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THE DAY AFTER DEBATES: Mel Friedman
ED SULLIVAN'S VARIETY: Hal Davis
CAMPAIGN REPORTING: Jerry M. Landay
ARAB TELEVISION: Laurence Michie

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ABC Television Network

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a couple of important
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AFTERMATH: REFLECTIONS ON THE DAY AFTER

BY MEL FRIEDMAN

"We later civilizations . . . we too now know that we are mortal . . . that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all. We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life. The circumstances that could send the works of Keats and Baudelaire to join the works of Menander are no longer inconceivable; they are in the newspapers."—Paul Valery, "The Crisis of the Mind," 1919.

I • The Hesitation

A friend of ours has a recurring nightmare: a nuclear war has taken place. Most of the cities in the U.S. have been razed, blasted into clouds of fallout. The winds spread the plague. She and her family, sequestered in the countryside, have miraculously escaped the first quick kill. Now, huddled together, they await the slow, painful death by radiation poisoning. Wildly, she ransacks the house for pills—tranquilizers, painkillers, anything that will do the job swiftly before her family begins to suffer.

At this point, the dream generally breaks off, and she awakens shivering and panic-stricken. The nightmare is so

vivid, and reality so little comfort, that she has vowed never to be caught unprepared. Her medicine chest is now amply stocked with bottles of valium—just in case.

Mother love in the nuclear age includes knowing how to kill your children kindly.

Our friend did not watch *The Day After*, ABC-TV's grim vision of an atomic holocaust, when it was shown on network television last November 20 amid great ceremony. "I've already seen it," she remarked sardonically, managing a tight smile.

For how many others, I wondered, was the movie just a pale reflection of buried anxieties, fears that have been accumulating for 40 years, ever since two suns illuminated the Hiroshima skies quite early one August morning.

I did see *The Day After*, although I tried hard to miss it: rejecting invitations from friends and other journalists to view it in groups; debating the issue endlessly with myself for hours prior to airtime ("Yes, I will . . . No, I won't."); finally ceding the decision to chance by playing Russian roulette with the television dial.

The Day After was for other people, I told myself, people who (are there any left?) never gave much thought to the question of the threat of nuclear annihilation, or who may have been seduced by the rhetoric of the Reagan Administration into believing a nuclear war "winnable." I didn't need to see ABC's makeup wizardry to fully appreciate that

Armageddon, if it ever arrives, will be far, far ghastlier than anyone has yet imagined.

Inevitably, I tuned in the program out of morbid curiosity and a nagging sense of professional duty. *The Day After* was clearly a national event. The White House was up in arms over the broadcast and

Was *The Day After* a beacon or a light that failed?

scrambling in all directions to blunt its impact. Anti-nuclear groups, which obtained bootleg tapes of the made-for-TV movie, were using the telecast to mount a nationwide campaign on behalf of an immediate nuclear weapons freeze and the resumption of serious arms reduction talks with the Soviet Union. The political right was moved to apoplectic rage, and conservative leaders rushed to denounce the film as "blatant leftist propaganda," if not outright appeasement of the U.S.S.R. Heated exchanges on *The Day After* erupted on the floor of Congress. Rep. Dan Lundgren (R-Calif.) protested the poor timing of the program, set to air just prior to the scheduled deployment of new Pershing II and cruise missiles in Europe. Two other members of the House, Dan Glickman (D-Kan., whose state was incinerated by ABC) and Elliot H. Levitas (D-Ga.), co-sponsored a resolution expressing the "sense of Congress" that *The Day After* should be shown to the Russian people. And hovering about the fray were the media, helping to fan the controversy and build momentum behind the movie like some gathering, onrushing wave.

At its best, television viewing is a eucharistic rite. It assembles the mystic body of the viewing public in communion over national events: mourning the death of a President or a fallen civil rights leader; celebrating a walk on the moon. At its worst, television offers us sham community, the illusion of participating in a shared experience—what Kurt Von-

negut calls a "false karass." With a great gong beating, ABC summoned the whole nation to watch its \$7 million *cri de coeur* against nuclear madness. Probably never again would a network invest so much in so risky an enterprise. Probably never again could a network ride the tide of publicity so well to capture so large an audience for so repellent a topic.

With 100 million Americans convened for the occasion, which was *The Day After*: a beacon or a light that failed? Moreover, how should it be compared to other works in the sparse video literature on nuclear war? And lastly, what do the media reactions to the program tell us about public expectations regarding the role of television in a world perched atop an unexploded bomb?

II. The Video Literature

"And suddenly I could see all these birds, I could see the birds that I'd been watching for days before. They were suddenly visible through the opaque visor of my helmet. And they were smoking. Their feathers were on fire. And they were doing cartwheels. . . . They weren't vaporized, it's just that they were absorbing such intense radiation that they were being consumed by the heat."—an observer of an atomic bomb test near Christmas Island in the Pacific, quoted in Robert Scheer's *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush and Nuclear War*.

The nuclear age lives with demons. At no other time in history have the lives of multitudes depended so directly on the perfect operation of machines, the perfect communication among governments and the rule of reason in the world. Humanity appears to be in a relentless race against the laws of probability, and the past offers little encouragement that humanity's edge can be long maintained. Meanwhile, in Defense Department think tanks, nuclear strategists

continue to ponder a growing list of "what ifs" and "unthinkable" scenarios.

In the past, when Hollywood and, to a much lesser extent, television have treated the issue of nuclear war, they have tended to focus their attention on the dangers of miscalculation. With the exception of *Testament*, a recent movie, films such as *On the Beach*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Seven Days in May*, *Fail-Safe* and *Atomic Cafe* managed to point up the folly of entrusting dissembling governments with the fate of billions while still observing the amenities of Greek tragedy: all the slaughter occurred mercifully out of view of the audience. What distinguished *The Day After* from all of these was its unremitting preoccupation with the epic horror of nuclear war, its attempt to document how one small corner of Kansas could be instantly transformed into a cancer ward.

But *The Day After* was not the first television program to seek to illustrate our vulnerability to nuclear attack or nuclear terrorism.

Memory sometimes fails, but I recall, as a child, being presented with my first frightful images of the physical effects of an atomic bomb blast from an unlikely source: *The Ed Sullivan Show*. I think of it now because back then I was totally unprepared for what I saw, and the terror of those few moments haunted my dreams for years. Young children who happened to view *The Day After*, I'm convinced, would have been similarly overwhelmed, and I'm glad that ABC and various psychological and educational organizations took great pains to forewarn parents about the possible consequences of watching.

The clip was from Great Britain, an animated short perhaps two or three minutes in length. I vaguely recollect that it was produced by some civil defense group. Why Sullivan chose to run it during a peak family viewing period I'll never understand.

Its opening frames were absent of menace and revealed a bucolic English setting, a countryside dancing with flowers and alive with the play of chil-

dren, birds and animals. Without explanation, a "buzz" bomb appeared in the far sky, tracing a lazy arc toward the happy party. The children looked up; the birds looked up; the animals looked up. The world took a breath. Then the buzzing stopped—the warning that the rocket had spent its fuel. The bomb fell and detonated, and the countryside split apart in a nuclear explosion. As I watched, the faces of the children, the skin of the birds, the flesh of the animals melted away like wax, down to bone. What remained afterwards was a scorched earth littered with skeletons.

America's nuclear weapons monopoly ended abruptly in 1949, when the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb. With the rise of Cold War hysteria and the outbreak of the Korean War, the country began to sense that a new world order was emerging, one based upon a "balance of terror." The safety of the continental United States could no longer be guaranteed against a Hiroshima- or Nagasaki-style attack.

Television tried to address those fears, but with only limited success.

On June 29, 1952, Edward R. Murrow and Fred W. Friendly, co-producers of CBS-TV's *See It Now*, devoted half of their 30-minute broadcast (the other half was an interview with Presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower) to a simulated attack on New York City by "Soviet" bombers. By arrangement with the U.S. Air Force, Howard K. Smith, then chief European correspondent for CBS News, was permitted to fly aboard a B-29 bomber, as it and two others attempted to penetrate U.S. air defenses undetected. To approximate the distance Soviet T.U.-4 strategic aircraft would have to travel to reach New York, the B-29's took off from a base in Upper Hayford, Oxfordshire, England on a mission scheduled to last 20 hours. Murrow, himself, accompanied a squadron of state-side fighter pilots as they scrambled to intercept the intruding "enemy" planes. One of the B-29's made it through, drop-

ping its mock payload on the Empire State Building. Summarizing later in the broadcast, Murrow said that "70 percent of a determined attacking force" would probably penetrate to its intended targets.

Special Bulletin was in many ways the most sophisticated, intelligent and gripping docudrama of the nuclear weapons issue. . . .

Inevitably, a few full-length television programs were produced which gave unsparing accounts of the medical consequences of a nuclear bomb blast, but rarely did they make it onto the tube. Prints of *Strike*, a drama written by John O'Toole in 1959 about a military hospital's problems treating survivors of a missile attack on the U.S., were seized by the U.S. Army less than a year after the production had been authorized. Peter Watkins' searing *The War Game*, created for the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1965, was immediately banned by the network without a showing as too gruesome. Watkins thereupon released the film for theatrical exhibition, and a year later, it captured an Oscar for "best documentary." Japanese footage of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 remained classified by the U.S. government until 1970, when only public television proved courageous enough to put it on the air. Even as late as March of last year, NBC-TV demonstrated great timidity in its promotion and handling of *Special Bulletin*, a made-for-TV movie about a radical group which builds an atom bomb and threatens to detonate it in Charleston, S.C. harbor if the U.S. doesn't take immediate steps toward unilateral nuclear disarmament. Confused as this plot summary may seem, *Special Bulletin* was in many respects the most sophisticated, intelligent and gripping docudrama on nuclear weapons issues ever

shown on commercial television. Yet, it received scant support from the network and much less press attention than it deserved. Interestingly enough, of the hundred-odd newspaper and magazine articles I've read on *The Day After*, not one mentions *Special Bulletin*, in my opinion the superior production.

III. Controversies

"Doom! Doom! Doom! Something seems to whisper it in the very dark trees of America. Doom!"—D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, 1924.

A vision of hell on earth, *The Day After* depicts what could happen if a world crisis escalates uncontrollably, and somebody—for whatever reason or suicidal impulse—pushes the "button" and launches nuclear missiles. Like *On the Beach*, it leaves deliberately ambiguous who actually provoked the attack. Also, like *On the Beach* and *Testament*, its main business is not with the military strategists or the political leaders whose policies failed, but with the victims of their failure.

In the case of the ABC movie, which was directed by Nicholas Meyer, written by Edward Hume and produced by Robert Papazian, the hypothetical victims are Midwesterners, people living within a 40-mile radius of Kansas City. The selection of this area for "ground zero" was not accidental, Meyer and Papazian have said. Kansas is the American heartland, its breadbasket, its essential soul. "Bleeding Kansas" once signified the torment of a nation slipping into civil war. Today, Kansas symbolizes a mighty agricultural engine which feeds a hungry world and bears witness, as some see it, to God's abiding covenant with America. But buried beneath this good earth, and in neighboring Missouri, is massive death waiting for its moment. More than 150 missile silos in Missouri,

alone, make Kansas City and its environs one of the top 10 military targets in the country.

The Day After exploits to the hilt this monstrously ironic yoking of life to death force. Its opening shots, appearing over a stately musical score by Virgil Thomson, feature grand aerial sweeps of cornfields, stockyards, dairy farms, sports stadiums, schools and bustling freight trains—almost disintegrating into a Chamber of Commerce advertisement. In spite of this, the initial tone of the movie is elegiacal because the audience knows it is catching its last glimpses of a doomed way of life. Unfortunately, *The Day After* isn't able to penetrate much further into the true character of this grief. In the end, it remains too pedantic and limited by prime time conventions (its main characters are a dedicated surgeon, a *Waltons*-esque farm family and a self-sacrificing black airman) to shock a slumbering nation out of its complacency on arms control and nuclear proliferation.

After the bombs hit, a truly horrific sequence, the plot degenerates into "situation-tragedy," in which all the people we've just been introduced to die awful deaths—from the blast, radiation poisoning or at the hands of armed and desperate survivors. If, on one episode of *M*A*S*H*, Hawkeye and all his buddies were suddenly pasted all over the Korean countryside by an incoming artillery shell, America would have been numbed and briefly set to thinking about the contingent nature of life. In *The Day After*, our involvement with the lives of the protagonists is so casual that we hardly mourn their passing. Instead, the real contribution of the movie lies in the raw power of its mass scenes: the tide of nuclear "Okies" who shamble along the road in search of food, clothing, shelter and medical care; the crowds of emaciated figures who set up shantytowns on the rubble of the old order; and the thousands of injured and dying who camp out on the hospital grounds waiting for

treatment that may never come. And here, in its shock value, *The Day After*, discovers its one important message. For it says unmistakably that, unless we find a way to reduce nuclear tensions, we court a global Jonestown that would make *The Day After* look Edenic by comparison.

Aside from its creative flaws, *The Day After* has been criticized on three basic scores: that it was a "political" movie; that it engendered feelings of hopelessness in viewers; and that it represented an "emotional," rather than a reasoned, approach to complicated national defense issues.

Poor ABC! There probably was no way it could avoid excoriation by the political right and advocates of stepped-up military spending, given the kind of film *The Day After* was. But, in numerous press interviews leading up to the broadcast, the people behind the movie only succeeded in whipping up conservatives to new heights of fury by protesting their ideological neutrality. Brandon Stoddard, president of ABC Motion Pictures, who conceived of the project, told *Time* in October, for example, "We never intended the film to be a political statement. The movie simply says that nuclear war is horrible. . . . That is a very safe statement," Nicholas Meyer, the movie's director, asserted that *The Day After* was nothing more than "a giant public service announcement, like Smokey the Bear." Then, Edward Hume, author of the screenplay, gave the hawks the ammunition they needed, telling *The New York Times* a week prior to airdate, "I would like to see people starting to question the value of defending this country with a nuclear arsenal. What troubles me is that there's no dialogue on the subject. . . . To that extent, it is a political film."

The right pounced like a lion tearing into red meat.

William F. Buckley, Jr., in his syndicated newspaper column, bracketed ABC's claims that *The Day After* was apolitical with the Soviet Union's that the downed Korean 007 airliner was a

"spy" plane, and called both "the two outstanding flat-out lies of the fall season." His confrere, William Rusher, publisher of *The National Review*, denounced the movie as "the biggest package of ratings hype, raw shock value, and blatant leftist propaganda ever thrown at the American people." Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.) labeled it "a nuclear freeze propaganda film" designed to "instill fear and hysteria into the lives of the American people." And the White House, ever alert to disturbances in the electronic Force, began moving swiftly to counteract the possible damage *The Day After* might inflict upon President Reagan's image.

On November 18, Presidential aides disseminated an 18-page booklet to the press, entitled "President Reagan on Peace, Arms Reduction and Deterrence," which sought to deflect charges that the Administration (Grenada and Central America aside) was trigger-happy. Plans were drawn up to make high-level officials, including Secretary of State George P. Shultz, available to the press for interviews before and after the Sunday night broadcast. Nevertheless, one top Reagan aide worried aloud that the film could be "potentially the most emotionally powerful thing ever shown on American television."

For their part, anti-nuclear activists left no doubt they considered ABC's showing of *The Day After* a courageous political act, and one which might infuse new life into their movement. Roger Mollander, founder of Ground Zero, one of many anti-nuclear groups to organize events around the broadcast, noted: "To come to grips with the reality of nuclear war, one has to go through a nuclear passage, to confront a nuclear war in all its horror. [*The Day After*] will provide a passage for 30, 40, 50 million Americans." (He underestimated by half.) And Rep. Edward T. Markey (D-Mass.), who sponsored a nuclear freeze resolution in the House, predicted that the movie would be "the most powerful television program in history."

The Day After attracted unprecedented press attention, both here and abroad. It made the cover stories of *Newsweek* and *TV Guide* and segments on CBS's *60 Minutes* and the CBS *Morning News*, NBC's *Today* and ABC's *Good Morning America*. It was page one—and often banner headline—news in scores of newspapers around the country, and received extensive commentary in both domestic and foreign journals of opinion, including *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *The National Review*, *The New Statesman* (U.K.), *Nuclear Times* and the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

In the days, weeks and months following the November 20 broadcast, conservative groups continued to hammer away at what they saw as ABC's "sellout" to the Russians. It was as if, having invented the bogeyman years back of the Eastern, fellow-traveling broadcast Establishment, they had finally caught a network red-handed, flaunting its true crimson colors to the largest U.S. television movie audience in history. Lieut. General Daniel O. Graham (ret.), founder of High Frontier, an organization lobbying for construction of a "Star Wars" continental defense shield, called *The Day After* a "one-sided view [that] can only benefit the Soviets." Phyllis Schlafly, head of the anti-abortion Eagle Forum, quipped: "The film was made by people who want to disarm the country and are willing to make a \$7 million contribution to that campaign." And a spokesman for Young Americans for Freedom said, "We think ABC has violated its duty to America. We think all of ABC and its sponsors should be boycotted for sponsoring Soviet propaganda."

Was *The Day After* "political"? Yes, of course; but not for the reasons advanced by the right. Actions, ideas and artistic creations acquire political significance from their social context. One might have thought that ABC was playing it safe coming out against nuclear war. War is hell, isn't it? Voices of conscience have been pleading that case ever since the times of Isaiah and Euripides. And for

over 30 years, U.S. military planners seemed to accept the truths that nuclear war would be unimaginable hell, and that no one side could emerge from a nuclear war "victorious." We held a loaded shotgun to their heads; they held a loaded shotgun to ours. Fear was the safety.

But the Reagan Administration swept into power in 1981 espousing a new doctrine. As one appointee to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency put it: "[I]t is possible for any society to survive" a nuclear war. "[N]uclear war is a destructive thing, but still in large part a physics problem." This was not just an off-the-cuff remark; it had become policy at the highest level. In the summer of 1982, the Pentagon, responding to a secret White House directive, drew up a master plan for fighting and winning a nuclear war. Meanwhile, President Reagan alarmed our allies when he told reporters that he thought it was possible to wage a limited nuclear war in Europe. The quintessential expression of this new attitude toward atomic weapons and the likely consequences of their use was a remark made by an obscure Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Thomas K. Jones, to Robert Scheer of the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1981, Jones gave this description, in deadly earnest, of how 200 million Americans could survive an all-out missile attack: "Dig a hole, cover it with a couple doors, and then throw three feet of dirt on top. . . . It's the dirt that does it . . . [and] if there are enough shovels to go around, everyone's going to make it."

Scientists now believe that a nuclear exchange involving less than one percent of the world's nuclear arsenal could precipitate a global ecological catastrophe sufficient to wipe out all human life.

The New York Times, in a particularly sour editorial on *The Day After*, huffed, "While it does not follow that deploring war is bad for you, there should be a presumption against this week's rampant notion that portraying war as hor-

rible is a meaningful political act."

To the contrary. At a time when the Reagan Administration has been inching toward the position that nuclear war is a tolerable instrument of national policy, a program, such as *The Day After*, which restates the obvious—that these weapons must never be used again—is, indeed, a "meaningful political act."

And in any case, there is no denying that ABC produced a major television event.

A related criticism of *The Day After* has been that it left viewers with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. The last lines of the film, for instance, are those of a Lawrence, Kansas ham radio operator trying to make contact with the outer world. "Hello, is anybody there? Anybody at all?" he asks. But he gets no response.

John Corry, a television critic of *The New York Times*, was among those who indicted the movie on this count. The "special quality" of *The Day After*, he wrote, was "its feeling of despair." Such feelings, if they are permitted to take root, he charged, can instill passivity and the impulse "to disarm, to throw down weapons rather than take them up."

This, too misses the mark. ABC didn't invent "duck and cover" or the overpowering image of the mushroom cloud cracking open the sky. As polls over the years have amply demonstrated, the angst people feel about nuclear weapons antedates ABC's bleak docudrama. The opportunity *The Day After* afforded us to peer into the abyss and step back, I believe, actually invests the sphere of action with renewed meaning. It's like the closing scene of *On the Beach*, where the camera zooms in on a banner draped by the Salvation Army across a now desolate public square. "Repent, Brother, there is still time," it reads. As Robert Jay Lifton, the Yale University psychiatrist, commented, "Hope doesn't lie in pretending the threat doesn't exist, so I take the film as an act of hope."

Moreover, I can think of no greater

expression of hopelessness and futility than that contained in the *Times's* editorial, which stated in part:

"If graphic rendering of the horror of war were a way of promoting peace, there might have been no major wars in this century. . . . The Red Badge of Courage did not reduce America's enthusiasm for World War I; All Quiet on the Western Front did not protect the West against World War II. Indeed, one could argue that humanism in the contemplation of war can breed pacifism, which may only render democracies vulnerable and thus invite war."

These strike me as odd and dispiriting observations from a major newspaper presumably dedicated to the proposition that words and pictures make a difference. Artists, poets, novelists and composers are powerless, indeed, against tanks, but their moral force and independent reflections on the human condition do shape the character of civilizations. *The Day After* was no *Trojan Woman*, no *War and Peace*, no *Guernica*, no *Disasters of War*, no Wilfred Owen dirge; it was television pure and simple—and commercial television at that. But it certainly wasn't cause for the *Times* to conclude that, in the face of the most important question on the human agenda, all art is bunk.

***The Day After's* job was to do precisely what it did—to gather huge national audiences for a sneak preview of the apocalypse.**

A final complaint about *The Day After* has been that it appealed solely to the emotions and contributed nothing to informed debate about the arms race and disarmament.

As *The New Republic* declared, "The creators [of the movie] seem to think that political objectives can be achieved by

apolitical means, that if we can only get everyone emotionally stirred up, the whole problem will somehow melt away amidst the frenzy." And Henry Kissinger, sputtering with anger on the ABC Viewpoint discussion panel that followed *The Day After*, said "this film represents a very simple-minded notion of the nuclear problem. . . . Are we supposed to make policy by scaring ourselves to death?"

Obviously not. But it wasn't *The Day After's* responsibility to "solve" the nuclear problem, or even add to the already considerable treatment of nuclear issues on television public affairs programming. No one would have watched if Jason Robards, John Cullum and Jobeth Williams sat around a kitchen table for two hours puzzling out "throw-weights," "MIRV's" and the destabilizing effect of increased warhead-to-launch-vehicle ratios. Rather, *The Day After's* job was to do precisely what it did—gather a huge national audience for a sneak preview of the apocalypse in order to unleash a great debate.

Furthermore, I'm not persuaded that emotions play no part in the discussion of the arms race. Parents, I would think, should get worked up about the prospect of their children being incinerated. In navigating the obscure shoals of military weapons technology, the dread of nuclear war and the innate yearning for peace are probably the only reliable compasses the public possesses. As David Hume, the 18th century philosopher, once observed: "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." And he added this chilling example of the inability of rationality, alone, to set human priorities: "It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger." Empathy permits us to transcend blind self-interest. And if a way out exists to the nuclear dilemma, emotions will be the guiding force.

IV. Impact

"Tremendous and powerful causes sometimes produce small and unimpressive effects, sometimes none at all; then again it happens that a brisk little cause produces a colossal effect."

—Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1843.

Rightly or wrongly, television is perceived as a battleground for the hearts and minds of America; hence, the furious sharpening of the knives every time television announces it is undertaking a project of potentially controversial importance. Whatever people may think about television programs per se, they intuitively believe that TV does make a difference—that it exerts power and influence over their lives, and that it, therefore, should reflect their fundamental values.

But television doesn't reflect so much as refract social reality, sometimes with clarity and distinction, most often cheaply and grotesquely. Paul Attanasio, writing in *The New Republic* about *The Day After*, expressed an otherwise enduring truth when he observed, "You might even say that, once television decides to tackle an issue dramatically, it reliably signals that no one else is really interested anymore."

In the case of *The Day After*, however, this general proposition is belied by the raw facts; unless, of course, one assumes that half the country was impelled to watch out of some irresistible lemming instinct or Freudian death-wish fantasy. Judged by commercial broadcasting standards, *The Day After* must be accounted a huge success. Against the odds, it captured a 46 rating and 62 share of audience, making it the highest-rated made-for-TV movie of all time, and also the top-ranked movie telecast in terms of total number of viewers, an estimated 100 million Americans. *Viewpoint*, the Ted Koppel-hosted endpaper

to *The Day After*, scored a 31.8 rating and 48 share in prime time, making it one of the highest-rated public affairs specials in television history. Released for theatrical exhibition abroad, *The Day After* has been seen in approximately 35 countries, including the United Kingdom, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, West Germany, Australia, Mexico, Japan and Poland, and has grossed over \$50 million in box office receipts, breaking foreign attendance records left and right.

From a corporate standpoint, the film was a coup for the network. This past January, for example, ABC presented the results of a nationwide survey of viewer attitudes toward *The Day After*, developed by its Social Research Unit and conducted by R. H. Bruskin Associates, a respected marketing research firm. According to the survey, most viewers of the program characterized it as "good" to "excellent"; roughly one-third came away from it with improved impressions of ABC, and television in general; and only 4 percent registered negative reactions toward its participating advertisers. In addition, only 6 percent of those surveyed said their feelings about the movie were colored by its perceived "political" content; and just under 70 percent of those who saw *Viewpoint* as well as *The Day After* said that the panel discussion helped to clarify some of the issues raised by the movie.

That's a victory, I suppose, for ABC, a vindication of its claim that *The Day After* was politically affectless. But beyond the study's findings that the film generated no ill-will, what did the poll reveal about *The Day After's* impact upon viewers' attitudes toward nuclear war? Did it change any minds? Reinforce preexisting beliefs?

Curiously, ABC never asked that question. Others did, fortunately, and the short-term answer apparently is: while *The Day After* catalyzed widespread debate, it did little to sway people's ideas and opinions. Polls performed by *The Washington Post*, Abt Associates Inc. for *Time* and Smith, Berlin & Associates for George Washington University reported

no significant changes in viewers' attitudes toward the threat of nuclear war, or toward their chances of survival if one occurred. (A less statistically reliable survey by Warner Amex's Qube cable network nonetheless did show a jump in public anxieties about the imminence of a global conflagration.) President Reagan's job-approval rating even increased slightly in the wake of the broadcast, lending support to the contention of David Gergen, former assistant to the President for communications, that "the predictions that people had [made] that we might go down the tubes over the show never panned out."

What the various polls do seem to suggest most clearly is rampant public confusion about nuclear defense issues and their implications. In the Abt Associates survey, for instance, nearly six out of 10 viewers of *The Day After* indicated that they approved of the Reagan Administration's "present policies regarding defense against nuclear war," which are based upon a strategy of deterrence; yet, almost three-fourths, in the next breath, said that they did not approve of defending our allies by threatening to use our nuclear arsenal. And tellingly, for Kansas City viewers, not even the ultimate shock of seeing their families and homes vaporized on national television was enough to provoke them into some expression of symbolic rage against these weapons which have taken all of humanity as hostages. Of those Kansas City viewers surveyed by Abt, 52 percent said prior to the program that they endorsed U.S. nuclear defense policies versus 49 percent after; and, in response to another question, 44 percent said prior to the movie that they would vote to reelect President Reagan (in a Reagan-Mondale contest) versus 47 percent after.

In the final analysis, *The Day After* was a national video Rorschach test, a grand opportunity for the public and the media to explore and discharge their pent-up fears and frustration about the ticking nuclear time bomb. In spite of the polls, though, I'm convinced that it's still too early to predict whether the film

will have any lasting significance. Who knows? Like that film clip I saw on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Day After*, in the long run, may provide a whole generation of young Americans with indelible impressions of a holocaust they will have the courage and wisdom to prevent.

V ● A Modest Proposal

"The point was that there were people who could destroy mankind and that they were foolish and arrogant, crazy, and must be begged not to do it. Let the enemies of life step down. . . . Now let us all dress in our shrouds and walk on Washington and Moscow. Let us lie down, men, women, and children, and cry, 'Let life continue—we may not deserve it, but let it continue.'"—Saul Bellow, Herzog.

The Day After pulled its punches, and its creators knew it. At the end of the movie, a postscript informs viewers that the carnage they have been seeing understates the actual effects of a nuclear blast. Vomiting and diarrhea have been tastefully omitted; and there's no evidence anywhere of the "Dresden-effect," the raging firestorms that roasted and asphyxiated an estimated 135,000 German civilians in the February 1945 bombing raid. When Mount St. Helens exploded, the earth shook with the equivalent force of a 10-megaton nuclear bomb going off. A former weapons engineering advisor to President Carter told Robert Scheer that this event caused "\$2 billion worth of damage, and it occurred in the middle of nowhere." A missile attack on New York City, some military experts claim, could involve warheads carrying perhaps as much as 18 megatons of destructive power—twice the force that uncapped Mount St. Helens and 1,400 times the force that obliterated Hiroshima.

Michael Westmore, who did the makeup work on *The Day After*, was

quoted in *The Philadelphia Enquirer* as observing that the survivors of Hiroshima "had their eyeballs literally melted out of their heads. That would have been too strong to show. My purpose was not to make viewers sick."

I'm not so sure that decision was wise.

In his essay, "Reflections on the Guillotine," Albert Camus recounts the story of his father, who went to witness the execution of a murderer by decapitation in Algiers. "What he saw that morning he never told anyone," Camus writes. "My mother relates merely that he came rushing home, his face distorted, refused to talk, lay down for a moment on the bed, and suddenly began to vomit. He had just discovered the reality hidden under the noble phrases with which [capital punishment] was masked."

Camus' essay is an eloquent attack on the death penalty. But, if society is to retain capital punishment as a deterrent against murder, he concludes, the execution of criminals should not be conducted in "prison courtyards before a limited number of specialists." Instead, it should receive maximum publicity. Photographs of the event should be broadly disseminated. And the guillotine, itself, should be erected "on a platform in Place de la Concorde at two p.m., the entire population should be invited, and the ceremony should be put on television for those who couldn't attend."

The nuclear age has put all of humanity under death sentence, with a temporary stay of execution guaranteed by a balance of terror. As long as we have nuclear weapons, we must advertise their true nature, and broadcast their effects without flinching from their full horror.

Some wags have suggested that *The Day After* should be followed by a sequel depicting the Red Army's triumphant march into Kansas City, the asserted inevitable consequence of a policy of unilateral disarmament.

My idea is different. I think CBS and NBC ought to be given tax incentives by the government to produce *The Day After II*. This movie would contain all the aw-

ful elements *The Day After* left out. And it would also have spliced into it, scenes from *The Siege of Leningrad*, the powerful British documentary, aired by PBS, on the wartime ravages experienced by the Russian people. That way, no one can ever say that the Russians welcome war. To ensure maximum distribution of this film, I would make its broadcast a condition of receiving U.S. foreign aid. The Soviet Union, for example, would not be able to purchase wheat in this country unless its people first saw the program. When direct broadcast satellites become operational, permitting telecasts across national boundaries and directly into homes, *The Day After II* should be a periodic programming requirement of all government-licensed satellite operators. Thus, over time, *The Day After II* will doubtlessly become the most viewed TV program in history. Eventually, it might even offer a slim chance that a universal revulsion against atomic war will lead all the nuclear powers to the bargaining table to discuss ways of forcing the nuclear genie back into the bottle.

Failing acceptance of my modest proposal, we will have to make do with the original version, since it is unlikely that television will tackle the subject again with quite the enthusiasm. The hope of *The Day After* is that its wide distribution, both here and abroad, will impel hundreds of millions of people to begin thinking about nuclear issues. The danger of *The Day After* is that its bathetic plot and airbrushing of the nuclear holocaust fumbled television's last, great opportunity to make the world stand still and take notice. ■

Mel Friedman is a New York writer specializing in communications issues. His articles have appeared in *The Nation*, *The Columbia Journalism Review* and *Channels of Communications*. He has M.A. degrees in political science and in world affairs from Columbia University.



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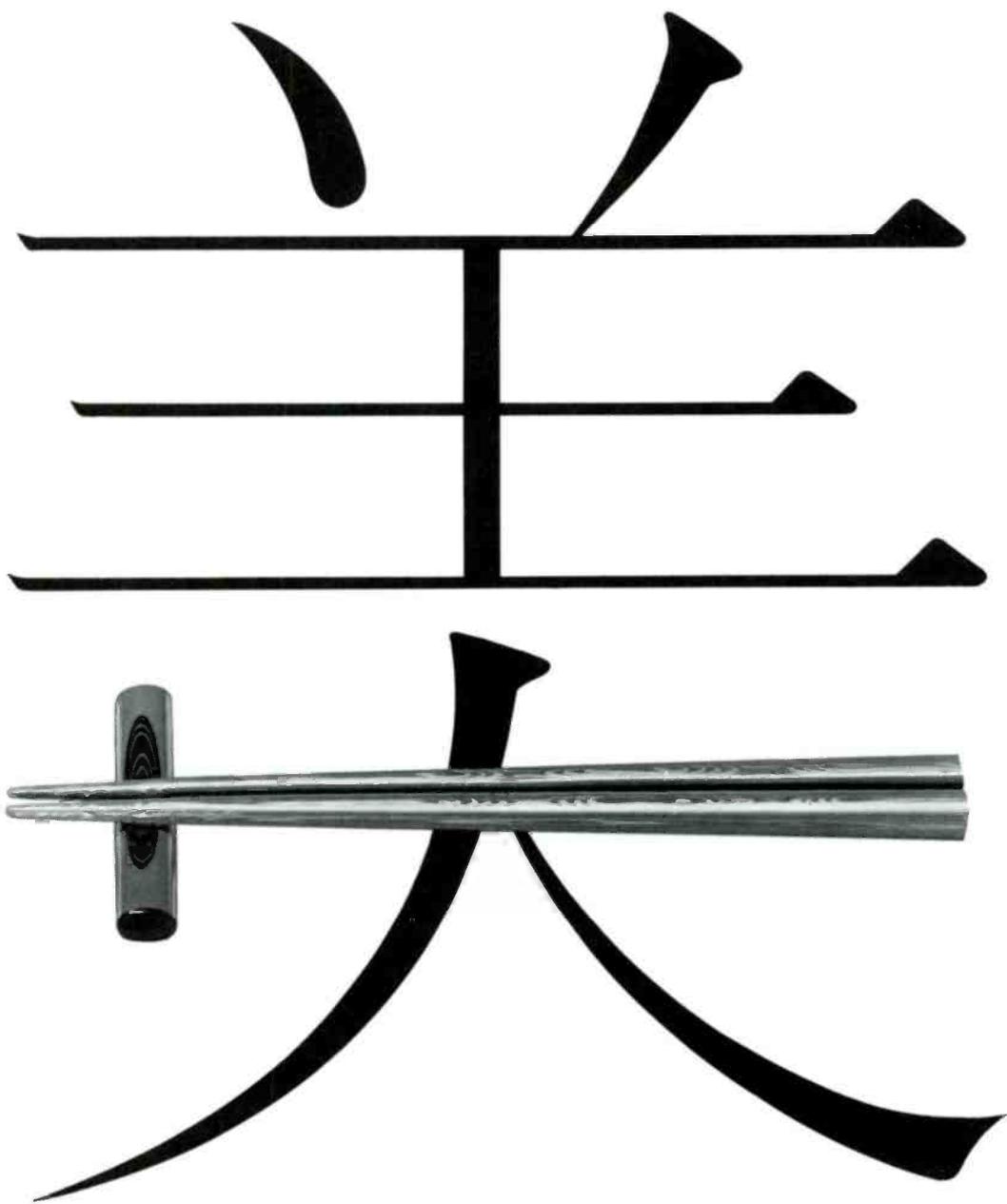
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I DIDN'T BUILD A FALLOUT SHELTER, EITHER. . . .

**BY LAWRENCE
LAURENT**

Approximately 100 million persons viewed all or some part of *The Day After*, but I resolutely fell into the majority, the approximately 134 million who did not see the program. Not see it? I carefully avoided it even though it was heralded by magazines, touted by newspapers, promoted at nearly every ABC-TV break and even proclaimed from the pulpit by my minister at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia, as something that all good communicants should witness. After the service ushers handed out flyers about *The Day After*, demonstrating that they, like my minister, were taking part in a hype that few outside the television business could ever understand.

I earned a very good living for 33 years, partly by reading press releases and observing public relations campaigns. As a result I am relatively immune to hype and I do understand that the mass media in the United States, by the limits voluntarily put in place, are unlikely to deliver anything that is truly shocking, or highly absurd, or even very controversial. Further, I learned in childhood from a master who ran the second-run movie palace in my home town, the cogent stratagem: "Our next attraction is not very appealing. Better advertise it 'For Adults Only' and every kid in town will get in

line to buy a ticket."

In this kind of discussion one is required to provide the mandatory note of caution that he is loyal to the United States, hates Communism and abhors nuclear war. And having completed that routine one is then allowed to ask, just what was I being offered by a telecast of *The Day After*? Well, high-pressure specialists assured me that the program was going to make me aware of the futility of atomic warfare; demonstrate forcefully the devastation that would follow; show the human suffering; illustrate unspeakable horrors, and warn me that I had better do something to make certain it would never happen.

The trouble is that I don't—and didn't—need convincing. I concede each point that I have been conceding for 38 years, or ever since as a Navy enlisted man in World War II I read the first accounts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Following that I studied the brilliant reporting of John Hersey on Hiroshima that filled an entire issue of *The New Yorker* magazine. (The ABC Radio Network devoted a long broadcast to a reading of Hersey's text.) Still later, as a college student, I was present when two learned, serious scholars compared the United States and the Soviet Union to "Two scorpions in a bottle" and I shuddered for all humanity.

In the 1950s, as a young father in the Washington suburbs, I had infuriated my wife by refusing to imitate my neighbors who were taking out second mortgages and building fallout shelters. I was ad-

vised that a fallout shelter would enable us to survive an atomic hit, and I responded that the only thing I could conceive as being worse than being killed by an atomic explosion would be to survive in whatever world might remain. (Some of my neighbors were properly chagrined later by the published stories that followed Civil Defense drills in which the proprietors of the shelters had used loaded rifles to keep unwanted visitors out of their shelters.)

On a national scale, novelists have been fascinated by the ultimate horror, and the implications were not lost on science fiction writers nor on the writers and producers of television programs. For example, as early as 1954, writer-producer James Moser, a thoughtful and skilled craftsman, produced an episode for his *Medic* series which had Dr. Konrad Styner (Richard Boone) trying to cope with the problem following an atomic explosion in Los Angeles.

In due course, Pat Frank's apocalyptic novel, *Alas, Babylon*, was adapted for *Playhouse 90* and not long afterward on the same series came a fine production about a single family that had survived an atomic war and was looking for other survivors. This drama had an upbeat ending with the birth of a child and the

***The Day After* was hardly a new or novel television experience; merely the most heavily promoted.**

presumption that mankind just might do better a second time around. Rod Serling shattered a few psyches with his *Twilight Zone* episode about the book addict (Burgess Meredith) who survived only to shatter the lenses of his desperately needed eyeglasses.

Then, just two seasons ago Gene Reynolds turned an episode of *Lou Grant* into a laboratory exercise of what might

happen at a Los Angeles newspaper after an atomic explosion. Reynolds compared the episode to administering a "badly needed dose of medicine" to the public, but for some reason—perhaps because it avoided sensationalism—this was one of the lowest-rated episodes of the entire *Lou Grant* series.

I have not attempted to list every television program on post-atomic survival, just to demonstrate that the content of *The Day After* was hardly a new or novel television experience: merely the most heavily promoted.

As "controversy" mounted, television stations affiliated with ABC-TV scheduled network and local programs of discussion and debate to support *The Day After* and members of the ABC family glowed with satisfaction when the Nielsen overnight ratings testified to the program's success.

Fair enough. Lest I be misunderstood, I think that ABC had a valid goal in exploiting a common fear to achieve the largest possible audience for the November sweeps. That's just fine. Still, one must recall Nietzsche, who held that the critic is obligated to answer three questions about any public performance: (1) What are they doing? (2) Are they doing it well? and (3) Why are they doing it?

Finally, one is entitled to suggest that the producers may have been addressing the wrong audience; that they were preaching to the already saved. United States policy for over three decades (in the face of a constant barrage of taunts that one cannot do business with the Soviets) has actively sought to find ways to avoid a nuclear holocaust. Every President, from Eisenhower to Reagan, has sought agreements that would lessen the probability of atomic warfare. Much of the population of the United States is already convinced that neither side could win an atomic war, with only the "nuke-the-bastards" reactionaries denouncing any attempt to find common ground with the bad guys. To the best of my knowledge, no responsible group in the West has ever advocated unilateral disar-

mament. The problem, then, is that the target audience for *The Day After* should have been the officers in the Kremlin, the members of the politburo, who unlike the leaders of the United States, do not answer to public opinion in open elections.

"Well, at least it got people to think," argues my very attractive and reasonable neighbor. "Maybe something good will come from that." But I keep recalling the opposite view, once enunciated by that old philosopher and trumpet player Louis Armstrong, who said: "There's some people and if they don't know, you can't tell 'em." ■

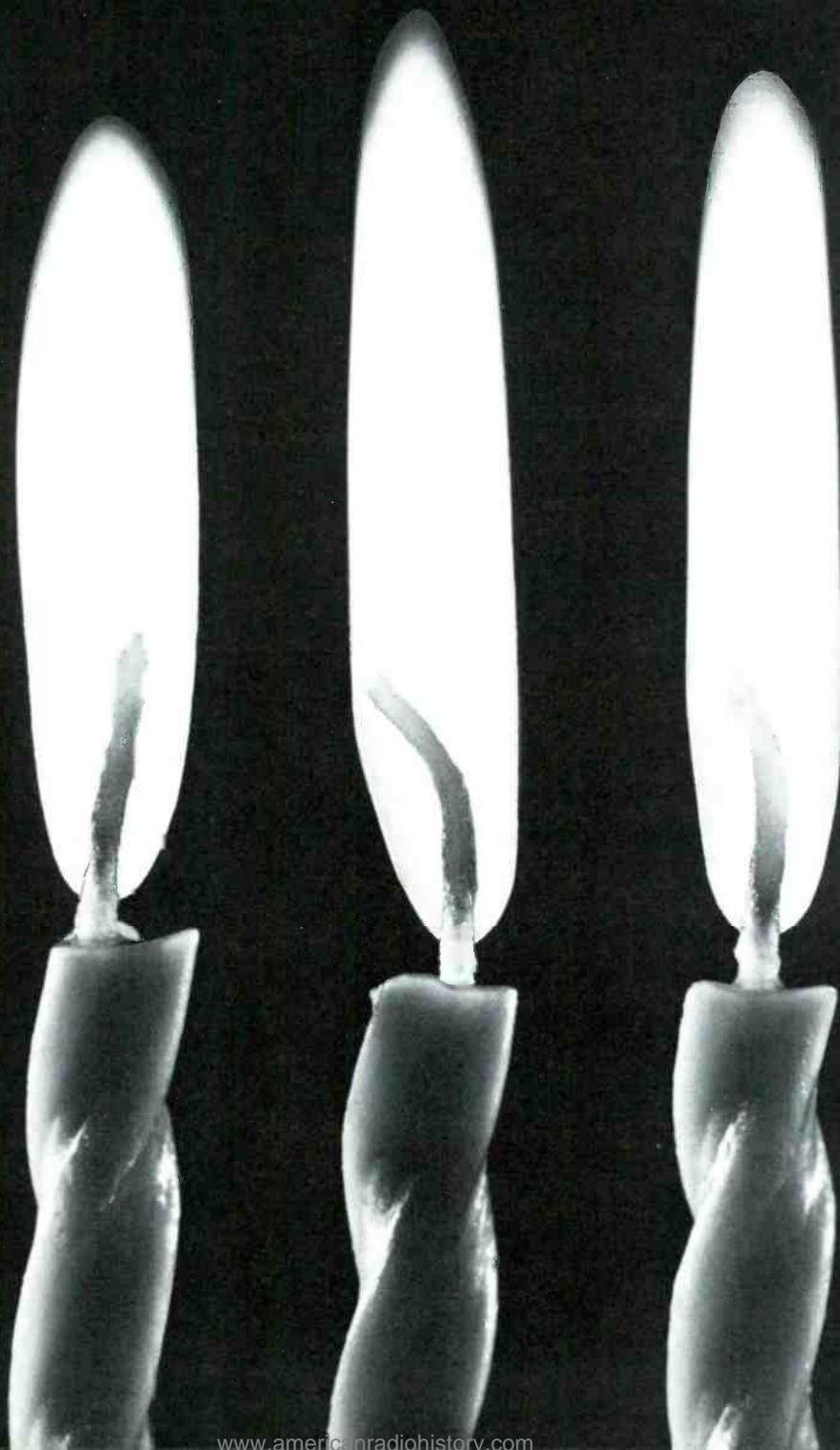
Lawrence Laurent was the television editor and critic of *The Washington Post*. He now teaches communications courses at American University and George Washington University, and free lances as a writer.

REPLAY

It is true that television thrusts people into prominence, but in order to remain there they must have the qualities of greatness. TV cannot manufacture them. It can only transmit what is there. It's too easy, I think, for politicians to blame TV or the press if things seem unfair. Generally speaking, it's still up to the candidate to attempt to 'fit in' by himself. He must project the issues of a campaign in a way that people will find compelling. If he cannot, they will not watch him on television.

—Kenneth P. O'Donnell, *Television Quarterly*, Winter 1966.

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ED SULLIVAN AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VARIETY SHOW

He was the medium's master showman. No one has ever equaled him for showcasing talent or putting together a variety program. Some lessons for today's programmers

BY HAL DAVIS

Andrés Segovia, seated on a plain kitchen chair in front of a plain backdrop, played the last notes of his performance, stood up, bowed shyly as a few people at the rehearsal applauded, and then slowly walked off stage.

"Ed, we've got to change that whole thing," said producer Marlo Lewis, turning to Ed Sullivan, seated in the back of the dark control room. "Nobody is going to stay with the show for seven minutes while he plays Bach on the guitar."

"He's the greatest guitarist in the whole world, isn't he?" Sullivan said quietly.

Lewis nodded agreement.

"And what we've just heard—that's what he does at his concerts?"

Lewis agreed.

"Then," Sullivan decided, "he'll do the same thing on the show."

Segovia did just that. And scored such a hit that he came back to *The Ed Sullivan Show* three consecutive Sundays. Once again, Ed Sullivan, the man the critics in the first years of television used to consider a joke, had been right.

Those of us at Kenyon and Eckhardt who worked closely with Sullivan from the time when he was first signed by the agency for the Lincoln-Mercury account never doubted that the "non-personality," the stony, slow, sometimes difficult newspaperman with the quick temper and major hangups, would stay on the tube long after his detractors had given

up trying to understand his success. *The Ed Sullivan Show* (which began its long life as *The Toast of the Town*, before CBS finally realized that Ed had to have star billing) lasted 23 years.

"Showman" is a word that's loosely tossed around, but if ever there was a master showman in our medium, it was Ed Sullivan. In the opinion of those who intimately know his work, Ed in his time was the Number One showman, and were he around today he'd still be ranked way up there, new technology or old.

During the years Lincoln-Mercury sponsored Ed, an informal course in Sullivan Showmanship was available every week at the agency for those who sat in on the weekly review meetings presided over by the magnetic Bill Lewis, once the programming head of CBS Radio, and now adventurous boss of the K & E Radio/TV department. These sessions were attended by the key persons connected with the programming and promotion of the show, including, of course, our star. Ed would discourse on his concepts of the essential nature of television and its special qualities, and how best to harness its power to keep the show in front.

I vividly recall an early meeting during which Ed was challenged on his device of using the top act at the head of the hour, and then bringing it back at the end. Sullivan compared programming variety shows with vaudeville.

"Instead of putting on the top name when people are most attentive, our competition is opening with the 'Chinese

Jugglers' and building to their big act," Ed explained. "By the time they get to the star, the audience has left. I'm going to flash our top act right at the start of our show, and then bring it back at the end, when the audience has been waiting for more throughout the whole show. It's simple."

True enough, but what was simple for Sullivan was too simple for the sophisticated TV trade. I still have a clipping from *Radio Television Daily* which scoffed at my taking bets on my hunch that *The Ed Sullivan Show* would outlast the *Colgate Comedy Hour*.

So far as I know, Ed Sullivan was the only man who ever booked an act while the show was on the air.

It happened on Sunday at dress rehearsal. Nancy Walker had been signed for two or three weekly comic spots, each running about seven minutes. The rehearsal ended about twenty minutes before airtime, and Sullivan immediately turned to Marlo Lewis.

"Tell Nancy the act isn't going on. It's not right. We'll make it up to her another time."

Next, Ed confronted Ray Bloch, the bandleader. "Ray, who's in town you'll be able to get over here for the end of the show?"

Ray gulped and took a fast look at his book.

"There's a gypsy fiddler-lady playing in mid-town, schmaltzy, but good."

Ed ordered Ray to grab a cab, locate the Gypsy violinist, and rush her back with her music—meantime, someone else could conduct the orchestra. Marlo Lewis turned pale. So did the rest of us.

At eight o'clock, as usual, on went the show. And sure enough, about 8:30, back came a breathless Ray Bloch with a nervous lady Gypsy. He quickly passed the music around to the band, handed a slip of paper with the violinist's name and credits to Ed, and a couple of minutes later, she was on camera coast-to-coast!

Unlike many of the stars of current television shows, Sullivan had a keen sense for promotion and merchandising, and he understood the relationship of a

program to selling products. He energetically and warmly cultivated all Lincoln-Mercury dealers. When the agency came up with the idea of touring the show to major cities, Ed was in his sentimental glory.

The first city on our tour was Philadelphia, tied in with a Connie Mack celebration. As Ed strolled down Market Street during the day, a woman ran over and held up her baby for Sullivan's attention. Ed kissed the baby, hugged the mother, and then walked off with us and began to cry. "This is the first time," he said. "In all my years in the business, that never happened to me before."

On tour, there was never a dull moment. In Boston, where Sullivan appeared at the Opera House, a power failure threatened to doom the origination. But the show went on—saved by a Navy ship in the harbor which provided enough juice to keep the lights going that Sunday night.

Sullivan had a tough schedule in Boston, but because of my personal interest in helping Brandeis University, then a new and struggling institution, Ed agreed to address the students. At the end of a busy day, we headed out to Waltham and the Brandeis campus, and on the way I briefed him about the school.

Since we were late, we had to interrupt the students' dinner hour. That didn't make for a good start. Besides, the kids were rather sophisticated and not really interested in TV personalities; in fact, they were noisy. But Ed jumped up on a table in the cafeteria and started talking about the Brandeis philosophy. He even tossed in an anecdote about Supreme Court Justice Brandeis, for whom the University had been named. In a few minutes, the students were quiet and attentive. Sullivan caught the essence of the campus perfectly. When he left, he received a standing ovation.

It may be that Ed Sullivan's ability to reach and touch men and women of all ages off the air, as well as on, was a big part of his talent as a showman—as a communicator. I also believe that his personal appearances, whether before a

bunch of car dealers or to a crowd of university students, contributed a great deal to developing his insight into what audiences wanted in television; he didn't depend on ratings or panel studies for that. Ed kept intimately in touch with his audience.

More than anyone else in TV, Sullivan understood the front page. He knew what was hot in sports, entertainment, music, movies, classical theatre, dance, comedy—anything. With his show, went a family commitment; nothing off-color.

That did not include, of course, his looking down the dress of a guest star

Ed Sullivan had a New York viewpoint . . . that was one of his assets.

(without meaning to stare), or the time the show came under attack because of its first ballet segment.

Ed decided to do *Swan Lake* as a prime-time first on television. The cameras were set off-stage and caught the action from a number of angles, mostly waist high. Barely was the show off the air when the phones rang: how dare Sullivan put on such erotic and pornographic material?

Nobody knew what the complaints were about. So we looked at the kines. Wow! From close-up, the male ballet dancers' crotches looked rather bulgy in their codpieces. From that time on, no ballet dancer was allowed to wear a codpiece on the Sullivan show.

Ed Sullivan never thought he was smarter than his audience. He differed from the experts of today in that he had an actual love for—and awe of—real talent. He let them do what they did best. And usually he was absolutely correct.

His sense of program flow was impeccable, and he himself took charge of the way a show was routined. On the few occasions when he goofed, Ed would soon realize his error and make corrections. A fanatic golfer, he once booked Byron Nelson for a series of televised golf lessons. Nelson's first appearance ran twelve minutes. By the third week, how-

ever, the golfing champ had been cut to a few seconds.

Ed Sullivan had a New York viewpoint, and that was one of his assets. Although he was a Broadway guy, his toughness was leavened with sensitivity and savvy acquired in theater and vaudeville, sharpened by years of covering the Manhattan beat as a reporter and columnist. The Hollywood style is something else—gimmicky and glittery. Somehow, Hollywood can't do it straight; variety has to be jazzed up. If television drama lost something when it moved to the Coast, so did the variety format.

Ed didn't believe in flashy treatment, in overwhelming performers with tricks or smothering them with production. The way Ed showcased the great Segovia was an example of his style: he presented him straight—the artist and his guitar—no intercuts of flamenco dancers or film inserts of the Alhambra.

Well, the weekly variety show is no more, and its absence is a substantial loss, not only to the television audience, but to talent. The death of the weekly network variety show has eliminated a major outlet for performers of all sorts to display their skills. For the newcomers, the big variety show offered a place to break in; to make a name. For the stars, it was a place to do their own thing, as performers, not just to exchange repartee with a host.

On the Carson show, performers usually play second fiddle to the talkers, or to the comedy. As for the surviving syndicated talk shows (or talk-variety as some of them are still called . . . Merv Griffin, etc.), chatter and gossip are still the main ingredients. The variety act is usually just a drop-in between the interviews.

The Ed Sullivan Show offers some lessons for our time. Back in the Fifties and Sixties when his program was usually in the top ten, there were as many as eight different hour-long, and ten half-hour, variety shows on the air each week! In 1970, there were still eighteen variety programs on the networks, and they usually out-rated the average evening pro-

gram series in the Niensens. Today, Nielsen no longer reports on variety as a format group. There's nothing left to rate.

Five years ago during the reign of Fred Silverman, NBC with *The Big Show* attempted to bring back big variety. For many reasons, it was a big flop. Although the program had one of the best variety show producers in charge—Nick Vanoff—it strained for spectacular effects and elaborate production. Whether this was Vanoff's fault or Silverman's is obscure.

But certainly *The Big Show* had delusions of video grandeur. It tried to attract viewers with a weekly water ballet with fizz and fountains, plus ice skaters, but it often looked like a parody of old Esther Williams flicks and Busby Berkeley musicals; or Vera Hruba Ralston's skating films, depending on whether *The Big Show* waters were moving or frozen.

Worst of all, *The Big Show* failed to understand that a variety show should have the same host/emcee each week, to give the viewers someone to identify with, and to build continuity, as Ed Sullivan did. For some quirky reason, *The Big Show* fronted two hosts each week. And never the same pair. Actually, the program's producers had the correct idea at the start, when the opening program had the right emcee, Steve Allen, fine host and comedian, who himself used to have one of the best weekly variety shows. But after getting rave reviews for Steverino, NBC foolishly switched to pairing him with a co-host (Sarah Purcell of *Real People*, for example).

Finally, not content with such odd mixtures, the show dropped Allen (perhaps at his own request) and sailed on to failure with freaky blends of co-hosts like Marie Osmond and Gavin MacLeod, Dean Martin and Mariette Hartley . . . and so on.

Now a non-network organization, Metromedia, recognizing the potential of attracting substantial new audiences with variety, is producing *On Stage America*, a new show which is syndi-

cated by satellite every Saturday night. Advance blurbs called it "the most dynamic musical variety series ever," whatever that means, although the program's production group—Dwight Hemion, Nick Vanoff and Gary Smith—does rate Metromedia's boast that it is "a dream team." If the new show clicks, it can bring back a format today's television urgently needs. One can only wish that the show will not be drowned by water ballets, a flood of gimmickry or by multiple bubbly emcees.

The lively range of *The Ed Sullivan Show* and Ed's box office sense made it possible for his program to showcase new talent, to revitalize old talent, and not only to bring to audiences great new acts like Elvis Presley and the Beatles, but also to introduce to a mass audience major artists with supposedly narrow appeal—musicians like Segovia and dancers like Margot Fonteyn. That kind of showcase is a significant asset to television, and to all of the lively arts. If Hemion, Vanoff and Smith can build "a really big shew" (as Ed used to say) they will deserve the applause and support of viewers, and of the television industry.

A veteran Ed Sullivan aficionado hopes they decide to use only one host/emcee a week. And please, fellows, the same one every week: you might remember Ed Sullivan and the kind of showmanship which kept Old Stony Face—the man they said would never last—on top for so many years. For a refresher, you might take a look at a few of the kines of his show at the Museum of Broadcasting. ■

As Vice President of Kenyon and Eckhardt, Hal Davis directed and organized publicity for *The Ed Sullivan Show*. He later went to Grey as head of its TV department, and as a management supervisor. He then became president of Grey and Davis, the agency's PR subsidiary. Davis was one of the founders of the New York chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

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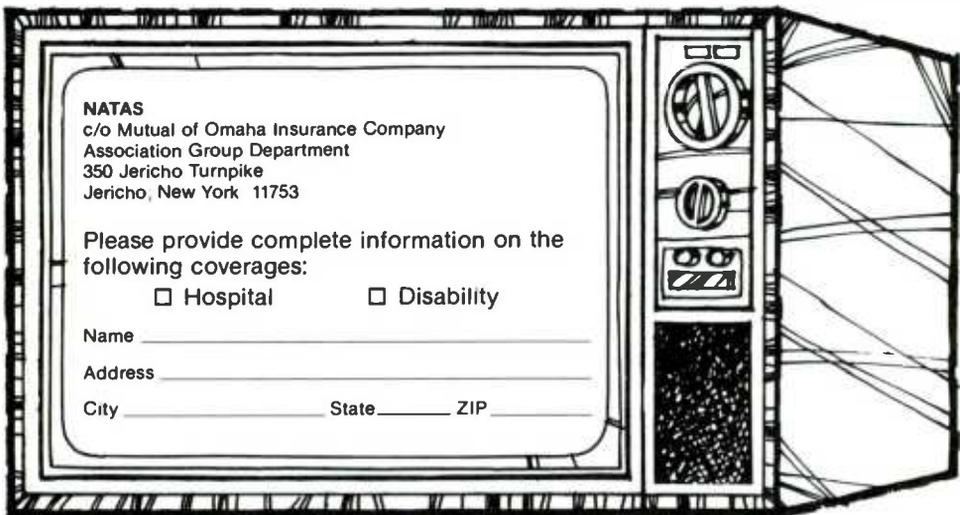
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LOOKING AT ARAB TELEVISION

An American reporter at the "Golden Fleece" awards finds the cultural differences great, and the Islamic values strong. But there are the same arguments about the social impact of TV.

BY LAURENCE MICHIE

The limousines and buses passed through armed military checkpoints into the Ministry of Information, where a dense crowd was gathering in the theater lobby. There were actors in black tie, actresses in dazzling gowns. There also were high-level television executives milling about amid the lights and cameras of television crews. But most of those executives were garbed in floor-length robes—this gathering was for the presentation of the "Golden Horse" awards in Kuwait last January.

Winners of the awards, whose nearest American counterparts would be the Emmys, are determined by program review panels and kept secret until the ceremonies. Entries in various program categories are made by the seven Arab Gulf states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Bahrain. Each category has three winners, the Golden Horse, the Silver Horse, and the Bronze Horse.

The theater was fairly small but SRO—perhaps five to six hundred people. In Western terms, the ceremonies lacked punch. First there was a concert—an original work mixing modern and ancient instruments and using male and female choruses—by Kuwaiti singer Shady El Khalig. Then, a single pair of presenters announced all the winners, with no attempts at jokes or patter. Attractive but moderately clad young Ku-

waiti women brought the equine statuettes to center stage, and with two exceptions the winners picked up their prizes and promptly sat down again without a word. The two acceptance speeches were brief and utterly noncontroversial.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia tended to dominate the awards. Kuwait won the gold in drama for *It Was Not My Wish*, in variety for *Cinderella*, in documentary for *Diving*, and in children's shows with *World of Children*. Saudi Arabia won the gold in religion for *Visual Islamic Magazine* and science for *Art of Management*. Bahrain won a Golden Horse for its contribution to the jointly produced Gulf States evening magazine show.

In the religion category, by the way, the Saudis beat out Kuwait's *Day In the Life of a Moslem* and the UAE's *Islam and Moslems in the United Kingdom*. The latter was favored to win the gold, because a companion piece, *Islam and Moslems in the United States and Canada*, was awarded the Golden Horse at the previous competition.

The awards ceremonies thus pointed up a few of the simplest differences between the Arab and the American approaches to television. And just as Arabic names can be translated in numerous ways into Roman letters—English-language newspapers in the Mideast, even though edited by Arabs, are apt to use very different spelling of the same name—so too are there varied ways of translating the Arab TV industry into

American terms. What's more, the cultural differences are great enough that something's likely to be lost in the translation.

The Golden Horse awards were the culmination of a week-long Arab Gulf States Television Festival held every other year by the seven nations. The seminars, press conferences and screenings all were held in the Holiday Inn on the outskirts of Kuwait City, and there was a concurrent Pan-Arab Television Market. Representatives of all 22 Arab nations were on hand to talk over programs and policies and perhaps swap yarns over a hookah or two. Carpets, pillows and "hubbly-bubbles," or hookahs, were set up in a popular corner of the hotel lobby, the same corner where live and amplified Mideastern music was performed past midnight most nights.

Obviously, the Arab television industry can't be separated entirely from the complex political and socio-economic tensions of the Mideast. I was in the Mideast for the first time to cover the festival

If one focuses on the differences between the Arab nations, making sense of their approach to television might seem impossible.

and market for *Variety*, and I can make no claim to seasoned expertise. I was subject to a flood of raw data, numerous interviews, and a few polemics. And I tried to keep my eyes and ears open.

The gathering of Arab television officials had some built-in-drama, as Kuwait had suffered terrorist bombings in December. Kuwait prides itself on being stable and open, however, and it was decided not to signal any intimidation. The festival and market went on. The country instituted much tighter immigration controls. The nation's ruler complained that the Western press exaggerated the threat of terrorists.

The Holiday Inn itself was tightly

guarded, and security personnel were abundant. But I felt no unusual tension, saw no little bursts of security fervor of the sort that are apt to be generated spontaneously when there are a lot of precautions in effect. All proceeded very smoothly, despite the perfectly credible stories I heard subsequently about fears of bombing.

If one focuses on the differences between the Arab nations, making sense out of their approach to television might seem impossible. There are bitter political disputes between various of the countries, and while all emphatically oppose U.S. policies supporting Israel, some are more dramatic than others in expressing that opposition. Several of the Arab countries—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait—are very rich, and a number very poor. Some are restrained in their interpretation of Islamic law, and some quite strict. A few are in or on the brink of war; most are avidly peaceful.

But they have a common language and heritage—Arabic—as well as a religion, Islam. All Arab states are Islamic, though only half the 44 Islamic states are Arabic (Iraq is Arabic; Iran is not). And those similarities, along with a generic Third World distrust of Western motives, provide a framework for describing Arab television as a whole. Certainly both Arab and Islamic values are guarded very jealously, and one can sense a desire to turn a face of unity toward outsiders despite any intra-Arab disagreements.

The most delicately tolerated Arab nation, Egypt, is its most important source of talent. After the Camp David accords transformed Egypt into a pariah, its TV programs were banned. But the ban didn't stick for long. There is a great deal of program interchange between the Arab states, and much of the production comes from Egypt. Television shows made by other countries often use Egyptian talent. One of the subsidiary concerns of hotel security forces, in fact, was keeping out the groupies and autograph-seekers, as a number of Egyptian per-

formers attended the festival. I went to the Golden Horse awards in a limo along with a popular young Egyptian actor, and the guards at the gate simply waved us through with friendly shouts of greeting once they recognized him. Even Egyptian superstar Adel Imam was on hand. Saod Housni and Samiha Ayoub also are extremely well-known. Some nostalgic glamour was provided by Madiha Yousri, whose star was brightest in the 1940s.

Drama and variety seem to equally divide audience loyalty, with soapy serials not at all uncommon. Mid-level Egyptian actors and actresses are particularly partial to television over motion pictures, because the electronic medium at their strata pays much better. Although a major performer such as Imam might make \$100,000 or more for a feature, a solid but unspectacular trouper might be paid only \$1,200 or so (we're talking about low-budget pictures that are quickly shot). But that same performer might be paid around \$1,600 per episode for a TV series, with a number of episodes guaranteed.

An aspect of Egyptian talent dominance is that the brand of Arabic spoken in Cairo is readily understood throughout the Arab world, while the dialects of the Gulf region, for example, are less easily accessible. Egypt has a firm industry that extends back to the '20s, so experience also is on its side. (A fellow from Lebanon, however, told me that his country once had better production standards than Egypt. When we spoke, Lebanese production had been halted altogether; a few weeks later the Ministry of Information was overrun.)

Most Arab countries have two national television network services. The first is mostly in Arabic and uses programs from various Arab countries, as well as local news and religious programs and so forth. The second network is mostly in a foreign language; English dominates, though French is preferred in former colonies. If programs originally were made in that preferred second language, they will be shown in their original form with Arabic subtitles. For

example, if they were shot in Russian or Japanese, however, they will be dubbed into the second language and then subtitled in Arabic. Many countries carry a limited amount of advertising.

If there's an English-language channel, it will broadcast the news in English, perhaps a show such as *Understanding Islam*, designed to acquaint foreigners with the religion of the country, and a multitude of programs ranging from *Dallas* to Disney. Dramatic miniseries seem to be particularly popular, with the likes of *Rich Man, Poor Man* and *Kennedy* drawing enormous viewership for the length of their runs.

On the Arabic channel, programs made and exchanged within the Arab world run for 10–12 hours a day, on average. Readings from the Koran open the broadcast day, and religious programs are increasingly popular. The head of Baghdad television told me that his crews have accumulated vast quantities of war propaganda footage since Iraq's war with Iran began, and when the fighting heats up, patriotic programs dominate the schedule.

Not many of the programs produced by Arab lands are ripe for export outside Islam, but a handful make the transition. A couple of years ago the Arabian Gulf States Joint Program Production Institute financed a half-hour documentary series, *Gulf Waters*, with a British director and Australian underwater photographers. I saw one of the shows on the English channels in Kuwait and it was excellent, and apparently it has been sold to the BBC and several other European broadcasters. The examination of underwater ecology in the Arabian Gulf would fit right into the PBS schedule as well.

At least one American show has been adapted and completely revised with great success—*Sesame Street*. The Children's Television Workshop series, which is known as *Iftah Ya Simsim*, has made the culture-to-culture shift to what appears to be universal applause. It also

was produced by the joint program institute, which is headquartered in Kuwait.

It is more usual, however, for the television authorities of the Arab countries to wish to consolidate and reinforce Arab and Islamic values, without regard to possible international deals. Ahmad

The kind of show most acceptable in Arab countries is the most wholesome of the *Little House on the Prairie* episodes.

Farrag, the courtly secretary general of the Islamic States Broadcasting Organization, was in Kuwait for the festival, and he explained his group's philosophy in some detail. He believes that the Third World first was seduced by the values of their colonizers from the West, then they rode the pendulum all the way in the other direction toward Marxism. Now, he believes, both systems have been found wanting, and the Islamic nations are discovering their own values and their own way of coping with the modern world. ISBO is trying to define those values through television and radio programming.

One of ISBO's first series was 18 hours called *The Mission of Martyrs*, which traces the beginnings of Islam. Now, ISBO is working on a series that explores Islamic law, tracing the history of key rulings and their effect on both Islam and the outside world.

Perfect agreement does not reign within Arab television, of course, and many of the arguments about the social impact of television that rage in this country are very familiar there. At one panel during the festival, Iraq's Jabbar Yousef criticized a health education program, *Salamatak*, as depicting Arabs as lazy, shiftless, and incompetent—a hated stereotype. Ibrahim Al Yousif, director general of the joint production institute, replied that "the ideas are not imported,

but are presented in acts of daily life."

The various Arab nations enforce different standards of severity in applying the Islamic law to TV programs, but by U.S. standards, all the countries are exceptionally strict. A platonic kiss might be allowed in Syria, but it would be clipped in Kuwait. As Clint Eastwood is about to clutch Shirley Maclaine in *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, there is a mysterious jump in the film (leaving no doubt as to what those two were about, however). In Saudi Arabia, a child cannot be shown being disobedient to his father, a standard that could wipe the ABC Afterschool specials right off the schedule—to say nothing of future productions of *Oedipus Rex*. The kind of U.S. show most acceptable in Arab countries is the most wholesome of the *Little House on the Prairie* episodes.

I talked to the censor from Jordan, a fellow named Kazem Qububbaj, and he spoke of censorship in his relatively liberal country. "Light entertainment shows I can take without a problem," he said but he keeps a close eye on foreign dramas. A U.S. program dealing with homosexuality would be canned altogether, he suggested, because "that's not a problem for us" so there's no need to have a TV show about it. And if a show has a drug theme, he'll leave in the parts showing the bad effects of using drug, but leave out palaver on the subject "because it's a problem only in America."

All the Arab television standards are threatened with change, however, because video cassettes are becoming ubiquitous in Arab lands, especially the wealthy ones. Pirated Western movies—uncensored because pirated—are readily available. There are various legal attempts to curb piracy, but within the home, the lid of censorship is off. And, one bittersweet irony: of course there can be no prosecution for piracy if the film is on the Arab proscribed list, which is a long one, because such films enjoy no legal protection. There probably are more films on the blacklist than off, given the

rigor of Arab censure. The films of Omar Sharif—from Egypt originally—are banned because one of his pictures was partially shot in Israel even though he didn't go there himself.

Naturally, the titillations and attractions of home video are going to have an impact on Arab censorship, as will the eventual advent of Direct Broadcast Satellites. Even production standards will change. As one Saudi official told me, "Our children prefer watching the second channel because they like faster cutting and more action. We must learn that." ■

Laurence Michie, a free-lance writer, is a former television editor of *Variety*.

“ QUOTE UNQUOTE ”

Funny Weather

Though the anchor must be a sage, the weatherman is, on American television, more often a comedian. The former has to be believed; but it would be better if we didn't believe the latter, since he's likely to daunt our optimism. The weatherman therefore embraces his own ignominy by behaving as if his were a ludicrous calling . . . the weatherman is the smirking butt of his colleague's taunts and puns. 'Where do weathermen keep their money?' we're asked. The answer is, 'In cloud banks.'

The weathermen appear inanely garbed for the temperatures they're predicting, or draw cartoons of shivering or sweating puppets on their satellite maps. Why these antics? Once more, it's the medium's compulsory palliation of its messages. Perhaps the weathermen remember their disreputable ancestors those false prophets, the rainmakers.

—Peter Conrad in *Television: the Medium and its Manners*.



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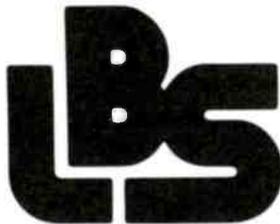
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CORRESPONDENTS AND CAMPAIGNS: TIME FOR A CHANGE

A veteran of the campaigns raises some tough questions about the quality of political reporting, and suggests ways to improve coverage of Presidential races.

BY JERRY M. LANDAY

We are in the process of electing a President again. And, as we move through primary season, the signs are there before us on the screen and loudspeaker that all the old, old memos on how to cover the event have been pulled out again, updated from "Campaign '80" to "Campaign '84", and, with vernier adjustments, redistributed to the "troops", who are again carrying them out.

They have fanned out across the countryside again, tape recorders on shoulder, camera crews marching behind, as they take to the jets and busses again; once more, they have oversaturated the airwaves with trivia and effluvia, vulgarized the banal, aimed at the hole instead of the doughnut, and have presented, yet again, presidential politics as an entertainment. A cliffhanger. A horse race. A pennant chase. A superbowl.

The candidates have muttered privately and laughed derisively at the media scene, at its naiveté and superficiality, while of course staging those hokey picture opportunities at the shopping centers, club meetings and barbecues to get themselves on the air.

Vast amounts of money are being spent by networks and stations in the cause of outcompeting rivals, a premise without validity since everyone is covering the campaign in precisely the same way.

Broadcasting executives who believe

their audiences go for the jazzy window-dressing, and equate honest journalism with dullness, are again serving up the campaign in predigested doses not to exceed 2:00, please—except for the superficial feature. The reporters have often been kept at home while their assigned candidates do routine politicking. In the name of economy, their producers in the journalists' absence have been standing in. And theatrical values have again been substituted for the journalistic process of making connections between the audience and the real world.

The objective has been to search for the good guys and the bad guys, the strong guys like Glenn who get weak, and the weak guys like Hart who get strong—and then dip—while sidestepping that dull stuff about why. Coverage has stressed the nuts-and-bolts that are easy to tell and illustrate, hyping the simplistic "plot lines" (like Jackson versus the Jews); the focus is on "carny"—the great tape, the pithy sound bite—while neglecting the context and content of the most complex and wondrous political process in human affairs.

What the broadcasting industry must come to know at the highest levels of management is that what it presents, and the way in which it does so at campaign time, is *not* entertaining. It is boring. It is boring because it is not informative and not credible. It is as featureless and characterless as some of the telegenic front-people who now stand in for credible, professional newsmen.

What the electronic media have cre-



ated is an information famine—a hunger for solid, substantive storytelling delivered with confidence in the product, with clarity and insight, that simply tells voters not only what is going on but why and what it may mean, so that voters can come to some reasonable conclusions about their society, their world, and the context in which they must orient their positions and chart their courses.

The absence of quality reportage on the air may be the single most operative factor in the erosion of citizen-participation in a process in which so few of those who can vote are bothering to do so.

Broadcasters apparently have convinced themselves and their news divisions that all they can provide is a highly profitable headline service, and that to do more is to undermine those profits. Nonsense! What the consumer wants is news, and a reasonable shot at understanding what it means. We ought to do more first-hand chatting with them, and start believing the results of those confidential proprietary surveys broadcasters have taken. Audiences want honest news product.

The absence of context and meaning in much of what we see and hear in broadcast news so reduces the interest-level of a piece that it tends not to enlighten but confuse; not to entertain but tire into tedium. Perhaps that is why so few Americans really care when television teams are denied access to Grenada.

One night, Bill Moyers was given about a minute to comment on the dangers to the Democratic Party of a possible clash over convention delegate selection rules. But he did not have the time to explain what the argument was about, rendering the entire minute almost meaningless.

On the same program, Dan Rather shifted suddenly to the field to show us a montage of a visceral Jesse Jackson in a series of stump speeches aimed to move blacks to register. Supposedly, the intent of the piece was to explain Jesse Jackson; what we actually got was Jesse

Jackson explaining Jesse Jackson. He, not Rather or his producers who assembled the piece, was in control. There was virtually no reportage. What we saw was what there was. Rather ended the piece by asking us to take a leap of faith with him and accept that Jackson somehow could now lay "legitimate claim" to the mantle of the late Martin Luther King.

At about the same time, some print journals were supplying more substantial coverage of Jesse Jackson the candidate. Citing aides, one dispatch told us that Jackson is engaged, on behalf of his pivotal black constituency, less in running for President than in collecting a sizable bloc of trading power for use in dealing on planks of the Democratic platform, and brokering on the ultimate choice of a candidate and running mate.

This seems the more mature and useful contribution to political reportage than the hasty, hyperbolic drawing of analogies with Martin Luther King.

In coverage of the Iowa caucus results, the networks demonstrated that they have a huge stake in a horse race, and take a direct hand in trying to keep one going. While Gary Hart's second-place finish there was at the time indeed unexpected and significant, viewers had to pay close attention to learn that the winner by a three-to-one margin was Walter Mondale (nor were they given much of an insight into Hart's dramatic emergence). Dan Rather also attempted to convince viewers that the Cranston and McGovern campaigns had somehow acquired new luster in Iowa, though each attracted less than minimal caucus support, and Cranston pulled out several days later.

One would be hard-put, on the basis of pure hunch, to prove that the horse-race hype attracts votes to the emerging candidates in subsequent primaries. But the degree to which such motives may influence and color editorial content, as well as voter behavior, is a useful question for researchers and journalists to pursue.

I also note the return in strength of the hackneyed news practice known as the

herd Thumbsucker. In the name of analysis, broadcast pundits select a premise, often ill-founded and usually oversimplified, and then devote more on-air attention to it than the proposition deserves. One reporter deals with it, then another, then another. The subject is passed down the line like a bucket in the hands of an overworked fire brigade against whom the flames are gaining. "Super Tuesday" was one of those gimmicks. So was "Yuppies."

The classic example to date from this campaign: the proposition that the movie *The Right Stuff* might possibly make John Glenn the nominee of his party—a proposition clearly pleasing to the candidate and to the movie's producers. It provided the excuse for airing a lot of exciting, free film excerpts, although the idea was predictably absurd in political terms, and insulting to the good sense of the American public.

It is possible to anticipate some of the thumbsucking in which the herd will indulge as we move down the days toward the Conventions and then the Presidential campaign home-stretch. Does Gary Hart remind us of President Kennedy? Is he a liberal or a centrist? Will President Reagan agree to debate? Will Mondale or Hart accept the groundrules? Did either candidate peak too soon? Is there a white "backlash" against Jesse Jackson? Is Reagan being too Presidential? Or not Presidential enough?

The hypothesis about a white backlash was a familiar thumbsucking theme in 1964. It held that segregationist George Wallace and Senator Barry Goldwater—Wallace in the Democratic primaries and Goldwater in the general election—would be the recipients of a massive white "backlash" against President Johnson because of the decisive role he played in the passage of landmark civil rights legislation.

I wish there were more assignment editors like the one I had when I was covering the Goldwater-Johnson campaign. Given the hermetic nature of opinion-sampling and punditizing aboard a campaign jet, this shrewd editor de-

cidated that I should drop off the Goldwater plane and "hang around town" after the candidate left. I chatted with steelworkers in the beerhalls of Indiana industrial towns at changes of shift. I spoke at random with voters on Main Street in Columbus, and in the factories of Lorain, Ohio and nearby towns.

I talked with a host of savvy local and state politicians of both parties, who knew their areas but had no direct stake or involvement in the presidential contest, and who, without the presence of a microphone or camera, would speak frankly about their sense of the situation on the ground.

All agreed with the blue-collar union member in Gary who told me: "Civil rights or no, things are good under Johnson, and I vote my paycheck."

That proved to be the case.

It is not that thumbsucking is necessarily poor journalism, rather that the premises tend to deal not with the overarching questions of the campaign but with technical processes—nuts-and-bolts trivia. And they are overworked to the detriment of the larger questions of our times.

Among other issues, the outcome of Campaign '84 will ride on voter perceptions of candidates' positions on war and peace and the purposes of the American nuclear arsenal; on economic policy, on the responsibility of the government to an individual in need in mercurial economic times; on the trials and transformations of American industry; and on basic matters of leadership and character.

□

But these are questions which require time in which to reflect, and are harder to "tell" on television and radio than the stumpwarming and ballyhooing that are so eminently record-able in trailing a candidate from platform to platform, banquet hall to banquet hall. Reportorial assessments on the greater matters are not easy to pictorialize, and there may be no audio tape available as



illustrative material. Conclusions often do not lend themselves to "boxscore" quantification. Their hue may prove to be not so much black or white, but grey. The world, in short, may be somewhat more complicated than news producers would like it to be. And those producers want to see moving pictures, not talking reporters.

Then, too, these questions heavily involve major characters in a presidential election whose activities are not often covered by political reporters: not pollsters, pundits, not advance men or spokespersons, but the voters themselves: rank-and-file laborers, both on the job and off, business leaders, opinion molders on Wall Street, ethnic role models, the leaders of other countries, and those who affect history by chance. Had reporters spent more time with them, they might have anticipated the emergence of Gary Hart, and his decline.

Coverage dedicated to context, substance and meaning calls for the changing of old habits and practices, calls for trying something new: actually the implementation of old journalistic standards in a new setting. And change comes hard to broadcasting.

Some of the bad habits:

- *The tendency to repetition and overexposure.* A top network news official was once asked to explain. And he responded frankly: "Because it is so easy and we have done it so often." Familiarity has bred only more familiarity. If your basic approach to campaign coverage is following the candidates around, then your coverage repertoire is, by definition, limited.

The costliness of such coverage—in teams of reporters, producers, crews on travel allowances, in air fares, air freight, and facilities—often becomes the sole justification for putting on the air material which under other circumstances would not be considered newsworthy. In short, the business office wants to see and hear what it is paying for, significant or not.

Also, the susceptibility of the business

to imitativeness means that things are often put on the air because you expect the competition will broadcast them too. And because nighttime news carried the piece, the morning edition will frequently demand a re-edited version: use the same set-ups and cutaways . . . just change the voice bites and the lead-ins. Things are slow some mornings and there is space to fill.

But the correspondent, producer and crew feel the pressure. They often carry on into the night at the feed point at which they cut and transmitted the early evening piece, now reshaping the story for the morning, then rushing off in the wee hours to rejoin the candidate before his breakfast pep-talk to local party leaders and an early-morning departure to New Orleans. They move around too much, and get to understand too little.

- *The phenomenon I call the "mandate to morbidity."* This is the cynical, though rarely mentioned imperative of the news industry never to leave the candidate's side, regardless of the importance of the event (and at times, to stake out his suite, his hotel floor, or the entrance to the hotel itself during non-public hours on assassination watch).

That is to say, the correspondents covering the candidates ride all the press planes all the time, in herd configuration, set up a forest of tripods before the same platforms and rostrums, banqueting tables and motorcade routes, and mob all the shopping tours and teas tendered for the candidates' wives, in order to insure that they will be in the right place if someone important gets shot.

The shameful regularity with which American political figures have been shot at has bred a competitive nervousness among the media to be at the kill, a sad reality of this gun-saturated, and relatively open society. But, if the mandate of morbidity must be served, the less important stops could be "protected" by a pool crew and reporter, freeing major resources to research and produce pieces on more meaningful aspects of a campaign. That, of course, assumes a will-

ingness to cooperate, as well as compete, among the major broadcast media on the campaign trail.

● *The triumph of trivia.* Also, there is the concomitant impulse to air what has been taped, irrespective of its significance or contribution to an understanding of the political process. All too often, the candidate responds by tailoring his words and actions to the trivial, and to the operational modes, of the media rather than to his own judgment of what is important and meaningful.

● *The numbers game.* As a substitute for substance, the broadcast media have sought to quantify and quantify everything—to stress not the process and issues of a campaign, but “how it’s coming out” and “who’s ahead of whom”. Rather than embracing the more demanding, and satisfying, chore of teaching and explaining, producers have placed numbers on everything. Who’s winning, how do the voters feel, the attempt to define the issues—it’s all become a matter of numbers.

A problem of polls in this complex age is that they are merely a reflection of the confusions in the minds of men and women at any given moment. And, because they are feelings rather than judgments, they are mercurial. Anyone trying to base a conclusion upon the last poll results may find conditions so wildly different in subsequent surveys that his premises are no longer valid.

Furthermore, polls are not truly enlightening. They merely represent the recycling of a voter’s uncertainties and inconsistencies back to that voter, exacerbating the feeling of powerlessness, rootlessness, and confusion that already tend to paralyze the judgment of a citizen of this Republic.

Polls tend to demystify the most mysterious of political processes on this earth, a process not fully given to rational analysis.

And they do not answer the question: why?

Why, for instance, do more men than

women face the future with optimism this year than in years past? That is what a recent CBS-*New York Times* survey tells us. It seems to me crucial to understand this. But audiences are not told why.

We may learn, for instance, that Walter Mondale is ahead among the leadership of organized labor, and it seems important that Ronald Reagan is more attractive to male than to female voters. We may be told that Senator Hart received more applause than Senator Cranston during a joint appearance. But what truly enlarges and enlightens us are the facts contained in a well-told news story about the human tides and currents that attempts to probe and explain it all. And that is a reporter’s job, not a pollster’s.

● *The tyranny of pictures and sound.* As broadcasting technology has improved, the quality of political coverage has suffered because of the production-obsession with the black boxes rather than the content. All too often, it is what the camera and tape-recorders capture rather than what lies behind the words and pictures that is treated as “the news.”

My dictionary tells me succinctly that news is “tidings of intelligence of new or hitherto unknown things.” You cannot necessarily take a picture of “tidings”, nor can you always shove a microphone into “intelligence’s” face.

A producer could simply let a reporter look at the camera and tell viewers in a provocative and appealing way what that journalist learned. But that technique is not permitted to operate freely within the groundrules of the “star” system, which relegates most television reporters to the status of sound-on-tape voices separating the talking heads from the anchor men and women, and to short “stand-upper” paragraphs with most of the substance gone. The working professional who is not on the “star” list may be heard, but rarely ever seen. The “star” who may be seen a lot has for the most part not covered or written his own story, and therefore is not truly in command of the material.



It is true that a single picture may be worth a thousand words. But it is more often true, as Eric Sevareid put it, that a few words may be far more important than a thousand pictures, if those words convey tidings or intelligence of unknown things.

Such words might be about what someone in a knowledgeable position tells a reporter unattributively, which, after *professional evaluation* and checking is deemed to be important and significant. They may tell us about the result of research into a claim about, or a position on, an issue. Or, perhaps, they may help profile a key political personality, or offer an assessment of his or her role in the campaign for which no pictures are possible or available.

Yet, often, the first question a television producer back at the desk may ask of his field producer or political correspondent on the road is not: "What's the news?" but "What's the best tape bite out of today?"

On a network newsdesk, it is often the practice during campaign season to put voice and video excerpts from candidates and campaign officials on the air without guidance from the field as to its import, and without any idea of what political story to package it in. Yet, on the air it goes, irrespective of whether or not it carries a legitimate news lead with which to top the "cut" and justify its use. Often the piece which gets on, is not the one with solid content, but the shortest and snappiest.

● *The decline of reportage.* The tape product, as we have discussed, is rarely the yarn in itself. Yet, too often it has become the substitute for the once-essential role of reporting a political (or any other kind of) story. Broadcast management of major media evidently has come to have little confidence in reporting as it has been practiced—or its practitioners. Reportage implies sticking your neck out in the name of truth, often being alone for a time, drawing sparks from principals who are unhappy with enterprise, and occasionally taking heat if the

reporter is wrong. The problem of poor reporting has grown, of course, as more and more broadcast news people have been hired for their videogenic qualities, rather than any special journalistic talents.

Network producers often want to see the substance of a story, especially one that embodies controversy, turn up first in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. In fact, a correspondent or field producer often sells the idea of doing a television story by placing a newspaper clipping of that story on an executive producer's desk.

One network news operation would not air the word from a reporter at George Washington Hospital, based on good authority, that doctors had found a bullet lodged in President Reagan after the Hinckley shooting. During that critical period when the nation was uncertain of whether its president had been hit, the reporter's bosses insisted on letting someone else tell it first.



The essential danger stemming from the reduced role of reportage in campaign time is that the candidates effectively come to control the coverage, and the news media assume the role of passive propaganda conduit.

Photo opportunities rather than voter enlightenment often is the dominant factor in the making of a campaign schedule. And it is the daily agenda of the candidates, rather than the curiosity of the editor, which largely determine what shall be covered and how.

The art of reporting degenerates into the act of a "nervy" reporter in crashing a presidential receiving line to ask an impertinent question, or the shoving of a microphone in someone's face at the end of a long stake-out to capture the trivial, or poorly thought-out comment. "What's your reaction to . . ." is the form of the most frequently-asked question on the campaign trail. The audience is left with claim, counter-claim, cacophony and noise. In the industry, pure repor-

tage is an intrusion.

I often wonder what would have become of that certain stroke of this reporter's fortune on the eve of the 1960 West Virginia Democratic Primary, had it occurred in 1984. I was a young reporter covering JFK. . . .

West Virginia was the showdown between John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey. Kennedy was on trial in the Bible Belt for his Catholicism. Humphrey was trying desperately to measure up to the charismatic, well-funded Kennedy. And the Kennedy people were telling anybody who would listen that they were going to lose badly to Humphrey.

I was given a room next to the Kennedy suite in the old Kanawha Hotel in Charleston. And, a few days before the vote, by chance as I was walking to my door I overheard Senator Kennedy's voice booming through the louvered door of his suite as JFK spoke confidently to a confidante on the telephone: "Hell, nothing to worry about. Our private polls gave us a 55-45 edge a week ago."

I put that to a reliable informant on the Kennedy campaign, and he reluctantly confirmed the "poormouth" tactic, the object of which was to generate voters sympathy, and to maximize the impact of the anticipated victory. My story was accurate. But airing it implied professional trust in me as a reporter, and on the words I wrote, rather than the sounds or pictures I recorded.

Much important news is lost to political coverage on the air, simply because current usage militates against the average reporter's going on camera and simply telling his audience what he or she has discovered.

The endgame of the race is, or should be, the selection of the people and ideas that will comprise the policies and operating philosophies of government at the federal level for the next four years.

But broadcast coverage stresses "what happened today", rather than illuminating the nature and quality of those who run, the size of their ideas, or the quality of their claims. A recent television story told of the embarrassment at

the White House because presidential adviser Ed Meese complained that reports of hunger in America were merely "anecdotal".

The TV story then showed a montage of bedraggled, unshaven unfortunates wolfing hungrily at a soup kitchen, as though the pictures of these homeless street people proved Meese wrong. The media response to insensitivity was superficiality. The appropriate journalistic response would have taken a little more work: an objective survey of ghettos, talking to the needy, getting data from the relevant social and governmental groups, culling the observations and studies of respected experts in the nutritional field.

□

Broadcasters have become excessively cynical about what news and information on the air are for. However, the broadcast news product is like any other: its value and marketing success are dependent upon the degree to which it provides a useful function or service to a market that seeks it. The intent of sound broadcast journalism is not to distort vital information with soap-opera values, but to tell the viewer who flicks the switch about the world in which he is living.

The viewer or listener who seeks out a news broadcast is not looking for fantasy (the advice of certain news "consultants" to the contrary), but a broadcast which contributes materially and meaningfully to a body of knowledge from which he can make sensible decisions. Never is that need more urgent than in campaign season at this time in history.

Without purpose, without honest content and value, a news product loses its credibility, and therefore, its reason for existence, and will ultimately be abandoned by its market. If it is true that political coverage helped establish the reputations of our leading broadcast news organizations, then it follows that these reputations can be unmade by debasement of the product.



I offer a few suggestions for building market value back into the political news product:

- a campaign story should be evaluated on the basis of sound journalistic criteria for what constitutes a news story worthy of publication. If the day's "catch" contains few "tidings or intelligence of new or hitherto unknown things", it should not be aired.
- overexposure debases the value of any product. The size of an electronic standing army or the extent of the budget upon which it marches is no criterion on which the daily news judgment should be based.
- the campaign story is not solely about candidates. It is certainly not about pollsters or pundits or sample precincts or plane and bus stops. It is about voters, issues, perceptions of the needs of leadership, the state of the pocketbook and the world. These may tell us more about the outcome of a campaign process than anything the boys who stay in the bus or roll the electronic cameras may contribute. What that means is that we reporters may have to spend more time off the bus working the sidewalks along Main Street.

What a seasoned reporter has to tell us about what he has learned may prove to be more illuminating than shots of yet another candidate repeating his standard speech at yet another lectern, or pictures of yet another crowded hall or pressing-the-flesh session.

Campaign reporters need to do more basic reporting.

The magnificence of television as a reportorial tool is that it is a "people" medium. And, since politics is essentially the process of how people choose to organize themselves to conduct their public business, television can personalize this process as no other medium can.

Radio, too, is an intensely personal medium, with the ability to filter out the trivial and focus finely on people and their ideas.

The portability of both radio and television can also widen the spectrum of our experience. We can dramatically know the plight of the jobless worker in Youngstown, or the legislator who must make the tough judgment between guns and butter in Washington. And the good reporter can relate both to the process called politics.

Making full use of the versatile electron to communicate wholly and creatively to this society not only adds up to sensible political coverage, it is also damned good television. ■

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As a correspondent for Group W, ABC, and CBS, Jerry M. Landay has covered presidential politics from Eisenhower to Ford. He is now executive producer for *Why In The World*, a current affairs program for young people on PBS.

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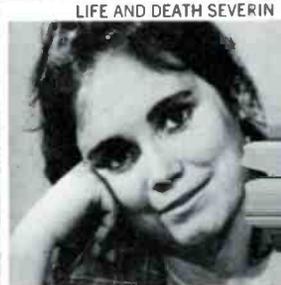
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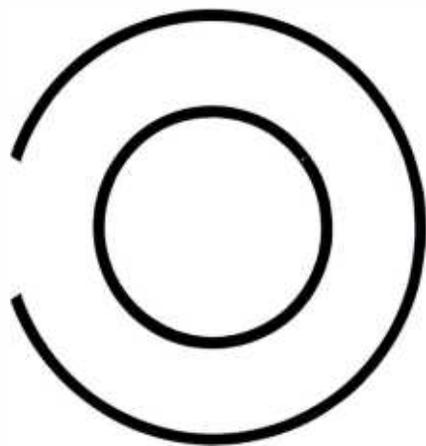
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- the '79 Ondas Award from the Spanish Broadcasting Society and Radio Barcelona bestowed on the series "Malu, Woman."

- 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 Fcnste 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."

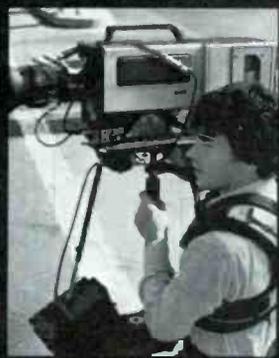
- the '82 Golden Emmy for the programa "Life and Death Severina" in the Popular Arts category.



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AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE AGE OF TELEVISION

A noted historian argues that TV has nearly destroyed old and valuable political traditions. Politics should not be a spectator sport.

BY RICHARD C. WADE

Television has been accused of many things: vulgarizing tastes; trivializing public affairs; sensationalizing news; corrupting the young; pandering to profits; undermining traditional values. The indictments are no doubt too harsh, and they ignore the medium's considerable achievements over two decades. Yet even the severest critics have not noticed the way in which television first seduced and then captured the whole American political process.

The fact is that each year fewer people register to vote, and among those who do, an ever-shrinking number actually go to the polls. Since casting a free ballot constitutes the highest expression of freedom in a democracy, its declining use is a grave matter. How did we get ourselves into this perilous state?

Television's victory was not the result of a carefully planned and calculated assault on our political procedures; less still was it the conspiracy of a greedy and power-hungry industry. Rather it was a process in which each year witnessed a modest expansion of the electronic influence on American politics. A look at the presidential election of 1948, the first in the age of television, suggests both the magnitude and swiftness of the

change. President Harry Truman ran a shoestring campaign sustained largely by his incumbency and the overconfidence of his opponent. Together the two candidates spent only about \$15 million—the cost of a gubernatorial contest in New York three decades later. Both presidential candidates leaned heavily on their state and local parties for crowds and election-day support. Truman's whistle-stop tour of the country harked back to a century-old technique. Television covered the conventions but intruded no further. Radio handled the late returns, and the commentator H. V. Kaltenborn, who assumed historical patterns would hold true, waited for the rural vote to sustain his early prediction of a victory for New York governor Thomas E. Dewey.

Some of the possibilities of television emerged, however, in the election. Sen. Robert Taft used time-honored, if somewhat questionable, tactics to line up a solid phalanx of Southern delegates at the 1952 Republican convention. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower's managers presented a more properly selected alternative set of delegates. Historically, disputes of this kind had been resolved behind closed doors and brought to the convention only for ratification. But Eisenhower strategists wanted to transform what had long been seen as a technical question into a moral one. They chose as their weapon televised committee hearings. For the first time, the public became privy to the vagaries of party rules. Viewers were let into the



smoke-filled room. The result was resounding defeat for Taft, and Eisenhower went into the convention with plenty of delegates and wearing the fresh, smiling face of reform.

A few months later Eisenhower's running mate, Richard Nixon, found himself entangled in a burgeoning scandal involving a private fund raised by large contributors to advance his political career. Though no law had been broken, the impropriety was clear, especially in a campaign based on cleaning up "the mess" in Washington. Eisenhower declared that anyone in public life should be as "clean as a hound's tooth," and many of his advisers told him to drop the young congressman.

A desperate Nixon decided to take his case directly to the public—through a half-hour paid telecast. He declared he had meant no wrongdoing, detailed the high costs facing a California congressman, noted his own modest means, and said he had always voted his own conscience on issues before the House. Most memorable, however, was his use of his dog, Checkers, as a kind of surrogate "hound's tooth." To sophisticates it seemed like a clip out of a daytime soap opera, but the public found it plausible enough. More important, it satisfied Dwight Eisenhower.

These two episodes revealed the ambiguity of the new medium. Until 1952, conventions had been closed party affairs run by the national committees. In fact, that is still their only legal function. But television put the voters on the convention floor. Both parties had to dispense with a lot of the traditional hoopla—endless floor demonstrations, marathon seconding speeches, visibly indulgent behavior by delegates—and keynote speakers had to project telegenic appeal as well as party service. To be sure, television introduced its own brand of hoopla. Cameras zoomed in on outrageous costumes, floormen interviewed colorful if not always important figures, and networks did the counting of the delegates before the issues or

nominations actually got to the decisive stage.

The Nixon heritage was less complicated. The "Checkers" speech became shorthand for slick, calculated manipulation if not deception. Critics argued it demonstrated that a shrewd master of the medium could sell anything—not only commercial products but political candidates as well.



The presidential election of 1956 was essentially a rerun of the previous one, yet one episode demonstrated the increasing influence of television. With Stevenson's renomination by the Democrats a certainty, the networks faced a four-day yawn from their viewers. Salvation suddenly appeared in a contest over the Vice-Presidency. With no obvious choice and with Stevenson himself undecided, three senators moved into contention: Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, and John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts.

Chicago was awash with whispers of deals being concocted in smoke-filled rooms to designate a running mate, and to sustain his reform image, Stevenson threw open the choice to the convention. Suddenly there was theater. Kefauver had a second chance; Humphrey got his first; and Kennedy seemed to have no chance at all. A big scoreboard behind the podium recorded the voting from the floor. The Kentucky Derby never generated more excitement. As state by state announced the results, the lead fluctuated. At the last moment Humphrey released his delegates to the Tennessean who had contested Stevenson in a dozen primaries. Afterward only historians would remember that Kefauver had won, but Kennedy's performance gave the public its first impression of a man who would dominate his party—and the media—for almost a decade.

Four years later another national election provided television with one of its greatest moments: the Nixon-Kennedy debates. It was a strange event, and it

is hard to say who won. A reading of the transcripts today reveals no surprises. Each candidate expressed views already known; each circled and jabbed; but there were no knockdowns. Yet millions saw the relative newcomer under the most favorable of circumstances, and even though the contrast was sharper visually than intellectually, there was a vague general feeling that JFK had got the better of it.

In all, the new medium lived up both to its responsibilities and its possibilities. For the first time, it had brought two presidential candidates to the same podium. The proceedings were overly elaborate, but the handling of the event was scrupulously fair and nonpartisan. And afterward it would become increasingly hard for candidates, even incumbents, to avoid legitimate challenges on television.

The turbulence of the sixties can only be understood in the context of television's ubiquity. It brought its first war, Vietnam, into the living room from ten thousand miles away; it showed us racial explosions across urban America; it covered the campus meetings that revealed the widest generation gap in American history; and it captured, in endless replays, the assassination of three of the country's most popular political leaders. And viewers were also voters. The decade of turbulence scrambled old allegiances and rendered old labels meaningless.



The year 1968 was a tide without a turning. Nixon's election ushered in a new era dominated by the paid commercial and an overall media strategy. Already what the press would call "image makers" or "media mavens" were on their way to becoming at least as important as campaign managers. Charles Guggenheim's twenty-five-minute TV film *A Man From New York*, broadcast in the 1964 senatorial contest, purported to show that Robert Kennedy was not really from Massachusetts; four years

later Guggenheim portrayed George McGovern as a bombardier in World War II to dispel the notion that he was a craven pacifist. More daringly, political manager David Garth ran John Lindsay for reelection in New York City with commercials in which the mayor admitted to endless small mistakes in office, the better to magnify presumed larger accomplishments.

Guggenheim and Garth were pioneers: the full media impact lay in the seventies, when it replaced more conventional activities. Its muscle was most obvious in determining the schedule of the candidate. Traditionally, managers had tried to get their stalwart in front of as many groups as possible. A heavy speaking schedule gave the candidate a chance to make his views known to a disparate electorate, and if the newspapers covered the meetings, so much the better.

Now, every effort focused on television. Instead of sessions with political groups, the object was a contrived "event." The candidate showed up at a senior citizens' center and delivered a brief statement drawn from some position paper. Television news deadlines determined the timing; the campaign coverage of the previous week determined the issue. As election day approached, two or three of what Daniel Boorstin has called "pseudo events" highlighted the day's schedule. Nothing important was said, but the ninety-second exposure brought the candidate to the voter without the intercession of a party or political organization and showed him concerned about something the pollsters had discovered was on the public mind.

This direct appeal made parties increasingly superfluous. To be sure, they still had the critical line on the ballot; they still had enough registered members to make an endorsement worthwhile. But they were no longer the candidates' principal sponsor. Indeed, they could seldom guarantee a crowd. When that was needed, a few media celebrities could draw a larger audience



than a politician's speech. The parties also lost their traditional recruiting function.

Formerly, the ambitious sought political office after a period of party service, often at lowly stations. Now the young headed directly toward electoral office with party registration their only evidence of loyalty. In fact, many considered a close affiliation with day-to-day party affairs to be the mark of a hack; a fresh, nonpartisan face appealed more to the electorate than a veteran party standard-bearer. The spread of primaries at the expense of conventions opened the way to further end runs around the organization. In addition, state after state adopted laws designed to loosen the monopoly of parties over the nominating process, thus magnifying the importance of independents. In some states, for example, an eligible voter need only appear at the polls and declare himself at that moment either a Democrat or a Republican to be entitled to cast a ballot in a party primary.

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Initially, reformers rejoiced at these trends, and the regular parties seemed to be the first casualties. But media politics knew no factional boundaries. Just as surely as it undermined traditional party practices, it also withered the voluntary base of reform politics. The parties depended on patronage, reformers on participation. What regulars would do as part of the job, independents would do from commitment. Yet a media campaign did not leave much for volunteers to do.

The new media managers cared little for traditional canvassing where party workers or volunteers went door to door to discover preferences, deliver literature, and argue the candidate's case. The foot soldiers were untrained in modern interviewing techniques; they worked at odd hours; they often returned with useless material; and even good campaigns could not provide full voter coverage. Large banks of telephones were more re-

liable. Paid operators called scientifically selected numbers; the message was uniform; computers swallowed the responses and spit out the printouts. Ironically, phone banks had originally been a volunteer activity. Supporters took home lists and made personal calls; but better management dictated closer control. The new system is expensive, and there is no way of knowing if phone canvassing, even confined to "prime" lists, is effective; but every campaign for high office finds it necessary.

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Polling, too, is an indispensable part of the media campaign. This is not new, but its intensity is. "The calls go out every night randomly, 150 or more," wrote B. Brummond Ayres, Jr., in *The New York Times* in 1981, of the Reagan Presidency, "to homes across the country." The interviews last a half hour; they ask every kind of question bordering on the voter's interest and public matters. Then the computers whiz and calculators click; "earlier interviews are thrown into the mix" and "in a matter of hours President Reagan and the officials of the Republican National Committee have in hand the latest intelligence needed to tailor a speech, a program or a policy." Richard Werthlin's Washington firm is paid \$900,000 a year for this "tracking" of the popular mood.

Previous Presidents relied on a handful of trusted advisers and erratic, and usually unsolicited, reports of party leaders and friends from across the country. But now all campaigns use polls. Indeed, despite their frequent and sometimes flagrant errors, the press and the media treat their results as news stories; columnists scatter ratings throughout their interpretations; analysts worry that their wide use has become a surrogate election, even affecting the actual outcome. Polls are, however, so much a part of the candidates' strategy that some state legislatures have moved against the release of selected parts and require the publication of the full survey. And one poll alone won't do. Anxious managers

and candidates can hardly get enough of them, especially in the climactic weeks of the campaign. What is also important is that the survey is bought and requires no use of volunteers.

The media campaign is all business. There is none of the congenial chaos that characterized traditional politics. At headquarters a few people mill about numberless machines. Everything is computerized. Paid employees run the terminals; paid telephoners call numbers from purchased printouts; rented machines slap labels on direct-mail envelopes. Mercenaries grind out "position papers," and press releases are quickly dispatched to a computerized "key" list of newspapers, radio, television stations, columnists, and commentators. "What they have created," wrote the *New York Times* reporter Steven V. Roberts, "is an electronic party."



At the center of the effort is the purchasing of paid television commercials. They are the modern substitute for conventional campaigning. The candidate is not seen live; the message, in fact, is often delivered by a professional voice. The purpose is to project a candidate who is like the viewer, but better: one who arouses but does not agitate; one who elevates but does not disturb; one who exudes morality but not righteousness; one who conveys strength but not arrogance; one who is experienced but not cynical; one who has convictions but avoids controversy. Since such people are in as short supply in private life as in public affairs, a good deal of contrivance is demanded, and the commercial permits it.

The commercial does not seek truth but plausibility. It confines itself to a handful of "issues" that are the candidate's long suit and that are reiterated until the viewer is convinced that these are of paramount interest to other voters even if they are not so to him. The idea is to define the argument on the candidate's own terms. All this is done in the

context of constant polling, telephone feedback, and, it must be added, old-fashioned political instinct. As the campaign continues, one spot will be dropped, others altered, and still others emphasized.

The central fact about commercials is their cost. For maximum advantage they are artfully spliced into programs with large voting audiences. Since most advertisers head for the same viewers, the price is very high. In 1980 thirty seconds in the prime-time New York market cost \$5,000; ninety seconds cost \$15,000. Even in South Dakota these figures ran as high as \$250 and \$500.

The financial risks attendant on a media campaign are borne solely by the candidate, not by the media managers. Bookings for commercial spots have to be made far in advance and the money paid on the barrelhead. In the past, suppliers of campaign materials—printers, hotels, and airlines—were more tolerant. Some creditors had to wait years for their money and then settled on a percentage, often small, of the original bill.

But now media consultants get their money on schedule. The most common plea at a fund raiser as election day approaches is, "If we don't have the money by tomorrow noon, the candidate is off the air." This is shorthand for saying, "Unless you cough up, the election is over."

The media people have so convinced the public and political donors that the commercial is the campaign that only the penurious or uncommitted will resist. And the media's demand is insatiable. If the consultant's polls show the candidate is behind, then a large buy is crucial; if ahead, then the turnout is critical. In either case, the cameras roll and the candidate pays.

Worse still, the media's demand hits the candidate when he is most vulnerable. A whole career seems to ride on the outcome. Hence, the resources of the family are called in, friends enlisted, business and professional associates tapped. For a while this feeds the tube. But except for the personally very



wealthy, the cupboard is soon bare. The only recourse is to go to "political givers," old and new. They have the capacity to underwrite the big loans to cover the up-front money. Yet their liability is very small. (State and federal laws restrict total spending and the amount of individual contributions; everything above those limits must be repaid.)

For the donors it is a cheap ante: they are ultimately repaid by the finance committee. After the election a few galas retire the victors' debt. For the losers, debt is a persistent nightmare.

Many people can afford political giving, but few do it. The result is a hectic and not always elevating courtship of a handful of wealthy people by the candidate and his finance committee. Some potential donors have only a dilettante's interest in politics, but most have interests that are more than marginally related to government. They expect what the trade euphemistically calls "access" to the winner.



The influence of money in American politics is, of course, not new. But the media has introduced a level of spending never known before. In the 1960 presidential campaigns about 10 percent of the budget went to television; by 1980 it had reached 80 percent. David Garth, the most successful practitioner of the new politics, succinctly summed up the present reality when he asserted that political effort outside commercials "is a waste of time and money." The result is that the inordinate power of money in American politics is larger now than it was a generation ago.

Nothing, perhaps, better illustrates today's sharp cleavage with past electioneering than Rep. Millicent Fenwick's 1982 campaign for the United States Senate seat from New Jersey. Now in her seventies, Fenwick grew up with the old politics. "I have a total amateur approach," she told *The New York Times*, reflecting her traditional reliance on vol-

unteer activity. But she reluctantly admitted to hiring a television consultant, studying polls, and submitting to the new fund-raising imperative. "I have never used a television person before, and all this professionalism is not happy-making, being packaged by professionals as though you were some new kind of invention like the splash-free valve on a faucet." Yet soon Fenwick commercials began the "thematic" bombardment, polls suggested tactics, and fund raisers started scrambling. Ironically, she was defeated by a wealthy newcomer who had no reservations about television.

Perhaps an even more telling gauge of the transformation of the political process was Theodore White's bewilderment in covering the presidential election of 1980. Since 1960 he had been the country's premier chronicler of the summit contests. Now, baffled by the new system, and nearly certain it signaled democracy's decline, he left the campaign trail and went home to watch it all on television. Always the quintessential insider, he now felt himself irrelevant bric-a-brac from the age of Dwight Eisenhower. He decided, "I could sit at home and learn as much or more about the frame of the campaign as I could on the road." But in fact, Teddy White, without knowing it, was still at the center of things: all the strategy, all the organization, converged on the screen in front of him, coaxing the voters' acquiescence.

And the voters, more and more, choose to stay away. Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential victory has been called the most decisive since Franklin Roosevelt's in 1932. Yet it drew the smallest voter turnout in modern history. Just over half the registered voters exercised their franchise that year, and fewer than 20 percent of adults over eighteen years of age gave the new President a "landslide." This decline in registration and voting and the ascendance of the media is no temporal coincidence. Increasingly politics has become a spectator sport, with the public watching without participating. The candidate moves in front of

the voters on film, while the continued publication of polls keeps him abreast of the latest standings. Election day thus becomes a time for ratification rather than decision. Today many just don't bother. Worst of all, there are no signs that this trend will not continue. What if, someday, we give an election and no one comes?

The media, of course, is not wholly responsible for this imperilment. The public's disillusionment with politics and politicians is another cause, and it has happened before. The very size of the country and the aftereffects of the sixties' turbulence among the young create an air of alienation, discouragement, and irrelevance. But the media revolution is truly that, and in some form it is here to stay. Yet it is not immune to change. The convention system replaced caucuses a century and a half ago; primaries replaced conventions in most states in this century; and amendments, court decisions, and congressional legislation have immensely widened voter eligibility. The process has adjusted to changing technology in printing and to the democratization of the telephone and radio. There is no reason why the media revolution can not also be made apt to democratic purposes. But that is the task of the generation that is growing up in it, not those who suffered the shock of its introduction and present triumph. ■

Richard C. Wade is Distinguished Professor of History at the City University of New York. He was Harmsworth Professor of History at Oxford University. 1974-1975.

VIEWPOINT

Some countries take television for children seriously, and invest considerable resources and talent to create a large menu of quality children's programs. Great Britain, Sweden, and Japan are clearly among them. In Great Britain and Sweden, 12 percent of the total TV broadcasting time is devoted to programs especially designed for young audiences. Given the strong Japanese commitment to children and education, it is no surprise that the country provides an even greater number of children's programs, designing some of them for children who may be viewing alone and many more for viewing with a parent or older sibling. Still others are designed for parents, to help them better understand their children's development.

Other countries take neither their children nor educational television seriously, and to our great misfortune, the United States is among them.

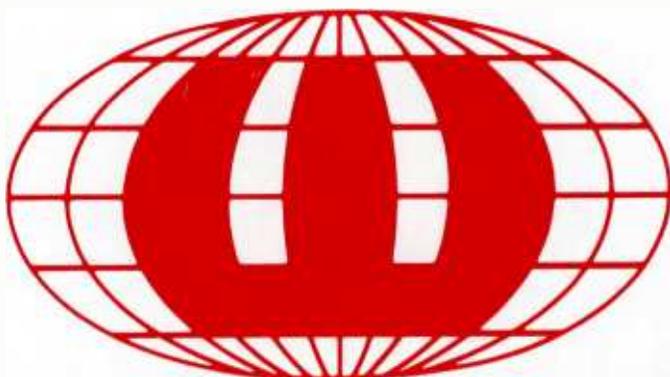
—Gerald S. Lesser, professor of education and developmental psychology at Harvard University, in *React Magazine*.

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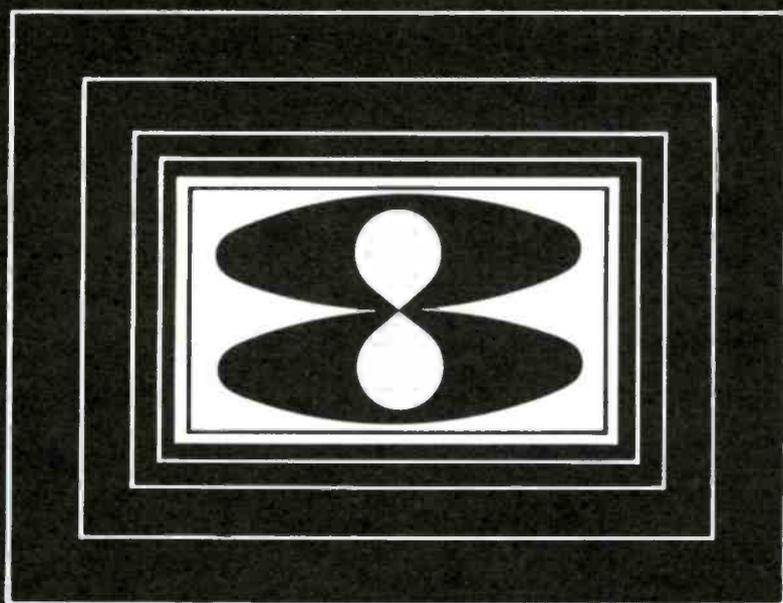
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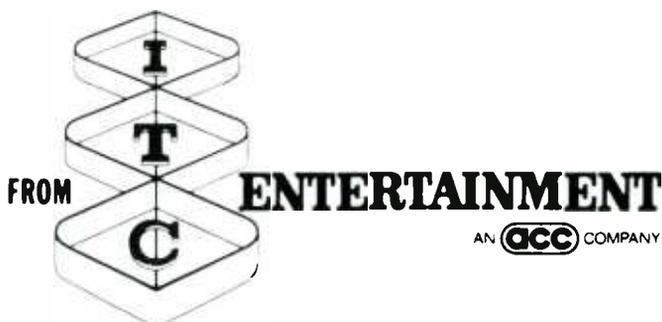
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Entertainment For The World



CONFESSIONS OF A VCR JUNKIE

How to outsmart the news pundits, confound the sports experts, make Johnny Carson work weekends, and other tricks of a videotape wizard.

BY ANDY COWAN

It's been a year now since I rushed to my neighborhood video outlet, and plunked down a wad of money in exchange for that miracle of miracles—the video cassette recorder. At the time, I had no idea the extent to which TV's "laws of nature" would be altered on my very own set.

For one thing, the days of the week have lost their meaning. It used to seem like Sunday when the flashing *Sunday Night Movie* graphics would beam from my screen. Now, I'm never sure what day it is. I can record the *Sunday Night Movie*, and play it on Tuesday. While most viewers in my apartment building are locked into the aura of a Tuesday evening, there I am feeling Sunday vibes, because the *Sunday Night Movie* announcer is telling me it's Sunday. If I want to feel like Sunday or Tuesday, that's my business, for I'm now the TV programming executive of my own network—whose target audience numbers "one", me!

Sometimes I'll watch daytime shows at night, and vice versa. For some reason, morning quiz shows at 11 P.M. feel like more of an event. I think it has to do with the fact that there's no daylight invading my surroundings, nagging me to get out in the real world and earn some money, instead of wasting time at home watching strangers win some. And catching David Letterman or Johnny on a Saturday afternoon lends to a new cas-

ual air to late night entertainment. It's as if these guys know it's the afternoon, and they don't have to work as hard to keep me awake. Plus I get a kick out of realizing I have the power to make them work weekends.

Have you ever wondered about the difference between nighttime soaps and daytime soaps? Try playing *Dynasty* at noon, and turning *Days of Our Lives* into *Nights of Our Lives*. You'll soon discover there is no difference.

Bloopers, foul-ups, and fluffs are permeating the airwaves these evenings, and whether or not shows built on such gimmicks are rewarding entertainment is debatable. I find they serve a greater purpose when you record them for early morning viewing before going off to work. During that critical time of the day, it's a nice confidence booster to be reminded that good looking and successful people sometimes can't even pronounce words of one syllable.

I also find it therapeutic to videotape seasonal messages, and play them out of season. What greater antidote for the February blahs than a word from your "Peach Advisory Board" on fresh summer fruit? However, be careful about recording Yuletide greetings for playback in August. If watching a *Smurf's Christmas* brings out the cynic in you in December, watching it during a heat wave could turn you into a Scrooge for life.

Television news is one kind of programming that thrives on its capacity to be timely. But try recording a newscast and watching it a week later. It's good

for your ego; at that point, you know more than Tom Brokaw or Dan Rather. They're still grim-faced and serious over stuff that's already moved to the back pages of the newspapers.

Via the wizardry of videotape, you can watch political pundits forecast election results that have already been proven wrong. What fun that is! But it's not nearly as amusing as recording a dark horse candidate glossing over his poor showing in the latest primary, as he confidently predicts victory in next week's more important one—and then watching it a week later, after he's lost the "important" primary, and also glosses over its significance.

A VCR can also drive home the mercenary nature of professional sports. Simply videotape the locker room merriment after a team clinches the division championship, and play it back after the hushed players go down to defeat in the finals.

Awards ceremonies are entertaining to watch after the commotion has died down and you know who's won. For fun, tape the Oscars, and when you scrutinize that five-shot of nervously cool nominees awaiting the name of the winner, you needn't waste time riveting your eyes upon each candidate. Just center on the soon-to-be champ before the thrill of victory sets in—or if you're feeling sadistic, study the other nominees as they display their acting skills in the roles of "happy losers."

With the purchase of a VCR, fleeting moments of television are no longer fleeting. You can record and replay them again and again. And repeated viewings make for a new level of awareness. I'm now able to study how convincingly an actor or actress will react to something he or she knows is about to happen, because I, too, know it's about to happen.

I've seen little Beaver Cleaver traipse into the kitchen with paint all over him, and the way June reacts to him with horror and surprise. But after I rewind this segment and begin viewing it again, I know what's coming up, and can fully

appreciate where Barbara Billingsley's overacting prowess takes over. After all, Barbara certainly knew the Beaver was about to come in all along, and now she and I share this intimate secret.

Other fleeting moments that were intended to be brief can now be magnified and singled out—courtesy of my "pause" control, which freezes the action to a grinding halt. An embarrassing boom shadow in the middle of an outdoor scene, which appears for two seconds and would have gone unnoticed, can stop dead in its tracks.

With the aid of my "slow motion" button, the Hollywood stuntman can finally get the recognition he deserves. In the old days, I'd seen Roger Moore—in the role of James Bond—take a flying leap off a plane, after which I'd see Roger Moore sailing through the sky. Now, thanks to modern technology, I clearly see the guy sailing through the sky only looks like Roger Moore. He's somebody else, whose name is less bankable; some of the magic may be gone, but in its place is some satisfaction in knowing I can't be fooled that easily.

Anything and anyone that appears on the little screen is now subject to intense scrutiny. I press "slow motion" in the middle of a recording of President Reagan's press conference, and I study how he reacts to a question about the deficit. Did he just swallow especially hard, or am I imagining things? If I really feel like sticking him under the microscope, I can stop the action entirely, literally at the blink of an eye—his eye. Little was the chief executive aware that later that same evening, this constituent would be gazing at Reagan with his eyes closed; not a very presidential image, but a perfectly human one—thanks to my machine.

Perhaps the most amazing power I've attained from owning a VCR is the ability to visually speed through commercials, thanks to my "quick scan" control. I pride myself on how little time I take between sensing a commercial coming,

and hitting the button. Learning just when to push it, and just when to push it again to resume normal play, has become an art. Seeing Madison Avenue's ads to the rhythm of "The Keystone Kops" is entertaining. As more and more of us start zooming through commercials, I'm afraid advertisers will come up with a cruel retort: slow motion commercials. So when they're speeded up, they'll look normal. That is, as normal as they get.

I've learned to appreciate my VCR enough to realize the modern conveniences that go along with videotaping are sorely lacking when it comes to real life: Many times I've been stuck in the middle of a traffic jam on a crowded L. A. freeway, and found my "quick scan" trigger finger itching. I just wanted to "fast forward" the scene in front of me, until I was rounding the bend for home.

Look at all the time that would save. By whizzing through life's annoyances, and speeding through commercials, think of all the extra time we'd have every day. Time spent to do important things—like running fight scenes in slow motion to see how Mr. T's punches never land.

While the television community comes to grips with the emerging "cassette network," the VCR will be handing power back to the viewers—the power to "fast forward" through programming that doesn't stimulate them, or to rent taped movies when nothing "good" is available. And the power to watch shows at their convenience they might have otherwise missed, before this time machine H.G. Wells never imagined came along. ■

Andy Cowan, a West Coast comedy writer, is on the staff of *The Merv Griffin Show* as a talent coordinator. His first television job was as a local station reporter.

“ QUOTE UNQUOTE ”

Values and Decisions

An information and entertainment system for society that's based on the family would protect important values. It would recognize such values as humanity, excellence and cooperation—qualities that are often ignored or even subverted by the mechanistic and competitive model of the pure marketplace. But just as the family overcomes most of the shortcomings of the marketplace, so does it lack most of the virtues of the other model.

After all, a true family—however modern or permissive, with however much discussion and negotiation—inevitably consists of adult parents and children. And ultimately it is the adults who must be the decision makers, and the children who obey.

Again, it seems to me, this clearly isn't an appropriate model for our democratic society. Even a representative democracy like our own is very different from an adult/child family. For if we as a society are a family, then who are the adults? Who are the decision makers? Who decides which values to protect? Which television programs to censor? President Reagan? The FCC Commissioner? The Church?

—William F. Baker, president Group W Television, speaking on 'TV and Values', Catholic University of America.



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INGMAR BERGMAN AND TELEVISION

BY PETER COWIE

Some film directors—Fassbinder, for example—take to the TV medium without hesitation or distrust. Others, like Orson Welles, have never really been drawn to the box; even Welle's most recently-released picture, *The Making of Othello*, was shot on 16mm and sold to TV stations more from pragmatism than desire.

Part of the answer lies, of course, in the cramped, claustrophobic effect that TV has on people and landscapes. Long-shots are a disaster, which is why viewing Mizoguchi movies on the small screen (and that includes video, of course) is not recommended. Close-ups are *de rigueur*, as are neutral, spartan backdrops. Characters have to stand close to one another if cross-cutting is to be avoided (ever watched an early CinemaScope movie on television, with the station technicians frantically "panning" from one side of the shot to the other?).

Then there are the ancillary hazards of poor sound reproduction, and an audience at most family-strong in numbers—the Marx Brothers may induce stitches and tears of laughter in a packed theatre, but in the living-room their antics look stilted and remote.

Despite all these caveats, the fact remains that several major directors have practiced in the TV medium, sometimes from choice but more often from expediency. In Italy, RAI-TV has long been a

source of finance and imaginative production methods for the talented Italian movie-makers (and not just Italians—Tarkovsky's brilliant *Nostalgia* was funded by RAI).

Abroad, such films are frequently given a theatrical release. How many film buffs realise, for instance, that Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem* was made for TV, or that Fellini shot *I clowns* almost fifteen years ago for the box? In West Germany, ZDF in Mainz has been among the leaders in promoting good "cinema," and in Poland most directors are expected to make a couple of featurettes for television before embarking on their first theatrical feature.

Nor is the habit confined to Europe. Steven Spielberg's *Duel* was a TV movie in the United States, but travelled round the cinema circuits in Britain and elsewhere as Spielberg's fame increased.

Ingmar Bergman, however, offers an almost classic case of a great film director converting to television in much the same way as the more astute Hollywood personalities adapted to the sound revolution post-1927. Not since 1972 has Bergman begun a major film project without its being at least partially conceived along television lines. Back in 1957 he directed a small-screen version of Hjalmar Bergman's *Mr. Sleeman Is Coming*, only two years after television had been officially inaugurated in Sweden, and the following year he offered domestic audiences two further productions. Television also enshrined some of Bergman's most celebrated stage

triumphs for posterity.

Then in 1967 Bergman began thinking seriously about television. After all, its dimensions and challenges were commensurate with his interest in what he describes as "chamber cinema"—just three or four characters, neutral settings, and an emphasis on the human face. It also tickled Bergman's fancy for economical shooting ratios: only some 12,500 meters of film were exposed for *The Rite (Riten)*, which was eventually aired on Swedish TV on March 25, 1969. Split into nine terse scenes, the film is almost insufferable when viewed in a cinema; the close-ups are too massive, the walls of the studio too oppressively grey. But on TV, its intimacy beguiles one. The tiny screen appears to cage in the four characters.

Soon afterwards, Bergman saw the political potential of a TV programme, and resolved to champion the cause of the few hundreds of his neighbours on the minuscule Baltic island of Fårö by making a documentary about them and their plight at the hands of a remote and disinterested central government. Shot with no pretensions (although Sven Nykvist's color inserts of the lambing process in late winter snow were mysterious and beautiful), *The Fårö Document* lasted 78 minutes and was seen on New Year's Day, 1970. Here was a new image of Bergman. Audiences were startled to see him in sheepskin and boots, clutching a mike and interviewing farmers and teenagers on the island. Ten years later, Bergman assembled a sequel—more lyrical, more reflective, ultimately more Bergmanesque—which traced a calendar year's progress on Fårö, and even risked a long-shot of a lit window in a darkened farmhouse, where an aged denizen eats his supper with a priest's solemnity and devotion.

For all his international repute, Bergman was having difficulty in raising finance for his feature films. *The Touch* (1970) had proved a disaster at the box-office, and *Cries and Whispers* (1972) was saved only by the acceptance of deferred salaries by Sven Nykvist and the ac-

tresses involved in the production. So, in the spring of 1972, Bergman decided to opt for a new concept: the "miniser-ies." *Scenes from a Marriage* was shot on 16mm with a tiny crew and on a budget of \$240,000, half of which Bergman immediately recouped from Swedish television for the domestic rights to the six-part enterprise. Each programme would run 48½ minutes, and at the same time Bergman would prepare a theatrical version of around three hours, which could be distributed abroad for an art-house audience.

S*scenes from a Marriage* transformed Bergman's career. Immensely popular in Scandinavian living-rooms, the series attracted an entirely new public following for the director. In Denmark, police officers left traffic congestion to fend for itself and stayed at home to watch the latest episode in the ruined marriage of Marianne (Liv Ullmann) and Johan (Erland Josephson). Ratings leapt upwards; so did the divorce applications ("That's got to be good!" laughed Bergman).

It was logical, therefore, for Bergman to accept the proposal from Sveriges Radio to celebrate that organisation's Golden Jubilee with a TV production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (aired January 1, 1975). Like *Scenes from a Marriage*, the film was screened outside Scandinavia in theatres as well as on TV. By now, Bergman was thoroughly enjoying the intimacy and flexibility of the television medium. The budget was large, at \$950,000, and nearly every department at SVT was called into play; but the result was a sumptuous opera-on-film, immaculately synchronised (something that had earlier handicapped every opera brought to the screen) and luscious to look at even when blown up to 35mm for theatrical release abroad.

In 1976, Bergman's *Face to Face* ran on Swedish television over four weeks (April 28–May 19), and was again shown in feature film outside the Nordic area. Less successful than *Scenes from a Marriage* because of Bergman's attempt to

be more up-to-date in his treatment of sexual violence and homosexuality, *Face to Face* was praised for Liv Ullmann's portrayal of a psychiatrist who cracks up after being assaulted by two strange men.

Bergman's most lavish television production remains *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), which will be aired only in late 1984 (running time some 300 minutes, by comparison with the already-released feature length of 188 minutes). So rich is the period detail and production design in *Fanny and Alexander*, however, that the small screen is likely to diminish their impact.

There is no doubt that what Bergman likes most about television is the freedom to spread his chronicle over a leisurely time-span—no Hollywood film studio could contemplate a 300-minute release. He is beginning to resemble the 19th century novelists like Dickens and Dumas, who wrote their novels for magazines in serial form.

In summer 1983, Bergman completed post-production work on *After the Rehearsal*, a television play starring Erland Josephson and Ingrid Thulin, and—as usual—the producer was soon able to find purchasers abroad for a theatrical release.

Speaking at the National Film Theatre in London, in September 1982, Bergman expressed his enthusiasm for TV. "I love to have a camera and a small crew and to make things for television. It's not difficult, you just make it and then it runs one evening, and it's gone." ■

This article appeared originally in *International TV and Video Guide: 1984* published by the Tantivy Press Ltd. in London, and distributed in the U.S. by New York Zoetrope Inc. Peter Cowie is Executive Director of the guide.

Checklist of Bergman's television productions:

- 1957 *Herr Sleeman kommer* (*Mr. Sleeman Is Coming*).
- 1958 *The Venetian* (play).
Rabies (play).
- 1960 *Storm Weather* (play).
- 1963 *The Ghost Sonata* (play).
- 1969 *Riten* (U.S.: *The Ritual*. U.K.: *The Rite*).
- 1970 *Fårö-dokument* (*The Fårö Document*).
Reservatet (*The Lie*). (Teleplay only, directed by Jan Molander in Sweden and by Alan Bridges for BBC.)
- 1973 *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes from a Marriage*).
- 1975 *Trollflöjten* (*the Magic Flute*).
- 1976 *Ansikte mot ansikte* (*Face to Face*).
- 1979 *Fårö-dokument 1979*
- 1983 *Fanny och Alexander* (*Fanny and Alexander*).
Efter repetitionen (*After the Rehearsal*).



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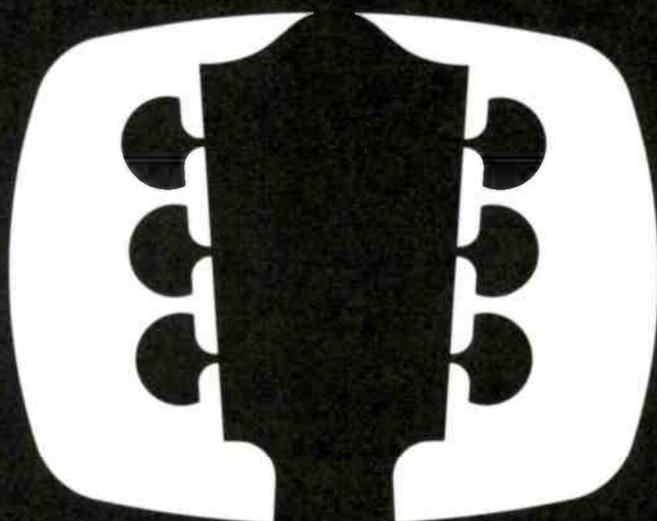
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Basic Books, New York, \$14.95

BY HARRIET VAN HORNE

Good authors begin with high purpose. In the prologue to *Inside Prime Time*, Professor Gitlin sets down the nagging questions that impelled him to write this candid and instructive book. Such questions as: What is the logic or illogic of network decision making? What attention do network executives really pay to ratings and program tests? How do they read public moods and political swings? And, finally, Why do they imitate themselves? (He found a two-word answer to that last one—"Safety first!")

Gitlin, who is a professor of sociology and director of the mass communications program at Berkeley, begins his mission with one fixed idea. Put tersely: "In any society, images have meaning and are not arbitrary".

To discover the meaning of television's images, Gitlin spent a year watching the tube intently and record-

ing lengthy interviews with the industry's movers and shakers. He learned fast and he learned a lot. Network people were not his richest source. They tended to waffle and temporize. But writers, actors and independent producers seemed to welcome his queries, spilling out stories that give this book its best chapters. Prof. Gitlin can be faulted for one serious lapse of judgment, however. He has had the bad taste to retain every obscenity—all the lavatory graffiti—of these conversations. The constant repetition of these words strikes a vulgar note in a serious and important book.

In all, Gitlin conducted some 200 interviews, ranging from board chairmen to "the small, revolving world of major suppliers". It is clear that he had a fine time all the way.

"Meeting these people and liking almost all of them," he confides, "led me to marvel at the way the American entertainment industry keeps real intelligence on a short leash."

Uncertainty, Gitlin found, is the permanent condition of what he calls "the TV-industrial complex". In an effort to reduce this burden of doubt and fear, all TV programs go through a pre-testing process before reaching the air. The professor is baffled to discover that it's the shows that test below average that are usually chosen over those rated "very good". Sometimes this fact attests to the shrewdness of network programmers. *All in the Family* tested below average before a sample audience in 1970.

After all the testing is done, "TV ex-

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ecutives are left with themselves", he notes. The yawning hours are always there and the schedule must be filled. Programming decisions—Gitlin's primary field of research—are made out of habit and fear, responses conditioned by the medium, he found. "They do not rest on firm values," he notes. "They are not deeply rooted in a cultural tradition."

Like the legions who toil in the medium, Gitlin places little faith in the Nielsen ratings. It isn't the small size of the sample that distresses him, but the fact that it really doesn't represent the one third of the nation that watches prime time shows every night of the week. If you begin with a flawed sample, he reminds us, you can only get a flawed result. Something to ponder at renewal time.

Over and over the professor asked the program creators, "What makes a show successful?" The reply, over and over, was, "Likeable characters"—that is, people the viewer would like to invite back for another visit very soon. Viewers, Gitlin believes, "strike up mysterious, quasi-personal relations with these flickering icons". His belief was confirmed by one of NBC's program chiefs, Perry Lafferty, who said, "People never remember the plots, only the characters."

After months of interviewing, Gitlin concluded that the TV industry "speaks with a single jaded voice". He also learned that "everything is a spin-off". Or a clone or a sequel or a recombinant. Nothing truly original or off-beat ever makes it, he observes sadly. The financial risk is too great to allow for experimentation.

Writers, above all other TV artisans, are keenly aware of the assembly line philosophy. "You don't have to have talent to write for television," one veteran scripter told him. "It's a craft. It's like a tailor. You want cuffs? You've got cuffs."

Three TV programs are subjected to in-depth analysis, Gitlin tells the sad story of how a high-minded, slice-of-life se-

ries, *The American Dream*, was hustled off the air after four performances. ABC executives sought to "pretty it up". An aging prostitute became a 24-year-old waitress. An order came to the director to remove graffiti and garbage cans from a Chicago street scene. Finally, ABC found a low-rated time spot for the show, then dropped it, ostensibly because of the low ratings. To the author, this case history goes far to explain what is wrong with television.

The demise of *Lou Grant* illuminated still another area of TV decision making for this expert on the mass media. It wasn't the liberal tone of the scripts that set off the deluge of protests (largely coordinated by the "far righteous" bloc) to CBS. It was the political activism of the star, Ed Asner. After three years, the ratings had dropped slightly but not enough, by all the rules, to merit cancellation.

"Had it not been for Asner's conspicuous politics," Gitlin concludes, "the show's prestige would probably have compensated for the drop in ratings and it might well have been renewed."

The longest chapter in the book is a history of NBC's award-winning *Hill Street Blues*. Gitlin extravagantly admires its creators, Steven Bochco and Michael Kozell. He sees a sorry decline in the series over the past year and suspects that writers and directors have tried too hard "to accommodate to right-wing pressures." Having passed its prime, *Hill Street* is now repeating its own clichés, he observes, and the dialog has long since "lost its edge."

While he found much to praise in the world of prime time TV, Gitlin notes some crippling disabilities. He thinks it's wrong that fully half of prime time TV is written by only ten per cent of the 3,000 active members of the Writers' Guild. He is saddened that social commentary drama on TV is inevitably "simplified and flattened" to avoid too great a jolt to viewers' prejudices. Finally, he notes a trend that merits the bitter Shakespearian line, "First, let's kill all the lawyers!"

Ronald Cohen, a writer with impressive credits, summed up the problem.

"This town is run by and for the lawyers and the agents. Not the creative people. I know agents who make six hundred thousand dollars a year, every year. . . . You have to own a significant piece of a hit series."

To a scholar from the groves of Academe the frenzied world of television was "great fun" but ultimately a disillusionment. He found cowardice where courage and generosity were desperately needed. He found that good men—creative and honorable—were consistently betrayed, their work emasculated by the conventions of the industry.

Gitlin even finds space to deplore the poor quality and execrable sound of the American TV set. American TV signals generate a picture from 525 horizontal lines. The Europeans are far more fastidious in these matters and Gitlin is puzzled that we cannot duplicate their sharp 625 line standard. Just one more mystery in the fascinating world of prime time.



In *Channels of Power*, political scientist Austin Ranney suggests that television has drastically altered the nature of American politics—and not for the better.

As a fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, Ranney's politics are somewhat to the right of center. Not only is he persuaded that TV "gives more attention to politics than viewers need or want," he sees TV's saturation coverage deepening the prejudices—regional, ethnic and intellectual—that already exist.

Though he sees no left-wing bias among TV newsmen, Ranney does perceive the medium as "anti-politician". He notes that a survey of 240 newsmen revealed this not very dark secret: a majority of them often voted the Democratic ticket.

Network newspeople, in Ranney's opinion, "take the anti-Establishment stance most journalists take, in part be-

cause they feel it is their professional obligation and, in part, because it makes for more interesting stories. . . ."

Americans have never held politicians in high esteem, Ranney writes, and the piercing eye of TV seems to have confirmed their worst prejudices. Ranney deplores this negative view because it exacerbates the long, steady decline in trust and confidence. He even blames TV for keeping people away from the polls. This arresting view runs contrary to the conventional wisdom that credits TV with involving more Americans in the political process.

Ranney is not a great admirer of the press, print or TV, but he finds newsmen closer to the idealistic "progressives" of the early 1900s than to the militant left of the 1930s. Indeed, he compares today's newsmen to the old time "muck-rakers". He also suggests that television and politicians need each other, despite an uneasy and quarrelsome relationship.

The most important question posed by this former president of the American Political Science Association is, "How has television affected the way America is governed?" His answer—which may be summed up as "greatly for the worse"—is certain to set off debate among readers. Ranney insists that "the glare of television's attention has helped significantly to weaken the ability of presidents and congressmen to govern."

To this assertion a patriot who cherishes the ideal of honest participatory government must ask, "How can the allegedly harmful effects of TV be ameliorated?"

Here Ranney will disappoint the Far Right with his answer. "I do not, for example, think that things would improve if we somehow got 'better people' producing television news. . . . Most of the people who now produce the network news shows are very good people." He would, however, like to see TV news programs in which the coverage of the news is criticized by experts from inside and outside the networks. This seems a very modest, unimaginative remedy for a sit-

uation the author views as damaging to the political process.

Author Ranney says at one point that he found considerable merit in Vice President Spiro Agnew's charges against the press 14 years ago. That statement alone will probably make his entire thesis suspect in the eyes of liberal readers, particularly those involved in TV news.

GIMME A BREAK

by Warner Wolf (with William Taaffe)

New York, McGraw-Hill

BY DAVE BERKMAN

When I first arrived in Washington from New York City in the early '70s, my Big Apple chauvinism was quickly re-inforced by the popularity accorded Warner Wolf, then the sportscaster for the District's CBS-TV affiliate. "Any town that can buy off on a clod like Wolf . . ." I told myself. . . .

Warner Wolf (after a brief professional disaster at the network level with ABC-TV) now reigns supreme in sports—in fact, as the hottest sportscaster in all local New York City TV—which goes to show how wrong a chauvinist can be at least about the 'sophistication' of his home town. What I had, of course, missed in my initial, superficial dismissal of Wolf, is that Wolf's superficiality, which is the essence of Wolf and the Wolf style, would make Warner Wolf an inevitable success, no matter where he played.

Warner Wolf is the ultimately successful sportscaster, because Warner Wolf is the ultimate sports fan.

At ABC, it wasn't Wolf who blew it, but rather ABC itself. ABC Sports would not let Warner Wolf be Warner Wolf.

Warner Wolf understands that he is merely another knowledgeable sports fan, but the one who was lucky enough

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(after having paid the standard dues in small town broadcasting) to have made it to the other side of the screen. As he says in his autobiography, *Gimme a Break*:

"to be a successful local sports commentator, you have to make the audience feel at ease with you. Talk about the same things you would at a bar. Crack jokes, poke fun. Ask the questions the fans would. . . . If you're putting on airs the fans will find you out."

Or, as *The Milwaukee Journal* recently reported about a sportscaster whose contract was not renewed by a local TV station, "He said viewers failed to see him as a guy they could talk sports with over a beer. They found him 'too preppy'."

One suspects that in this context, "preppy" (or Wolf's admonition about "putting on airs") can also be read as "serious." The sports component of the local TV newscast is the one element of local video journalism whose practitioners will admit that which so much of local TV news refuses to admit about itself: that Chris Craft and Warner Wolf are right—local news, to a distressing degree, is show biz. While Craft resents it, Wolf proudly proclaims, "I never claim to be a journalist . . . I'm a sports commentator, an entertainer." Although such an admission may disturb those of us who believe TV news is still (or at least should be) journalism, Wolf is "amazed at some people in the TV business who resent that. They want to call themselves strictly journalists and not performers."

Gimme a Break, like Warner Wolf, his sportscasting, and local TV sports news and commentary in general, is, for the most part, a trivial book whose triviality accurately reflects the triviality of TV sports, and the triviality which most sports fans cherish. (Note that qualifier, "most." As one who cherished his season tickets to the Jets in the mid and late '60s only slightly less than his firstborn, and who is infinitely more forgiving of Benedict Arnold for his treason than he is of Walter O'Malley's for pulling the

Dodgers out of Brooklyn, I obviously cannot include *all* sports fans.)

The book tells the story of a sports-nut-of-a-kid in a close relationship with a sports-crazy father. It's filled with the usual 'gee whiz-isms' about sports figures Wolf idolized, and how, after small market stints, he made it in a straight-line ascendancy to the top in Washington TV. The most interesting material describes how Wolf was apparently mis-cast by both ABC-TV and the ABC o&o in New York, and the depression he suffered when ABC banished him to a video limbo. Vindication came with his switch to WCBS-TV, and the court suit he won when ABC tried to prevent him from making that move.

All of which is interesting, but still, for the most part, trivial. Indeed, if this book has any significance, it lies in those questions which Wolf unintentionally—but implicitly—raises about TV sports reporting as legitimate journalism.

If sports claims to be a legitimate component of a TV newscast, it should be no less a legitimate form of journalism than that concerned with the reporting of 'straight news.' Do those who report and comment on sports for newspapers, consider themselves less journalists than their counterparts on the city desk? But, then, deep in their hearts, do most local TV newscasters consider themselves less entertainers and more journalists than does Warner Wolf. Or, more accurately, does station management?

Perhaps the worst ethical excess of local sportscasting is its "homer-ism." All too often—and the smaller the market, the more this seems to be the case—TV sportscasters see their job as not so much *reporting*, but rather, *supporting*, the local teams. In large part, this is because it seems to be what the local sports fans want.

I recently spent four years in a market ranked as a low 60's ADI. The town boasts one major-league, multiple-sports franchise: its university fields a Division IA independent in football, and is a member of a powerhouse basketball conference. At the time I left, there was not a

sportscaster who did not first root for, and then only secondarily report on, the university's sports. There was one might-have-been exception: a serious young sports journalist, part of the local affiliate news operation generally regarded as first in quality—but always third in the ratings. In came new ownership and out went he, to be replaced by a joker who would intro his sports segment literally tooting his own trumpet (I mean he actually played a real trumpet!) and who would regularly dress up in funny 'native' costumes to shill for a travel company as part of some sort of barter deal.

He was no less a shill for the university's teams. But then, I guess, if I read his 'give-the-fans-what-they-want' philosophy correctly, Wolf would be the first to concede that was a necessity in that market. Indeed, if the letters carried on the sports pages of the local dailies were an accurate reflection, then this was the case. Any time a local TV sportscaster seemed even mildly critical of the university's teams performance, wrathful letters would flood the erring TV sportscaster for his temporary—and, no doubt, aberrant—refusal to "support our teams."

Such "homer-ism," it should be noted, is no longer limited to sports. One of the stations in that same market promoted its newscasts in a manner implying that they were a promo for the city. The slogan of one of the affiliate news operations where I reside, is "We're pulling for you, Milwaukee." (That's "pulling for," not "reporting about.")

Where is the local sportscaster in a town with a university with a major intercollegiate athletic program, who will point up the essential hypocrisy of big-time college sports? Who is the local sportscaster in such a town who will track the percentage of those athletes whose eligibility has expired, and who never receive their degree?

Who is the local sportscaster who, when finally forced to face up to, and

report on, a nasty drug situation involving a local team, will not resist the temptation to resort to the inevitable clichés about the poor role models these athletes are presenting to their idolizing kid fans—just before leading into the commercial for the beer he will, himself, be pushing to those same kids every half-inning during his play-by-play for that team?

Sports, like television—and, for most of the same reasons—is a serious phenomenon. Any phenomena which command the time and attention of so many of us as sports and TV do, are intrinsically worthy of serious study and analysis. Thus sports, like TV, has been the subject of a serious body of print literature. At least some of this has come from the pens of those who know it best, the athletes themselves: Jim Brosnan, Jim Bouton, Bernie Parrish, Dave Meggyesy and Bill Russell. Serious journalists, such as David Halberstam, Joe Durso, Roger Kahn, Jerry Izenberg, Leonard Schecter, Robert Lipsyte and Roger Angell have also contributed to this outpouring. To varying degrees, much of what these writers have told us focuses on what each sees as the corrupting interdependence of sports and television. Might this, in part, explain why sports has received so little serious attention from TV? There is an analogy in network news. If the networks have been guilty of one omission in what they cover in their nightly news, it is TV itself.

In neither case am I suggesting that lack of serious coverage in the one, and the virtual non-coverage in the other, is the result of a conscious conspiracy.

De-regulation, 'Fairness', and network syndication are simply not thought of as that stuff in which people are interested, even though television is so central and essential to so many people's lives. Yet, while the network news divisions in their evening newscasts give no attention to the serious side of TV, these same network news operations devote large chunks of *Today*, *Good Morn-*

ing America and the *CBS Morning News* to the trivia of television, like the doings of a Selleck or a Collins which, although they may be interesting to some, are not as profound in their impact, as are those of a Tartikoff, a Turner, or a Goldenson.

Sportscasters also focus on trivia—like Steinbrenner's latest display of wealthy adolescence, or this year's running back's latest long run (not that different from any among an innumerable number of indistinguishable, hot running backs' latest long runs). But where is the sportscaster who tells us why the names of those who make up the litany of leading runners change so frequently; why running backs last so few years, with so many ending up partial cripples; or why TV has made it possible for a worst managed franchise in the NFL to be not much less profitable than the best; or why academics at the local high school powerhouse is allowed to deteriorate, while the athletic program gets everything it wants?

Warner Wolf is probably best known to his fans for his "Boo of the Week." And, to be fair to Wolf, I have to concede that more than a few of these have been targeted at an excess, hypocrisy or other sports wrong worthy of note.

Still, my "Boo" has got to go to a premier local sportscaster who boasts he is an entertainer, first, and a journalist last. ■

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THE EMMY STORY

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

Emmy history goes back to the first ceremony.

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

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

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

Once the name had been se-

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

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

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

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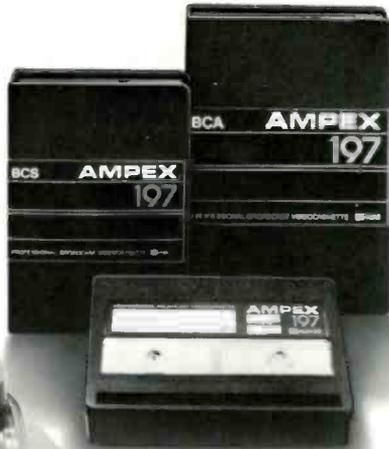
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