disappointment that, on the basis of what's been shown so far, perhaps

the time is now propitious for the three commercial TV networks to reassess their thinking about going to a full hour, and let matters rest where they are.

As matters now stand, the expanded PBS hour is a mixed bag of Monday-thru-Friday programming still struggling to find its way through its transitional period to hit on a correct formula. In a bid to siphon off some of the NBC, CBS, ABC audience, it has slotted the program in some of the major TV markets (such as New York, Washington, Miami, New Orleans) directly opposite its competition, thus inviting diminishing ratings. Audiences long accustomed to the more searching camera work and extensive global coverage by the commercial networks, might easily switch away from PBS.

The *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* has now taken on a "something for everybody" facade, which includes a runthrough of the day's top stories both at the top of the show and at the close. In between are about half a dozen or so "expanded reports" including on-the-spot film, but with watered-down analysis. On occasion there's a sprinkling of mini-documentaries, culled mainly from affiliate stations and CBC or British success. Too much of it is run-of-the-mill, and too much run-of-the-mill creates dullness. By watering-down its once-cherished in-depth treatment on analysis to compete more effectively with the rival networks' "spot time", it would seem to add up to a "catch 22" situation (not to be confused with catching a 22 share of audience).

True, the "talking heads" format for in-depth examination, since the days when MacNeil/Lehrer had the field pretty much to themselves, has become more widely used. And a lot of it comes off with happier results. The Ted Koppel late-night hour on ABC, properly situated at a time when the major stories have been thorough aired, has achieved a respectability that cannot be denied. The same network's Sunday morning David Brinkley program generates a kind of excitement and insight that makes it a top-level presentation, unique in TV jour-

nalism. That, coupled with Agronsky & Co.'s no-holds-barred freneticism by the politico-oriented Katzenjammer Kids (Carl Rowen, George Will, Elizabeth Drew, Hugh Sidey, James Kilpatrick) can only serve to illustrate where the new *MacNeil/Lehrer* show falls short.

It wasn't until the twin crises in the closing days of last October—the Lebanon Marine disaster and the Grenada invasion—that the *MacNeil/Lehrer Hour* began hitting its old stride, with its extended play-it-for-all-it's-worth analysis and discussion for eminently satisfying results. But lo and behold, ABC, CBS, NBC were matching them, head for head, with equally compelling results. Soon it appeared that everyone had exhausted the round-robin of personalities available for expertise.

Not that the two co-anchors are to be faulted personally, for both MacNeil and Lehrer have long since established their credentials as professional TV journalists of the first rank. Also commendable is their new Washington correspondent Judy Woodruff (wooed over from NBC). And not to be overlooked is Charlayne Hunter-Gault, both as reporter and a sort of sub-co-anchor.

As for the executive producer, Les Crystal, the former president of NBC News, the problems ahead remain. Thoroughly schooled in the crisp global coverage of commercial network news, he's now venturing into new and tamer TV pastures. Perhaps given time he may find his way in achieving a clearer sense of direction, or at least make it a more diverting hour. We wish him luck. ■

George Rosen for 24 years was television and radio editor of *Variety*. In that time, he estimates he reviewed more than 3000 programs. He later worked for NBC News in London and New York.



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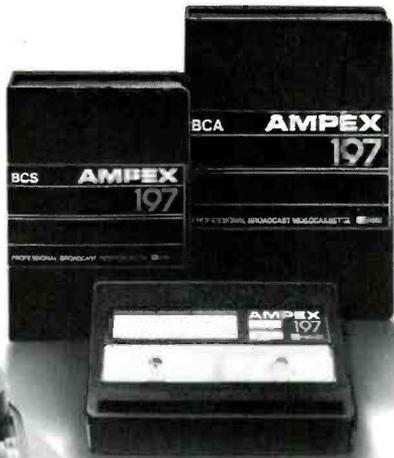
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