

THE CRITICAL VIEW Television



Edited by Horace Newcomb

TELEVISION: THE CRITICAL VIEW

EDITED BY

HORACE NEWCOMB

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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For Charles and Irene Mitchell

PREFACE

The essays in this collection were selected because they view television in broad rather than narrow perspectives. Newspaper columns have not been included. This is not to say that newspaper criticism is excluded by definition from a breadth of vision, but simply that the pieces included here all develop their point of view in the single essay rather than over a period of time, as is the case with the columnist.

The essays in the first section all deal with specific program types. They serve as excellent models for practical television criticism because they show us that there is a great deal of difference between watching television and "seeing" it. They are, of course, involved with critical interpretation and assertion. Other analyses of the same programs may be offered by other critics, and the audience, as critic, must learn to make its own decisions. These essays will help in that learning process.

The second section is comprised of essays that attempt to go beyond the specific meanings of specific programs or program types. They suggest that television has meaning in the culture because it is not an isolated, unique entity. These writers want to know what television means, for its producers, its audiences, its culture.

The essays in the final section are concerned with what television is. They seek to define television in terms of itself, to determine how it is like and how it is different from other media.

All the essays are seeking connections, trying to place television in its own proper, enlarged critical climate. Consequently, many

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of them use similar examples, ask similar questions, and rest on shared assumptions. Some of the connections are obvious. Others will occur to the reader using the book. In this way the reader too becomes a critic and the printed comments may serve to stimulate a new beginning, a new and richer viewpoint regarding television.

I would like to express my thanks to John Wright of Oxford University Press for his initial interest and continued support for this book. His suggestions have strengthened it throughout. A special note of thanks must go to all my friends and colleagues who have made suggestions about the book and who, in some cases, have offered their own fine work for inclusion. Thanks, too, goes to my family for the supportive world in which I work.

H.N.

*Baltimore
November 1975*

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HORACE NEWCOMB

INTRODUCTION TELEVISION AND THE CLIMATE OF CRITICISM

Writing in 1962, Moses Hadas suggested that television, already considered a nearly worthless pastime, be taken far more seriously by thinking persons.

Because he is not directly determining profit and loss, because he is contemplating a range of subject matter almost unlimited in scope and has regard to an audience almost as large and varied, the critic of television is in effect dealing with universals and hence he must cultivate the philosophical approach. To have validity, universals must, of course, be solidly grounded in particulars, and our critic must obviously be expert in various relevant techniques; but these are ancillary to his larger aims. The larger aims are, in a word, educational. And education in its fullest sense, not schooling alone, is the single most important enterprise of civilized society.

A truer analogy than drama, therefore, is literature, which has traditionally held the general educational mandate television has now come to share. In literature, too, the scope is vast, the audience coextensive with literacy, and the benefits need not involve cash expenditure. In literature, as we have observed, there is a tangible critical climate, guided and made articulate by professional critics, perhaps, but shaped by all who take books seriously and write and talk about them. The critical climate, in turn, determines what

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books are made available; no writer who wishes to be heard and no sane publisher will fly in the face of it. A similar critical climate must be created for television; all who take education seriously in its larger sense—and not the professed critics alone—should talk and write about television as they do about books.¹

I take Hada's phrase, "education in its larger sense," to mean something like "culture" in its most pervasive and all-inclusive form. What he is suggesting has little to do with the idea of formal instruction, or as he says, with "schooling." It has much to do with the ways in which members of a society are shaped, changed, directed, and influenced by their most pervasive forms of communication. It has to do with the ways in which the lives of people are reflected by the content of those communications forms. We are "educated," our culture is reflected by the stories that are told to us in literature or by way of television, by commentary on daily occurrences (the "news"), by the thorough explorations of important or unique events (documentary), by the personalities and stars who entertain us. This is the sort of education that goes on each day, unconsciously and largely without evaluation on the part of the audience. It is part of the texture of our lives.

This broad educational or cultural function of television has not, of course, been overlooked or denied. From the earliest development of the medium it has been of great concern to those who deal with television on a daily basis: newspaper critics of television, researchers, professional educators, and parents. Television producers and network officials have recognized the enormous power of their "business" and have issued statements denying the negative influence of TV almost at the same time as they have praised its positive effects. Governmental agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission, and professional organizations such as the National Association of Broadcasters have written professional regulations and codes designed to clarify the function of television and to protect the viewing public from possible harm. The most careful defenders of television, therefore, have often based their concerns in fears of television's educational function, an attitude which is, to some degree, well founded. If it

¹ Moses Hadas, "Climates of Criticism," in *The Eighth Art*, ed. by Robert Lewis Shayon (New York, 1962), p. 19.

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is not always easy to accept the judgments of elitist critics who fear for the degradation of mass "taste"; it is quite simple to accept the concern of writers who remind their audiences that television is a complex financial system in which the viewers are consistently manipulated for profit. The realization that television demands no essential literacy forces us to see that among its available victims are children, an issue that forms the basis for extensive research into the effects of violence and aggression as seen on television. A similar concern for TV's political and economic power warns minority or special interest groups that their integrity must be protected and that other audiences must be forewarned about false stereotypes and negative portrayals.

Unfortunately, our fears about television, no matter how healthy or well founded, have restricted the development of a critical climate for television as called for by Hadas. Most serious television commentary, for example, has been directed toward the audience rather than to the content of the medium. The primary concerns have been with audience response as influenced by television. While this results in an extensive body of research literature, there are very few careful descriptions of television programs. Similarly, while we have several political and economic histories of broadcasting, there are no histories of television programming. Without such descriptions and histories, there is no sense of development in television and little awareness of differences in program type, in writing, in production. On the one hand, television is seen as new and unique, its behavioral influences unrelated to those of other communications media. On the other, it is denied qualities and properties of its own and is only judged comparatively. Usually the comparisons are invidious ones in which television is condemned for what it is not rather than for what it is or even for what it might become. Excellence in television is taken to be the exception with continual surprise, as if this were not also the case in literature and film. Television, then, has no heritage of its own, no place in the culture except as an intruder. And while it should be clear that more comprehensive critical approaches would not see television exclusively in virtuous terms, it should also be clear that an assumed negativism can effectively prevent thorough analysis.

Such analysis and its contribution to the creation of a true

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"critical climate," have been further restricted by the most prevalent forms of television commentary, journalism and research. Journalism, by its very daily nature, responds to the brutally immediate aspects of television, as Lawrence Laurent makes clear in his essay, "Wanted: The Complete Television Critic."

This complete television critic begins with a respect and a love for the excitement and the impact of the combination of sight and sound—pictures which can be viewed and words which can be heard, by millions of people at one time. This complete critic must be something of an electronics engineer, an expert on our governmental processes, and an esthetician. He must have a grasp of advertising and marketing principles. He should be able to evaluate all of the art forms; to comprehend each of the messages conveyed, on every subject under the sun, through television. And there's more.

He must be absolutely incorruptible, a firmly anchored man of objectivity in a stormy world of special interests and pressure groups. At the same time, he should stand above the boiling turmoil while he plunges into every controversy as a social critic and guardian of standards. While being both aloof and involved, he must battle for the right, as his judgment and instincts guide him toward that right.²

Laurent notes, of course, that the total fulfillment of all these tasks is beyond the human capacity of a single individual. But it is in the very attempts to complete the tasks that the real failures of journalistic writing about television occur. The journalist feels and accepts the responsibilities that Laurent outlines, feels the responsibility to form judgments that will guide the audience to some understanding of the issues. The journalist must "keep up" with the latest problem, whether that means reviewing an important show, responding to the latest research report, or writing about the most current political or financial restrictions. His subject matter is, in this way, determined by what is most important in a journalistic sense, by what should go into a daily newspaper designed for a single, quick reading. The journalist, then, is open

² In *The Eighth Art*, p. 156.

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to manipulation by the medium about which he writes. The networks see that the "best" shows occupy directly competing time slots. They bring out special shows during essential "rating periods." Weeks of "good" or "important" shows are run together, leaving the critic at the mercy of consistently mediocre programming at other, leaner, times.

Frequently, the critic learns that he must develop some formula that will allow him to have something to say day after day. Some resort to scorn, pouring out column after column of satire. Television becomes a whipping boy, always available and ultimately impervious to the blows delivered by the critic. Others resort to the easiest and handiest resource, passing along to their readers condensed versions of the massive public relations packets that arrive with each day's mail. When the critic chooses to combine scorn with ready made publicity there results the gossip column, devoted more to amusement than to commentary on television.

There are, on the other hand, truly responsible critics who pursue courses designed to provide significant commentary on the medium. Superior journalists—Laurent, Jack Gould, John Crosby, Robert Lewis Shayon, John O'Connor, and others like them—shape television with views as responsible as Laurent would have them be. These critics often see their role as one that allows the audience to have its own views corroborated or challenged, and realize that such a process can aid both critic and audience in seeing television more clearly. Still, in most cases, there is time and space for the expression of only immediate response, and no matter how informed or responsible, such immediacy does not tend toward the development of a clear overview of television's complex role in culture and society. Over a period of months or years the faithful reader may see the growth of a set of critical principles for judgment and analysis, but he will see them only if the critic has been able by withstanding the pressures of his position to state them clearly. And because of the multiplicity of the journalist's concerns the reader must pick through comments on politics, economics, technology, aesthetics, and personality before he can discover consistency or its absence. Even when the journalist produces a book-length examination of television such as Martin Mayer's *About Television*, the essential concern is with

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bringing every aspect of television into the critic's purview. Instead of brief columns devoted to a range of immediate concerns we have lengthy chapters devoted to them. Ultimately, the journalist gives us small bits and pieces of ideas about a great many aspects of television. The business of the journalist is information, and we are informed with fragments.

The researcher too is concerned with fragments. He is concerned with individual programs or with parts of them, with particular portions of the audience under special circumstances. His primary questions have to do with the ways in which television affects the behavior of the audience. Most often his questions focus on the ways in which television *causes* certain types of behavior rather than with the broad and general sort of effect. Here, for example, is a statement describing in simple terms one method used by the researcher in establishing such links.

The experimental method involves the manipulation of some experience (called the *independent variable*) and then the measurement of some aspect of behavior (the *dependent variable*). The major purpose is to determine if the changes in the independent variable produces changes in the dependent variable; that is, to determine whether there is a causal relationship between the two. An additional goal is to insure that *only* the independent variable could have caused the difference—to eliminate alternative interpretations of the results.³

This use of experimental techniques to establish causal links between television and audience behavior is only one of many sophisticated research techniques. To supplement this essentially laboratory procedure the researcher also uses field studies in more natural settings. In order to be as accurate as possible he will also modify and correct his findings with elaborate statistical techniques. Nevertheless, if the fault of journalism is that it gives us no systematic overview, the fault with research is that we see such overviews built on statistical inference. Critics of such methods are quick to point out that such inferential system building tells us little about individual behavior, about single lives. Because the

³ Robert M. Liebert, John M. Neale, and Emily S. Davidson, *The Early Window: Effects of Television on Children and Youth* (New York, 1973), p. 38.

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researcher, so far, has most often been concerned with the possibility of harmful influences on behavior he is able to reply that even a minimal significance, if carefully established, is sufficient to call for reform, regulation, or continued monitoring.

Both the researcher and the journalist act most often out of a deep concern for the meaning of television. Each in his own way tells as much as possible about the medium. But because their concerns are reportorial and fragmented on one hand and narrowly defined on the other, neither can be properly termed criticism in Hadas's sense. A far better example of that sort of criticism is offered by Robert Warshow in his comments on how the critic should examine another form of popular art, the movies. Dissatisfied with both sociological and "art" criticism of the movies, Warshow suggested that there is a more accurate way to establish the critical relationship.

This is the actual, immediate experience of seeing and responding to the movies as most of us see them and respond to them. A critic may extend his frame of reference as far as it will bear extension, but it seems to me almost self-evident that he should start with the simple acknowledgment of his own relation to the object he criticizes; at the center of all truly successful criticism there is always a man reading a book, a man looking at a picture, a man watching a movie. Critics of the films, caught in the conflict between "high culture" and "popular culture," have too often sought to evade this confrontation.⁴

Or, putting the same view even more succinctly, he says, "A man watches a movie, and the critic must acknowledge that he is that man."⁵

With this sort of statement we are approaching Hadas's admonition that all who take education seriously in its larger sense should think and write about television as they do about books. But there is one more step that must be taken before that is fully the case. We must acknowledge that Warshow's "man watching the movie," is in some sense a special sort of man. That is, he is the man aware of what he is doing, aware of the

⁴ Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience* (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), p. xxv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

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relationship between himself and the movie, aware of the relationship between the movie and the cultural traditions that contribute to its production. Finally, he is aware of his own relationship with that same culture. Again, Warshow points the way for this sort of criticism.

I have felt my work to be most successful when it has seemed to display the movies as an important element in my own cultural life, an element with its own qualities and interesting in its own terms, and neither esoteric nor alien. The movies are part of my culture, and it seems to me that their special power has something to do with their being a kind of "pure" culture, a little like fishing or drinking or playing baseball—a cultural fact, that is, which has not yet fallen altogether under the discipline of art. I have not brought Henry James to the movies or the movies to Henry James, but I hope I have shown that the man who goes to the movies is the same as the man who reads Henry James.⁶

The "man at the movies" then is a self-conscious man. He is a self-conscious critic. He is aware of the movies as he is aware of Henry James, and if he wishes to make distinctions between the two he must make them critically, on the basis of judgment and definition and not on the basis of snobbery and condescension.

The first task of this collection of essays, then, is to bring together some of the best writing about television. This writing goes beyond journalism and research. At times it goes beyond it by simple extension; the essays here are longer, more thorough, more reflective, even when they are written about topics that would interest the journalist in a brief comment. Most often, however, they go beyond the other forms of television commentary in that they seek to establish more carefully the cultural context of television. Some of that context forms the background from which television develops, other parts of it are caused by television. The essays prove that such thorough television criticism can and does exist, that the medium itself does not dictate the more superficial or the more narrowly defined comment. They also make painfully clear the fact that such excellent criticism has not been the dominant mode of discourse regarding television.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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Their scarcity indicates that Hadas's critical climate has not yet developed, but rather, that those who take education in its larger sense most seriously have too often been those who have left television out of their thought, even as it changed the world in which they lived.

There is another purpose of this collection. It is based in the assumption that people other than self-styled, self-conscious critics are seriously involved with "education in its larger sense." In our culture, even those who do not like books take them seriously. They may even take their dislike seriously. But at the very least they are introduced formally to books, they are required, at some stage of their lives, to think about them, to look at them. And they are required to look at them in particular ways. Books are considered the repository of cultural heritage and the agents by which that heritage is not only reserved and transmitted, but examined and amplified as well. Because television has not been given attention by those whose professed purpose is the serious concern for education in its full sense, it has developed no respected place in the culture. The end result of this chain of consequences is that the mass audience, sensing this general lack of concern, this pervasive attitude of fear and negativism, has little of the respect for television that it has for books, and is left without general critical guidance. Because it is uncritical the mass audience is left at the mercy of those willing to manipulate it. The old network excuse, "We give the audience what it wants," must finally be laid at the feet of those who would be first to state publicly their concern for education in its larger sense. Their lack of concern for this medium that has assumed "the general educational mandate" indicates ultimately a lack of concern for the audience rather than for the medium itself. They do not care for the people who watch television.

A true climate of criticism, then, will involve not only those who consider themselves to be professional critics, researchers, journalists. It will also involve most of the population, for most people do care in their own way about the general education of the culture. Such caring is at the heart of the critical enterprise and as Robert Lewis Shayon suggests, that enterprise is at the heart of what it means to be human. "The critical spirit is the supreme manifestation of human intelligence which sets man off from the

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animals. It is the world's best hope." His purpose in writing criticism, then, and the purpose of this collection, is "the making of critics."

. . . not only professional critics of the arts, of society, of the various departments of human affairs, but also and especially "people critics," alert, perspicacious individuals who know how to confront the assorted phenomena of their own lives, their own worlds, and their own relationships, how to analyze them, to manage them dialectically, and to discover in the dialectic creative new possibilities for human dignity and mutuality.⁷

Surely it is not too much to ask that we turn this sort of critical intelligence toward television. Nor is it too much to ask that the climate of criticism so created by thoughtful writers be frankly and openly educational. Until the audience understands what it sees in larger contexts, until it develops its own critical facilities we will live in a world dominated by one-eyed monsters. When all of us participate in the critical climate we will live in a world more thoroughly humane than any other.

⁷ Robert Lewis Shayon, *Open to Criticism* (Boston, 1971), p. ix.

TELEVISION: THE CRITICAL VIEW

I

SEEING TELEVISION

Most of us look at television without ever seeing it. It surrounds us. We seem to measure our days by "what's on," and by "when does it start." But few of us think about what it is that we look at and consequently form no critical view. The result, of course, as many people have pointed out (some of them in essays that appear in other portions of this book), is that we are easily manipulated by TV. The way out is to become critics of what we see, a suggestion that is far more rewarding than it might sound. The same suggestion is made by Michael Novak in a recent comment:

Prime-time television is worthy of a serious critical effort. If one watches a show, and tries to criticize it afterward, the effort bears fruit; and the shows bear the scrutiny. The television camera is a very rich instrument of creativity, and the power of its impressions, even when the subject matter is prosaic, is quite remarkable. Thus a segment from *ALL IN THE FAMILY*, or *RHODA*, or other shows can generate quite intense and fruitful argument about values, perceptions, characterizations, artistic techniques and the rest.

(*Commonweal*, April 11, 1975, p. 40)

The essays in this part follow the lead suggested by Novak's comments. They usually begin with careful description, demon-

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strating that there is much to be seen in the programs that we so often take for granted. Following the description, however, these critics go on to larger concerns. They attempt to draw conclusions that take us once again beyond the narrow concerns of journalism or research. They reach out for extended meanings, and can be seen as evidence for or against the theories that are developed in later parts of the book. As such, they are perhaps the best models for the sort of television criticism, expansive and detailed, that is necessary for a fuller understanding of the medium in its present form.

This sort of criticism is based on careful observation and critical assertion. Conclusions rise most often from personal interpretation. These critics often disagree about the meanings of programs, but as with all good criticism, even the resonances of their disagreements aid us in a fuller understanding of our subject matter. We are never likely to agree about such matters as "values, perceptions, characterizations, artistic techniques and the rest," but we can have a far more adequate response to television when we are able to "see" what we watch.

James W. Chesebro and Caroline D. Hamsher examine many different types of programs in their "Communication, Values, and Popular Television Series." This article uses the literary criticism of Northrop Frye as a framework in which to categorize television programs and as a basis for the extraction of messages or value-laden communications. It is possible to see the immediate results of such formulaic criticism. It is also quite possible to disagree with some of the interpretations offered by the authors. Chesebro and Hamsher, then, offer an excellent sounding board for many of the comments that follow them.

Michael Arlen and Carol Traynor Williams both look at popular programs but arrive at different conclusions. Arlen is less concerned with the specific messages offered in Norman Lear's comedies than with the shrillness he finds in the structure of the programs. Williams finds in the growth of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" an important aesthetic point by demonstrating the ways in which television characters—most of whom we think of as static—can change and grow.

Renata Adler, Philip Wander, and Anne Roiphe all look at television families. But the distance between any typical inhabit-

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ant of a soap opera suburb, the now famous Bunker household, and the nostalgic and pastoral Waltons allows us to see the range of television art. Families are central units on TV, but they stand, metaphorically, for many different things. The critic's task is to discriminate among the meanings, and that means detailed analysis rather than crude generalization. All three of these critics are "critical" in the harsh sense of the word as they look at these examples of popular entertainment, but none of them condescends to the subject matter. They take television seriously precisely because they have seen it closely enough to know what they are talking about when they define some of our central cultural images.

Harris Dienstfrey, Philip Merzman, and Arthur Asa Berger look away from the centrality of the family toward the image of the hero. Again, they are dealing with programs that have been touched on by the opening essay of this section, and again they are looking more closely at specific examples. They see television doing things to our visions of heroism, creating new heroes, changing old ones and placing apparent innovations in a thoroughly conventional context. They help us to define the values we associate with doctors, lawyers, cowboys, spies, or karate experts, and in so doing, tell us something about who we are.

The section closes as Dan Menaker applies many of these same heroic categories to the people we feel must be most real, the newscasters. This essay leads quite easily into the following section where the discussions are more philosophical. Remember Menaker's image of the "funhouse mirror" while reading Aubrey Singer's "Television: Window on Culture or Reflection in the Glass?"

JAMES W. CHESEBRO & CAROLINE D. HAMSHER

COMMUNICATION, VALUES, AND POPULAR TELEVISION SERIES

Communicating is inherently a selective process. Faced with an ever changing and ongoing set of human transactions, both the source and the receiver are forced to make choices about what they say and hear. Consciously and unconsciously, these choices are typically controlled by the needs and motives of those communicating. Try as one may to be "objective," the very decision to communicate reveals particular and personal needs, fears, and commitments. In this sense, all communicative acts selectively highlight one set of human values rather than another set. We are ultimately left with the conclusion, aptly expressed by Gerald R. Miller, that "every communicative act involves, of necessity, a value judgment."¹

Popular television series are communicative acts. A source (producers, directors, and writers) conveys an identifiable message enacted through a plot played out by characters who ultimately cast certain behaviors as better than others. Consequently, these plots and characters—whether intentionally or accidentally—reflect, convey, and reinforce certain values about what is "good"

¹ Gerald R. Miller, *An Introduction to Speech Communication*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 10.

James W. Chesebro and Caroline D. Hamsher teach in the Department of Speech at Temple University. This essay is reprinted from *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (Spring 1975), by permission of the publisher.

COMMUNICATION, VALUES, POPULAR TELEVISION SERIES

and what is "bad." In this context, Richard D. Heffner recently argued that television series may appropriately be viewed as "subtle persuaders." He observed,

There is much more to television than meets the eye. Understanding the medium requires not only a familiarity with the series plots that continue from week to week, but also an awareness of TV's less explicit levels; its offhanded comments; its modes of thought and action that we have come to take for granted. It is, you see, this *less-than-conscious* level of television's content that educates us, subtly, without our even realizing it. . . . Television, the newest and far more prevalent form of fiction, is even more profoundly influential on our lives—not in terms of the stories it tells, but more importantly, the values it portrays.²

While we may wish to ignore the issue, it now appears essential to view television series as persuasive efforts. Consider the case. First, the producers of television series seem overtly aware of their decision to persuade through their series. Grant Tinker, producer of "The Mary Tyler Moore" and "Bob Newhart" shows, initially argues that the "qualities in our shows . . . are not important. . . . These are comedies, after all—and if the themes were too serious, we'd lose the comedic element." Tinker does note upon reflection, however, that Mary "does come close, in her 1970s version, to the good old-fashioned virtues we find in the Waltons. In fact, now that I think of it," he notes, "in its own way, the show is projecting all the different values we have been talking about. The show appears to be rather hip on TV, but in fact she and all the characters in that show—forgetting their comedic eccentricities—are all four-square people."³ More overtly, Quinn Martin, producer of "Streets of San Francisco," "Cannon," and "The F.B.I.," observes: "I am a patriot. In the police stories that I do, I show the police in an idealized way. Without respect for the police, I think

² Richard D. Heffner, "Television: The Subtle Persuader," *TV Guide* (September 15, 1973), pp. 25–26.

³ Quoted in Bill Davidson, "Forecast for Fall: Warm and Human," *TV Guide* (February 16, 1974).

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we'd have a breakdown in our society."⁴ Similarly, Lee Rich, producer of "The Waltons," notes that "the success of this series is because of what is going on in the country today, the loss of values. Many people see ethical qualities in this family that they hope that they can get back to."⁵ Producers appear overtly aware, then, of the value-orientation controlling their series. Second, viewers perceive the series predominantly as entertainment rather than persuasive acts. We may repeatedly observe that entertainment and persuasion are not exclusive dimensions: entertainment may be persuasive; persuasion may be entertaining. Yet viewers act as if the series offered an opportunity "to get away from all the pressures." Third, millions watch the shows. Fourth, these persuasive efforts rely, not upon one presentation of a value, but some twenty or so reinforcements depending upon the number of shows within the series (not to mention reruns). As Heffner puts it, television "combines the traditional two steps of impactful communications: statement and reinforcement. . . . TV is so highly integrated in our lives that its characters create their own effective credibility, influencing us more than we realize with the life styles they portray."⁶ The intentions of the producers, perspective of the viewers, size of the audience, and reinforcement process obligate us to view popular television series as persuasive acts, for as Andersen and Andersen argue, such values "influence social perception by providing us with a set of basic rules by which we judge the behavior and beliefs of others."⁷ In addition, Nilsen observes that if we ignore "the fundamental values" of communicative efforts, we ignore "vital information needed by the listeners if they are to make intelligent decisions."⁸

However, doesn't something more need to be said? We might reasonably ask: *What values are conveyed by popular television series?*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Heffner.

⁷ Kenneth E. Andersen and Mary Andersen, "Ethics and Persuasion," *Persuasion: Theory and Practice* by Kenneth E. Andersen (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 313. See also Ronald L. Applebaum, Karl W. E. Anatol, Ellis R. Hays, Owen O. Jenson, Richard E. Porter, and Jerry E. Mandel, *Fundamentals in Human Communication* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973), p. 91.

⁸ Thomas R. Nilsen, *Ethics of Speech Communication*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), p. 76.

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How do those values gain credibility before television viewers? How desirable are the values conveyed by television series? Such questions are significant; answering them requires a critical assessment of particular television series. The answers provided here stem from the critical methods generated by communication theorists. Particularly, the form and the content of television series are treated in this analysis as the factors which transform and convey the values into more subtle and thereby acceptable messages for the viewers.⁹

While many methods exist for describing the formal characteristics of persuasive messages and thus for distinguishing major types of persuasive messages, Northrop Frye¹⁰ provides a critical framework we find relevant and useful for an analysis of television series. In Frye's view, two variables generate and distinguish the major persuasive forms: (1) the central agent's or hero's apparent relationship to the audience, and (2) the hero's ability to control circumstances. These two variables produce five particular persuasive forms. In *irony*, a hero is inferior in intelligence and power to others and unable to control environmental factors. In *mime*, the hero is one of us and able to control circumstances with the same skill we possess. In *leader* centered forms, the hero is superior to others in degree but again able to manipulate the environment with the same degree of control possessed by others. In *romance*, the hero is superior in degree to others and the environment. In *myth*, the hero is superior to others and the environment in kind. These five persuasive forms constitute the formal framework we shall use to assess popular television shows.

The content or substantive dimension of popular television series may certainly vary from show to show. As we shall employ a concern for content in this analysis, however, the focus is upon those ideas, notions, or principles which repeat themselves from

⁹ We have sought, in an earlier essay, to justify and explain how such an approach may be used to examine persuasive messages. See James W. Chesebro and Caroline D. Hamsher, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Message-Centered Procedure," *The Speech Teacher*, 22 (November 1973), 282-90.

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), especially pp. 33-34. We are obviously adapting Frye's analysis to our particular interests. The adaptation may distort Frye's particular objectives.

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show to show during the series. Attention is thereby given to the persistent or enduring principles continually advocated throughout the series.

The range of methods used to describe the central symbols or principles of persuasive messages varies. However, Kenneth Burke's "dramatistic process" may be employed to describe the stages or communicative progressions ordering popular television series. As we use the dramatistic process to identify central principles of television series, four questions function as a critical framework: (1) *Pollution*—What norms are violated and cast as disruptive to the social system involved? (2) *Guilt*—Who or what is generally held responsible for the pollution? (3) *Purification*—What kinds of acts are generally initiated to eliminate the pollution and guilt? (4) *Redemption*—What social system or order is created as a result of passing through the pollution, guilt, and purification stages? By way of example, the Christian conception of salvation may be revealed by way of the dramatistic process: man sins by violating God's laws (pollution); man is held responsible for the sins although Christ accepts the responsibility because of His great love (guilt); Christ is crucified to eliminate man's sin and responsibility (purification); and all men are thereby allowed to enter Heaven after death (redemption). While our example may not be as detailed here as a reader may wish, the central point is that the dramatistic process may be used to reveal systematically the central symbols or principles controlling a drama.¹¹

Our concern for the form and content of popular television series generates a five by four critical matrix which is used here to identify systematically and comprehensively major television series' persuasive appeals. Figure I depicts this matrix. While providing the foundation for a systematic and comprehensive identification of persuasive appeals in popular television series, the matrix also offers a method for contrasting types of television series as well as for grouping those series which employ essentially the same persuasive appeals.

¹¹ While some differences emerge between our treatment of the dramatistic process and the perspective offered by Bernard L. Brock, Brock offers one of the most convenient summaries of a rhetorician's view of the dramatistic process; see: Bernard L. Brock, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Burkeian Approach," *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth Century Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Scott and Bernard L. Brock (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 315-27.

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Figure I. THE CRITICAL MATRIX

SUBSTANTIVE CHARACTERISTICS	FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS				
	Irony	Mime	Leader	Romance	Myth
Pollution					
Guilt					
Purification					
Redemption					

Some forty-one popular television series constitute the data base for this analysis. All forty-one series have been classified into the matrix. Five of the series are highlighted and examined in detail as representative of each of the formal characteristics identified in the matrix: Irony—"All in the Family"; Mime—"The Mary Tyler Moore Show"; Leader centered—"Maude"; Romance—"Marcus Welby, M.D."; Myth—"The Six Million Dollar Man." Four of these series were selected because they were in the top ten according to the 1973-74 Nielsen ratings; "The Six Million Dollar Man," while not in the top ten, was most highly rated among the series categorized as myth. Two shows from each series were randomly selected, videotaped, and analyzed to illustrate and establish the claims made about each of the series.

"All in the Family" conveys a range of identifiable messages. The series implies, initially, that *bigots only hurt themselves*, that their attack on human frailties ultimately destroys their own esteem and individuality and reveals them to others as insensitive. In the particular shows examined here, Archie Bunker verbally assaults George (a mentally retarded person) and Joe Tucker (an unemployed man seeking psychiatric aid), only to gain the scorn of his family for the attacks.

A second message of this series is that *bigots can be laughed at instead of hated*. Such a message implies that bigots only reveal their own limits as people and that their assertions are shallow and therefore formal; the formality provides a comic dimension to

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bigotry. In the shows we considered, Archie's behaviors make him a source of bewildering amusement (typified by his son-in-law Michael's reactions) rather than an agent of evil.

The series posits yet a third message: *the WASP is dying as a national norm and ideal*. Archie is a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant who asserts the WASP position: that being white is better than being nonwhite; that the Anglo-Saxon heritage is better than the Eastern European, Asian, or African heritage; that being Protestant is better than being Catholic or Jewish. For Archie, the non-WASP's quest for equality is a sign of his or her being "uppity." The series denies Archie's ideal; cultural differences are presented as equally valid life styles. People often need help, thereby rejecting the WASP ideal of rugged individualism and independence. Thus, both George and Joe Tucker seek assistance from others; the impact of both shows is that requesting and receiving help allows individuals to develop more fully.

Finally, "All in the Family" suggests that *change is good as long as it is moderate and liberal*. Extreme responses, whether conservative or radical, are cast as unreasonable. Archie's rejection of the retarded and those seeking psychological help is viewed as too conservative. Correspondingly, blacks who hate whites are cast as too extreme; Archie's black neighbor, Mr. Jefferson, is presented as Archie's equally misguided counterpart. The argument of the series is that the best change is that which is thoughtful and evolving, respecting individualism.

These messages, even when explicitly stated, as we have done here, are by no means automatically acceptable. The messages are conveyed in ways which disarm the viewer and make the viewer more susceptible to accepting them. In particular, Archie's drama (like that of "Sanford and Son") is ironic to the audience. Archie lacks intelligence and power; he cannot control his environment; his pride is a reflection of his stupidity. Archie's flaw is placed in a social context which makes him incapable of success; Archie becomes, therefore, a pathetic figure to be pitied rather than hated. The ironic form of the series sets bigotry in a formal setting which denies its power as a social force.

As the ironic drama is played out in show after show, the bigot becomes even less of an object to be treated seriously. The hero, Archie, causes the pollution in each show and thereby creates the

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irony. Repeatedly, Archie is assigned the guilt; the irony is extended because the hero is responsible. Purifying acts are initiated by others to minimize the hero's pollution and guilt. As a final touch, redemption is a return to the old order as Archie re-establishes himself as ready to engage in additional ventures in exactly the same manner.

Certainly such messages, when cast in the form of an ironic drama, deserve critical response. At first the series may disarm us and make us forget the power of bigotry. But bigots are not always ironic and we should not assume that bigotry only emerges ironically. The bigot may be presented in mythical, romantic, leader centered, or mimetic dramas. Men such as Hitler, Spiro Agnew, and George Wallace have utilized forms which add power to the claims of bigots. The ironic form is seldom selected by the bigot as a vehicle for persuasion. "All in the Family" should not encourage us to look for bigotry only in ironic guise.

Moreover, we need to realize that even ironic bigotry may reinforce racial and religious intolerance. From a random sampling of viewers in the United States and Canada, Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach demonstrated that to the unprejudiced persons Archie was a "dumb, bigoted 'hard-hat'" but that to the prejudiced, Michael is the object of scorn and is cast as a "long-haired, lazy 'meathead Polack' who spouts liberal slogans."¹² Thus, rather than dissuading bigots, the series creates an opportunity for bigots to perceive a new enemy selectively without disrupting their belief structures. On a weekly basis, the irony of bigotry may reinforce rather than eliminate bigotry.

Consequently, we may wish to be more cautious in believing that liberals always possess the power to disarm bigots. The liberal wish to see bigots as ironic does not guarantee that bigots are therefore devoid of power. Groups such as the John Birch Society and the Christian Anti-Communist League have members whose educational, economic, and political activism exceed the national norms. There are things to fear in this world; some problems must be taken seriously. Liberalism may not have taken the most positive step in casting bigots as ironic; clearly the labeling process does not diminish the power of bigotry.

¹² Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, "Archie Bunker's Bigotry: A Study in Selective Perception and Exposure," *Journal of Communication*, 24 (Winter 1974), 38.

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"The Mary Tyler Moore Show" embodies and conveys a different set of messages to audiences. The series initially suggests that *Puritan morality is a viable philosophic system*. The world is perceived in moral terms in which good works promise salvation. In particular, honesty, simplicity, cooperation, self-discipline, orderliness, personal responsibility, and humility are cast as desirable values. Mary is honest; she may not always want to be, but she worries about complete honesty and, if forced, she must tell the truth. One of the shows, in fact, is based on the premise that Mary once lied and all of the evils of the "white lie" are revealed; Mary suffers for the lie. Mary is, moreover, a prototype of contemporary simplicity and orderliness. Her dress and hair are uncomplicated and efficient. Her apartment is itself an "efficiency," and she lives in the Midwest, the core of simple American purity. Mary is cooperative; she is part of a "team" and tries to make all members of the team feel good. She will, for the team, even agree to do tasks when they inconvenience or hurt her. In one show, Mary lends Rhoda money for a flower shop when she, Mary, needs it for a car. Mary is self-disciplined and personally responsible. In one show, she works all night on obituaries, and fatigue leads her to write humorous death notices; she is suspended for two weeks when one of these obituaries is read on the air. Mary says she wants "no special treatment," for she was responsible and lacked discipline. Mr. Grant responds, "You have to be punished." After realizing the impact of the suspension, Mary observes, "I'm usually so in control of myself." She even reflects that when she was a child her mother put her in the room that needed the most cleaning for Mary released anxiety by tidying up. Another Puritan virtue is Mary's humility. She admits she needs others, wants to be with her office mates: "I feel lousy without my friends." Whatever success Mary achieves, she finds it ultimately linked to the efforts of others; she is humble.

Achievement and success are important values; this is a second message of the series. Upward social mobility is held to be especially important, particularly in business, so Mary is delighted with her title of Associate Producer even though the job is often secretarial. In one show, Mary is nominated for a "Best Documentary" award; she is pleased to be recognized for such success. In another show, Ted Knight, the extreme manifestation of the

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values, feels sorry about the likelihood of Mary's losing her job but is reluctant to defend her, noting that, "There's no percentage in everyone's head being cut off." To Ted, Walter Cronkite is "top dog"—Cronkite occupies the most esteemed position in his field and for his achievement warrants great respect if not awe. Achievement and success are thus seen as powerful values to be sought and secured by all.

This series also promotes a third message: *Effort and optimism are always rewarded*. Mary tries. Ted tries. Murray tries. Lou tries. The whole team tries. And while the team may not have produced a top rated news program, the implicit communication of the series is that one day the effort and optimism could be rewarded. If nothing else, trying hard and thinking positively make everyone feel happier and more fulfilled.

A fourth message of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" is that *sociability, external conformity, generosity, and consideration for others are appropriate modes of social interaction*. If one serves others, they will appreciate one. Getting along, being loved, being worthy of love—these are particularly important social values. Mary prepares coffee for all; she holds parties at her apartment and suggests surprise birthday parties even when these gatherings offer her no opportunity for personal growth. After an argument with Rhoda, Mary clearly expresses the value: "I hate being on the outs with someone I like," even though Mary has every reason to be cross. As Mary puts it, "It's lonely being right."

Finally, the series suggests that *patriotism is an essential spiritual value*. Patriotism is cast as loyalty to tradition, both occupationally and socially. Thus when Mary, having been suspended from her job, has an opportunity to get another position, she asserts, "I want to come back. I don't like it out there. I like it here." Likewise, on the job, everyone refers to the head of the newsroom as "Lou" except for Mary, who has for years perceived him as "Mr. Grant." Socially, Mary retains traditional commitment, and she "feel[s] lousy without my friends." Patriotism functions, as a result, as a pattern of identification. If the pattern is broken, the life is destroyed. Mary is, correspondingly, destroyed when her job or her friends are destroyed.

These messages become credible within the framework of the mimetic drama, which employs the common, the familiar, as its

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central mode of action. The values conveyed in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" appear realistic and relevant because the values are cast as operative within social and circumstantial relationships shared by all of us. As the mimetic drama unfolds, pollution may be generated by Mary, by others, by circumstances or accidents, but customarily the pollution occurs when the best of intentions are operating. Correspondingly, guilt may be assigned to Mary or to her close friends, but the guilt must always be qualified because of the force of circumstances, accidents, and good intentions. As a result of the development of the pollution and guilt frames, purification is seldom a decisive moment; it results from someone's admitting or accepting the responsibility for wrongdoing or recognizing the force of external causation. Self-victimization or mortification strategies possess a genteel quality in the purifying stage of mimetic drama. No one is ever really "evil" and so the punishment itself is never severe. Redemption, consequently, requires only a return to the old social system with "greater wisdom" about the nature of this system. Life goes on, but one is a bit wiser for the experience. It would seem to us that a host of popular television series employ the mimetic drama to espouse essentially the same values found in "The Mary Tyler Moore Show"; these would include "Rhoda," "Friends and Lovers," "The Bob Newhart Show," "Happy Days," "Good Times," "The Little House on the Prairie," "That's My Mama," "Movin' On," and "Chico and the Man."

The mimetic drama and the cluster of values it casts as credible require a critical response. The form assumes that conflicts are really only "differences of opinion" rather than profound confrontations. All people are viewed as basically decent and wholesome. The perspective is conservative, offering a limited view of actual experience, and it may thereby preclude a realistic approach to the wide range of human relationships. Also, the form presents the "establishment" or "status quo" as the most viable mode of organization. The mimetic framework highlights *means* (hard work, optimism, achievement, effort, and the like), seldom questioning the *ends* toward which those means are directed. As we face "real" confrontations, we may be so "drugged" by such shows that we assume our means can satisfy all demands made upon our society when, in fact, new systems may have to be

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devised. We must continually assess our social objectives as well as the means employed to secure those ends. The failure to question the evolution of the entire social system—even if we do not change the direction or the rate of change—ought not to be the result of popular television series which function as societal narcotics.

"*Maude*" is a vehicle for yet another set of messages conveyed to television viewers. The series suggests first that *individuals, especially women, can be strong and powerful*. None of the characters in the shows—husband, wife, daughter, grandson, or housekeeper—lacks "backbone." The women in particular are more than weak or passive. Depending on one's perspective, *Maude* is either a powerful symbol of independence and autonomy for women or she is, in the vernacular, a "ball buster." Carol, *Maude's* daughter, is involved with women's liberation. Both these women avoid housework and the values typically associated with femininity. *Maude*, in fact, does a predictable slow burn which erupts into a violent attack when women as a class are cast as "housewives" or viewed as passive and obedient servants of males. *Maude* would determine her own fate; four marriages and three divorces suggest that *Maude's* quest for self-determination is to be taken seriously.

A second message is conveyed by the series: *the nuclear family is not sacred or private*. Traditionally, the family has been considered stable, permanent, and closed to outsiders. But *Maude's* four marriages contravene such a traditional conception of the nuclear family, although *Maude* obviously tries to make the system work. Sex is openly discussed, and "private" interpersonal issues become public issues among friends.

The series also implies that *liberals have more fun*. Liberals traditionally tend to hold individual rights and individual development as primary values for the society; the responsibility of the liberal (and of society, therefore,) is to provide equal opportunities to secure those rights and therefore attain happiness. In "*Maude*," liberals have more experience, more action in their lives. They are wittier, happier, more interesting. Liberals can afford face lifts, housekeepers, and cocktail parties. Liberals are middle class; their conflicts are predominantly differences resolved by and for the liberal.

The series also suggests, however, that *liberals may be right but*

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liberalism may be a rocky road. Maude's contests are often rugged; tensions and voices are raised. Yet liberals remain strong and powerful; they prevail.

These messages gain credibility and subtly affect viewers because Maude is a leader. The leader centered drama provides a context supportive of a strong, if not dominant, personality. Leaders do dominate others, mobilizing intended responses from their followers. We anticipate that the followers may often feel overpowered, lack comparative power, or even experience jealousy. Leaders do, by definition, introduce and formulate goals, tasks, and procedures. They are centers of action, often delegating and directing action. They integrate and pull individual efforts together; they often summarize group efforts and offer transitions between acts. Thus, we expect those cast as leaders to appear confident of their values, to use those values to interpret events and create issues, and to label forces as "right" and "wrong." Correspondingly, those cast as followers use the leader's values for perceptual and interpretative categories.

With respect to Maude's leadership, pollution occurs when the liberal ethic is somehow challenged: individual rights are violated, or individual opportunities are not provided because of race, religion, sex, or nationality. Maude views the Puritan ethic as often overpowering people at the expense of the liberal ethic. In one of the particular shows examined here, Maude requires that her domestic must have faced racial, religious, sexual, or ethnic discrimination. Maude's black housekeeper (who is leaving) is ultimately replaced by a Puerto Rican woman. As Florida (the black woman) puts it, "Maude is a bleeding heart liberal."

Guilt, in the leader centered drama, may be assigned by victimization or by self-mortification. Self-mortification is the commonly used liberal approach; Maude tends to assume guilt for societal injustice. In the liberal framework, it is the way in which individuals use or do not use the system which creates circumstances producing minority problems; minority group members are seldom perceived as having caused their own plight, whatever it may be. As Florida aptly puts it, "Maude feels guilt"; so any servant of Maude's must be a representative of a minority group. In another show, Maude feels that she must first get her friends Arthur and Vivian to talk; then she must ultimately get them

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married. If Maude touches their lives, she feels she must assume responsibility.

As might be expected, in a leader centered drama the leader generates purification. At this particular stage, Maude is the source of change and improvement. She mobilizes others; she introduces and formulates goals, tasks, and procedures; she delegates and directs. Maude is, after all, described as a "Betsy Ross" and a "bra-burner" in the series' theme song. Thus, she initiates those actions necessary to get Vivian and Arthur married. Maude hires the housekeeper while Carol, Arthur, and Florida make bets about whom she'll hire. Maude is verbally labeled, in the show, as "the big bad wolf," "the slugger," "the tail end of the batting order," "anything but tranquil," and a "prizefighter."

The drama concludes, reaches redemption, when Maude's values and goals control and dominate; individualism is thus secure. Because Maude accepts guilt, carries out those acts necessary to eliminate the pollution, her set of values prevails in a final moment of redemption. Conflict is thus eliminated and happiness returns.

A host of television series employ the leader centered drama as the vehicle to justify the messages generated; included would be "Get Christie Love," "McMillan and Wife," "Mannix," "Police Surgeon," "Cannon," "The Rookies," "Gunsmoke," "Adam-12," "M*A*S*H," "Barnaby Jones," "Lucas Tanner," "Petrocelli," "Ironside," "Streets of San Francisco," "Harry O," "The Rockford Files," "Columbo," and "McCloud." Virtually all of these series cast the hero as leader; these leaders act out much the same kinds of dramas. Critic-observers can readily discern a liberal bias permeating these series as well.

These shows offer a reasonable set of messages in an entertaining manner. However, a critical examination of the leader centered form raises noteworthy issues. During periods of cultural transformation when interpersonal relationships and institutions are often in flux, a stress on "rugged individualism" may diminish attention to the development of needed social and community relationships and systems. Moreover, messages emphasizing hierarchies (leaders-followers) in interpersonal relationships as exciting and viable approaches would appear to detract from the growing and reasonable trend toward interpersonal equality.

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Finally, the liberal vision tends to conceive of cooperation rather than conflict as the most desirable base for human interactions. While we would not advocate fighting, certainly conflict is a dimension of human conduct which may often be essential to growth and development. Perhaps we need to prepare people for both cooperation and conflict rather than encouraging them to accept uncritically those messages which promise cooperative redemption as the most desirable outcome of human interaction.

"Marcus Welby, M.D." communicates a fourth set of messages to television viewers. As the series evolves during a season, audiences are left with several specific conclusions. First, they are advised that *wiser counsel and more thoughtful planning than we are capable of emanates from a select few*. On one of the shows considered here, Gary is slowly losing his voice, essential for his continued functioning as an airport flight controller. Gary is unable to detect or handle the physical, circumstantial, and psychological implications of this change in his life. Welby, although a family practitioner, possesses the perceptual framework and critical facilities Gary does not have. Welby recognizes his power; Gary is, in Welby's words, "a very insecure young man," "headstrong," "ignoring what must be done." Welby knows, moreover, that Gary's wife "has the psychological strength" to understand and help Gary "if only she will." Besides possessing this grasp of complex psychological variables, Welby observes that some "6,000 people get hit by carcinoma each year" and that a laryngectomy, in Gary's case, indicates the use of one of the newly developed vocal resonators. While Welby certainly consults with experts on particular medical questions, he generally recognizes the symptoms, severity of the case, and nature of treatment well before the specialists articulate the issues. If we are to believe what Welby's face suggests before the formal diagnosis and if we have listened carefully to Welby's previous "hunches," we know what Welby knows before his patients or his colleagues do. Beyond his control of such psychological and physiological issues, Welby handles the circumstantial variables as well. Extremely expensive medical treatments can, Welby affirms, be "worked out." While Gary may be unable to continue in his immediate job, Welby makes all of the arrangements necessary to obtain an equivalent job for him. Thus, while Gary believes he'd rather "die" than go through the

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entire transition, Welby offers superior advice and planning to reconstruct Gary's life.

The series also suggests that *agents possessing special vocational skills warrant unique social respect*. As each show evolves, Welby's professional skills control emerging circumstances; it is only a matter of time until the other characters in the show recognize that Welby's skills stem from a depth of sensitivity, human understanding, and compassion more profound than theirs. Welby's medical rank, expertise, and success are direct indicators of the social respect he deserves.

The notion that *the external or objective perspective can recognize and resolve human dilemmas* pervades the series. Welby's patients exist in relatively closed social, psychological, and physical systems; Welby enters those ongoing systems essentially as an outsider. His external or objective point of view generates new views and insights. Welby knows, for instance, that Gary's wife is "the biggest influence in his life." Gary does not know; Gary's wife believes simply that "he had to be goal oriented" to raise himself above his background. Welby goes on to predict, as circumstances begin to affect Gary, that "he doesn't realize what an unexpected blow this will have on him." Welby's sense is uncommon; his insights appear reasonable only if we assume that the role of "external, objective agent" functions as a perspective essential to recognizing and resolving human dilemmas.

These messages appear credible when cast as part of a romantic drama. The romantic hero is part of a legend and possesses a chivalric love for others. There is a supernatural aura essential to romance, and correspondingly the romantic hero appears adventurous, mysterious, and all knowing. As a romantic hero, Welby does not create but rather identifies and describes pollution. Other agents or circumstances create the pollution: Welby identifies the nature and extent of problems of the mind, body, and environment. Likewise, the romantic hero assigns blame to those agents or circumstances generating the pollution. Blame is assigned so that the romantic hero can grapple with or purify the social system; the hero, employing the special skills he possesses, slowly but decisively corrects the problems of the mind, body, and environment. The redemption stage of the romantic drama is essentially a recognition of the skill and sensitivity of the romantic

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hero in recognizing and resolving the pollution and guilt through a particularly wise set of purifying actions. The other characters in the show overtly acknowledge the constructive role of the hero at this stage in the drama as well as explicitly admitting that the hero has profoundly altered their lives. This kind of romantic drama is a framework for several other popular television series including "The Waltons," "Kojak," "Medical Center," "Hawaii Five-O," "Kung Fu," and "Apple's Way." In each of these series, the hero possesses a unique set of special skills, and each series likewise conveys essentially the same kinds of messages found in "Marcus Welby, M.D."

These series provide confidence and security for the viewers through the concept that external agents will resolve human dilemmas; however, viewers are thereby encouraged to perceive themselves as more passive, less responsible for themselves, and more dependent upon the efforts of mystical figures for solutions to extremely real problems. Some of the same dangers that were discussed with respect to mimetic and leader centered dramas reappear in this construct. Such reliance on the romantic illusion, the "happily ever after" ending, tends to stifle critical thought and realistic efforts at human problem solving.

"The Six Million Dollar Man" conveys a set of predominantly inspirational messages to its viewers. A central message is that *human imagination and creativity have no limits*. The premise of the series is grounded in a kind of ultimate faith in the human ability to overcome all limitations. Steve Austin, hero of the series, was a relatively successful astronaut until a nearly fatal accident forced him to lose an eye, an arm, and both legs. The government intervened; Steve was transformed into a bionic man at a cost of six million dollars. He can run 60 miles an hour, he has X-ray and infrared vision, he can leap thirty feet into the air, and he has superhuman strength in his bionic legs and arm. An experiment in human imagination and technology has transformed Austin from a helpless cripple into a quasi-mechanical superman. Only human choice, we are led to believe, can preclude us from employing technology in more creative and imaginative ways.

The series further suggests that *technology aids and may also be complementary to the human condition*. As a bionic man, Steve is a perfectly balanced biological and engineering construct. Human

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creativity is retained and transformed into a more viable and usable structure. Technology is thus cast as a more constructive means for carrying out the human intent. Implicitly, a promise of immortality and physical perfection is associated with technology in the series.

Humans may ultimately exercise absolute control of their environment, we are told by the series. Steve's bionic system promises profound and thoroughgoing control of complex environmental forces. Not only can he see; he can see through physical objects with X-ray precision. His speed on the ground enables him to cover territory efficiently without the aid of a vehicle. Moreover, Steve has a superhuman sense, the ability to view and detect heat without the use of touch. Violent or forceful environmental factors are negated by virtue of his superhuman strength. While Steve cannot fly unassisted, his leaps are of such size that flying seems but one "step" away in the evolution of human technology. The series implies, then, that control of the environment is not far away.

Such messages, while initially incredible assertions, gain force when placed in the context of a dramatic myth. Mythical drama involves universal struggles such as the quest for absolute truth or beauty, or for a permanent peace, or the conflict between good and evil. Both sacred and timeless issues are at stake; the mythical drama possesses, as a result, ritualistic and dreamlike qualities. In the classical myth, the source of the form, the hero possesses skills or knowledge which others do not have; the hero has supporters who also may have special powers; the hero engages in a long, unknown, and difficult journey which ultimately establishes the hero as unique in his search for a precious object or significant goal; the hero must do battle with guardians of the object or forces preventing him from reaching the goal.

In the mythical drama, pollution is a product of a set of circumstances beyond human control, unreasoned or overwhelming human or superhuman strength, or a profound ideological or religious conflict which admits of no compromise. In one of the shows surveyed here, for example, Steve's counteragent is an indestructible, self-protecting computer set to initiate a nuclear war automatically in the context of tense Soviet-American relations. To complicate matters further, an earthquake has both disrupted the timing of the computer and closed off circuits

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essential to shutting down the computer. These circumstances generate a set of supernatural problems. Blame for these events cannot be placed on any human agent; guilt is beyond the limits of humans. Purification requires the strength, intelligence, and virtue of a mythical Hercules or Jason, willing to undertake a dangerous journey operating, at best, with the aid of a select few who complement the hero's power. No predictable set of purifying acts exists; the hero's real powers may, in fact, surface only during the struggle itself. To get to the computer, Steve must, for example, pass through an underground research center which has been designed to protect itself; this center has been blown up and all its mechanisms are unpredictable. The hero alone controls the purification stage of the drama. Redemption occurs when the hero has accomplished the task and others are able to speak of the efforts employed to eliminate the pollution.

While the skills of the mythical hero and the completeness of the ritual vary from drama to drama, only a few popular television series today employ even a variation of the mythical drama as the central vehicle to convey certain messages to the viewers; "Planet of the Apes" and "The Night Stalker" do contain some of the elements. In the past, various series such as "Superman" have also employed the form; generally at least one representative is found on television during any given time period. Problems which arise from overemphasis on the concept of the mythical hero seem too obvious to belabor; they relate clearly to the issues raised with respect to the romantic hero. The fact that the mythical drama does not appear extensively on television does suggest that our times are perhaps not conducive to the messages presented in such a form. The significance of this phenomenon is certainly worthy of further, in-depth speculation.

We readily acknowledge that popular television series function as entertainment; we have sought to offer an equally important but different conception of such programs. Essentially, we have suggested that such series are persuasive communications. As acts of communication, they represent choices about what to say and what not to say. Such choices reveal value judgments about what is important as well as what is "good" or "bad." The dramatic forms controlling popular television series reinforce the tendency to highlight value judgments, since statements delineating "good"

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and "bad" are inherent in such forms and are revealed in plots, characters, settings, and themes. The messages conveyed to the viewers and the values they reinforce become credible because of the form and the content controlling each series. Form and content thus determine how values can subtly and effectively be conveyed to audiences.

While we may wish that we could dismiss such issues altogether, to do so is to ignore factors affecting thoughtful and insightful decision making. Therefore, we have been concerned primarily with the substantive relationships among popular television series, values, and communicative forms and content. We have argued that an intimate relationship exists among these three variables: television series function as persuasive acts of communication altering or reenforcing value systems.

One concluding methodological note regarding the interrelationship between content and form: early in our analysis, by way of our critical matrix, we suggested that content and form *could* be meaningfully related to reveal the persuasive styles of television series; in concluding, we would offer an even more powerful hypothesis—*content controls form and form controls content*. As we considered series after series, we were ultimately able to predict the content of a show if we knew its form; if we had determined the form, we could make reasonable estimates about the kinds of principles that would be conveyed on the show. Such an hypothesis clearly requires more direct assessment with appropriate methods; we believe we have provided a suitable heuristic base for this type of investigation.

MICHAEL J. ARLEN

THE MEDIA DRAMAS OF NORMAN LEAR

I have been trying to figure out what is so fascinating about the comedies of Norman Lear. Right now, six of Mr. Lear's shows are being broadcast every week to a prime-time audience: "All in the Family," "Maude," "Good Times," "The Jeffersons," "Sanford and Son," and "HOT L BALTIMORE." The first five programs named are currently among the dozen most popular programs in the nation, while the sixth, and newest, "HOT L BALTIMORE" (the title refers to the Hotel Baltimore, a riffraffy version of "Grand Hotel"), after just six weeks, has received a warm reception, despite a degree of wariness on the part of network-affiliate stations, several of which appear to think that in populating his run-down inn so freely with prostitutes, homosexuals, and other social misfits Mr. Lear may have been pushing his gift for jokey topicality farther than the mass audience will bear. Even so, it's probably a good bet that roughly a hundred and twenty million Americans watch Norman Lear comedies each week—which adds up to a total of roughly five billion viewers every year. Perhaps what is most fascinating about Mr. Lear's œuvre is the dimensions of its success, for he seems to be one of those ordinary but uncommon figures who come along every so often in our mass-entertainment culture and manage to

Michael Arlen is television critic for *The New Yorker*. This essay is reprinted from *The New Yorker* (May 10, 1975) by permission. © 1975 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

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achieve—more or less single-handed and with the appearance of naturalness—what tens of thousands of business geniuses and consumer theoreticians spend half the energies of the Republic vainly striving after; namely, a “feel” for what the public wants before it knows it wants it, and the ability to deliver it.

What is *not* so fascinating about Lear programs is easier to determine. Surprisingly, they are not very funny, for the most part, which is to say that the level of acting—at least, the stage presence of the actors—is generally of a higher order than the humor in each show: the jokes and joke situations. The humor is not bad, but it certainly isn’t brilliant. “In my building, the roaches are so big that the crunch drowns out the television.” And “Deep down, you know, he respects you.” “Yes, but I don’t want to dive that deep.” On the whole, there are few unusual comedy routines in Lear comedies, and there has been virtually no introduction or creation of striking new comedy characters, with the possible exception of Archie Bunker, in “All in the Family,” who was transplanted from the successful BBC series “Till Death Us Do Part,” and, in any case, derives from a mass-entertainment cartoon that stretches back from William Bendix and Wallace Beery to Sancho Panza and Shakespeare’s Pistol. And even Bunker, who has most of the best lines in his show, is given an overabundance of easy malapropisms: “Salivation Army,” “Let him who is without sin be the rolling stone,” “‘Pilferers will be prosecuted’ means ‘Queers stay out of the men’s room.’” In fact, much of the aura of comedy in Lear shows (as in other television comedy programs, with the exception of Carol Burnett’s) derives from television’s electronic institutionalizing of the old theatrical claque: the sound track of taped audience laughter, which rises and falls, whoops, giggles, and shrieks, taking on a blurry identity of its own, like a lunatic Greek chorus, and nudging the isolated viewers into an impression of high spirits.

If the level of humor in Lear comedies is routinely professional—which in itself wouldn’t be unusual, save for the enormous success of the programs—what is more visible is the level of anger. For, while the sound track is laughing, the characters in Lear comedies are mainly snarling. Again, Archie Bunker stands as the prototype of the Lear angry-man character. When Bunker first appeared on American screens, in 1971, representing the politi-

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cally and socially threatened silent-majority blue-collar worker, his outbursts on politics and race were taken as quaintly liberating and timely. They also had a specific quality and direction to them: blacks moving into the neighborhood, or being hired at a nearby factory. For some time now, though, Bunker's anger has become random—a random musical note that is methodically sounded by the script as it travels through each half hour. It is an accepted form of stage business. In a recent episode of "All in the Family," for example, within a space of about fifteen minutes Bunker snarled and mugged such lines as "What's the stink in the oven? What kinda animal you cookin' in there?" (It's a fish.) "So, Irene is a Catholic. That means I gotta pay for *her* mistakes?" (Irene leaves.) "Whadda I care if she leaves. She's not my guest, she's your guest." "C'mon, throw the fish on the table!" "Don't stay in there—c'm here! Move it!" "Listen to this, Commie pinko!" "Let me remind you of something, Meathead!" "Yeah, Dingbat, I'm talkin' to you in English!" "Get in, get in. Just put your keyster in the chair and shut your mouth." If Bunker's anger has settled in as a conventional *shtick*—like Groucho Marx's walk or Jack Benny's stinginess—it has also been picked up and incorporated into all the other Norman Lear shows, and, for the most part, with the same quality of randomness. On "Sanford and Son," which was transplanted from "Steptoe and Son," another BBC series (about two Cockney junk dealers), Fred Sanford is an irascible and bullying black man—often with only the sound track and the vaudeville mugging to tell one that the show is a comedy. In a recent episode, Sanford was waiting for the arrival of his younger sister and her new "mystery" husband. First, he wanted his truck. "Where's our truck?" he asked angrily. "Julio borrowed it," said his son, referring to a Puerto Rican neighbor. Sanford grimaced broadly and slammed his fist on a table. "Now, you gone got *Puerto Rican* all over our truck!" The taped audience erupted in laughter, the joke presumably being that it *was* a joke. Then the married sister appeared with her new husband—a white man. The audience giggled apprehensively but delightedly as the husband—a soft, droll figure—sidled warily into the room, unseen by Sanford. Time passed and Sanford still didn't notice him. Then he mistook the man for a taxi-driver. Then, finally introduced to and embraced by the new brother-in-law, he went into an elaborate

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and energetic sequence of grimaces and double takes, crashing about the room in a fury that was again comic mainly in the laughter of the unseen audience. "How come you're lookin' that way?" Sanford's sister said to him, feeding the line. "I just got hugged and kissed by a Snow-Whitey," replied Sanford. Afterward, he called the white husband "Mr. Intermarry," "Paleface," "Honky," "Color-Blind," and "The White Tornado," each one to bursts of applause from the tape; indeed, the only purpose or reality of the white husband's existence seemed to be as a butt for Sanford's jokey snarls.

Anger as stage business runs through nearly all Norman Lear's comedies, but it is a curious, modern, undifferentiated anger, provoking laughs from the sound track, and providing the little dramas with a kind of energizing dynamic—sometimes the only dynamic. At the beginning of an episode of "The Jeffersons," George Jefferson enters his new apartment already angry—vaguely and generally angry. Maude, in "Maude," appears to be angry at Walter, in one particular instance, for eating too much, but clearly—clearly to the audience—she is just *angry*: it is a state of being, interrupted periodically by stage-business jokes or stage-business sentiment, or sometimes stage-business problems. What is notable here is that anger in a Norman Lear comedy isn't something isolated or set apart—as with, say, Sheridan Whiteside in George Kaufman and Moss Hart's "The Man Who Came to Dinner," or in the traditional routines of "insult comedians." It has become part of the spirit of the occasion, like music in a musical comedy. Also, as with the characters themselves, who, despite their fits of problem-solving and self-awareness, return each week to the same unserial starting point, it is a rage that rarely extends much into the future, or even into the present. An individual outburst of temper may sometimes produce a concrete result, such as the disruption of a dinner, but for the most part these acts of the new anger are strangely actionless, and, in any case, are soon automatically defused and retracted. King Lear's rage has travelled, by way of Sheridan Whiteside's irritability, into the release-rhetoric of the psychotherapist's waiting room.

Modern, psychiatrically inspired or induced ambivalence may, indeed, be the key dramatic principle behind this new genre of popular entertainment. A step is taken, and then a step back. A

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gesture is made and then withdrawn—blurred into distracting laughter, or somehow forgotten. This seems especially true in the area of topicality—topical themes—which is supposed to be where Mr. Lear's chief contribution to new forms of comedy lies. For it is in Norman Lear comedies that the mass-entertainment public has first been persuaded to deal regularly with serious contemporary social subjects such as racism ("All in the Family"), alcoholism ("Maude"), black middle-class striving ("The Jeffersons"), and black lower-class problems ("Good Times"), and with a hodge-podge of traditionally unacceptable social and sexual situations ("HOT L BALTIMORE"). With or without the help of contemporary trends, what Mr. Lear has done in this regard is no mean achievement. He has taken a lot of the subjects that people privately talked or thought about, in between watching game shows, detective shows, and stand-up comedians, and put those subjects into mass-entertainment programming. His shows don't explicitly claim to be constructive or dogmatic, although the writers (and presumably Mr. Lear) are not averse to throwing in periodic doses of social democracy, but they do implicitly claim to be topical.

As things work out, though, it is a curious kind of topicality. The subject seems to be there—for instance, financial problems stemming from the recession, in a recent episode of "Maude"—but the actuality of the subject soon dissolves into the texture of the aforementioned vague anger, or else into a new type of ambivalence, which has been effected by employing fast cutting and the claque sound track. For example, in a recent episode of "HOT L BALTIMORE" the main drama concerned the breakup of a long-standing homosexual ménage involving two hotel tenants—the middle-aged George and Gordon, with George clearly the "wife" in the pair—as a result of George's decision to spend two evenings out of each week studying law. Interestingly, the roles of George and Gordon were cast with a fair amount of sympathy and contemporary realism; at least, the actors and their parts were several cuts above the traditional mass-entertainment depiction of limp-wristed effeminacy à la Billy De Wolfe. The tilt of the drama—rather more a vignette—seemed human, and even serious, but then the mood would suddenly shift, almost in mid-dialogue, into an old-timey gag or a cheap laugh played off the

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invisible audience. At one point—supposedly a key moment—the youthful and well-intentioned but dopey hotel manager appears on the scene to try to patch things up between the two separating roommates. The scene requires him to shake hands with George. George, quite dignified, extends his hand. The camera cuts to the hotel manager mugging his straight-arrow distaste. Then we see George, playing it seriously. Then back to the hotel manager, alternately rolling his eyes, shuffling his feet, and continuing to mug he-man embarrassment while the sound track variously giggles, sniggers, guffaws, and breathes a chorus-like sigh of relief when the handshake is finally consummated. What seemed unusual about the scene was that the other actors onstage were directed to play it seriously. In other words, the caption on the picture, so to speak, said that we were watching a human, realistic, albeit comedic treatment of a contemporary "social problem," but in fact the figures in the portrait were dissolving into images of our own (and perhaps their creator's) anxieties and ambivalences: into a caricature of the homosexual's role in our society, which the "caption" was attempting to deny. Similarly, in a recent episode of "The Jeffersons" the dramatic vignette concerned a tenants' party in the family's new apartment, in a predominantly white, upper-middle-class building, which George Jefferson had decided to give in order to show off to his neighbors and impress an important white banker with his cultivation. Predictably, the party was a social disaster. A funny "colored maid" went screaming around the room. When an effete, English-type tenant asked for "a Scotch—neat," one of the Jeffersons said, "Don't worry, you'll get a clean glass." George Jefferson had ordered, sight unseen, a grand piano, which none of the family could play, and it was delivered into the middle of the living room, so that everybody tripped over it. And so forth. But none of the people onstage batted an eye. If the real point of the story was that the Jeffersons were pushy, *arriviste*, inept, but unfortunately *there*—in fact, were uppity—it was not a point acknowledged, or even touched upon, except very slightly, by the rest of the cast. There were no haughty looks and contemptuous sneers from the other posh tenants—the way the ritzy people used to look at Charlie Chaplin when he stumbled into the wrong salon. The only way you'd know that the party was an embarrassment was from the sound track, which, with its

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shrieks and giggles at the awkward moments, keyed the real audience: Yes, the Jeffersons *are* uppity. We can't say it too loud, because that would be wrong. In fact, we're going to play it on the level with those other stage tenants, perhaps—Lord knows—encouraging real tenants somewhere to play it on the level with real Jeffersons. But in the meantime let's let our anxieties and ambivalences work up the real drama, and let's have a laugh.

Even so, if what could mainly be said of Norman Lear's comedies was that they were on the cheap side, playing serious topical subjects for easy laughs—with a few jokes and snarls and much professional expertise thrown in—that wouldn't be very new or very interesting, and I don't think it would account for Mr. Lear's enormous success. It may well be that Lear does more with topical humor than comedians and comedy writers before him have done, but topicality isn't his invention, nor is exploiting it a new device, recently discovered. Indeed, American mass-entertainment producers have exploited audience "seriousness" for generations, as with the *Classics-comics* pageantry of Cecil B. De Mille, or with Stanley Kramer's "message" films, or with "The Defenders" on television, or even with the slick good-think of the Smothers Brothers and the political wisecracks of Bob Hope and "Laugh-In." Topicality doesn't really seem to be what Mr. Lear does best—nor does comedy seem to be his strongest card. After watching a great many of Mr. Lear's six shows this past season, I suspect that what is most fascinating about the works of Norman Lear is that they are our first true "media" dramas.

Consider briefly how American mass-audience comedy has evolved in the past fifty years. For much of this time, comedy—both in print and onstage—was trapped within the joke: the one-liner, the two-liner, the set piece, the funny bit. From these beginnings, with the joke presented as separate or disconnected from ordinary life, came the more expansive—albeit still disconnected—narrative joke or funny story: "Nothing but the Truth"; "Bringing Up Baby"; "Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein." On television, the funny story survives in such now old-fashioned programs as "Hogan's Heroes" or "Gilligan's Island" (as, indeed, vaudeville one-liners still survive with Bob Hope), but, for the most part, during the last generation television—as if it had prenatally digested "The Pickwick Papers" or at least "Life with

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“Father”—has expanded humor from the isolated joke into the so-called family comedy. In “I Love Lucy” and “The Honeymooners” and “The Beverly Hillbillies” and countless other shows, the surface emphasis was still on jokes—Lucy finds a wallet, wins a contest, loses a handbag—but the joke sector of life had been enlarged to include not merely a comedian onstage talking about farmers’ daughters but much of ordinary family life, if a rather stylized version of it. Lucy at first was not a real woman, although she had many of the appurtenances of a real woman—modest house, noisy kitchen, gossipy neighbors—but she ended up actually having babies and bringing up children. More recently, Dick Van Dyke and then Mary Tyler Moore expanded the terrain of family comedy further, replacing the home family with the job family, and fashioning, as in the case of the current “Rhoda” and “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” more or less “real” people to go with the “real” problems and comedy situations. Still, “Mary” and “Rhoda” have remained by and large in the conventional mold of families dealing with *family* situations—either home family situations, such as boyfriends or dieting or mothers-in-law, or job family situations, such as office misadventures or employment rivalries.

The comedies of Norman Lear are probably new in that they seem to depend mainly neither on jokes nor on funny stories, nor even on family—although they often give the appearance of depending on all three—but on the new, contemporary consciousness of “media.” By this I mean that the base of the Lear programs is not so much the family and its problems as it is the commonality that seems to have been created largely by television itself, with its outpouring of casual worldliness and its ability to propel—as with some giant, invisible electric-utility feeder line—vast, undifferentiated quantities of topical information, problem-discussions, psychiatric terminology, and surface political and social involvement through the national bloodstream. Thomas Jefferson, it is said, wrestled for a lifetime with the dark, felt concerns of intermarriage and miscegenation, and it is high time that Americans should be able to deal freely and rationally with such historically taboo matters. Now in the space of a single week, in two Norman Lear shows, the subject of mixed marriage twice breezes blithely by, accompanied by the usual defusing jokes and

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the laughter of the sound track. Have we come this far so suddenly? In which case, who are *we*? Doubtless we are the same people who, as informed adults and media children, discuss, with all the appearance of passion and involvement, events that have occurred in places we have no knowledge of and had no previous interest in, and with implications we have rarely examined, or tried to connect backward or forward to other events—but events that now sit there and *exist* in the new consciousness in the manner of found objects, tuned into by interested and uninterested parties alike.

Mr. Lear is surely not the first explorer to have stumbled on this pool of media-informed consciousness, but he is the first man, as far as I can tell, to have so formally and so successfully tapped it for the purposes of mass entertainment. It is perhaps not a step higher, but it is a step forward. Ancient drama, one might say, was concerned primarily with the act as act—as the dynamic of drama. Modern drama has gradually interposed motive and guilt as the kinetic forces. Now, maybe, we are treading dizzily into a new phase, where both act and motive have blurred or receded and what we are left with onstage (or onscreen) is the strange dynamic of a ubiquitous, unfeeling, unknowing, discursive collective consciousness. Beginning with the comedies of Norman Lear—as Aristophanes might have been the first to appreciate—we have finally been plugged in to our own Talk Show: connected to nothing except the assumption of being connected to something, which for the time being appears to be our new bond and our new family.

PHILIP WANDER

COUNTERS IN THE SOCIAL DRAMA: SOME NOTES ON "ALL IN THE FAMILY"

"All in the Family" is obviously more than just another television series. With an audience in the tens of millions, continuing critical acclaim, and a willingness to treat controversial issues, it is a cultural "event" and a source of considerable influence on modern society. As a rhetorical document, "All in the Family" works to sustain fundamental myths about American society, contains conflicts which threaten to disrupt it, and provides a comic frame through which even its most telling failures may still be integrated. The "family" is a pivotal symbol. Through it we are, as individuals, invited to see ourselves once again as part of a larger social unit, a collective more ancient and more immediate than state or nation. The family is the primal unit. "All in the Family," however, does not establish relations by blood alone. Even neighbors belong. An old man on the street after a fire who decides not to return to the home for the aged becomes part of the family, an honorary grandparent. America, one of the founding myths holds, includes all peoples, all races, all religions, the young, the old, the Black and the White, Catholic and Jew. This is an article of faith in "All in the Family," *all of us are of the family.*

Another fundamental myth of American society, one likely to

Philip Wander teaches in the Speech-Communications Department at California State University, San Jose. This essay is reprinted from *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (Spring 1975), by permission of the publisher.

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be questioned during periods of economic depression, is the belief that anyone, through hard work, honesty, and perseverance, can get ahead. Michael Stivick, young, lower middle class, Polish boy has moved out of his class by reason of his education and his culture. The liberal middle-class attitudes he apparently learned through higher education. It is this same liberal ethos which gives Lionel Jefferson, the young Black living next door to the Bunkers, hope to move ahead of his parents, who, in turn, have moved up out of Harlem into the Bunker neighborhood. Archie himself, however, can rise no higher in the social order. He is frozen, not only because of his job on the loading dock (which offers no prospect for advancement) but because of his unwillingness to share in the culture of the upward bound. He is victimized by material circumstance; he victimizes himself in his perverse view of the world.

Human worth is not judged solely by material and cultural achievement. There is one's spiritual condition. Within the "Family," it is Edith who symbolizes spiritual transcendence in the face of oppression, stupidity, and economic stagnation. True her ascent wobbles at times, her dumb stare into the murkiest complexity becomes evidence of a kind of mystical experience allowing her to transform ugly paradox into beautiful and compelling simplicity. Irene, her next door neighbor, sits over the kitchen table wondering for a moment about Edith's sanity, but senses the benevolent glow Edith passes over everything even in the face of the most obtuse personal rejection. Edith—who runs to the door to kiss her husband and give him a hug at the end of the day, each time to be rebuffed by Archie who seems embarrassed by any but the most belligerent emotions. Edith—who treads over logic, circumstance, and habit to affirm a humanity not to be denied even in the realization that she purchases this sublimity through consigning herself to a lifetime of domestic drudgery.

"All in the Family" is a tragi-comedy. Archie and Edith, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, settle slowly to the bottom, Archie resplendent in his resolution not to admit any sign of decay, measuring all others against what he believes he acquired by right of birth; Edith playing out the role fate seems to have given her, trying through love to hold together what little remains and encouraging in fumbling, ineffectual gesture of what ought to be,

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a sort of domesticated Jane Addams, cheerful in the slums. At times she is stricken with the most penetrating insight. She asks Mike: "Do you know why Archie picks on you so? Because he's jealous of you. Archie ain't going nowhere. He never had the chance you had, and it hurts him." The lower middle-class, uncertified WASP whose feelings of superiority regularly crunch into social reality flails about in a gloom relieved only by the utter gracelessness of the flailing. The upwardbound lower middle class Blacks, the Jeffersons next door, follow a similar pattern. Mr. Jefferson is not moving much further and consolidates his gains, his flight from his impoverished Black world, and the punishment of a White-dominated social structure, through a belief in Black superiority. Mrs. Jefferson, like Edith, is the saintly presence in the Jefferson household. More assertive, more worldly and practical than Edith, still she binds her world together with love, dragging her man snorting and bawling into the light.

Each character on the "Family" is a counter in a larger reality of social conflict: White racist, Black racist, non-violent White saint, non-violent Black saint, young White liberal, young Black liberal, woman's liber, domestic slave, middle age reactionary, middle age liberal. Archie, the prototype male chauvinist; Irene who fixes appliances, hustles pool, married to Frank who does the cooking and the housework. Archie, uptight heterosexual, and his friend, a pro-football player, an avowed, happy homosexual. "All in the Family" is encounter writ large. Symbolic worlds press in on one another in face-to-face conversation creating a space in which to explore the personal experience of social conflict. But no matter how serious the clash, there are definite rules under which it takes place. *All conflict is non-violent.* Bunker and Jefferson may puff themselves into the most threatening creatures, but they never reach for a weapon or throw a punch. Conflict is softened, either through outright compromise, making good the counterfeit twenty dollar bill Archie unwittingly passed off on Jefferson to pay a cleaning bill, or through comic relief, Archie the complete butt of all the preceding, allowed at the close to sit in his chair sputtering "dingbat" at his hapless wife who seems to enjoy even this little attention. As a rule, *all political and social views are balanced.* No one character or point of view is allowed to dominate. No matter how perverse a view, its negation will be voiced; thus, no

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one in the audience need feel that his or her opinions have been silenced. In each show *there is always a sense of tolerance*. Redneck, fag, racist, pinko-liberal, no one counter is portrayed as hateful. At its worst a counter becomes ludicrous, not evil. Archie, delivered of one of his racist comments, immediately plays the fool; he mispronounces a word, overlooks the most obvious facts, contradicts what he had said only moments before. Dramatically the transaction goes: illiberal tirade to folly to failure. Even the bigot is merely absurd.

But while bigotry is continually satirized within the "Family," the question which must be asked is: how do those of us who hunger to hear our point of view expressed on television respond to Archie's telling of it? Do we hear Mike's stunning rejoinder, or is it not quite so stunning, perhaps only a bit of white noise in between what really counts? Is Mike's response clinching for one audience and merely a temporary annoyance for another which has at last had its view of the world legitimized by the media? The enormous popularity of the "Family" suggests that it may function as a giant ink blot in the media allowing us to read into the drama what we will. The success of the enterprise may lie in part in allowing each counter to speak in the vernacular of the sub-culture, social class, ethnic group, he or she represents. There is some evidence which bears on this question. In the Winter, 1974, issue of the *Journal of Communication*, there appears an article by Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach entitled, "Archie Bunker's Bigotry." These writers surveyed some two hundred students attending a small mid-western high school. One of the questions they asked was, "Generally speaking, at the end of the program does Archie win or lose?" Forty percent of the respondents thought Archie won. When the respondents were divided on the basis of a personality inventory into high prejudice and low prejudice groups, the results were even more disturbing. Among the high prejudice group, when asked to choose between Mike and Archie, who do you like or admire, 38% said they liked Archie. When asked about the use of ethnic slurs, 22% of this group said they did not think the practice was wrong. Yet there was some encouraging information. Again among the high prejudiced group, when asked whether Mike or Archie made better sense, 10% thought Archie, 44% thought Mike made better

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sense. Among the low prejudiced group on the same question, only 3% chose Archie, while 43% chose Mike. The authors also asked, "In 20 years will your attitudes and values be most similar to Archie or to one of the other main characters?" Among the low prejudiced, 7% and among the high prejudiced 16% thought they would hold attitudes and values similar to Archie's; 39% and 37% of these two groups thought they would be nearer the values and attitudes of other characters on the show. Vidmar and Rokeach's findings suggests that satirical control of even the most outrageous opinions on television does not automatically inform viewer response.

"All in the Family" raises social issues, but does not offer political solutions. Instead it offers a frame within which to understand social conflict. It aims at enlightenment, and as Kenneth Burke reminds us in his book *Attitudes Toward History* the "progress of humane enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as vicious, but as mistaken. When you add that people are necessarily mistaken, that all people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that every insight contains its own special kind of blindness, you complete the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of great tragedy" (p. 41). The comic frame, of course, has its limitations. In the interest of political stability, we may turn away from conflict and pass our time watching the parade, each person an actor, this one lamenting, that one angry, the one over there shouting obscenities, each moving toward the inevitable end. This is a compelling and relatively safe vision in troubled times. The critic, in the comic frame, becomes a spectator following the peculiarities of the actors in the train. The stuff of this vision is the peculiar, the odd, the absurd gesture or character trait. The stuff of comedy is eccentricity, of tragedy human suffering. Suffering is talked about in the "Family"; it is no small triumph that the issues raised week after week on the "Family" have to do with racial and sexual discrimination, problems of aging, and the inadequacies of big government. The Lucy we all loved in the 1950s was transfixed by get-rich-quick schemes, jealousy, and domestic conspiracy. Yet the problems on "All in the Family" come serially, a cause a week, disembodied, frustrating, ultimately unfathomable. In the end these problems become like fate itself, indestructible, a test of our

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personal qualities. The proper response is not political; it would be naive to think that American television would tolerate a series which would advocate specific solutions to social problems. The heroes on network series tend to be quite orthodox; dozens are members of law enforcement agencies. The interest in most shows has been the identification and correction of social deviant, whether it be the childish error or social *faux pas* in family shows, or the actual violation of law in the legal melodramas. I do not recall any series, for example, in which the hero organizes political rallies. Perhaps it just wouldn't sell. Instead of political activity there emerges the pale promise of personal salvation if one will only feel the right feeling, rail the proper rail, make the appropriate donation. "All in the Family" has come to be a secular Sunday school, gently exhorting us to do right, hinting at a better world if we will only lovingly persevere in what we are already doing.

And as in Sunday school, everything is purified, softened about the sharper edges. A Jewish activist dies off stage in a bombed car. The only casualty. A few statistics, a little righteous indignation, but no bodies, no malnutrition, no spittle dribbling down the chin of someone making a meal out of a can of cat food. The eighty-year-old "grandfather" does a dance, tells charming fables, is altogether active and inspiring. It is important that our elders appear on television in roles other than as shills for pain killers, laxatives, and denture adhesives. But "All in the Family's" resolution of the problems of the aged in American society is instructive: if only old folks would move in with one another, resolve not to get married, so as to save on their Social Security checks, and get a little help from the Edith Bunkers of the world, they could make it. If only good liberals can climb to the top of the pyramid, emerging out of graduate schools to teach the young, to man and woman the technosstructure, to appreciate the sacrifices their fathers made while they attended school, to look after them in their old age, to convey a new world to their children; this is the pious hope of "All in the Family." The people at the cleaners, down at the local bar, living in the house next door share with us a common vision of humanity. We are different; we do disagree; we even shout at one another. But we are all members

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of the family of man. And this vision is available to all of us at least once a week, on CBS.

Taking the notion of family in its ordinary social meaning, that of father, mother, children, living and working together, it becomes clear that "All in the Family," along with the other family shows on television, relate realities of economic life. All is nostalgia. One may sit on the 20th floor of an office building and hum along with John Denver, "I'd rather be a cowboy; I'd rather ride the range." But the range is gone, the sky is blackened, and the buffalo don't roam down Wilshire Boulevard. The American family is not quite that rare a beast, but in some tract housing areas in California the divorce rate is 80%. The extended family is almost as rare as a clear, sunshiny day. Television does look back. Most of us are, I suppose, wistful in our living rooms. But the Bunkers, as a family, serve a somewhat different purpose, and for that reason do not invoke the family myth nearly as well as "The Waltons."

The difference between these two series is, when we think about it, obvious. There is no counterpart to Archie Bunker on the Waltons. Why? Because Archie is wholly unfit to raise children. This is precisely the point at which satire would lapse into tragedy. The attempt by Archie and for that matter, Edith, to raise a small child, conveying, if only by example, their own attitudes and values, would be pathetic. We can accept Archie because he is not persuading others, because he is completely boxed in, laughed at, frustrated, ridiculous in his graspings at lapel-flag solutions. Gloria exhibits virtually none of Archie's influence. She is the ideal synthesis of Archie's will and Edith's compassion. She never shows any of the strain of having her father raging deep inside her own psyche. She never reminds us of Archie's ugliness, his pounding and shouting and instilling his grotesque world into the young. There are no children in "All in the Family," at least none who can be or have been bent out of shape.

Still, after we have vented our liberal spleen on poor old Archie, and after we register our objections to his belligerence, insensitivity, his inability to love or relate beyond a blustery wave, there is something which raises him above the villain and the fool. Above all, Archie is indomitable. He goes to the loading dock every day

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knowing that it is hard work, and that it will be a bad day. He asserts his understanding of the world knowing it will be rejected. He keeps on coming, a corpulent, slower, middle aged, bejowled Jimmy Cagney, scrapping against all odds. He will not adapt. And in his unwillingness to change, Archie serves both our nostalgia for inner directed individualism in a nation of clerks and our need to believe that this particular species of individualism is dying out. Therefore, we can study its peculiarities, laugh at its outrages, take courage from its imperviousness to economic and social forces so far beyond its control that, in Archie's variation, it can only be maintained through a binding of illusion, delusion, and barbarity. Still there he stands, genus Americanus, circa 1850, the pioneer spirit in modern times.

CAROL TRAYNOR WILLIAMS

IT'S NOT SO MUCH,
"YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY"—
AS
"YOU'RE GONNA MAKE IT
AFTER ALL"

As Mary Tyler Moore goes, so goes the nation. —MAUDE

The genre "sitcom" is both popular and significant as TV art and as documentary of our time. Among sitcoms, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* is one of the most significant, as revealed by its subject matter and the ideas, values and feelings it expresses about that subject matter. This show, and its form, has changed considerably since its beginning in the 1970-71 season, and in so doing has expanded the conventions of the sitcom form significantly. Its change in both content and form reveals that the MTM show is a story about women in our time which has expanded its woman's world to encompass, as Maude's neighbor Arthur put it, "the nation."

That these two interests—the show's comic and social values—are not unrelated can be seen in what Carl Reiner and Sheldon Leonard said, not about MTM but about situation comedy, a TV genre they had a lot to do with creating. As far back as 1963, when they were interviewed in *Television Quarterly*, Reiner and Leonard agreed that situation comedies could include "social comments" and "ethical concepts."¹ More important to our study of the form,

¹ All references to Reiner and Leonard are to "Comedy on Television: A

Carol Traynor Williams is on the faculty of Roosevelt University, Chicago. This essay is reprinted from *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. VII, No. 4 (Spring 1974), by permission of the publisher.

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they implied that the term "sitcom" is a misnomer, and that any analysis of *situation comedy* should primarily be analysis of its *characters*. These characters, Reiner said, should be recognizable, representative people, not exotics, and they should be developed with "integrity and consistency." The "laughs," he said, really don't come from situations but from the "interplay" between the characters and situations. In their emphasis on realistic characters and their (cautious) acceptance of serious content, Reiner and Leonard reveal the vital conventions from which MTM grew. But when they define sitcom, they describe MTM only in telling us what it is not. In this, though, they help us see why it stands out.

The key to a successful sitcom, according to Reiner, is the "stand-up comedian" rather than the "comedy actor": an Andy Griffith rather than a Sid Caesar, he said. Too much acting—such as we get from a Caesar—misleads the audience from "the laugh." "I like to load every moment with the possibility for laughs," said Reiner. "If I must have a straight scene it should lead directly to something . . . funny."

Now we are close to a definition of MTM. The highly praised "troupe" that supports the star, Mary Tyler Moore, certainly acts. And each episode contains not only funny scenes but poignant scenes and—most important to this show's unique personality—scenes of interplay between the regular characters which serve the plot not at all, but instead clarify and deepen the relationship between these characters. This sitcom works precisely because it is not the Reiner type series of funny scenes led by a stand-up comedienne, but rather a continuing comic-drama about a group of human beings who are connected to and care about each other, and with whom we are made to feel a connection and concern.

The emphasis is on character—as in *All In The Family* and *M*A*S*H*, it is on socio-political issues and in *The Odd Couple* (etc.), it is on "the laugh." MTM does what the usual prime time TV series, drama or comedy, does not do: it develops character. In most series (except soap operas), the regular characters do not change.² In each episode conflict is introduced, and resolved at the

Dialogue Between Sheldon Leonard and Carl Reiner," in *Television: The Creative Experience; A Survey of Anglo-American Programs*, ed. A. William Bluem and Roger Manvell. (New York: Hastings House, 1967), pp. 96-7, 103.

² See David Feldman, "The Aesthetic of Soap Operas," paper presented at the

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end of the half hour. Suspense comes from how the conflict will be resolved and the series regulars returned to normal. As Paul Monash puts it, "It is very difficult to write good drama when your hero is a repetitious man who does not develop, in terms of himself, over the course of 30 hours in a year."³ In MTM the regulars do change—though slowly, slightly, and only some of them. Mary Richards (Ms. Moore) and Lou Grant (Ed Asner) alone have changed significantly. Mary, especially in the 1973–74 season, has become more professional, independent, competitive, in short, more liberated. Lou, in the 1973–74 recurring complication of his wife's leaving him in order to learn more about herself, is changing from the stereotypical Boss to a vulnerable, appealing human being, learning about himself. But in other episodes Lou is all too often old irascible Lou.

Nor have the other regulars changed conclusively: Murray (Gavin MacLeod), not at all; Rhoda (Valerie Harper), some, a softening; Ted (Ted Knight), a humanizing which suggests both vulnerability and dignity beneath his still active, always comic egomania. Too often though, Ted becomes the silly butt or Rhoda the whiplash, for the sake of "the laugh." Yet all in all, it seems that MTM's creators are pushing against the boundaries of their popular art form, trying to change their regulars from static to dynamic characters. In a recent interview, Ed Asner revealed their anxiety that Lou's separation would hurt their ratings (it hasn't), but he also implied their consciousness that they are expanding sitcom's dimensions: "'We think [the separation story] is a golden opportunity to explore the subject of divorce . . . with someone . . . you see week after week.'"⁴ (Another sign of this consciousness is Lou's final line in the episode where his wife leaves him: "It wasn't going to end like this.")

In normal human fashion—i.e., inconsistently and imperfectly—the MTM company seems to be creating itself as a company *auteur*, expressive in a certain style that expands the conventions of

Popular Culture Association convention, Milwaukee, 1–2 May 1974: an excellent structural analysis of "soaps."

³ Ray Bradbury, David Chandler, Paul Monash and Barry Trivers, "A Writers' Symposium," in *Television: The Creative Experience*, p. 64.

⁴ Bob Rose, "Ed Asner—showing Lou Grant's mild side," *Chicago Daily News*, 10 January 1974, Sec. 4, p. 43, col. 7.

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its popular art form.⁵ That certain style is particularly and essentially a gift for humanizing the stereotypical characters of situation comedy. It is *avant-garde*; it seems trend-setting. (Alan Alda currently characterizes the "humanist philosophy" of *M*A*S*H* in nearly the same words I have used to describe MTM: ". . . the introduction of feeling. . . . [A series now] is less . . . a vaudeville sketch, more . . . a play about believable people."⁶) Even now devotees of MTM will find dated the definition of situation comedy in the volume on popular culture in the Dial Press "American Bicentennial History": Situation comedies "deal in neither sex, nor issues, nor problems, but only laughter."⁷

Only laughter. I checked my opposing conclusions with MTM's "Executive Story Consultant," Treva Silverman (18 March 1974). She confirmed that its creators are a company *auteur*. "Whatever happens, happens spontaneously," she says—I think because this is an extraordinarily like-minded group, led by its original and still totally involved creators, Jim Brooks and Allen Burns, and by producer Ed Weinberger. "There's tremendous self-commitment and personally putting yourself on the line in story conferences," she says. One example: Ms. Silverman (who describes herself as the "tedious," serious one, especially on women's issues) was working with Ed Weinberger on a story about Lou and his wife having a "smashing" fight. She assumed that the episode would end with reconciliation; the only "victory" she hoped for was that the reconciliation would be preceded by Lou's capitulating to Edie's argument. Then Executive Producers Brooks and Burns appeared, and one of them suddenly said, "How about if they don't reconcile?"

And thus was born the Lou-Edie separation. ("I really got a chill down my spine," Treva says.) Will Lou and Edie reconcile? Not

⁵ Although they are a company and not an individual, MTM seems to fit John Cawelti's definition of the *auteur* as a creator "within a framework of . . . conventional structures and commercial imperatives," who nonetheless stamps the conventional with his own "artistic personality" ("An Aesthetic of Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2, Fall 1971, 264).

⁶ Robert Berkvist, "'M*A*S*H' Is His P*A*S*S*I*O*N," *New York Times*, 19 May 1974, Sec. II, p. 19, col. 6.

⁷ Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 412.

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decided—but Ms. Silverman is sure that the answer will come as spontaneously as the separation. She would find it more interesting to keep Lou a separated middle-aged man ("we have Murray for a married man"), but maybe sometime next year, she says, it will seem interesting to show the middle-aged couple trying a second marriage. In any case this momentous question for MTM fans will be decided because someone in the company "gets an idea," or because of boredom. (The reason Ted began to be humanized was that his role as butt got "boring"—and yes, Ms. Silverman agrees that "we're not consistent about Ted's character.")

If all this spontaneity suggests accident rather than artistic design, it also suggests the normal, proper way of creating *for a company*. I asked Treva Silverman if the growing complexity of at least some of the series' regulars was designed, and she implied that that too came spontaneously when she answered by telling me how it began: with the story (which she wrote) about Rhoda's losing weight. This, she said, grew from producer Jim Brook's recognizing how "great" "Val" [Harper] looked after losing weight, and saying, "'we have to do a story about it.'" From this, Ms. Silverman said, grew "awareness that as the actors change, we have to change what they do as characters."

I am certain after my conversation with Treva Silverman that the spontaneous creativity of the MTM company grows from a bedrock of craftsmanship—the deep-down, assumed feel for conventions that sees one character, the married middle-aged man, as the balance for another, the separated middle-aged man. Ms. Silverman noted off-handedly something I had never discovered in the show's design—and if I had, you would probably have thought me pretentious. We have an "abrasive influence," she said, in both "the home" and "the office": this provides "built-in conflict, of course." (The abrasive influence in the office is Ted Baxter; at home it is Phyllis Lindstrom [Cloris Leachman], Mary's and Rhoda's landlady.) Solid craftsmanship supports this series, and humanism makes it soar.

It wasn't always this way with MTM. At the beginning it had one big strike against it: its star seemed a loser as a star. A good wife to Dick Van Dyke, she had subsequently "bombed" (her word) on Broadway and in Hollywood; and for a while, probably

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until 1973 when she finally joined the MTM troupe in winning Emmies, she seemed second (at least) banana on her own show. Partly the problem was her comedy style: "My forte is not being funny, but reacting in a funny way to those around me."⁸ Largely though, it developed from an accident that initially must have surprised Ms. Moore as much as it did the show's viewers: the acting spark that ignited a creative glow among the individuals in the supporting cast and made a company out of them. This *companionship*, still almost unique on TV,⁹ has been critical to the show's character and its success. If we remember Ms. Silverman's report of Jim Brooks' response to Val Harper's losing weight, we can see that as the MTM company came to life it caused the change in the show's emphasis from humor to humanistic values.

At the start MTM had something else going for it even more than its "supporting" actors. That was its concern with an imperative social issue, women's rights. Immediately, critics found Mary a refreshingly "subversive" antidote to Nanny and Carol Brady, and to all the nameless commercial women slaving, bright-smiled, over their waxy floors and greasy ovens. In the show's first two months, to *Life's* surprise as to ours, Mary got herself a job as Girl Friday in Minneapolis TV station WJM's newsroom and served neither coffee nor "her" men's egos. Instead she produced her own program, and even nominated herself for an award.¹⁰ Since then she has gone on grappling with Lou Grant for fair pay, more responsibility, and equal human regard. In a 1973-74 season episode, for example, she gets to hire her first staff person, a sportscaster. She agonizes over the decision, and then when it is made and the new man's first broadcast smoothly accomplished, she bursts out in frustration: so much agony over such a small decision. It is a frustration that speaks to all administrative women, but it is a subtle one, and hence it is important that it climaxes a TV sitcom episode.

⁸ Malcolm McPherson, "MTM and Her All-Star Team," *Newsweek*, 29 January 1973, p. 60.

⁹ *The Bob Newhart Show*, also produced by Mary Tyler Moore Productions, also looks increasingly like the work of a company. As with MTM, the growth of the *Newhart* company seems interlocked with growing realism, complexity and concern with human values in characterization and situations.

¹⁰ John Leonard, "The Subversive Mary Tyler Moore," *Life*, 18 December 1970, p. 8.

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But though women's issues, especially women's professional issues, remain as they have been from the series' inception, an integral part of its "sits," more and more, and especially in the 1973-74 season, other social issues have been added: the generation gap (between Rhoda and her "Ma," who only wants to be her "friend"—and to get her married; and between Mary and her father, whom she suddenly realizes she has never really known); homosexuality and "the affair" (but not among regulars!); and to some extent (compatible with this series' value of human dignity), the sex lives of the regular characters. The main story in 1973-74 has been the middle-aged woman's crisis of identity—and subsequently, her man's crisis. These "social issues" are fundamentally *human* issues, and the key to the change in MTM's content is that they are treated as the concerns of realistically vulnerable human beings. When Edie tells Lou, as she leaves their home after twenty-six years of marriage, that she has leaned on him since she was nineteen and now she needs to know what it's like to be depressed and not have him to fall back on, at this moment she is real—and educational—in a way that jargon such as "crisis of identity," or a militant posture of "liberation," can never be.

The change in MTM from the Reiner "laugh is all" formula to the human comedy is also seen in the relationship between Rhoda and Mary. Critics are still calling Rhoda Mary's "brassy contrast," probably because this is what they expect from sitcom's friendships between women (cf. Ethel Mertz—Vivian Vance—Lucy's neighbor in *I Love Lucy*). In the beginning of MTM this was so, but while Rhoda is still more "tart-tongued" than Mary, in the course of the series the two women have grown more alike.

Mary has toughened: she stammers less; she stands up more to Lou; she acts competitively, at least with other TV stations. But she—Mary Tyler Moore—has also been humanized. From "Goody Two-Shoes" she has grown into that rare thing, the Star who opens herself to ridicule—as in one of the series most startling episodes (from the 1972-73 season), which turns on her facing a public appearance when she has a cold and nothing right to wear (as venerable a plot as you could find in sitcom-land). The climax of this episode is her appearance on the podium in a truly dowdy dress, really lank hair, and really, truly looking sick as she blubbers her troubles into the mike: a scene realistic enough to

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hurt. A Lucy Ball may get a pie in her face; but so far as I know, this MTM episode represented the first time a female TV star portrayed her own humiliation in a realistic story.

As Mary has both toughened and been made vulnerable, Rhoda has softened. She still "bites"—as in the 1973–74 episode in which she tells some twenty-year-olds that *their* nostalgia of the '50's is *her* life. But she has also come to show love for a man, and pain when it ends. "Why do the *honest* people always get clobbered?" her friend Mary cries out at the end of this affair (10 Nov. 1973 episode). It is this friendship between Rhoda and Mary that has most to do with Rhoda's increasing complexity; and it is this also which has made their growing similarity seem natural, and hence go unnoticed. When Ethel and Lucy got together it was always for a laugh, but MTM leaves human space in its half-hour for scenes that do not advance the plot but do establish Mary's and Rhoda's friendship. One has to wonder about the effect of Valerie Harper's leaving next season. But when she goes, there will still be Lou-Ed Asner, like Val Harper, a Paul Sills' veteran, and the other MTM regular who seems to have contributed most to the show's growth.

The transformation of Lou may have begun in a moment in a 1972–73 season episode when he realized he was desirable to a younger, attractive female TV producer. The expression on his craggy, middle-aged face was memorable—wonder, delight, fear, indecision. Then, unforgettably, this caricature, the irascible cynic who until that moment we probably would have expected to make a blundering (and comic) "pass" in this situation, instead spoke haltingly, and with moving realism to all the old-marrieds among his audience, of how he would like to, but he had been married twenty-six years, and fathered three daughters, and this is what it is like to be married, and to be a father, that long.

Since this episode Lou Grant has become increasingly complex. Still too often merely comically gruff, he also appears more humanly mixed up, in need of help, sometimes wise, and fundamentally good. In an episode which can stand as a microcosm of what MTM is becoming (3 Nov. 1973), Lou, after a conventionally farcical mishap, winds up with a blind date who is not the attractive widow Rhoda has promised but her eighty-year-old mother-in-law. His face, when he first sees white-haired, lace-collared, tottering Martha Dudley, is another of his master-

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works, and another of the series' moments almost too painful to watch. But he goes through with the date until at the TV banquet he is forced to introduce Martha to his wife Edie and her handsome, younger escort. At this point he falters: he introduces Martha as Mary's friend. But immediately, he realizes, "What have I just done?"

"Well," Mary answers, "you were in a tough spot."

"Not that tough."

He walks Martha over to Edie, introduces them, and then dances with Martha. In almost any other sitcom, Martha would have fallen asleep in Mary's apartment before the banquet and her daughter-in-law come and take her place as Lou's date. At the very least, Edie would have melted at her husband's gesture to the old lady. In MTM, the act—and the actor—stand alone, as in all decency they should.

Like Lou, the station anchorman Ted Baxter has also grown to surprise us with new likeableness and even dignity. Ted makes us wonder why we like him (or why the station suffers him!), but that we do like him is testimony to Ted Knight's skill, to superior scripts focussing on him (perhaps because of Ms. Harper's imminent leaving), particularly on his need to be respected, and very much to a new character in the 1973-74 season, Georgette (Georgia Engel), the "dumb blonde" with the hidden strength of love, who completely irrationally adores Ted. A typical example of Georgette's subtle force is the Martha Dudley episode, in which it is Georgette who shapes the audience's response to the "old lady." While Lou is still shocked, Georgette (off-camera), accepts her—"dumbly"—and then asks the company enthusiastically and naturally, "Did you know Martha was flower girl at the wedding of Thomas Alva Edison?" (The importance of this is underscored at the end when Lou, reversing his cruelty, introduces Martha to Edie, saying, "Did you know . . . ?")

MTM is far from perfect. One of the regulars, Murray, resists every effort to come to life, lacking even a defined, much less a developing personality. At best he gives hints of being Mary's male counterpart: an unaggressive, sensitive, thoroughly accomplished professional. Such a role would be welcome, but usually Murray is used as the sarcastic "voice" for putting Ted down or the caricature of the milktoast husband or employee. Phyllis is out

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of key—as Treva Silverman says, only "a garbage dump for a lot of negatives." All in all, though, it is a pretty special sitcom, and mainly because of its humanistic values. They transform Georgette's "dumbness," and Ted's; they give rise to Lou's refusal to hurt someone else in order to save face—and not only to his refusal but to the fact that at first he did hurt Martha Dudley, and we saw him do it, and then we saw him realize he had done wrong (at least partly because his friend Mary helped him see), and then we saw him change. It is critical to humanism that its values not be made to look commonplace.

Most of all, these humanistic values shape Mary. Her painful, groping struggle to assert herself as a professional we see. What we don't see, but which is basic to everything she does is her refusal to "assert herself" at the cost of her own dignity or that of any other human being. Love—*companionship*—shapes every MTM episode; it makes us believe when real conflicts are resolved in friendship. Only a company can make that dull virtue, companionship, a value of power and promise at this point in time. The values underlying MTM are all like companionship—superficially unexciting, banal, "old fashioned" (in fact, conservative), and humanistic. They affirm the complexity of every human being; they parade every butt and foil—not just women, not just unmarried women, but eighty-year-old *old* women—and insist (no less stubbornly for their subtlety) that we see their dignity. They achieve their aim, I think, because the complex, sometimes apparently contradictory human characteristics MTM portrays are real human characteristics, and the complex values of human dignity and companionship that underlie and shape the series are real human values that we cherish—perhaps wistfully—beyond all militant fads in "values." It may even be that one reason for the show's growing popularity (a subliminal reason) is that it moves in the conservative direction in which as a society we may be heading.

Harbinger of the future as "conservator," or only fortuitous, skilled craftsmanship, still I am grateful for MTM. Its rueful, hopeful theme song line, "You're gonna make it after all," seems to say it better than the strident, "You've come a long way, Baby." Better, that is, if the human race is going to "make it" along with the women.

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I am indebted to Professor Gary K. Wolfe throughout this paper for a number of ideas relating MTM to TV conventions and popular culture. I am also indebted to Norman Mark, TV critic, *Chicago Daily News*, for history and MTM analysis.

RENATA ADLER

AFTERNOON TELEVISION: UNHAPPINESS ENOUGH, AND TIME

You have to tolerate extremes of hatred and loneliness to follow, Monday through Friday every week, through a still unterminated period of months, the story of an educated man so bitter that he kills himself solely to frame another man for murder. Yet there is an audience of at least six million at two-thirty every afternoon New York time (other times across the country) prepared to watch this plot line, among other plot lines, develop on "The Doctors," a television program of the genre soap opera, or daytime dramatic serial. Whatever else it is, it is no joke. There cannot in all fiction be a purer single act of rage and isolation than this imploded revenge, the carom suicide: no simple murder of somebody else, no murder of somebody else to frame a third, no ordinary suicide that might leave others feeling guilty of some metaphorical murder by neglect. This contriver of his own death to make it look like someone else's literal crime has, in one classic solitary act, detonated incalculable threats in other lives. "The Doctors" plays it out.

For all I know, it happens all the time in life. So many events are quite other events in disguise. But "The Doctors" has a special instance here. It certainly has high tragic possibilities, except that

Renata Adler, former film critic of *The New York Times*, is the author of *Toward a Radical Middle: Eighteen Pieces of Reporting and Criticism* and *Year in the Dark*. This essay is reprinted from *The New Yorker* (February 12, 1972) by permission. © 1972 by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

AFTERNOON TELEVISION: UNHAPPINESS ENOUGH, AND TIME

no one writes high dramas now. In times of mass violent death, individuals in drastic personal straits look tabloid. Most fiction keeps its personal crises low-profile and small; writers with serious claims upon the desperate dramatic themes seem to have crossed further out of tragedy and into melodrama than writers of soaps have crossed going the other way. The term "pop culture," never of much use or elegance, is empty now. There is almost no culture of any other kind. People with a taste or instinct for the arts are thrown back on the classics or must bide their time. The arts, first-rate, second-rate (the creative enterprise is not a horse race, after all), are just not much in evidence. Painting is a kind of caricature: ribbons, billboards, commercials are not simply the inspiration—they are *better* than this incessant, humorless joke that passes through museums and galleries in the name of art. In writing, one would never have found a Kafka on symposiums or on the Johnny Carson show. But, in all the modern strategies of fame, it becomes harder than ever to know where to look.

And then there are the soaps. They are pure plot. Perhaps the grand oral tradition rambled on this way, and then we had the Iliad and the Nibelungenlied. For months, the audience was not told—the characters did not yet suspect—that Dr. Allison killed Dr. Allison. But the audience knew. Everyone knew. It was so in line with the characters and their motives over the last four years, at least, that the only questions were when Dr. Aldrich's murder trial would begin, if it began, and how it would come out. Conviction. Acquittal. Conviction and—perhaps months *later*—acquittal. All this was not conventional suspense. Too much was known. It was more like sustained morbidity and dread. Things were going to get worse before they got better, if they ever did. White housewives, black housewives, children home from school, men unemployed, the aged, the preschool young, the idle, the ladies at the ironing board—there was no telling, even from commercials, who was watching this, except that they were millions, across the country, and that they were, and are, willing to endure what has become the perfected medium of daily, inexorable, and almost unrelieved depression.

It takes about five days to catch on to the plot of a soap opera in apogee. It takes five years for one of these fictions, whose beginnings and ends are as obscure as the first questions of the

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universe, to capture and maintain an audience. There seems to be no reason for whole generations of adults still to have strong, clear memories of Helen Trent and other characters from the radio soaps. Surely we could not have been sick, or otherwise home from school, on so very many mornings, and "amnesia" need not have been our first word of adult pathology. But the television soap operas (the radio ones are now defunct), in addition to being in the afternoon, have brought their stories far closer to home. "As sands through the hourglass," says a voice, over music, each day at the start of a daytime serial, "so are the days of our lives." The program happens to be called "Days of Our Lives." In all the years of the program's logo, the top half of the hourglass has never emptied and the bottom never filled. It is yet another Hundred Neediest Cases of the mind. Fidelity, betrayal, rape, murder, amnesia, alienation, misunderstanding, literal misconception (wives pregnant by their husbands' brothers or by the fiancés of their husbands' sisters), hostages, adoptions, suicides, loves, wars, friendships, deceit, insanity, operations, villains, tea—whose sands and hourglass are these? A lot of people's, evidently. The serial "Search for Tomorrow," which is just now floundering a bit (writers of soap operas burn out, shift programs, lose their touch, endure, go mad, or simply vanish with their own dramatic frequency), has been on television continuously for more than twenty years. The serial "Another World" became so popular and full of plot (also so pressed by N.B.C.'s need for another loved half hour) that it split in two: the old "Another World," at its usual 3 P.M., and "Another World (Somerset)"—later renamed simply "Somerset"—with many of the same characters, at 4 P.M. "The Doctors" itself, at two-thirty, is N.B.C.'s competitor with C.B.S.'s "The Guiding Light," which was once one of the most watched programs in daytime television. No more. "The Doctors" was just a better-written, better-acted epic of despair.

My happiest moment on any of the soaps I have watched with anything like constancy occurred some years ago, when Andrea Whiting, of "Search for Tomorrow," cracked up on the witness stand. Her villainy had been relentless, undiscovered, pathological for years. She had broken the engagement of her son, Len

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Whiting, to Patti Tate. She had refused to divorce her estranged husband, Sam Reynolds, so that he could marry his true love, Joanne Tate, Patti's mother and the program's heroine. Andrea Whiting had been responsible, many years before, for the death by fire of Len's twin. She had blamed the death on her husband, Sam, thereby estranging Sam the father from Len the son. She had tried to kill several people in the intervening years—most recently Sam—but she had contrived to make it look as though Sam had been trying to kill her. Sam was on trial. He was being defended by Doug Martin, the father of Scott Phillips, who was going to marry Lauri Something, the mother of an illegitimate child. Names have little to do with paternity on any of the soaps; few legitimate children, for the most complicated reasons, have their fathers' names. Doug Martin, Scott Phillips' father, was about to marry someone else. Doug had overcome a severe breakdown only recently, and his marriage, his confidence, his relationship with his own son (Scott having just returned from Vietnam) depended on the success of his defense of Sam. Anyway, under questioning by Doug Martin, Andrea cracked up. The truth about the fire death came out, the truth about everything came back, in flashbacks spanning years. Andrea was carried off. I stopped watching for many months, quitting while I was just a bit ahead, I thought. Now it turns out that while I was away Andrea returned. Sam Reynolds is in prison in Africa. Joanne, having gone blind for a while, and thinking Sam dead, has fallen in love with her neurosurgeon. Len's wife, Patti, has had a miscarriage, and his girl, Grace (I can't explain about Grace), had a child and died herself. It is such misery. I'm almost glad the writers are troubled now, with quite other problems I don't care about. Andrea is scheming again. ("Nobody can match Andrea in the scheming department," a C.B.S. plot summary says. I do see that.) I simply don't understand "Search for Tomorrow" now. Some characters seem to be buying a house.

My second-happiest moment on a soap was a mistake. Several years ago, a girl named Rachel had, by the most unscrupulous means, ensnared Russ Matthews, son of one of the most decent families on "Another World." They married. Many months later, a very rich self-made young man called Steven Frame came into town and fell in love with Russ's sister, Alice. Alice Matthews

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loved Steve, too, but so did Rachel (by this time Mrs. Russ Matthews), in her own unscrupulous way. Rachel seduced Steve. She became pregnant, and claimed that the child was Steve's. Her husband, Russ, was, naturally, upset, as was his sister, Alice, who immediately broke off with Steve. For several months, I stopped watching. Then, one recent afternoon (recent in soap terms; that is, around July), when I was on the telephone, I had "Another World" on, with the sound off. The scene was a christening. The characters were Lenore and Walter Curtin (who had a difficult history of their own), a chaplain, a baby, Alice, and Steve. I thought—I truly hoped—that Alice and Steve had been reconciled and married while I was away, and that the child was theirs. All wrong. The baby was Lenore's and Walter's, although Walter had grave doubts on this very point. Alice and Steve were godparents.

Since then, Alice and Steve have really married. I missed that scene, but they have passed their honeymoon, and so I know. Russ and Rachel have divorced. Rachel has remarried—a young man whose business is now being financed by Steven Frame. Russ is engaged to Rachel's new husband's sister. Or he was, until a few sad weeks ago. People have to keep meeting at parties, where there are so many problems about previous marriages and affairs and present babies. Now Rachel's husband has been in a coma and has made sordid revelations about his past. Walter Curtin has vanished, under mysterious circumstances. Lenore has received, by messenger, a scarf. Walter has confessed by phone to the murder, in a jealous rage, of Steve's secretary's former husband, whom he suspected of having slept with his (Walter's) wife, Lenore. Most recently—in fact, tomorrow, as I write this—Walter has died. But on the whole such sudden accelerations of the plot are better on quick, episodic soaps, like "Edge of Night," which are akin to closed, formed, Aristotelian thrillers, which I never watch.

There are moments when some aesthetic things, all art aside, are simply so. People know it, without any impulse or attempt to argue: something is on. Such a moment, years back, protracted over many months, was the Moon Maid episode in the "Dick

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Tracy" comic strip. Long before the slogan "Black is beautiful" appeared in and receded from the news, longer before the astronauts reached the moon, Dick Tracy's son, Junior, returned from the moon with Moon Maid, pleaded with her not to remove her horns or try to conceal them with a beehive hairdo, married her, and delighted in their baby's little horns. The word would not even be "miscegenation" now. Junior was light-years beyond the country's perception of its race problems then. The McCarthy time of "Pogo" was less golden. It was one of those finest hours that "Peanuts," in another key, has sustained over many years with genius consistency. Something was touched.

The same was true for years of the talk shows on television. They were on. They meant something. Now, regardless of Nielsen ratings, watchers, they are off. One knows it. They simply do not matter in the sense they did. It is also true, oddly enough, of television coverage of the news. It had its years and faces. Then it had the instant things it was perfectly designed for: the shooting through the head of a man by the chief of Saigon's national police; the moon landing. Then it lost its purchase on events and, no matter how many people watched it, faded. The anchor man would mention an event, switch to the local correspondent, who would mention it again, then interview its source, who would mention it in his own idiom. No depth, no time, and lots of waste of time. McLuhanism was wrong. The mind needs print. Perhaps the news as captured by TV will matter again. Maybe tomorrow.

The soap operas, which have endured as long as anything in television, have their own rhythms, fade, recur. It was on "Another World," some years ago, that there was a moment—or, rather, nearly a half hour—of dramatic brilliance. It was just after Rachel, still married then to Russ, had slept with Steve and spent a weekend searching for her father. Russ naturally knew that she had been away, but not where or with whom. Suddenly, Russ insisted that he and Rachel pay a call that night on everyone they knew in town—to keep up appearances. Rachel resisted, in her usual sulky way, and then gave in. They made the tour. It was a masterpiece of compression. Russ and Rachel acted out their drama in such a way (by concealing it, and pretending that all was well) that all the other dramas on the program—and they were

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many, and of long standing—were called to mind, as though the audience were going through an Andrea flashback on the witness stand.

They went to visit, for example, Walter Curtin and Lenore. Walter Curtin had been the prosecutor, several years before, in a case in which Missy Fargo was mistakenly convicted of the murder of her husband, Dan. She had married Danny Fargo, in the first place, because Liz Matthews (another unrelenting villainess) had tried to prevent the love match of Missy and Liz's son, Bill. Liz, the mother, had decided at the time that her son, Bill, should marry Lenore, now Curtin but then single and in love with Bill. Bill loved Missy. Lenore loved Bill. Walter loved Lenore. When Danny Fargo was murdered, Liz (the mother), Walter (the prosecutor), and Lenore all had an interest in seeing Missy go to jail. Several years later, Missy was sprung and married Bill. Then Walter, repentant and, anyhow, in love, married Lenore. Liz, the villainess, was hysterically distressed, but she had other lives to wreck, including a long-lost daughter's, and she did.

Russ and Rachel, in their tour, met others—several generations of the Randolph family, for example, and Rachel's mother, Ada, of humble origins but of major significance in solving the Missy case. What had happened since Missy's trial (can I go on with this?) was an interminable rivetting episode in which Lee Randolph, a daughter of the Randolphs (who are related to the Matthews by innumerable ties of blood and misunderstanding), being in love with Sam Lucas, a relative of the humble Ada's, had, under the influence of LSD, killed someone, whose name I don't remember, of the criminal element.

This business of not remembering has an importance of its own, although insanity has replaced amnesia as the soap operas' most common infirmity. The files of the soaps are so sketchy that their history is almost irretrievable. "Laura comforts Susan, and Scott is surprised by a statement from Julie," for example, is N.B.C.'s plot note for the March 13, 1970, "Days of Our Lives." And "Nick and Althea did make it to the Powers apartment, and the dinner did not burn" was N.B.C.'s summary of two weeks on "The Doctors" during the AFTRA strike of 1967. The only true archivists of the whole history of a soap are the perpetual watchers, the loyal audience, whom, out of a truly decent sense of tradition and

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constancy, the ever-changing writers try not to betray. This requires careful and intuitive examination of those files, and an attempt to avoid anything that might violate the truth of the story as it existed before a given writer's time. Only the audience knows, and yet there are so many Scotts and Steves and Lees on various programs that even the most loyal audience can get mixed up.

Anyway, Sam Lucas took the blame for Lee Randolph's having murdered, under LSD, a thug. Everyone was acquitted in the end. Of course, there is no end. But Lee, thinking that LSD had impaired her chromosomes, kept far away from Sam, who misunderstood her motives as having to do with the milieu from which he came. Sam Lucas married a girl called Lahoma, an earthy character who was meant to appear only briefly in the plot but who was so good she had to stay. Lee Randolph eventually killed herself. Sam, Lahoma, Missy (now widowed again), and Missy's baby by Danny Fargo have all moved to "Somerset." Strangely, none of the catastrophes on soaps—and nearly every soap event is a catastrophe—are set up with much sentiment. I do not think the audience ever cries, except at Christmas, anniversaries, and other holidays, all of which are celebrated on their proper day. The celebrations are bleak enough, but it is the purest gloom to find oneself on December 25th or January 1st watching a soap, or, if the football games are on, deprived of one. The other days are just alternations of being miserable and being bored, or both, and knowing that the characters are the same.

Well, there were Russ and Rachel, visiting all these people on "Another World." To someone who had not been watching, it did all come back. It is not necessary, technically, to *watch*. Since most of the characters address each other incessantly by name, one can catch it all from another room, like radio. On the other hand, one needn't listen, either. I would have found out my mistake about the christening soon enough. There are the most extravagant visual and aural flashbacks, ranging from "Have I told you what Russ said to me last night?" (Answer, "Well, Russ did tell me"; both characters retell it anyway) to visual flashbacks that would do credit to the cinema. In the case of the temporarily misunderstood christening, it was my telephone that had turned the set on with the sound off. The ring of a telephone is often on the same

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frequency as the remote-control device that operates some television sets; many households have this strange mechanical rapport. A pin dropped on a table will sometimes do it, or the clicking of a belt buckle. One thinks one is alone, and suddenly the room is full of voices, or faces, or both, from "Another World."

Another moment, this one from "Days of Our Lives." It takes, as the whole addiction does, some bearing with. Mickey Horton we know—though he does not—is infertile. Tom Horton, Mickey's brother, returned several years ago from Korea, face changed, memory gone. His memory came back. About three years ago, Bill Horton, another brother, impregnated Mickey's wife, Laura, a psychiatrist. Tom Horton, before he went to Korea, had a ghastly wife, extremely ghastly. When his memory returned, she returned, too. Dr. Horton, the father of Tom, Mickey, and Bill, knows—as Bill found out by accident, as Laura knows, as we have always known—that Laura's offspring cannot be her husband Mickey's. Mickey does not know. Last year, there occurred the following episode: Tom's ghastly wife was at the senior Hortons', trying to be nice. The senior Hortons of "Days of Our Lives," like the senior Randolphs and Mathewses of "Another World," or the Tates of "Search for Tomorrow," are technically known by soap writers as "tentpole characters," on which the tragedies are raised. Anyway, as she set the table for dinner that evening at the senior Hortons', Tom's ghastly wife was singing. The elder Mrs. Horton said that she had a lovely voice, that she ought to make a professional thing of it. The ghastly wife went directly to Father Dr. Horton's study and made a tape recording of her singing voice in song. She forgot, in her slovenly way, to turn the tape recorder off. Later that evening, Dr. Horton had a chat with his daughter-in-law Laura about her child, her husband's infertility, and her brother-in-law's fatherhood. The tape recorder was still on. Tom's ghastly wife, trying later to recapture her own singing voice on tape, heard all the rest. It was unbearable. Months of blackmail, we all knew. It might have been a lifelong downer. I turned off for several years. The present moment—since July, I mean—as far as I can tell, is this. The tape incident seems nearly over. Mickey Horton, however, was believed by everyone, including himself, to

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have impregnated a girl other than his wife. Even I knew this was impossible, unless Mickey's medical tests had been in error—in which case he might be the father of his wife Laura's baby after all—or unless the writers, and Laura and her father-in-law, had forgotten the whole thing. When Mickey's girl's baby was born, it did turn out, through blood tests, that the baby could not have been Mickey's. Of course not. Anybody who had watched even five days two years ago knew that. Meanwhile, a friend of the Horton family, Susan, who has had a terrible life, has been raped in the park, and is being treated by Laura, the psychiatrist. Well.

One thing about a work of art is that it ends. One may wish to know what happens after the last page of "Pride and Prejudice." Some writers give signs of wishing the reader to abide with a given novel; one of the century's great prose works, after all, ends in such a way that the reader is obliged to begin again. But narrative time in art is closed. The soaps, although they have their own formal limitations (how many times, for example, a major character is required by contract to appear each week onscreen), are eternal and free. One can have a heart attack during a performance of "King Lear" or fall in love while listening to Mozart, but the quotidian, running-right-alongside-life quality of soaps means that whole audiences can grow up, marry, breed, divorce, leave a mark on history, and die while a single program is still on the air. Aristotle would not have cared for it.

The soaps can, and sometimes do, adopt the conventional thriller form, which has a different sort of addict altogether: the solvers, the classicists who demand a beginning, a middle, and an end. There was a superb many-month conventional kidnapping episode on "The Doctors" once, when a trustee of the hospital abducted a nurse, under entralling circumstances, and the only one who gradually caught on was the nurse's roommate, Carolee Simpson, a character who, like "Another World's" Lahoma, was meant to stay just briefly but has ever since been so good that she is essential to the plot—particularly in the recent matter of Dr. Allison. There was also a young lady physical therapist who thought herself widowed in the Six Day War (her husband had been a correspondent in the Middle East) and who fell in love with

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the son of the chief of all the doctors. The son was in love with her. Then it turned out that an Israeli girl had been nursing a blind American. He was rude to her for ages. She was kind to him. He turned out, after months, to be the lady therapist's thought-dead husband, and things were resolved. Such episodes do occur. But they are rare. They are too self-contained. Now the wife of the chief of all the doctors, having been kidnapped and returned some months ago, thinks she is going mad. Her paternal uncle was a schizophrenic in his time.

There does not seem to be a single sense in which soap operas can be construed as an escapist form. There is unhappiness enough, and time, to occupy a real lifetime of afternoons. There is no release: not the scream, shudder, and return to real life that some people get from horror films; not the anxiety, violence, and satisfactory conclusion of detective, spy, or cowboy shows; certainly not the laughing chapters of fantasy home lives like "Lucy," "Bachelor Father," or "The Mothers-in-Law." There is no escape, either, from political realities. The allegations that the soaps avoid the topical are simply false; race, Vietnam, psychosis, poverty, class, and generation problems—all are there. One thing soap operas do not do is flinch. They simply bring things home, not as issues but as part of the manic-depressive cycle of the television set. And what they bring home is the most steady, open-ended sadness to be found outside life itself.

No one can look forward to a soap unless he looks forward to the day, in which case he is not likely to be a watcher of soaps at all. Watchers resign themselves. There are seventeen soap operas on television now, some obviously less good than others (a soap that fails is not simply dropped from the air; it is, for the audience's sake, quickly wrapped up: the hero, for example, is run over by a truck), and in their uncompromisingly funereal misery there is obviously some sort of key. Most sentimental or suspense forms—dog, horse, or spy stories, for instance—have a plotted curve: things are briefly fine, then they're down for a long time, then they rise for a brief finale. There is some reward. The soap line goes almost straight, though inextricably tangled, down. The soaps are probably more true to the life of their own audience than they appear to be; certainly they are truer in pace, in content, and in subjects of concern than any other kind of television is. Not

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that there is much amnesia or that much insanity out here. Not that each woman's secret fear, or hope, is that she is bearing the child of an inappropriate member of her family. But the despair, the treachery, the being trapped in a community with people whom one hates and who mean one ill, the secrets one cannot expose—except once or twice—in the course of years when changes and revelations occur in sudden jumps: these must be the days of a lot of lives.

This is not the evening's entertainment, which one watches, presumably, with members of the family; not the shared family-situation comedies, which (with the important exception of "All in the Family") are comfortable distortions of what family life is like. Soap operas are watched in solitude. This is the daytime world of the Randolphs, the Mathewses, the Hortons, the Tates—a daily one-way encounter group, a mirror, an eavesdropping on the apparent depression of being just folks for more than twenty years. It is even entering the commercials now—the utter joylessness. There are still the cheery, inane commercials with white tornadoes and whiter wash. But there are beginning to be hopeless underdogs: unpretty, sarcastic Madge, who, as a manicurist, deals with dishpan hands; a moronic young housewife who can scarcely articulate what she is shopping for; the emphasis on cold-water products, with actors who look as though they knew about life in cold-water flats. The view of life as a bitter, sad, dangerous ordeal, with a few seconds' reprieve before the next long jolt to decent souls, cannot be confined to one side of the screen. Not on seventeen daytime dramatic serials. When, for millions, a credible villain is a suicide, dead and well out of it, and a hero is a man compelled to live his drama out, the daylight view of what life is like is far less sunny, on television, anyway, than the view by night.

ANNE ROIPHE

MA AND PA AND JOHN BOY IN MYTHIC AMERICA: THE WALTONS

A bobwhite cry breaks the quiet of night among the firs and pines of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. . . . "Good night, Ma." "Good night, John-Boy." "Good night, Pa." "Good night, John-Boy. . . ." and the lights of the Walton house on Walton's Mountain sometime in the early nineteen-thirties dim and a million viewers turn away from their television sets, eyes wet, souls heavy with false memory and hopeless longing. C.B.S. has filled another Thursday night with nostalgia, bathos, soap opera, formula plot, tear-jerking junk, and I and all those other viewers share a moment of tender shame at having been so painfully touched by such obvious commercial exploitation.

Six Emmy awards and a Nielsen rating of 29.2 testify to the enormous success of "The Waltons." Richard Thomas has become a major star playing the would-be writer who observes and tells the stories of his large, good, caring, moral, decent, hard-working but poor ("hard times" as they say in Walton country) family. What myth or memory has caught so many of us? Why are we watching Mary Ellen go to a dance with her first boyfriend; Grandpa and Grandma relive a youthful jealousy; John-Boy befriend a midget, an actress or a big-city delinquent; Ma give up

Anne Roiphe, a free-lance writer, is the author of *Long Division* and *Up the Sandbox*. This essay was first published in *The New York Times* and is reprinted by permission of Brandt & Brandt. Copyright © 1973 by Anne Roiphe.

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her career as a singer, overcome polio and gentle a wild, dying raccoon? What keeps us watching this obviously corny, totally unreal family?

Since every Thursday night I am reduced to ridiculous tears, I had to ask these questions and explore the program's skill at piercing tough hides, revealing sentimental ooze that can no more be controlled than the shift of dreams that still wake us screaming every now and then.

An age or so away, primitive man danced wild steps around night fires to scare away evil spirits and to comfort himself that he was not helpless against the demonic, destructive forces in the universe. Man has always invented stories, gods and heroes to give him a sense of understanding and control of the lightning, the thunder, accident and death. I think we use our television set in many of the same ways. We huddle about its blue light looking for relief, control and understanding, magic to be worked on all those confusing forces that push us about. "The Waltons" may be romantic nonsense, may bear only superficial and misleading resemblance to real life, but it is very good magic. It is a good, workable dance to scare away the evil spirits of loneliness, isolation, divorce, alcoholism, troubled children, abandoned elders—the real companions of American family life, the real demons of the living room.

Lionel Tiger, the author and anthropologist, points out that "our sense of community apparently may include, and for some perhaps even must include, fictional television characters. The continuity, predictability and consistency of these presumably reassuring domestic pageants may tempt those people who want or need symbolic intimacies." Before we moan about the pathetic quality of such a relationship with a televised illusion, we have to compare it to the familiarity, the good terms people have always been on with their oft-repeated myths, Bible stories, fairy tales. It seems to be only human to use our own imaginings to comfort ourselves.

First, the Walton family is the ideal family as we all wish ours was: the one we would choose to come from; the one we would hope to create. Three loving generations live in one large house in the beautiful mountains where nature has not yet been destroyed by strip miners or other industrial nightmares. . . .

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John Walton runs a sawmill. He works hard and never quite has enough. The electric company turns off the generator for lack of payment; the kids can't see a traveling circus because Grandma broke her glasses and the admission price goes to replace her lens. John Walton, as played by actor Ralph Waite, is a strong, honest, gentle, kind, stubborn, self-contained, uncompromised man, a man who takes responsibility, who is patient, understanding, devoted, open, without prejudice or fear—the kind of father that would make growing up seem part of an orderly natural process, not the intricate, crippling weaseling around it seems to be for most people. Is John Walton, who carries his sick child in his arms to the hospital, who teaches an arrogant young Baptist preacher humility and grace, who protects a troubled juvenile delinquent, who teaches trust and honor, love for all God's creatures to his children—is that John Walton too good to be true? Of course he is. Why do so many of us believe him, then—work-stained but proud, his seven children and two parents depending on him week after week? It can only be real to us, not a cartoon or a mockery of truth, because we want to believe it, we need to believe it. John Walton's down-home goodness (American as apple pie, turkey and cranberries, Mom) isn't a lie—or so our magic circles tell us on Thursday nights, weaving designs of make-believe we willingly admire.

Olivia Walton, played by Michael Learned, is beautiful, not in the manner of high fashion, not in a cheaply sexual way, but beautiful of manner, of soul; a kind of dignity, a light in her eyes when one of her children has particularly pleased her; an easy capability. She washes, cooks, cleans, irons, shops, gardens, sews, tends the animals, helps with homework, goes to church—all without the aid of modern-day appliances. She mothers all children, drifters and outcasts who for plot reasons find their way to Walton's Mountain. She conquers polio by sheer determination and the need to reach a child who has cried out frightened in the night. She has a beautiful voice and once dreamed of being an opera star but gives up her plans as they conflict with the continual needs for clean clothes, cooked food and attention to her family. She works hard and does not despise herself or her occupation, and her emotional importance to all around her is so clear that it is no wonder she walks with such pride and her smile

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is so full and deep. She is the mother we all wish we had. She is the mother we all would like to be. She is the image that gives us guilt on days when we are irritable or tired, when we are selfish, when we wander away from home, when we fail to stay married; when we produce children who drop out of school, turn to drugs; when we can't find what's wrong or remember how to talk to our parents or how to explain to ourselves the disappointments that line the edges of our life. Olivia Walton has confidence in herself. Her strength seems infinite and we mere mortal mothers and wives shrink to nothing, contorted twisted versions of what was once good and pure. Not for one mad second do I think Olivia Walton is a real person, but watching her serving an enormous breakfast to 10 people, scouring pots and saving money in the kitchen cabinet, I ache with wanting the television to be presenting a documentary—not a soap opera but a genuine model of what it might all be.

The theatrical illusion based on a novel by Earl Hamner Jr. called "Spencer's Mountain" is so successful that most of us forget the real nature of rural poverty. The Depression was not a time for the making of strong souls. James Agee described his folk in "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men": they tried hard, but their teeth fell out from lack of care, their children were malnourished and consequently lacked intellectual capacity. Unlike John-Boy and Elizabeth Walton, their eyes didn't sparkle and they suffered from a continual series of maladies—rickets, skin diseases, bowed legs. Childhood disease caused frequent death; childbirth itself was a killer. The homes had no pictures on the walls, no linoleum on the floor. Real poverty produced bigotry and hatred of the man under you, the black man—it created limits of thought and intolerance for strangers or newness. Poverty was not something you could pull through because you tried—it ground up human beings, pulverized the spirit and crippled the body. Unlike the Walton family, hundreds and thousands of American families lost their businesses, lost their land, lost their hope.

In our days of middle-class affluence we tend to associate poverty with an elevated moral sense as if it were our refrigerators, cars and swimming pools that were the source of the

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corruption of moral values, as if in the good old days without such material excesses people were better. A romantic myth if ever there's been one, and yet I suppose we need to feel that in the past, in the rougher, harder moments of our history, we were a fine people because surely we don't feel that way about ourselves now, and just as surely a John Walton character set in modern suburbia would be so unbelievable that the show would be howled right out of the Burbank studio, where it originated, into oblivion.

From a feminist viewpoint Olivia's decision to abandon her career as a singer is dreadful—one hopes she is not an inspiration to the next generation of women whom we are counting on to lead productive, intellectual, active lives outside of the home. However, Mrs. Walton's refusal to follow the now-popular path reminds us that, after all, happiness is the point and some women may indeed still find—even with fewer children and modern appliances—deep happiness in the roles of wife and mother.

The Waltons are equal partners in their family just as truly as if they were a team of neurosurgeons. This, I suppose, is part of the unreality of the program, and it is an important factor in the ideal image of family life it presents.

Ralph Waite and Michael Learned are themselves divorced in real life, with children traveling between two homes. Ellen Corby, who plays Grandma, has never been married or had children. Richard Thomas, who acts an ingenuous, enthusiastic, 18-year-old, is now going on 22 and must have a fortune in the bank, enough to buy Walton's Mountain and turn it into a swinging singles resort if he should desire. Naturally, they are good actors and the difference in their TV roles and their lives is brought out only to illustrate that the program, like fake electric fires in the fireplace, creates an illusion of warmth. As with the myth of Achilles or Hercules, no real man should measure his success by the activities of the gods and yet humanly enough we all do.

The Walton show, which must produce a full-hour-length story every week, has found a very successful formula for easily capturing our attention. To Walton's Mountain come all kinds of strangers, all of them troubled outcasts, fragmented or harmed by the value systems, the dizziness of the world beyond this sweet

rural community. A writer who has never succeeded since he left his own home many years ago, an actress whose fame is fading and whose degree of bankruptcy equals only her massive pretensions, the bitter son of a victim of New York City's gang wars, a suspicious immigrant Jewish family, a missionary student who needs to learn humor, a girl who is a mail-order bride and who is afraid to love—all these characters create some kind of tension in the Walton household, tensions which are resolved through understanding, love and growth of the family. The single characters themselves are somewhat healed by their contact with the Waltons and the simple values the Waltons exude. We, the audience, are suckers for these stories because we all know we are that outsider, that troubled person whose life, like an X-ray with dark spots, holds threat of bad things. We identify with the outcasts, the loners, the poorly valued, isolated people who don't have the security of the Walton family, and we also identify with the Walton family itself, not so much from recognition as imagination or mythical cultural memories of the way it ought to be. Since we think of ourselves as outsiders and we wish we were part of the cohesive, good, happy family, we eagerly sink into the story, two sides of ourselves playing against each other, and in the end we feel pleasurable sad—even though, of course, everything has turned out all right. We are sad because we know things aren't that way at all and yet we're not angry or provoked because we've enjoyed playing around with the images of family life as they might be (we determine, not consciously, to bring our own families closer together), and as with New Year's resolutions the lack of accomplishment is nothing compared to the sincerity of the attempt.

What really are the factors that make the Waltons' life so ideal? It is obvious that nothing disastrous ever does really happen: Polio is defanged, an occasion for family solidarity as the children, grandparents and father work together to bring hot packs to the bedridden mother; John-Boy's appendix doesn't burst before they reach the hospital; the fire in the barn doesn't extend to the house; Grandpa doesn't get senile and leave Grandma. The disasters, physical and economic and psychological, that would actually befall a real family only threaten here for purposes of dramatic

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tension. If Ma were really bedridden for life, the resulting strain on the family might destroy its good spirit, its faith in the goodness of God and its ability to survive as a family.

There are also the pictures of rural vs. urban life that we Americans carry around in our cultural baggage: Rural life is purported to be—remembered to be—sweet. Young people in rebellion against the modern collusion of economics and culture to rob them of their souls are returning to the land. Nature is somehow supposed to be healthier for mankind than the city or the suburb—the mind-draining work of the farm laborer, the bone-wearying, imagination-crushing work of the farmer and his wife are always forgotten as we think of wonderful things like homemade jellies and herb gardens and zinnias and sunflowers growing full in dark soil. The silence when night has come might be endless; the dependence on artificial, standardized stimulation like television could turn the brain to water, and alienation is as likely to drown us in the mountains as in the Wall Street canyons. But still when we think of pure, ideal happiness, we place it in the country, back in time when things were simpler; our myths of happiness (teasing thoughts of what someone somewhere else must have) are easily realized by skillful media people like those who design and execute the Walton show. We must believe that large families are happier than small. The fact that most Americans have two children in no way alters the image of the large family. We also, despite the fact that church membership is at an all-time low, seem to believe that religion is an essential part of goodness and happiness. The Waltons say grace before meals; Ma and Grandma are more conventional Baptists, but Pa and John-Boy believe that each man finds God's spirit in his own way. Nevertheless God is always watching over the Walton family—that seems still to be a part of our happiness myth, if only a small part of our reality.

The myth is indeed beautiful and anyone who scoffs has forgotten how to hope. It could be said that these myths torment us, describing role fulfillments that aren't there, promising marital peace that never arrives and forcing us to stare at the pitiful discrepancy between what is and what we would want. If that were the only function of this kind of myth, we would manage somehow to do away with it. The TV ratings would fall and that

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would be the end of it all. However, another function of the myth is to portray the ideal, the goal—it's not good enough to be always realistic about what the world offers. There must be some kind of image to strive for, some kind of positive cultural thought that serves to heal wounds and to point to the future.

The Walton family drama takes place in our recent past, but all those experimenting with new forms of marital-family relationships, all those parents planning the birth of a first child, all those of us midway in family life are constantly trying to achieve in our private ways the protective, humane, decent loving family that seems to come so easily to the Waltons. Never mind that we all fail; it's a journey worth taking.

Yes, I suppose the Walton family, pop culture that it is, is like the painted Madonnas one finds in taxicabs and local five-and-dimes compared with the Leonards, the Raphaels that adorn the Vatican walls. But pop culture, like the trinkets of the Watusi or the pottery of Guatemalans, is very revealing of the soul. And the American family dream is as naive and ambitious as some of our political credos—"all men are created equal," etc. There has always been a dichotomy in our society between what we believe—the image we would choose of ourselves—and the social realities. We think we are humane and good and then we discover a My Lai massacre. We preach brotherhood as racial tensions mount. Nevertheless, with a more realistic view of ourselves we would probably behave even worse. And despite the laughability of the American romance, it's not such a bad thing to keep on dreaming.

"Good night, Ma." "Good night, Pa." "Good night, John-Boy." Good night Mr. and Mrs. North America and all the ships at sea and all the Grandmas and Grandpas from coast to coast and all the neuroses that will bloom next spring. Who knows what the American family can become?

HARRIS DIENSTFREY

DOCTORS, LAWYERS & OTHER TV HEROES

Television drama lately has developed a new kind of hero, the professional man. He appears several times a week in a variety of forms: as a member of the medical profession (*Ben Casey*, *Dr. Kildare*, and *The Nurses*), as a lawyer (*The Defenders*), even as a plainclothes police detective (*Naked City*). This last occupation, plainclothes detective, may seem out of place. Usually, it is not considered a profession, and it certainly does not have the social esteem of medicine or law. On television, however, the behavior of the police detective is rooted in a skill and an ethic no less studiously acquired or punctiliously honored than those of a doctor or lawyer. Doctor Kildare himself once remarked that both policemen and doctors work long hours and drink lots of black coffee. (To this select list of professionals, educators may be pleased to note, television will add a high-school teacher in the fall.)

These characters have much more in common than a particular type of work; they have the same unswerving attitude toward public service. Whatever their individual skills, all of them turn out to have only one goal; to help their fellows.

Harris Dienstfrey, currently on the staff of *Cosmopolitan*, engages in free-lance publishing and editing projects. This essay is reprinted from *Commentary*, Vol. 35 (June 1963), by permission of the publisher and author. Copyright © 1963 by the American Jewish Committee.

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It is television's pleasant conceit that no professional ever concerns himself with questions of personal gain or advancement. Thus, the doctors Casey and Kildare, as well as their cross-network assistants, the nurses, all work endlessly in public city hospitals, and give no thought to establishing a more lucrative private practice. Similarly, the only interest of the detectives on *Naked City* is to maintain law and order in the streets and homes of New York. The lawyers on *The Defenders*, it happens, do work for themselves. Yet they, like their clients, make mention of fees so rarely it might almost be an obscenity. In short, television's professionals are supreme exemplars of moral rectitude and public devotion. They are urban watchdogs who keep crime, injustice, and illness (and, beginning in the fall, ignorance) ruthlessly checked.

Not too surprisingly, most of these professionals, on the basis of their appearance at least, are Protestant Americans of long lineage—the source, as it were, of their confident and selfless morality. The main characters of *The Defenders*, for example, a father and son law team, Lawrence and Kenneth Preston by name, impress one as being descendants of men who helped devise a legal basis for the Revolutionary War. Similarly, one suspects that the ancestors of Dr. Kildare and his mentor, Dr. Gillespie, landed at Plymouth Rock.

The only obvious exceptions to this oligarchy of Protestant professionals are the two main characters of *Ben Casey*. The older of the two men, Dr. Zorba, played by Sam Jaffe, looks as if he still knows several comic and touching stories about life on New York's Lower East Side, and even a few sadder, more painful ones about the Old Country as well. As for Dr. Ben himself, played by a swarthy and muscular star named Vincent Edwards, this young neurosurgeon seems to have been raised on healthy portions of pasta—his Irish-sounding name notwithstanding—and probably experienced in his youth the kind of difficult times that James Kildare only read about, say, in the weekly farm journal. (Edwards strengthens this impression by playing Casey rather as if the doctor were one of those burly Hollywood Italian hoods who needed at least seventeen slugs in his chest to drop him. Perhaps the snarl does not exhaust Edwards's mimetic talent; on *Ben Casey*, however, it comes close.)

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In terms of their general attitudes, though, Zorba and Casey—whatever the latter's specific background—are essentially the sort of first- and second-generation Americans who practice the ways of their chosen land even more vigorously than do the natives themselves, though perhaps not so calmly. Late-comers, they make up for their tardiness by the force of their persuasion.

As may already be clear, most of the professional dramas revolve around not one but two professionals: a neophyte of great impulsiveness and an older and sagacious mentor who keeps him on the difficult path of righteousness—professional, moral, or any other: on these programs, they are as one super highway.

During the days of Hollywood's original *Dr. Kildare* series, it is worth recalling, the teacher-disciple relationship was a good deal different. Then, it was always Kildare who had to correct the social and disciplinary blunders of his guide, Dr. Gillespie, a *medical* genius but also an old curmudgeon for whom tact and good form and hospital discipline were beneath contempt. Not so on television. Here, the blunders are all Kildare's. Moreover, Gillespie is no longer a genius, but rather Blair General Hospital's Chief of Staff; and to him the things that matter are tact and good form and hospital discipline. To imagine a television situation in which Gillespie had actually erred, and had to be corrected by Kildare no less, is rather like imagining Job giving God a box on the ears, and telling Him to cut out the nonsense.

A typical episode of the professional dramas goes as follows. The neophyte, at work on a case—medical, legal, or criminal—shows signs of breaking an important rule of the profession. In some instances, he is unaware of the rule; in others, he misunderstands the reason for its existence. In either case, the mentor explains that all rules exist for fundamentally one reason: to effect the greatest good for the greatest number. If a rule is broken, the mentor warns, then only disaster can follow, and it will fall not so much on the neophyte—that, after all, is his business—but on the very people the latter is trying to help. But the neophyte is headstrong, and willfully plunges over the edge of the precipice. A life is lost, or nearly so; people suffer; chaos looms. But like God, the mentor passes his arms over the angry waters. The suffering ceases; tranquillity is restored; the system of public good that has been threatened with disruption resumes its dauntless efficiency.

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Still, the neophyte has been humbled and dismayed by the near disaster. A few consoling words from his good superior heal the wound but carefully mark its place: that's one transgression he won't commit again. The true lesson truly learned, all's well once more with the world.

Within this basic pattern there are of course variations. When the improper behavior of the neophyte is actually a crime—like euthanasia—or a gross social sin—like racial prejudice—then, as one might expect, the young main character is not its perpetrator. In these cases, the evil-doer is one of his confrères, never to be seen on the series again, from whom he learns by proxy.

Two series have their own special variations. *The Defenders* mutes the theme of learning by one's mistakes and rarely has the episodes turn on the son's blunders. Yet it is clear enough that Kenneth Preston is engaged in a learning process nonetheless. Following in his father's footsteps, he is obviously being shown the true way by the old man. Often, in fact, it is Kenneth's role to recall to his father the lessons which the latter taught him but has momentarily forgotten in the heat of a case. On *The Defenders*, the son is sometimes father to the man.

Ben Casey diverges from the basic pattern in a different way, and apparently for nondramatic reasons. From internal evidence, it would seem that Vincent Edwards commands enough control over the program to prevent Casey's sweet-tempered superior, Dr. Zorba, from delivering more than the most modest and tentative advice to his putative protégé. In any case, when Casey does get advised, he either glowers or mutters sarcastically, "Well, thanks. You've been a *great* help." (To himself, Edwards always seems to be saying: "You big-mouthed runt!") Nevertheless, the true nature of things does out. However much the program substantively underplays Casey and Zorba's pupil-teacher relationship, each episode still contains a brief, curt confrontation when the two men discuss the going problem of the week. On television's professional dramas, young men may be strong, but it is the old men who are wise; and finally, not even Ben Casey can say no.

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In their innocence and impulsiveness, the neophytes are liable to commit two sorts of errors. For one thing, they often give way to their feelings. In the bleak judgment of their supervisors, the young professionals become "involved"—they develop, that is, a strong emotional relationship with the people they are trying to help. Whether the particular emotion is admirable or reprehensible is of no consequence. Feeling itself is the sin. In one episode from *Dr. Kildare*, an intern turns out to be racially prejudiced; in another, Kildare himself comes to believe in the adulation of two thankful parents whose daughter's life he has helped save; on another program, *The Nurses*, a nurse is in love with a patient dying of cancer. In all three instances, though the respective emotions range from hate through egotism to love, the result is equally disastrous. The intern, overpowered by his aversion, almost kills one patient deliberately and comes close to losing another accidentally; Kildare, for fear of losing the praise of the parents, fails to explain that their daughter might have a relapse, and as a consequence the girl dies; and the nurse, unable to bear the continual suffering of the man she loves, is brought to a point where she willfully kills him.

On all these programs, then, strong feeling is as incompatible with sound professional judgment as licentiousness is with chastity. On *The Defenders*, a college athlete who admits to shaving points in basketball games exclaims to the older lawyer, "What you must think of me now, Mr. Preston!" Preston replies calmly and almost automatically, "I don't think anything of you. I gave up being judge and jury a long time ago. My only job is to defend you." From this statement, one knows at once that Preston is a first-rate professional. Like all the wise men of these dramas, he effects the greatest good for the greatest number by ascetically weaning himself of passion.

The second type or error which the neophyte commits is more grievous than a mere professional sin; it is a social one as well. In his innocence, he often fails to perceive what society demands of him in the way of general obedience. This issue usually becomes explicit when the neophyte is forced to see some of his ordinary professional activity as part of a larger social process. The young detective on *Naked City*, Adam Flint, is asked to be a witness at the execution of an admittedly brutal murderer he helped capture,

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and he suddenly begins to wonder about the necessity for capital punishment. Similarly, when Dr. Kildare is assigned to his hospital's jail ward, whose patients are released to the police as soon as they are well, he begins to wonder whether society perhaps treats criminals too harshly: aren't they human too? In more general terms, the question that troubles the young professionals is: what must society demand from its citizens to be secure? How far should society allow itself to be defied with impunity?

On most of the programs—the single exception is *The Defenders*—the answer turns out to be: not by one inch. The neophytes at first do not want to believe this, but circumstances, as it were, prevail. The man in the jail ward whom Kildare treats humanely then tries to escape and in the process shoots two people. This isn't exactly Kildare's fault, but it needs no prophet to divine the handwriting on the wall. Society, like the older professional, knows best, and neither should be crossed. Adam Flint's superior, Lt. Mike Parker, explains the basic point rather well when he sees that Flint is disturbed by the prospect of attending an execution: "You intellectuals always worry about society's responsibility to the individual. But what about the individual's responsibility to society? If some higher court decides that society has the right to take a man's life in exchange for the pleasure he got out of running amuck for an hour or two, that's all there is to it!" And this, presumably, is among the many lessons Flint learns by forcing himself to sit through the execution.* Although the entire

* *Naked City*, I should note, is one of the most imaginatively produced dramatic series on television. It is filmed entirely on location in and around New York, and a proper measure of its over-all style is the fact that its acting and dialogue never seem awkward or out of place. The death house episode (set in an actual prison), its ideology aside, offers a particularly good example of the program's attempt to explore the possibilities of its medium. In one scene, Adam Flint, awaiting the appearance of the condemned murderer, is shown gripping the edge of the small rail that separates the witnesses from the electric chair. The camera focuses on his hands, then suddenly pulls away to reveal Flint on a roller coaster heading down a steep incline; his hands are holding the car rail in the same tight grip. The scene lasts for perhaps half a minute, certainly no more, and then the camera cuts back to Flint nervously waiting in the execution chamber. Neither he nor anyone else attempts to explain the visual point by mentioning the queasiness of his stomach. This is the sort of off-beat risk *Naked City* often takes. Even when such risks are not

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episode repeatedly emphasizes the intense psychic and emotional pain that the execution visits upon everyone connected with it, Flint somehow comes out of the death house miraculously made a better man by what he has seen. His initial qualms have been forgotten, apparently swept away like so much dust on the wind of his transforming experience. As Lt. Parker explains: "That's all there is to it!"

On *The Defenders*, though, there is a good deal more. Although the Prestons are as devoted to the security of society as are their medical and police counterparts, they see the basis of that security in essentially different terms. In an episode that might be taken as a direct answer to both the jail ward and death house stories, the Prestons go before a board of appeal to ask that the death sentence of a convicted murderer be commuted to life imprisonment. The man has, through a variety of unspecified circumstances, managed to receive stays of his execution for some seven years, and during this time, the Prestons insist (and manage rather sloppily to prove), he has been rehabilitated. They argue that society therefore cannot reasonably continue to demand that their client pay with his own life for one he took seven years ago; he is now a different man and deserves to live. After deliberation, the board of appeal agrees and commutes the sentence to life imprisonment. In short, according to *The Defenders*, it is worthwhile to treat prisoners well; rehabilitation does work. What's more, society's responsibility to an individual does not end once and for all when he violates one of its rules.

The general social philosophy of *The Defenders* differs from that of its companion programs on two counts. For one thing, the scale on which it balances the freedom of the individual against the security of society is weighted toward the individual's side. Unlike any of the other professional dramas mentioned here, the program is explicitly and seriously against capital punishment and censorship, and ardently for free speech—even, among other things, the right to be an atheist. (To defend an atheist on a mass medium, as

successful, as in this case, they still represent a tendency toward experimentation that few programs on television now share.

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the Prestons have done—an atheist who was a teacher, moreover—is rather brave. As Samuel Stouffer's well-known study, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*, revealed, popular opinion dislikes atheists even more than Communists. Also, the Prestons did not preface their defense by saying, "We despise atheists and atheism and all they stand for, yet. . . ." That's not their style. The Prestons really are liberals.)

Moreover, *The Defenders* is the only one of the professional dramas to imply that an absolute harmony between man and society is not necessarily in the nature of things. On the contrary, the program suggests that the interests of man and society inevitably diverge and conflict, and that the differences must always be freshly resolved. The magic word on *The Defenders*, then, is not obedience—the order of the day when society knows best—but reason—which is what one must use when the best can never be known with certainty.

Still, the men who preach reason and those who preach obedience on television's professional dramas are Siamese twins beneath their contrasting verbiage, tied together by their absolute conviction that they know what is right. Regardless of social orientation, they are all judge, secular priest, and transcendent boy scout rolled into one. Moreover, to all of them, the Good Life is equally a useful one, and wherever the road to social well-being leads, there runs the only road they will follow. In short, without the professional, Chaos and Old Night would rule the world again.

Which does something to explain why watching these programs can often be an extremely dispiriting experience. Part of the trouble is their authoritarianism, which is less a matter of specific issues than of general approach. Except in the case of *The Defenders* (which suffers from self-righteousness rather than authoritarianism), when society says No—as it does, for example, in the instances of euthanasia, abortion, and prejudice—then an individual is not allowed to say Yes. Conversely, when society says Yes—as it does, for example, in the instance of capital punishment—the judgment thereby outlaws the possibility that any

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decent man might say No. This is a depressing arrangement, whatever the issues involved.

Nothing, for example, could theoretically be more commendable than that such programs should take a stand against prejudice. What happens, though, is that they do not finally score prejudice because it happens to be a stupid and arrogant form of social cruelty, but merely because it is another example of social disobedience. They condemn it not because it is wrong, but because it smacks of individual rebellion, which, to most of the professional dramas, is a disease of incalculable harm they seem to have sworn a solemn oath to root out.

What is equally dismaying about these programs is the patent dishonesty with which they fashion the positions they oppose. In this regard, *The Defenders* is as culpable as any of the series, and possibly more so. All of them without exception load the intellectual and dramatic dice shamelessly. They put the losing arguments, hopelessly undeveloped, into the mouths of puppets verging on apoplexy; then, with calm aplomb, they proceed to demolish one straw man after another, all the while suggesting that each had been somewhat more formidable to overcome than the Colossus of Rhodes. The programs cheat, in short, and act as if they do not. As with their authoritarianism, such dishonesty also has nothing to do with particular issues. To compare *The Defenders'* attack on censorship, say, with *Naked City*'s defense of capital punishment is like comparing a pair of separately made counterfeit bills.

Obviously, though, such a dissatisfied response to the professional dramas can hardly be typical. Otherwise, the professionals would not now be joining the Westerner, the gangster, and the private eye in the mass media's Hall of Fame. There are two main sources for the popularity of the professional dramas. The first, and less important of the two, centers on the particular type of social concerns that their main characters confront almost weekly, concerns like capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia, criminal rehabilitation, and free speech—a complete list would read like the table of contents for a high-school text on "modern problems." Now, none of the programs conceives of such problems as political issues, but rather as moral ones. (Politics is the one subject which appears to be anathema to the professional dramas

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and which, in any case, generally seems reserved for television's Sunday forums.) What the programs reach toward—or, rather, hover in the general vicinity of—are those principles which define for an individual his role as a social being and his duties as a member of the community. In effect, the problems of the professional dramas raise the sort of issues and concerns that were raised, for example, by the attitudes of the Newburgh city officials toward the distribution of the city's relief payments; and they are fascinating for the same reason. The Newburgh incident captured the public imagination because the distribution of relief provided a dramatic frame for the larger, more troublesome, and, at the moment, much-discussed question of who, in the public realm, owes what to whom. In a somewhat less intense way, the weekly problems of television's professional dramas ask precisely the same question.

But this element of the programs is only the frosting. The cake, the more significant reason for the programs' popularity, is the image of contemporary life and society that finally emerges from behind their weekly crises and torments. For in the midst, as it were, of the urban jungle—and usually in one of its bureaucracies—the professional dramas are matter-of-factly able to uncover all the signs of a healthy, serene, and ongoing community. Where others mainly have seen the ravages of anomie, they find a plenitude of well-being.

There is, first of all, the work of their main characters. Who, these days, is not well-versed in the scriptures and experiences concerning the discontents of contemporary work? But on these programs one finds men in the very bosom of the city pursuing occupations that provide them with nothing but the deepest satisfaction. "I'm a detective," Adam Flint soberly explains in rejecting a job whose pay would reduce his weekly salary of \$128 (and some cents) to idle spending money. His succinct comment says everything: this work is *me*, it's my life. The Prestons might have said the same; so might nurses Liz Thorpe and Gail Lucas; or Doctors Kildare, Gillespie, Casey, and Zorba. And at one time or another, they probably have. It is in their work that all alike find their identity.

They do so, in large part, because they know that without such work the quality of everyday life would plummet, society would

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flounder. Their jobs, in short, are the best of all possible jobs: they offer both inner meaning and public worth. Television's city-dwelling professionals thus serve as living proof that work in the modern world can be beautiful.

In their attitudes and general principles, they also serve as a reflection of the attitudes and general principles of that world itself. The professionals of these programs are not only public servants; they are also spokesmen of society, and their behavior reveals the way society operates to take care of its own. The revelation could not be more pleasant.

The professionals themselves are tireless, selfless, and profoundly equitable. They are as likely to practice favoritism as is the Brownian movement to slow down in a slum. The goal of the professionals is to render aid, their vision is social, and their richest reward is obviously the knowledge that they have done their job well. When the public has such men to serve (or defend) it, the fundamental decency of the surrounding society follows as a matter of course.

It follows also from the way the main characters analyze the social problems with which they are always coping. In deciding the right or wrong of an issue, their only criterion is the effect a given action will have on the common good. One knew, of course, that this standard of judgment was considered the *summum bonum* in, say, the village of radio's Dr. Christian (the subtle symbolism of whose name should not be overlooked); but who had realized that it was similarly honored in the world of bureaucracies and cities—in Blair General Hospital, say, or in the New York Police Department?

But perhaps the most satisfying of all the sights of the professional dramas is the sight of the experienced professional guiding the impulsive neophyte. Week after week, the young sit at the feet of their elders, eagerly attending to the latter's ultimate truths about life, work, and the secret ways of the world. "That's all there is to it!"

It goes without saying that there is something gratifying about an image of a world where the young and the old are so united in purpose and belief. In such a world, clearly, times may have changed, but the things that count most, the basic values and ideals, have not. Eventually, one knows, James Kildare will

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become Leonard Gillespie; Adam Flint will become Mike Parker; and Kenneth Preston, in essence, will be his own father. And at this point, a fresh new group of disciples will appear to receive a still unchanged word from *them*. When such a continuity is possible, the world, at its core, remains settled and steadfast. And this is the type of world that the professional dramas have portrayed. In the imagined cities of their background, the center has held, and society is as society may once have been: whole and full of clear purpose.

Where all this leads is toward something of a much-awaited discovery. In the presumably cold, dead heart of contemporary life and society, television's professional dramas have managed to find nothing less than the pulse of the good community. The living there may have its difficulties, admittedly, but in the end the problems are only superficial ones. For this is a place that offers meaningful work, a public devotion to the common good, and secure, vital values. And in these days, understandably, such a discovery has its appeal.

RICHARD M. MERLMAN

POWER AND COMMUNITY IN TELEVISION

American mass culture has entered a new stage of development. For many years we had western movie heroes, criminals, soft-spoken and occasionally soft-headed heroines, squatters and cattlemen playing out their Saturday matinee destinies for a generation of American children. We had movie serials devoted to Superman, Captain Marvel, and other fighters of crime *extraordinaire*. We had, during World War Two, Nazi spies in the Old West. We had Little Caesars of the cities and Lone Rangers of the open spaces. We even had The Scorpion.

But only with the coming of television could the range and scope of mass culture enjoy an entirely new dimension. Now our children do not need a movie ticket to see many of their movie heroes. Often the Early Movie has them. For parents, too, television offers many radio and movie personalities who made the switch. In its omnivorous quest for material, television has long since run through the programs offered it initially by radio and movies. Its technical development and financial resources enable it to invent and project images of man and society far beyond the dreams of earlier mass culture generators. Television,

Richard Merlman teaches political science at the University of Wisconsin. This essay is reprinted from *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Summer 1968), by permission of the publisher.

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omnipresent as well as omnivorous, is found in approximately 98% of American homes; and parents who don't have a set spend much of their time explaining its absence to their children. Television has long since been crowned as the all-time champion projector of the collective images, fantasies, and assumptions of Americans.

Naturally, the diffusion of television called forth a suffusive critical outpouring. Some critics, viewing in horror the nightly reign of violence on the channels, predicted an upsurge of juvenile delinquency and sociopathic behavior. Others launched jeremiads against the lack of realistic social controversy on television. Were we, they wondered, becoming a nation of passive, self-satisfied, uncritical television addicts? These and similar fears have never been clearly laid to rest, but evidence in support of the most dire theories has always been in short supply. Strangely, however, in their desire to condemn or defend television, relatively few critics or social scientists actually bothered to examine its content carefully or imaginatively.

This omission is unfortunate, because television's western series, its crime and adventure shows, and its situation comedies are fertile sources of information about the collective projections of Americans. Though it has improved upon the technical aspects of earlier movie-making and radio broadcasting, television has not introduced many radically new program types. Its staples remain those of radio and movies—the western, the variety show, the crime-spy program, and the situation comedy. These programs expose many of our assumptions about political power, community life, social types and culture heroes. Unconscious as well as conscious expectations of political behavior, individual morality, and social norms are acted out in television entertainment series.¹

In order to uncover and analyze these assumptions, I examined a sample of 89 programs drawn from fifteen popular television western series of the 1964 viewing season. Recently, I have

¹ As Wolfenstein and Leites put it, "The common day-dreams of a culture are in part the sources, in part the products of its popular myths, stories, plays and films. Where these productions gain the sympathetic response of a wide audience, it is likely that their producers have tapped within themselves the reservoir of common day-dreams." Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1950), 13.

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supplemented this study with an examination of 40 crime-spy programs drawn from nine series which appeared during the prime television hours of 7-11:00 p.m. in the summer of 1966. My interpretations rely upon a flexible content analysis and a meticulous plot analysis of the sample programs.² Westerns and crime-spy programs are very different, but they reveal much about two major problems of American life, the meaning of community and the problem of power in a developed society.

The Western and the Community

The community, not the hero, is the center of action in the western. This conclusion may seem surprising in light of our traditional views of mass culture. Discussions about the western, especially, have emphasized the role of an individualistic, lonely, puritan hero who imposed his values on a lawless landscape. This puritan hero was a drifter—shy and suspicious of organized society, though clear on his obligations to his fellow man and to the land he loved.³ But the television western reflects in its approach to the hero the facts of twentieth century life. Puritan heroes are less in evidence than theory would suggest. The community more often determines the conduct of the hero than he its. The "wandering hero" has been replaced by the "resident hero." Today, when the hero finds himself face to face with the villain at the end of a dusty street, he shoots it out more often as the representative of a community than as the freely mobile hero of old.

Increasingly, heroes reside in communities, either as law officers

² For an introduction to thematic content analysis, of which this study is an example, see Bernard Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communications Research* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952) and Ithiel de Sola Pool, ed., *Trends in Content Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959). For an introduction to the more quantitative sorts of content analysis, see Robert North, et al., *Content Analysis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963).

³ For example, Warschow notes, ". . . the hero goes away when his position becomes problematical." Robert Warschow, *The Immediate Experience* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), 141. On the puritanism of western heroes, see Peter Homans, "Puritanism Revisited: An Analysis of the Contemporary Screen Image Western," *Studies in Public Communication*, #3 (Summer, 1961), 73-85.

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(Marshal Dillon of *Gunsmoke*), as respected citizens of long standing (the Cartwrights of *Bonanza*), or as semi-mobile employees (the heroes of *Stagecoach West*). Of course, wandering heroes remain, but even their behavior is usually determined by communities they confront rather than by other wanderers they happen to meet. The hero has changed in many other respects as well, each of which stems directly from his immersion in the problems of community.

Community is a problem because, as we would expect given the historical era in which most westerns are set, it is an unaccepted, ambiguous and difficult quantity. There are two major approaches to Western settlements, each of which is in some way unrealistic, but each of which indicates the problematical nature of community. On the one hand, we have Encapsulated Westerns and on the other Self-Conscious Westerns. In the former the community is homogeneous, united, wholesome and generally supportive of the hero as he fends off outside dangers. In the latter the community is divided against itself, unsure of the holders of power and authority, often hostile to the hero and gullible to the machinations of internal subversive elements.

Encapsulated Westerns picture communities which are under attack from external elements. Most often these attacks come from thieves and other lawless roving bands whose major motivation is either money or blind hostility to community life. In Encapsulated Westerns the hero is usually a resident of the community who takes it upon himself to protect it from external danger. Often the community follows his leadership unerringly and unanimously. There is relatively little flexibility in community response and even less consciousness of the variety of motives which lead outsiders to attack the community or insiders to protect it. The major figures of the Encapsulated Western are, for the most part, stereotypes. The outside world is viewed as a hostile, basically incalculable force which periodically launches challenges to stable communities, often from no clearer motivation than a fated incompatibility between community and environment.

However, despite the insecurity of community life, the value of community *per se* is rarely questioned in any television western. The community is endangered either by outside villains who

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mean to destroy and loot it or inside lawbreakers who exploit its social strains. However, never does a recognizable *hero* launch himself against communities with the intention of destroying them or suggesting that, fundamentally, they are at odds with human well-being. Community as a principle is accepted entirely. The only problems that remain involve upgrading community life and protecting it from outside anarchistic elements.

Let us look briefly at the following examples of Encapsulated Westerns. In one of the *Virginian* episodes, "The Intruders" (the title may be viewed as a symbol of the Encapsulated Western), gunrunners take over the heroes' ranch. The program is devoted to the successful efforts of the heroes to expel the invaders and restore serenity. In a *Temple Houston* episode, "Do Unto Others, Then Gallop," the hero, Houston, is accused unjustly of a murder he was forced to commit in self-defense. The murder is a frame-up intended to discredit Houston in the eyes of his fellow citizens. The outside villains succeed in casting suspicion on him, but finally Houston exposes them.⁴

A lingering fear of internal subversion haunts the Encapsulated Western. It is usually assumed that those hostile to the community will proceed unimaginatively. But occasionally outsiders will be clever enough to take advantage of the fundamental goodness, *naiveté* and hospitality of insiders. Thus, anything less than a unanimous response to outside danger is a source of major concern. Efforts must occasionally be made to gain support for the hero, but usually they are unnecessary because agreement is unanimous and spontaneous. There is rarely any recognition that citizens legitimately can reach differing conclusions about outside challenges. The simplicity of this assumption underlines the unsophisticated beliefs about community life which prevail in the Encapsulated Western. The unanimity expected as a response to external danger helps us understand why many Americans are bewildered about internal divisions over thorny foreign policy problems such as Vietnam.

Encapsulated Westerns present an unflattering picture of law enforcement officials. Although the communities such officials are

⁴ According to Wolfenstein and Leites, the "misunderstood hero" is a major type in American movies. Wolfenstein and Leites, *op. cit.*, 181-99.

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pledged to defend may be in extreme danger, only a quarter of all Encapsulated Western heroes are actually law officers. It is not that officers of the law are venal. Rather, communities can call upon efficient unofficial citizen protectors who do not need the experience or training required of an officer of the law. Citizen participation in community protection is not only permitted; it is expected. In some cases, officers of the law are bland, colorless, relatively ineffectual characters who do not really command community sympathy.⁵

For example, in *Temple Houston* (no longer telecast) the resident hero is a lawyer who works with and occasionally commands the sheriff. In *Bonanza* the Cartwright family, a group of ranchers, is periodically called upon to save the community. In the *Rifleman* a local rancher and his son form a team dedicated to community morality and protection. In the *Virginian* another group of ranchers occasionally protects the community.

But, whether lawman or self-appointed community protector, the hero is violent. In all westerns it is virtually impossible to expunge danger without bloodshed. Reform is almost never a possibility, especially in the Encapsulated Western.⁶ We can easily understand why the Encapsulated Western should be especially bloody, when we remember that external challenges to the community are automatic and stereotyped. The assumption that nature and community are naturally and everlasting at odds leaves no recourse but to obliterate the agents of external danger. It is impossible to reform a natural mechanism.

In the Encapsulated Western, as I have suggested, heroes occasionally have to protect themselves against internal subver-

⁵ At the impressionistic level, Lerner notes, "The American is not overly impressed by police authority." Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 433. Evidence also exists that young children view the police as both benevolent and powerful authority figures. However, this image is eroded by the time adolescence appears. See Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, *The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values Toward Government and Citizenship During the Elementary School Years, Part 1* (Cooperative Research Project No. 1078), (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1965), 374.

⁶ Klapp claims that ". . . there is distinct admiration of the man of force in America. . . ." Further, ". . . if the framework is acceptable, brutality is likely to get . . . approval." Orrin E. Klapp, *Heroes, Villains and Fools* (Englewood Cliffs: Spectrum Books, 1962), 149-50.

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sion engineered by wily outsiders. Rarely do they have to settle intra-community dissension. Typically, when disagreement occurs, it involves differences over means of meeting external dangers. In their haste to mount opposition to outside danger, well meaning but naive internal elements occasionally resort to vigilantism. For example, in the *Bonanza* production, "No Less a Man," the Cartwrights defend an aging sheriff against demands from townfolk that he be removed because of his advanced age and alleged inability to defend the town against an outlaw gang operating in the vicinity. Ultimately, pressure for the sheriff's removal reaches the city council, but action by the Cartwrights prevents removal by the businessman-politician coalition which controls the town. When the outlaws finally attack, the Cartwrights again have to prevent the vigilantes from thwarting the carefully laid plans of the sheriff. Here again, action by an extra-legal group, the Cartwrights, is necessary for legal force, represented by the sheriff, to control the situation.

What the Encapsulated Western does not do is as important as what it does. It does not provide us with in-depth portraits of the external villains; nor does it question the value of community stability and harmony. Despite occasional lapses, the serene unanimity of the community is usually unbroken as it faces those who wish to loot it, rob its banks, or steal its payrolls. The hero, faced with these obvious and stereotyped challenges, rarely needs to make any moral decisions or resolve any social or moral conflicts. When members of the community are led astray, they can easily be shown the error of their ways. When officers of the law are weak, community protectors abound and their way to leadership is open. Citizens of the community are able to recognize legitimate leadership and usually unanimously endorse it. The picture of community in the Encapsulated Western evokes the image of a content, insular, homogeneous, participant America. Its stereotyped views of the external world, its resort to unilateral solutions of a violent, sometimes spasmodic sort, its assumption that ordinary citizens can automatically play technical roles—all suggest a political world view suited to nineteenth-century America, yet still embedded in our political expectations.

That the community itself can be a major source of danger to

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the hero comes to be recognized only in the Self-Conscious Western. Self-Conscious Westerns, however, are a minority of all westerns. In them, the defining characteristic is that the community is rent with dissension. The dynamics of social life create severe tension both within the community and between the hero and the community. Like a long-suffering father, the hero must reconstruct community life along legitimate lines. The Self-Conscious Western focuses on ambiguities in the meaning of community, pinpoints the strains that community life produces, and identifies barriers to individual fulfillment within a community. Therefore, its themes are more nearly in harmony with contemporary American experience.

In the Encapsulated Western heroes acted automatically as residents of communities to protect community security. Rarely could any value other than community security be identified as the motivation for the hero's behavior. In the Self-Conscious Western, increasingly, the hero protects civil liberties, due process of law, and the rights of minorities and majorities. In short, *within* communities civil liberties become a problem, because individuals within communities find it difficult to abide by the rules of fairness, restraint and reciprocity that are the foundations of community life. Community implies restraint, yet such restraint is a constant burden.

Typically, the Self-Conscious Western shows one faction of the community exploiting another, either by perverting the legal process or by monopolizing real estate. Often, the hero must prevent hotheads in the community from lynching accused criminals housed in the local jail. These breakdowns of community restraint are occasionally encouraged by "respectable" elements of the community who may benefit from exploitation. Given this situation, the community is less capable of generating its own leadership to protect civil liberties. It is often forced to rely on non-resident heroes, many of whom, naturally, have to surmount community suspicion in order to restore dignity and justice.

Civil liberties, we should note again, are primarily a problem associated with intra-community dynamics. External challenges to the system have to do mainly with money. That civil liberties

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should be a major community problem indicates the extent to which, even in the absence of outside danger, the bases of community remain tenuous.

Let us look at two examples of Self-Conscious Westerns which indicate the importance of civil liberties and outside leadership. In a *Bronco* presentation, "Night Train to Denver," the hero, a visitor in town, is framed by members of the community for a robbery. Virtually the entire "respectable" core of the community is rotten. Involved in the plot are the local undertaker, the Wells Fargo representative, and a dance hall girl. Decent local elements cannot count on the intervention of local law enforcement authorities; nor can Bronco. Ultimately, he emerges from the situation by dint of his own cunning and restores the community to law and order. In another program, the non-resident hero of *Have Gun Will Travel*, Paladin, has to intervene in a community to defend a feeble-minded young man from a local lynch mob.

As the *Have Gun Will Travel* example suggests, although challenges to the hero in Self-Conscious Westerns often take the form of civil liberties violations, the motives that produce such challenges do not usually involve elaborate designs on the part of villains to gain and exercise power over a long period. Instead, need for an outburst of heated revenge motivates the villain to violate civil liberties. Of course, revenge is rarely a motive of outsiders who challenge the community. Those within who revolt against the community and the hero who represents its civilized norms seek revenge for various sorts of frustration. In the case of the *Have Gun Will Travel* episode, they revolt directly against frustrating community legal constraints. On the other hand, in an episode of *Temple Houston* an unattractive girl frames her two brothers by making it appear they have murdered a marshal. As the hero unravels her deception, we become aware that she suffers from the excessive attention her parents paid to her brothers and the neglect they showed her. Therefore, in the first instance she acts to avenge herself on her frustrating parents, not on the community. However, because she is a community dweller, she can express her frustration only by shattering community constraints.

With internal dissension so rife in the Self-Conscious Western, it is no surprise that the hero's actions are not universally

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admired. Often the disruptive internal faction is led by corrupt community law officers who use their positions to make the hero's task difficult. In other cases, suspicion may be cast on the hero by the misguided. For example, in another of the *Bronco* series, the hero is mistaken by members of the community for a robber and subjected to a series of indignities before he can drag others along with him in his search for justice. Again, however, we should note that although the hero in the Self-Conscious Western has to change community life to make it just, he never challenges the basic goodness of community living itself. Nonetheless, the Self-Conscious Western at least realizes the implications of community living.

Challenges which arise wholly within the community are especially likely to exploit citizen gullibility. Westerns usually teach that those within a community can be trusted, while those without cannot. It is therefore easy for unscrupulous individuals within the community to pervert the trust of citizens. Coalitions of misled citizens directed by unscrupulous leaders often persecute the hero or others within the community. In one episode of *Lawman*, for example, rumors disseminated by a villainous local lawyer succeeded in turning an entire town against the heroic marshal. The lawyer so captivates the town with his gossip that a group of slovenly barflies publicly reviles the marshal. Eventually he proves his innocence and the town council, embarrassed by the behavior of the citizens, make him a public apology.

Contrary to what we might expect, law officers are no more effective in dealing with internal problems of civil liberties than they are with security problems produced by external danger. Indeed, if anything, they are a bit weaker. One of the reasons law officers find themselves in this anomalous position stems from their own situations within the community. Often they are themselves caught in the pattern of internal injustice; and, indeed, in some cases, dishonest sheriffs and marshals are the principal villains against whom the hero must direct his attack. For example, in the *Virginian* episode, "Smile of a Dragon," the hero protects resident Chinese against the discrimination of local legal officials. In a *Stagecoach West* presentation, the hero prevents a local sheriff grown drunk with power from arbitrarily condemning innocent individuals to death. The Self-Conscious Western shows

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that officers of the law may be vicious as well as bland, villains as well as heroes.

However, despite the bitterness engendered by intra-community conflict, reform of wrongdoers is considerably more likely in the Self-Conscious Western than in the Encapsulated Western. Though subjected to strain, the bonds that hold members of the community together survive. It is easier and more natural to give errant members of the community a second chance than it is to give a second chance to strangers. Furthermore, reform seems to go hand in hand with violations of civil liberties and is not extended to those who steal from the community. A robber, apparently, is beyond redemption, but a man who merely oppresses his neighbor can be reformed.⁷

To summarize, the western suggests that, although community is the center of civilized life, it is by no means an unmixed blessing. Communities are beset from without by the natural hostilities of an incalculable, implacable environment. They are threatened from within by public gullibility, by the propensity of their citizens to revert to older, less civilized patterns of behavior, and by the inability of their citizens to withstand the inevitable frustrations of community life. Leadership is occasionally problematic. When communities are most beset with internal disruptions, they often must look outward for help. Under no circumstances can they rely upon their law officers for protection. Communities are, however, fortunate to have a general consensus on fundamental values which aid them in preserving their security against outside attack, a surfeit of citizen leaders to protect them against the outside, and the ultimate ability to recognize outside leadership which will aid in the restoration of civil liberties.⁸ In the

⁷ This depiction is possibly motivated by the feeling that outsiders can "take us for suckers," whereas insiders share our moral code. See Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), 48-53, for a suggestive discussion on this point.

⁸ Evidence exists that most Americans agree on fundamental civil libertarian principles at the abstract level. However, this consensus shatters when people are confronted with concrete situations involving conflicts over civil liberties. See James Prothro and Charles Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy," *Journal of Politics*, 22, # 2 (June, 1960); and Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," *American Political Science Review*, 58, # 2 (June, 1964).

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television western, community is a bud coming to an uncertain bloom.

Crime-Spy Programs and Motivation

Crime-spy programs show us the community in bloom, but, curiously, the blossom is too complex to form a major subject of examination. The world of the crime-spy program is contemporary; unlike the western it does not borrow its setting from an earlier period when communities were simple enough to be treated as wholes. Crime-spy programs, therefore, can be understood only as depictions of individual motivation in the context of complicated, ambiguous and fragmented community settings.

The decline of community as a major topic of concern in crime-spy programs is paralleled by the fading from the scene of civil liberties as a set of values the hero defends. There are two reasons for this change. Many of the spy programs involve international confrontations. Under these conditions, there is no expectation that civil libertarian norms apply to the opponent. The grim battle of spies is too deadly and too all-encompassing to permit pause for the niceties of civilized behavior. Rather, in this shadowland of intrigue, hero and villain are distinguished less by the values they defend than by the glamour, attractiveness and, in some cases, wit of their personalities. Also, crime-spy heroes are professional practitioners of their trade. The professional code of the crime-spy hero is far removed from the everyday problems of civil liberties. His creed is as different from the creed of the Western amateur as a Jaguar from a Model T.

As might be expected, therefore, the meaning of "Law" changes from the western to the crime-spy program. In the western there is some consciousness of law at least as a set of aspirations. Contrary interpretations of the relationship between law, community and civil liberties underlie the Self-Conscious Western. With the decline of community and civil liberties as foci of investigation in crime-spy programs, the explicit consciousness of law and legality also vanishes. There were many official representatives of law in the western—sheriffs, marshals, occasionally bureaucrats. But in

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crime-spy programs new occupations only ambiguously related to the law spring up. Secret agents are indirectly connected in most cases to the legal apparatus, but their action is never circumscribed by this connection. In many crime shows professional "private eyes" catch the criminal, while *both* the police and the citizens stand by either in amazement or consternation. Their relative independence from legal institutions gives private eyes and spies a greater latitude in their methods. The result of this change is that, paradoxically, despite the many *crimes* committed, the meaning of law is only rarely explored.

Given these developments, it is not surprising that the crime-spy hero, unlike his western compatriot, often reaches the conclusion that the end justifies the means. This new view is reflected first in the importance of imposture in crime-spy programs. The demands of modern spying and crime deterrence require the hero to affect disguises. Often he is required to assume new identities to infiltrate the villain's organization. The expansion of and fascination with the technology of detection also undermines scruples about means. For example, in a *Honey West* episode, "The Grey Lady," one of the heroes, in clear violation of laws governing the invasion of privacy, attaches a miniature television camera to the side of a real television set, so that some suspicious activity can be kept under surveillance. In a *Secret Agent* program, "The Black Book," the hero places a miniature microphone in a roll of banknotes so that he can trace some blackmailers to whom he gives the money. For both legitimate and illegitimate purposes, technology has brought heroes and villains together in their codes of behavior.⁹

Crime-spy programs replace the western emphasis on community with an investigation of motivation. The motivation of the villain especially forms the fulcrum of action. Typically, villains are motivated either by revenge, greed or power. The portrait of the power seeker and depictions of the nature of power itself distinguish motivation in the spy-crime program from the west-

⁹ The American fascination with gadgetry has been noted by many foreign observers. It may be part of the manipulative impulse which Gorer associates with Americans. See Geoffrey Gorer, *The American People* (New York: Norton, 1964), 153-54. In any case, concern with gadgetry has clearly entered a new phase.

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ern. In the western we see depictions of greed and revenge, but rarely a treatment of power. The view of power exhibited to us, however, in crime-spy programs is one with radical distortions of significant importance.

First, we must understand that power is something only a villain can want. Those on the side of patriotism, morality and rectitude have little to do with it. The hero of the crime-spy program agrees with Acton that a desire for and enjoyment of power are sure to be corrupting.¹⁰ Villains who desire power may, of course, wish to wreak revenge on others. However, their plans are usually more elaborate and premeditated than those who desire a simple act of revenge. They can express their alienation from the social order only by hatching complex, ingenious schemes to punish society by gaining power.

Examples of some power shows indicate the ambition, the extensiveness, and the ingenuity of the villain's schemes. In *The Avengers* program, "The Danger Makers," the villain hypnotizes some military officers into pursuing danger. He plays upon the naive romanticism of those officers who miss the "glories" of war. The villain plans to have his hypnotized army steal the British crown jewels from the Tower of London, and he revels in his power to manipulate people. In a *Wild, Wild West* program, "The Night that Terror Stalked the Town," the hero finds himself in what seems to be a town full of people. However, he is deceived, since the entire town is the masterful mechanical creation of a villain who controls it with a computer. The villain plots to gain control of the state of California by obtaining a bomb formula with which he will blackmail the United States government.

In order for the hero to prevent these villains from carrying out their evil designs to gain power, he must resort to elaborate schemes of his own. Typically, these schemes require the hero to become an impostor. For example, in *The Avengers* presentation, "Room Without a View," the heroes, an English secret service man and his attractively Mod helper each impersonate other characters in order to find out why large numbers of British

¹⁰ For an interesting attempt to dispel the widespread American fear of power by disproving the Acton formulation, see Harold D. Lasswell and Arnold Rogow, *Power, Corruption and Rectitude* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

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scientists have been disappearing. They discover that the Chinese Communists are in league with a wealthy hotel owner. The hotel owner has constructed in his hotel a special room which is actually a trap for visiting scientists. These scientists are then brainwashed in the same hotel, though because of ingenious simulation they believe themselves actually to be in a Communist prison camp. In another *Wild, Wild West* program, "The Night of the Freebooters," the hero masquerades as a criminal in order to infiltrate a secret army which has been built up by a military-scientific genius who plans to take over the United States. The sadistic villain has invented advanced rifles and machine guns which he plans to use in his uprising.

These examples highlight another distinguishing characteristic of power as a motivation. Only tyrannical, warped, evil geniuses can invent and manipulate the brilliant gadgets and the elaborate schemes which confront the hero. Power as a motivation is characteristic of frustrated intellectuals. The intellectual is feared as a brilliant, but twisted mind bent on self-aggrandizement. He is grouped with other social oddities. For example, the list of power villains includes disappointed ex-Harvard professors; witty, sadistic dwarfs; psychiatrists, and eccentrics with fetishes (the Mad Hatter in *Batman*). Often, the brilliant, but mad scientist can easily deceive the hero. Despite the spoofing character of some of these presentations, the power programs indicate considerable anxiety over the uses to which scientific expertise and the intellect can be put.¹¹

Although the hero tries to deceive the villain by assuming a new identity, his ruse rarely succeeds. More often, the villain, through his superior intelligence, is easily able to penetrate the hero's disguise and capture him. The hero must then fall back on his native resourcefulness and intelligence to figure a way out of his situation. Occasionally he can rely on the warped behavior of the evil genius to provide him with an opening, as when the hero of *The Avengers* program, "The Dangermakers," tricks the psychiatrist

¹¹ The coupling of power themes with mad geniuses is reminiscent of German cinematic expressionism between the wars. For striking parallels, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), part II.

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villain by making use of one of the latter's own operating principles. The ability of a resourceful hero to combat scientific genius provides reassurance that the corrupting powers of science and intellectualism are still controllable.

Given their extensiveness of plotting, their power theme, and their greater violence (they involve more murders, for example), one would expect to find an important role for governmental figures and police officials in power shows. In fact, we do not. Though there are more bureaucrats and politicians in power shows than in revenge or money shows, they contribute little to the progression of the drama. Normally, if anything, politicians and bureaucrats hinder the actions of the hero. For example, just when it appears that the hero of the *Secret Agent* episode, "A Date with Doris," will succeed in spiriting his hunted comrade out of a Latin dictatorship, he is impeded by a local politician who orders him to return the fugitive to governmental supervision. Although politicians and bureaucrats appear more in crime-spy programs than in westerns, they exhibit an almost entirely negative image. Traditional law enforcement agencies may play a role in programs where the villain is motivated by a simple desire for revenge or money, but they cannot be trusted to cope with the complicated schemes of villains bent on gaining tyrannical power.

It should be clear by now that the picture of power in crime-spy programs is distorted. Power is seen as an abnormality which can attract only thwarted, odd personalities. Rarely are there suggestions that power has any "normal" aspects, and relationships between power and the conduct of ordinary political and social affairs are rarely treated. The depictions of those who are professional power seekers and shapers—politicians—are cursory and unflattering. Those who would look to television as a device to educate the public in political affairs should not ignore these depictions.

Of course, there have been television series in the past which attempted to treat power as a normal process touching all of society. Series such as *East Side/West Side* and the *Trials of O'Brien* put power into a realistic, if somewhat more prosaic context. These programs, and others like them, have for the most part been commercially unsuccessful, despite significant artistic attainment in some cases. The picture, therefore, which the audience

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holds seems to be one which conceives power to be a freak phenomenon, corrupting to those who desire it and suitable only for frustrated scientists, intellectuals and deviates.

What produces the frustrations that lead villains in power shows to accentuate power? Typically, these villains become frustrated in their professional lives and turn to power as a means of assuaging their egos. Power is a response quite specifically directed against a depriving society. A second major motivation is a conflict between the values villains hold and the values they feel prevalent around them. In revenge programs, on the other hand, villains rarely are concerned with frustrations in their professional lives. Though they are as interested as power villains in changing society's values, they react to frustrations in love, a motive which plays no role in power programs. Power is, therefore, a response directed entirely against social frustration; revenge, a motive directed partially against private frustration. Finally, greed stems primarily from professional disappointment, but also, strangely, from disappointment in love.

Heroes

We were accustomed, when we thought of westerns, to expect not only that the hero would be a wanderer, but that he would act independently. Even though in the contemporary television western the hero finds it possible to reconcile his own and community values, we might still expect him to act alone. However, independent heroes rarely exist any more. Instead, we have "corporate heroes," a team which acts as a unit. This trend to corporate heroism is even more prevalent in crime-spy programs.

Corporate heroism performs two functions. First, it permits the responsibilities and demands of heroic action to be spread around so that they do not prove too onerous for any one person. Often, the corporate hero structure allows one hero to perform stupidly or insensitively, knowing that there are other heroes around who can rescue him from his difficulties. Therefore, it is not disastrous if Jim West of *Wild, Wild West* falls into the hands of the villain who sees through his disguise. West can be sure that his friend and partner, Artemus Ward, will save him. The diffusion of

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responsibility which corporatism permits allows the heroes to shirk responsibility for questionable decisions. For example, in a *Bonanza* production, the father of the Cartwrights experiences guilt after rejecting the advances of a young Indian girl. Rather than continue to frustrate her, he arranges for her to leave the territory. However, one of his sons persuades the girl that she should not hate his father for rejecting her. In this way, the team has managed to alleviate the guilt of one of its members.

Heroism by committee is also useful for television producers. It gives audiences more heroes with which to identify, and it cuts down the exposure of any one actor or character. In this way it lengthens the life of a series. For this reason, some series which originally featured single heroes, such as *Gunsmoke*, have adopted the corporate hero format. We should not, however, interpret corporate heroism merely as a commercial device. It is also proof of the extent to which group decision-making is now a widespread American expectation.

Relations between heroes and women also differ from what we may have expected. In westerns, we used to believe that the bashful cowboy would shy away from any attempt to exploit the innocent ingenue whose heart he had won. Instead, he would climb on his horse and ride off into the sunset. This plot structure rarely exists any more. Because the hero is usually a resident, he is able and, increasingly, willing to have long term relationships with women. However, because marriage for the hero is out of the question, he must put up with implied liaisons. Thus, Marshal Dillon of *Gunsmoke* and Kitty, the owner of a local saloon, are clearly involved with each other, but only in the most mysterious and ambiguous of ways. Permanent liaisons between heroes and women are even more characteristic of spy-crime programs.

In part, the greater tolerance for these liaisons stems from the new role of women. We find in westerns that the hero often needs the help of a woman to defend civil liberties. If she is a resident of the community who has "been around," the woman can often gain access to those the hero cannot. She is, therefore, a vital link in his plans. On the other hand, in crime-spy programs, with the absence of community and civil liberties as a major theme, women have less effect on values which the hero defends. But there are a number of spy-crime programs in which women and men are

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coequal partners in a corporate hero structure. Indeed, in the case of *Honey West*, the dominant hero is a woman. Nor should it be assumed that women function differently from men as heroes. Heroines may make use of their beauty, but they also have all the technical virtuosity and physical agility of their male counterparts. They are thoroughly professional.

Therefore, we have extremely civilized, contemporary heroes both in westerns and crime-spy programs. However, the presence of power as a characteristic motive in crime-spy programs has its own effect on the hero. Confrontations with power force the hero to pose and infiltrate. Western heroes, on the other hand, rarely need to pose or infiltrate, for they are almost never dealing with power seekers. How can imposture and infiltration be understood? On the one hand we may adopt a relatively prosaic interpretation. Because the plans of the villain are so elaborate in the power show, the hero must resort to imposture. After all, a spy must spy. On the other hand, the relationship between power, imposture and infiltration can be interpreted differently. The hero needs to pose because power both attracts and repels him. The hero knows that power is "bad," yet it is terribly attractive. In order to flirt with those who handle power, yet to deny to himself his attraction to power, he must adopt a different identity. In posing, the hero unconsciously claims that it is not "really" he who is attracted to power, but only his professional, second self which he can manipulate. The only reaction to power permitted his "real" self is revulsion and attack; only as an impersonator can he both deny his own attraction to power and at the same time get close to it. The behavior of the hero reflects once more the extraordinary ambivalence with which television, as a reflector of cultural norms, views power.

ARTHUR ASA BERGER

KUNG FU: THE RESOLUTION OF THE DIALECTIC

Puritan fearfulness is best explained in terms of the actual experiences of exile, alienation, and social mobility about which the saints so often and insistently wrote. Discipline and repression are responses to these experiences, responses which do not aim at a return to some former security, but rather at a vigorous control and a narrowing of energies—a bold effort to shape a personality amidst "chaos." MICHAEL WALZER, "Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology."

In the early seventies *Kung Fu* was a rage that seemed to pervade American culture. The program, starring David Carradine, was extremely popular; *Kung Fu* films, *Kung Fu* clubs, children playing *Kung Fu* were to be seen everywhere. Then, suddenly, it lost its hold on the American imagination and now the program wanders around its network, looking for a home and a place in the sun, much as Caine, its hero does.

America has always had a fascination with Eastern culture and there are devotees of the various Eastern martial arts, Indian gurus, Zen Buddhists, Sokka-Gakkai missionaries and Chinese restaurants scattered across the length and breadth of the country. After former-president Richard Nixon's trip to China, during which television stations carried broadcasts from Peking and other

Arthur Asa Berger teaches in the Interdisciplinary Social Sciences Program at San Francisco State University. This essay is reprinted from *The TV Guided American* by permission of Walker & Company, Inc., New York. Copyright © 1975 by Arthur Asa Berger.

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Chinese cities by the hour, the country was engulfed by a wave of books, programs, and films with Chinese themes and topics.

Actually the program *Kung Fu* is a spin-off from the big rage for Kung Fu movies which erupted out of Hong Kong and catapulted the late Bruce Lee to fame and the proverbial fortune before he died at the age of 32. Lee made only four movies, but they became international hits and firmly established the genre. Some critics have suggested that *Kung Fu* (I will use italics to identify the television program and separate it from the genre) is something new, something different on the American cultural scene. After all, its hero is an oriental priest who is practiced in an Eastern martial art, and the pacifist ambiance of the program also seems at first glance a bit unusual.

However, if you look at the program carefully you find that aside from these rather superficial traits, *Kung Fu* is as American as chop suey. Though Caine, the hero of *Kung Fu* is an oriental priest, he is, nevertheless, half American. He is the product of a union of a white American father and a Chinese mother, and in Caine we find a meeting of East and West and a *reconciliation of a dialectic that exists in the American imagination* and which is echoed in the program. The structure of the program is that of a dialectic, resolved, ultimately, in a ritual combat. But more about this shortly.

Caine, like all Americans, is a spiritual orphan—a man on a quest, looking for his roots, his "self." In search of this elusive "self," and an outcast from a despotic China, he wanders through the wasteland of the American West. He finds, in the course of looking for a "usable past" that he is unwittingly involved, at every turn, in other matters—so that his private quest takes on social dimensions; in trying to redeem himself he finds he must redeem society around him.

Frequently he finds himself defending racial minorities—Chinese, Mexicans, etc.—against a bewildering assortment of villains. In each case he finds himself forced to act, forced to use his powers to save himself or his friends (or both) from antagonists who cannot understand the dimensions of his strength or the intensity of his commitment. In keeping with the American notion of what spirituality is like and with the clichés in the common mind about the religious sensibility, Caine is portrayed as someone terribly solemn and glum. An English critic, Peter

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Lennon, commented about this in a review of the program that appeared in *The Sunday Times*:

On ITV we had *Kung Fu*, which was at least a painstaking attempt to launch a new cult figure: an American trained in the Chinese art of self-defense. A pacifist killer in good causes. The opening episode was elaborately worked out; good photography, sequences well edited and thrills spaced out with careful calculation.

But *Kung Fu* is afflicted with a defect which is common to a great many modern American television heroes: he is an unbearably glum creature. He is also sanctimonious. The mistake was to have not cast an oriental in the role; there the taciturn quality would have had a sheen of mythical inscrutability. A crew-cut American with the fleshy face of a college soft-ball player, suggests only that he is suffering from post-adolescent depression.

Caine is glum because in the American Protestant mind spirituality is glum and all the new American Christ figures walking around in the mid-seventies wallow about in a veneer of sentimental solemnity and glumness, demonstrating that they are playing roles and little else. People without a sense of tragedy can imagine no other options.

There is a strong and perhaps simplistic moralism about the series. Each adventure is meant to "teach us" a lesson about life, and this is made explicit by the flashback technique that is so dominant and, to my mind, beautifully used. In each tale the flashback permits the audience to see a second variation or reading of the episode, with Caine's master in the monastery explaining, in symbolic terms, the lesson to be learned. Something that took place in the Chinese monastery, where Caine was raised, always has meaning and is relevant to something taking place in any given episode.

In a recent adventure, we find Caine being taught by one of the monks, who is one of his masters. This master's family is murdered by the agents of the Emperor and the master barely escapes to America with the lone survivor of his family, a young

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nephew. Years later Caine meets the master and finds himself involved in a very difficult situation. It seems that the nephew of the master was killed by being run over by a train, and the master—now partially deranged—is avenging himself by blowing up the railroad. Inadvertently, Chinese railroad workers (who are shown being cruelly exploited by the railroad) are killed. Caine finds himself torn between two powerful forces: on the one hand there is the tradition of reverence and obedience owed to masters bred into Caine in the monastery, and on the other hand there are the demands of social justice and morality.

The situation is resolved via ritual combat. Caine fights and defeats his Kung Fu master, who then (so we are to assume) wanders off, having learned his lesson. "No man," Caine tells the master, "is all powerful." Yes! "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," to paraphrase Lord Acton. It might be argued that the philosophizing in *Kung Fu* is simplistic and banal; this may be true. But my point is that this moralizing is very much in keeping with the American spirit—as is the theme of the reluctant hero, who only fights after he is attacked or when he is cornered.

Kung Fu plays upon our fantasies about power, and, in particular, about natural power, about power in our fists and body. We learn that this power is dangerous and must be kept under control, and are shown that the man who is powerful and knows he is powerful is the meek man, the mild man, the quiet man, the man who even goes out of his way to avoid trouble. He does not have to prove anything to other people—or himself—since he is secure in his identity.

In *Kung Fu* the combats usually have a ritualistic quality and are presented in a highly structured and formalized manner. Much use is made of slow motion, which symbolizes the passage from ordinary time to a kind of timelessness—unconsciousness or even death. We are seldom sure which, for after the combat scenes, which are always concluded with an aura of finality, we quickly move on to other matters—usually Caine's departure. He has been tested and not found wanting, and now must resume his quest—the only battle he faces which he cannot win in this search for his origin and for his "lost" American roots.

I have, to this point, identified a number of themes and aspects

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of *Kung Fu* which relate it to American culture and American values. I have suggested that Caine is a "spiritual orphan" like many Americans (who are also immigrants), and that, like them, he finds himself on a quest. His mission inevitably involves him in fighting for justice and truth, frequently on the side of underdogs and oppressed minorities. In keeping with the American popular imagination, as a man of God he is portrayed as a solemn, perhaps even glum, figure, since we equate spirituality and depth with solemnity. And, as is so often the case in American popular culture and the American imagination, he (as "youth") teaches older and more powerful figures (even one of his "masters" in the episode described) lessons about morality and justice.

I would like to turn from this subject to one I mentioned earlier, namely the dialectical structure of the program. In each program we generally find ourselves drawn between opposites, so that a kind of dialectical process is established which is finally resolved at the end of each episode. To see this more clearly, examine the following chart:

Oppositions in *Kung Fu*

China	America
Emperor	Common Man
evil	evil
Civilized East	Wild West
History and Civilization	Nature
Spiritual depth	Spiritual shallowness
Power in man (internal)	Power in weapons (external)
The Past (flashbacks)	The Present
Institutions (monastery)	Discrete individuals
Community	Society
Yellow	White
Youth subservient: learns	Youth dominant: teaches
Confirmed identity	Diffused identity
Totalitarian society	Anarchy
Political subjugation	Economic subjugation

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Resolutions in *Kung Fu*

Half-white, half-yellow, half-Chinese, half-American hero
uses wisdom and powers from East to survive in West.
Brings order and justice to anarchic society.

Although this chart represents something in the way of a simplification I do believe it demonstrates, rather clearly, that there is a dialectic in the program; we are asked to reconcile opposites, and the success of the program is due to the fact that it accomplishes this in a satisfactory manner. I am not arguing that audiences are aware that these oppositions exist in their minds and in the American imagination—or that they are conscious of them. I do believe that they are affected by them since there is a fundamental dialectic in the American mind which defines America "in contrast to" Europe and also, now, the so-called "inscrutable" East.

China is portrayed as a totalitarian and corrupt land in which evil is incarnated in the Emperor. It is an ancient and old civilization, but we find cruelty there along with "wisdom." The two dominant Chinese institutions, for our purposes, are the monastery where Caine is raised, and the Court of the Emperor. America, on the other hand, is a wilderness full of lawless despots, where evil is incarnate in the common man and not necessarily a small group of corrupt rulers. Evil can exist, then, anywhere—and just because a society has spiritual depth, like China, doesn't mean it is any better. Indeed, we might argue that the spiritual lightweights in America are ignorant and don't know any better; when they learn they are capable of change.

Our view of China is confined, generally, to the monastery, where we find a community of saints and scholars living in harmony and peace. The greatest of the masters in the monastery is a blind man who is Caine's spiritual father and who teaches him about "life" at the same time he initiates him into the mysteries of Kung Fu. In this monastery there are rites, there are tasks, there is a path, and everyone in the monastery has what might be called a "confirmed" identity. They know who they are and what they are, except, that is, for Caine. He also has a secure identity but this is tarnished by the mystery of his origins, his roots in America, and

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it is the search for this missing piece in the puzzle of his identity that brings Caine to the American West.

Caine finds himself in a moral wilderness of individuals at war with one another and, of course, with themselves. They are a group of spiritual lightweights who need "teaching," and they recognize in Caine's calmness and, ultimately, in his power, that he has "depth" and much to teach them. At the end of the episode dealing with the master who dynamited the railroad, the railroad inspector (whose job it was to find the dynamiter) leaves the railroad, after securing better conditions for the Chinese workers. He can no longer justify (to his conscience) working for the unscrupulous railroad owners who exploit the Chinese so cruelly. America may not have cruel monarchs, monsters with political power, but it has, instead, economic "monarchs" who tyrannize people as cruelly as political ones.

We find something rather interesting here—the recognition that evil can arise out of innocence as well as knowledge, it can arise in a wild and barbarous West as well as an effete and over-civilized East. In America, however, the evil-doers are out of their class when they get into a fight with Caine, and they tumble through the air in dazzling slow-motion with a look of incredulity and awe. The brutish barbarians of the Wild West are like children in the hands of this quiet Kung Fu master, who unites in himself the moral fervor of the Protestant West and the technique of the East.

The price Caine pays for his power is celibacy! Few can make such a sacrifice, but in this respect he is not unlike many of the gunslingers in the westerns who also renounced love for power and a different kind of potency. One thinks of *Shane*, for example, as a similar kind of figure—a wanderer who appears, fights an incarnation of evil, and rides off into the mountains. Heroes like Caine cannot marry the schoolmarm; their love is of a higher order. In truth it is a modern manifestation of ascetic Protestantism, which dominates to this day (in many respects) American culture and the American imagination. The essential purity of Caine, his dedication, his unswerving devotion to his cause—all have the flavor of an undiluted Puritanism, masked in the guise of an oriental monk with strange powers.

I cannot leave this analysis of *Kung Fu* without saying something about the technical qualities of the program. Generally speaking it

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is beautifully done, and the photography is frequently brilliant, capturing and conveying an aura of mystery and magic. The use of the flashbacks contribute to this; time is interrupted and we move backwards and forwards through it, and through it at various speeds. The way time is used tells us that things as well as people are not always as they seem, and one cannot "count" on everything proceeding forwards on a regular basis. These flashbacks also reflect that the program is based on a very sophisticated understanding of how our minds work—for it does not proceed forward all the time but, rather, mirrors the "stream of consciousness" in our minds. Our minds race back and forth through time, from memories of the past to speculations about the future, and the program does the same thing.

Caine is a quintessential American hero—one more spiritual orphan wandering about through the American moral wilderness in search of personal salvation and achieving it (like most of our heroes) through the redemption of his fellow man.

DANIEL MENAKER

ART AND ARTIFICE IN NETWORK NEWS

Sculpting the Event into Pleasing Form

You may never have cared to analyze the literary aspects of the television ad in which Fat Ralph sits on the edge of his bed and keeps his wife awake by groaning, "I can't believe I ate that whole thing!" But the ad is not without poetry and drama. It has a chorus (in almost perfect iambic pentameter), physical suffering, character contrast, marital conflict, and a comedic resolution generated by patient wifely wisdom and a *deus-ex-tinfoil*.

Three factors militate against our regarding the Alka-Seltzer ad as art. First, most everyday happenings are relatively poor in artistic quality. Fat Ralph's dyspeptic insomnia falls far nearer zero on the aesthetic scale than does, say, Macbeth's lament over "sleep that knits up the ravel'd sleave of care." Second, we approach very few experiences with an attitude that makes us receptive to their aesthetic value. It would be pointless, although perhaps amusing, to explicate every phone call we make. Finally, even if it were pragmatically possible to view our ordinary actions and circumstances as artifacts, it would soon become tiresome to do so. The experience of art gains part of its psychological value from its very extraordinariness: we turn to music, films, or literature because they "take us out" of ourselves and our jumbled surroundings for a while.

Daniel Menaker is on the editorial staff of *The New Yorker*. This essay was first published in *Harper's Magazine* (October 1972) and is reprinted by permission of the author. Copyright © 1972 by Harper's Magazine.

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Nevertheless, for the past twenty years or so, an increasing number of artists and critics have been directing our attention toward the aesthetic potential of the commonplace: Warhol gave us Brillo boxes and soup labels; serious architects have begun to celebrate gas stations and pizza parlors; poets "find" poetry everywhere; composers have incorporated "real" noises into their works; underground films show us long segments of unedited reality.

One would expect that commercial-television programming and advertising should be a major subject for this new, iconoclastic aesthetic scrutiny. After all, approximately forty million Americans watched *Marcus Welby, M.D.* each week last season. But, because of vestigial academicism or because it bears too strong a resemblance to "real" film and drama, "shlock" TV remains the disowned daughter of Pop Culture. This neglect is lamentable because it keeps TV in a cultural doghouse, where, I believe, it has never belonged. More important, in at least one area—documentary and news programming—failure to apprehend the artifice in what we see on television may have practical implications for our "real" lives. It is crucial that we understand how TV producers mingle art and reality in their news shows so we can at least try to separate the two elements.

Approximately fifty million people watch Cronkite, Chancellor, or Reasoner and Smith every weekday evening. I hazard the guess that an overwhelming majority of this audience believes that network news keeps them "in touch" with the world at large. But I suggest that even if network news fulfills this presumed purpose of accurate communication, it simultaneously and contradictorily functions as art/entertainment—and that this second function vitiates the first.

Each of the evening network news shows begins with a scenario. On CBS Walter Cronkite, often scribbling copy up to the last second, is first seen in profile. An announcer, speaking somewhat loudly over the exciting chatter of teletype machines, introduces the show and Cronkite; he then recites the name and location of each correspondent, as the same information is superimposed in white printing over the opening shot. On NBC John Chancellor sits to the side of an oversize calendar month, with today's date

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circled, and tells the audience about the stories to be covered, often suggesting interrelationships among them. On ABC the opening format is a bit more complicated, but Reasoner and Smith do make use of pictures for the lead stories and a listing for the less important ones.

On each network the ritual opening establishes the theme of the entire program: excitement governed by order. The announcer projects intensity (as do Chancellor and Smith); the listing of events to be covered conveys control and structure. A pattern of decreasing importance strengthens the audience's sense of structure: all three news organizations almost invariably start with what they consider the "biggest" story and then proceed to matters of smaller and smaller dimension. On many evenings, the first few reports deal with international affairs—the South Vietnamese Army staging one of their patented dramatic comebacks, another agreement handed down from a Summit, Britain overcoming the thirteenth in a seemingly interminable series of procedural obstacles to joining the Common Market—and the anchormen present them with appropriately grave mien and in serious tones. The middle distance is littered with more fragmentary national news—the House-Senate squabble over the anti-busing amendment to the higher-education bill, another Ford or GM recall (this one occasioned by the discovery that for a week mayonnaise was inadvertently substituted for transmission fluid at a Detroit plant), the Republican governors' conference—which anchormen and correspondents report more chattily, unless, of course, they are dealing with some local disaster. The conclusion of many network-news programs strives for humor or lightness, justified by Broader Social Significance. CBS occasionally ends with a report by Charles Kuralt "On the Road," examining, say, the efforts of a Menominee, Wisconsin, senior citizens group to form a semipro jai alai team. Chancellor or Reasoner may finish up with a funny marijuana story or an all-of-us-are-human anecdote (Chief Justice Burger gets a traffic ticket).

This thirty-minute diminuendo, especially when it ends on a cheerful note, promotes an illusion of hard work accomplished. It implies that simply watching a news program is a meaningful task and that if we see the whole thing through, we deserve a reward, a

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little fun. The show's overall structure also tends to cancel out or modify whatever urgency informs its content and belies the radical messiness of reality.

Network-news shows routinely use highly structured film or tape reports from correspondents in the field as building blocks in their total edifice. These reports generally follow a formal, almost ritualized dramatic pattern, of which the following is a hypothetical example:

CRONKITE: Zanzibar's Grand Satrap Mustafa Kelly visited the White House today for talks with President Nixon. Dan Rather has a report. [Cut to shot of White House lawn, followed by Satrap's debarkation from limousine, followed by shots of Nixon and Kelly shaking hands and grinning in the Trapezoidal Room and then disappearing into privacy. Rather narrates the pictures.]

RATHER: Satrap Kelly, a man well known for his blunt, outspoken frankness, was expected to have some harsh words for Mr. Nixon concerning the President's plan to use Zanzibar, a tiny island republic, for Navy target practice, and to resettle its inhabitants in Joplin. The two leaders greeted each other warmly and joked about jet lag, but many observers feel that the smiles may fade once serious talks begin. [Cut to a full-length shot of Rather standing in front of White House, microphone in hand.] It is impossible to predict what the outcome of Kelly's visit will be, but one thing is certain: no one knows how—or whether—the issue will be resolved. Dan Rather at the White House.

This facetious example illustrates the stylized construction of filmed news coverage. It has a beginning (Cronkite's introduction and site-fixing pictures), middle (greetings and verbal exposition), and, most typically, end (Rather's on-camera summary statement). Whether it concerns a Vietnam counteroffensive, a German-Russian treaty agreement, or a Washington peace demonstration, each report is a self-contained subunit of a self-contained half hour. The most predictable element of the filmed report—the correspondent's on-camera summary—embodies the pervasive

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atmosphere of controlled excitement mentioned earlier: it serves simultaneously as emotional denouement (concern over what will happen next, in our example) and formalistic completion. In most cases, the structural coherence dominates and, again, cancels out the open-endedness of the actual content. The appearance of the correspondent on camera and the "Dan Rather at the White House" jerk our attention away from the news and back to the news *program*. The reporter's donation of his name and location has come to sound like an incantatory *pax vobiscum*, a formulized placebo.

Our imaginary White House visit also exemplifies the news shows' efforts to inject excitement into merely symbolic events—signings, arrivals, departures, press conferences, briefings, government announcements, speeches, appointments, and so forth; in fact, much of TV news consists of ersatz verbal and visual drama masquerading as the drama that in the real world lies behind a resignation, say, or an increase in the cost of living. Eyewitness stories about unplanned action are unusual fare (except for the relentless battle reports from Vietnam). And even when the networks are "lucky" enough to have a camera crew and newsman on hand at a spontaneous event (as NBC did for the shooting of George Wallace), they inevitably edit the film and wrap it up in smooth prose, if they have the time, so as to maintain as much consistency of product and packaging as possible.

The instinct to control crisis by structural technique rules the network-news program's settings, sounds, and graphics, as well as its copy and film. I have already remarked on the associate sense of urgency created by the teletype clatter audible during the opening of the CBS *Evening News*. Other examples abound: again on CBS, the calm and spacious cerulean behind much of Cronkite's reporting works as a visual antagonist to concern and involvement. (NBC favors darker background colors, like navy or black, which lend intimacy as well as coolness, whereas ABC uses red or orange settings, which are hot and sensational.) Although these studio backgrounds have a basic color scheme, they are also used in other ways. All three networks supplement their anchor-men's words with various kinds of rear-screen graphics—maps, drawings, still photographs, organization logos, and so forth.

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Many of these devices (such as the jagged Expressionist silhouette of a fist clutching a rifle, which ABC has used to illustrate guerrilla news) are distractingly noninformational in themselves, but their most striking general aesthetic quality is the magical ease with which they are summoned forth. Chancellor says, "In Vietnam today," and presto! a bright red map of that beleaguered nation appears behind him. "U.S. B52s carried out more heavy bombing raids on Hanoi," he continues, and Shazam! little white planes appear on the map over North Vietnam with little white sunbursts representing bomb explosions. The newsmen never even take notice of these light shows; they conjure them up and coolly ignore them. The anchormen skip by map, satellite, telephone, and film all over the world, dipping into one crisis after another, but always keeping their emotional distance, like master magicians who perform sensational feats in a detached, almost routine manner.

These men perform as consummate actors, even if they are simply being themselves. Walter Cronkite's paternal persona has been the subject of much analysis. Roger Mudd, Cronkite's heir apparent at CBS, sounds and looks substantial. He is a relatively young man, but his folksy Southern solidity makes him seem widely experienced. Mudd's speech inflections constantly hover on the edge of irony, as if he were saying, I am stable and serious and will tell you a down-home kind of truth, but let's none of us lose perspective and get too *serious*. John Chancellor is less the father and more the friend—the friend who knows a lot and lets you in on it. Harry Reasoner often appears open and vulnerable—an innocent, impressionable man-child. His colleague, Howard K. Smith, is prudent and authoritarian, though his high voice offsets the firmness a little. David Brinkley is smart-alecky, cynical, impish; he habitually asks barbed rhetorical questions and seems to treasure his opportunities to make trouble. Eric Sevareid always looks and sounds weary; he represents pure reason besieged by irrational extremism. Most of the players in the three troupes are physically attractive and aurally elegant. An obese, ugly, or squeaky-voiced newsmen, though he might be professionally qualified, could not meet the nonjournalistic requirements of a network correspondent's job. The competition for ratings, one assumes, must lead the three organizations to seek reporters with

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stage appeal, which, like dramatic structure and entertaining graphics, to some degree blurs the audience's vision of reality.

One may argue that coherent structure and dramatic delivery constitute precisely the right kinds of bait for luring an apathetic TV viewer toward interest in what is going on in the world outside of his personal concerns. That argument may be valid, but it misses the point: the methods used to capture the viewer's interest in a news program are simultaneously diverting and entertaining in themselves; unlike Cleopatra, the news shows satisfy where most they make hungry. And while it may be true that *any* successful attempt to distill reality into dramatic order becomes to some extent self-contained and "unreal," most such efforts—films, paintings, well-told stories, novels, musicals—are at least in part presented as works of art and entertainment.

The three network-news programs are for many Americans the only available mirror of the world at large. And they are fun-house mirrors: they shrink, elongate, widen, narrow, lighten, or exaggerate what stands before them. I do not know whether these images could be corrected or even that they ought to be corrected. I do know that we must see them for what they are, for we do not live in a fun house.

II

THINKING ABOUT TELEVISION

Aubrey Singer raises the essential question for this section. Is TV a mirror or a window? Do we see through it to an exciting vision of the possible or do we see what and who we are, like it or not? Clearly, Singer is concerned with the implications of television, and though the particulars once again vary, all the essays in this group are generally concerned with the same issues. How does television affect our lives? Are the images we see valid ones? Can we find values for living in the programs or, are the values mere idealized reflections, fantasies, illusions? The questions are raised and the answers offered in a humanistic rather than in a scientific context. Like the interpretations of individual programs in Part I, the conclusions drawn here rest on personal readings and philosophical assertions. There are no final answers based on scientific data. Rather there are deeply personal questions and thoughtful conclusions of the sort that can help the social scientists to design better research projects.

Jerzy Kosinski speaks from his position as a successful writer. He defines television by comparison with other forms of human expression and sees disastrous consequences for individuals and for culture. Individuals who experience life vicariously and in the form of TV fantasy cannot discriminate, cannot act. The world they live in will be a world in which they are open to ultimate manipulation. Curt McCray also draws his analogies from literature. Because television imposes a sort of perpetual frame on all its subject matter, he sees epic qualities in the medium and concludes

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that television "is engaging man in the growth of his own self-perception." Both these critics suggest that the notions of reality that each of us uses to understand television may not be so easily measured as we would wish. This is also the case with the essays by Roger Rosenblatt and Robert Lewis Shayon. Rosenblatt examines a controversial program in terms of its pretensions to "reality." But more than that, he examines the cultural matrix that surrounds "An American Family." He is concerned with the attitudes of the William Loud family, the subjects of the documentary, with their understanding of television. He is concerned with our expectations for them, for the program, for the "truth" that television brings us. Rosenblatt is defining the same sort of frame that McCray cites when he says that "It is far less interesting that the Louds were real than that we reacted to them as if they were not."

The selection by Shayon is in fact comprised of several "mini-essays." This chapter from his book, *Open to Criticism* is a partial illustration of a complex theory of criticism worked out in the book. That theory is based on an outline of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and this particular section is meant to demonstrate the ways in which we can be diverted, like Coleridge's wedding guest, into a world of false values. Shayon says, "It is only a distorted vision that would condemn television utterly; but it is also a distorted vision that would debase it to degraded ends." Here he has collected a group of critical essays that chronicle such a degradation. He is the rare critic who is able to turn his criticism onto itself, using the shorter pieces to define and augment his larger theory, and in the process, to comment on his own successes and failures.

The section closes with John Silber's "personal view" of television. But Silber is a professional philosopher and his view is couched in the larger questions with which the philosopher is usually concerned. It is not pretension that leads him into his comments on television only after a lengthy introduction on the nature of thought and meaning. When he says that he will "apply this basic point of view about the centrality of meaning and time in the life of each developing person to the critical evaluation of television," he is grounding his understanding of this complex medium in the complexities of the individual in the culture.

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Questions relating the individual to the culture, the individual to television, and television to the culture, then, serve to focus this section. These large issues grow out of our concern for individual programs and encompass such issues as perception, the definition of reality, the meaning of popular entertainment, and the function of fantasy. Like the question posed by Singer's essay, the questions in these frightfully complex areas are not answered. But the critics who are concerned enough to write about television in this serious vein help all of us to form our own questions and work toward our own answers.

AUBREY SINGER

TELEVISION: WINDOW ON CULTURE OR REFLECTION IN THE GLASS?

Before I begin, let me explain where I stand. I am not an academic. I am a practicing television executive producer and manager. I believe with Leo Rosten that the media, especially television, are enterprises, not I. Q. tests. They feed on inventiveness, not analytic discipline. They require creative skills and nonstandardized competences. It is from this standpoint that I write.

Television is something by our times, out of our times, for our times. It reflects the virtues and faults of our times.

Its electronic principles were conceived by the prophets of technology about the same time that practical radio was being demonstrated, that Einstein was laying the basis for the exploitation of matter, that concepts of anthropology were shifting to concepts of sociology.

Television was conceived at the end of the century when man's curiosity was optimistic, charitable and untarnished, when man still believed in God, in man, in laissez-faire economy and in the rigidity and essential firmness of the world around him. Although this world was changing with increasing pace, Marlowe's lovely

Aubrey Singer is the Controller of BBC Television 2. This essay was delivered at "Vision 65," held by the International Center for the Communication Arts and Sciences, at Southern Illinois University. It is reprinted by permission of the International Center for the Communication of Arts and Sciences.

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lines written in the last half of the sixteenth century fit the vision of man and the ambitious aspirations of the times.

Nature that fram'd us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world:
And measure every wand'ring planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest,
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

There it is, the reconciliation with environment to reach felicity through knowledge.

But in the fifty years from the turn of the century, in the fifty years that television has grown from an idea to fulfilled reality, man has changed and his ideas have changed his environment. Earth, air, fire and water lost their place as observed and simple absolutes two hundred years ago. It has taken this time for a new idea, the equivalence of space, time, energy and mass, to become their substitute.

Those old four fundamental elements, those archetypes of our environment, today are held in low respect. Earth is consumed for minerals, moved by the mountain, shaped, bored into, synthesized. Air is flown over and above, liquefied, solidified, split into constituent gases; its climate is altered, its heat and cold ignored. Fire is made small before the power of the nucleus: man can imitate the sun. Aqualung, bathyscaphes and permeable membranes are letting us return to our beginnings, to the sea that was the womb of life.

In fifty years man has not merely come to control environment at will. His familiarity and dominance now hold it in contempt. After all, when an astronaut can fly through space, when a picture can be transmitted around a planet or from another planet, when a jet can fly from London to New York in a few hours (and all this was developed within the last two decades), it is not surprising

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that man should have suffered an implosion of his horizons. Our personal and terrestrial worlds are no longer large enough—the immediate world has given way to the desperately desired imminence of the future world. "Give us this day our glimpse of tomorrow."

But when we look at tomorrow we have lost our vision of Utopia. Consciously people are led to believe the promised future is here. Unconsciously they suspect the vision of new bright lands has vanished forever. Along with our vision of Utopia we are losing our capacity for anger and indignation with what we see going on around us.

In his book *The Dehumanization of Art*, Ortega y Gasset says in a memorable passage: "A fundamental revision of man's attitude towards life is apt to find its first expression in artistic creation and scientific theory. The fine texture of both these matters renders them susceptible to the slightest breeze of the spiritual trade winds."

Architects, designers, composers, scientists and writers are being buffeted by the spiritual hurricane which is shaking our times. Compare the words of Marlowe's sturdy vision which I quoted earlier with E. E. Cummings' poem written with a profound sense of anxiety sometime in the 1940's.

What if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie;
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend:blow space to time)
—when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
the single secret will still be man*

The belief in the human spirit remains but is surrounded with a deep unease, perhaps inspired by those zephyrs of the first half of the century—relativity and quantum mechanics, psychiatry and sulphonamide, and the new knowledge of the impermanence of the universe. None of this gives a static vision—it speaks of the

* From E. E. Cummings, "what if a much of a which of a wind." Reprinted from *Complete Poems: 1913-1962* by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

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new relationships and resonances with which the human psyche has to reconcile itself.

And the last verse, in a spasm of buffeted prophecy, foresees our twenty postwar years and the new revolutions that were to come:

what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
bites this universe in two,
peels forever out of his grave
and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
Blow soon to never and never to twice
(blow life to isn't: blow death to was)
—all nothing's only our hugest home;
the most who die, the more we live

There's the spiritual jet stream for you. There's U.235 and plutonium, A-bombs and H-bombs and amino acids, computers and all the paraphernalia of our moments caught in a poet's glimpse at the start of our epoch.

The poem hints too at the new changes in quality produced by the changes in quantity and the organization of quantity. It hints at mass culture in all its impact, at cinemas, national newspapers, radio and paperbacks and television and tape recordings, at punched cards and computer codes. It hopes against hope that man himself will come through all this and retain his identity.

But it's too late, for surely the point about our present-day condition lies in the Marxist tag, "A change in quantity brings a change in quality." Philosophically debatable perhaps, but tenable when one looks at the changes our new techniques have wrought in modern urban society. The change in the number of man has produced a change in the quality of man. Somehow, compressed and crowded urban man is losing his individuality and becoming a cell in a larger organism.

In fact, for man to survive (and he needs nothing less than a lost Utopia really to achieve survival) he is being forced to accept (albeit and surprisingly rather willingly) a degree of organization that can lead to nothing less than insectivization. The dull routines and social customs of mankind are amenable to statistical measurement and indeed organization is now planned to facilitate

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this measurement. Within this framework the individual turns in on himself and frenetically tries to assert his individuality and, up to a point, the more he tries to do this the more he is a subject for statistical study. From the world of things man is moving to the world of probabilities.

Television is of all this, the twentieth-century born and bred product of our society. By our times, out of our times, for our times. Its electronic principles may be fifty years old but the persuasive networked home entertainment we know today began twenty years ago in 1945. Then there were perhaps a hundred thousand sets in the world. Now there are about one hundred and fifty million. Then it covered a few urban areas in experimental form. Now it is possible to ring the northern hemisphere.

Theoretically a picture could originate in Tokyo, be sent across to Vladivostok, thence to Moscow, through Europe to Britain, across the Atlantic by satellite, across America by landline, across the Pacific by satellite and back to Tokyo. Puck said he'd put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes—that old Shakespearean square! Television can girdle the earth in about a fifth of a second, and it's no longer a miracle. Along with our contempt for spatial environment has come a loss of wonder. *Sic transit gloria imago mundi*—thus passes the glory of the image of the world, and man looks around and wonders who devalued his psyche.

Those who sense this loss react strongly; for instance, television has become the chopping block for the liberals. While in the 1930's they indulged in political or social activity, now their attentions and frustrations are turned on the mass media, with special emphasis on television. If juvenile delinquency increases—blame television; if there is any decline in moral standards—blame television; if man feels cheated in any way by this society he has created, then the blame is turned on television.

In one aspect, and alas its most common aspect, television as practiced today is just one of the many windows through which we observe, transmit and reflect our valuation of society to each other. If indeed there has been a change in the quality of life, if indeed our times have belittled our stature, the television medium in this aspect only responds to and reflects the social climate. It has little to do with the initial creation of a spiritual trade wind. It

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is only a sort of air conditioner that processes and gets this wind into homes more quickly.

There is, however, another aspect of television. There are times when television acts in its own right, when it evaluates the new Renaissance in its own terms, when it uses its power of communication not merely to convey other people's images but rather to create out of its potentialities its own genuine statements. This is the television at which we in television have got to aim. When we do we can claim equal responsibility with those who create the values of society. With architects, authors, scientists, designers, film-makers, with all those who create and communicate original work.

If we avoid enlisting in the creative spearhead, then television abandons itself to the role of reflector. If we in television do not have the courage to speak our own mind—utter our own statements—then there are plenty who will buy our time from us, for communication, like nature, abhors a vacuum.

If television chooses to take the side of the creative talent, it joins with those trying to reach a new relationship with the shifting face of society and the fading importance of environment. It will react to the different visions of how this might be achieved. For the poet: "The single secret is still man." For the composer: It can be as escapist as romanticism or as brittle and "switched on" as the new sound. For the artist: Let a Francis Bacon painting speak for itself. For the architect: Let me quote from a recent publication: "We are concerned not with architecture or town planning but with the creation of environment for every scale of human association." (Saadrach Woods, 1963.)

Perhaps the architect speaks his mind most openly. At least he admits he wants to tailor the cosmos. He might be accused of the sin of pride but he latches on to the important truth that man must continually strive to live in a homeostatic relationship with society as well as environment. For it is this aspect of feedback, and control by feedback, that has become more important to our creative thinkers than the old indefinable frozen moment when things were still against a sharp background.

This is the new relationship in which television must share, the new relationship of man to his world, of man to art, the newfound

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relationship of man to mind. Recently in a B.B.C. program we asked a psychiatrist to define mind:

INTERVIEWER: If the mind can influence the body to make a father experience the discomforts of pregnancy, how do you define mind, Professor Trethowan?

PROFESSOR TRETHOWAN: Well, that's very difficult. Mind: mind is a function of the brain, it's a function of the sensory organs which feed it, it's a function of the motor organs which give it expressions. Mind, I think, is communication. Communication between man and his environment, communication between man and himself, communication between man and man. Mind is feeling and knowing. Knowing comes from the barrier of consciousness and mingles with the other contents of the deeper parts of the mind, is reflected back again like sound from the ocean floor where it breaks consciousness and modifies knowing once again. What we see here is mind as a continuous oscillating, fluctuating process, it's a cybernetic process, there's a feedback between man and his environment, a feedback between the inner man and the outer man.

These new thoughts, these new relationships and resonances are what concern us today. Perhaps we've not lost our vision of Utopia. Perhaps it's changing. As man changes. Perhaps what we're all a party to is a struggle between man and mankind: the point of evolutionary decision between *Homo sapiens* and (dare I coin the word) *Homo cyberneticus*.

If television is to play its part in helping man define his role then on its part society must know what to expect from this electronic window—whether merely to expect a reflection from the glass or whether to expect a good view of the cultural countryside.

What is the role of television? It's difficult to define. At its most ordinary it acts as an extension of vision. It relays routine information, routine entertainment, routine education, into the drawing rooms of the audience. At its best it bestows insight. It heightens perception, reveals new relationships and brings with it a new view of our daily lives.

Television is rapidly becoming one of the main contributors to

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the stream of information that makes up the feedback from the world to man. In taking over, ruthlessly and with compulsion, television processes other media and tends to drown them out. Before the electronic age there was a time when the channels of information, painting, music, literature, were held in balance and did not draw on each other very much. Mass communications, especially television in its routine moments, now draws relentlessly from all other media, from films, from literature, from graphic design, from theater, from events. In doing so—both because of its limitations and because of the frequency and thoroughness with which it does so—television is tending to act as a great leveler, a sort of tomato ketchup on a feast of culture.

If this is so then all the more do we have to be wary of the ubiquitous images of television. Those images are aggressively sociable and the medium that carries them technically complex; because of their easy acceptability and the facility with which they reach us in our homes these images become more credible, more important, than the reality they represent. Television supersedes reality and this new reality, this electronic picture, is a pale and transient thing compared with some of the images lying around our cultural supermarket. For instance, have you ever seen a tv picture that was really beautiful in the same way that some photographs are outstandingly so? In tv there is little or nothing that is pictorially beautiful. I suppose it has something to do with the size of screen, lack of definition and transient nature of the medium.

No, television is at its best when it's not trying to ape other media and achieve goals outside its limitations. Television is at its best in raw direct communication between people with things to say. Television favors the articulate and scorns the dumb. In television, unlike the movies, a word is worth ten thousand pictures. Television's real discovery has been the extrovert personality, the bridging of distance and, above all, the immediacy of the happening.

While there are advantages and disadvantages inherent in television itself, the mere business of operating the medium carries its own share of mixed blessings.

At the moment there are several limitations in the number of frequencies available to television operators. This of course means

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that under present legislation here and in Britain there is a limit to competition.

Making these channels available to the largest audience entails large financial outlay on capital equipment and high operating costs. Nevertheless it has been discovered on both sides of the Atlantic that television is amenable to the same management principles as any other mass distribution process. These principles require that the largest potential audience for a given type of program be reached at the lowest cost. Television by any present criterion of efficiency is too expensive to exist in a vacuum.

The managers of tv running their enterprises on a basis of profit or cost effectiveness are well aware of these problems. However, as they shuffle their programs on the chessboards of their schedules, they are aware that in the eyes of their critics the competitive search for audience, the rate at which television swallows material, and the sheer amount of air time to be filled tends to make them play down to lesser cultural levels, supporting complacency rather than satisfying aspiration.

Obviously there is a large measure of truth in the criticism. Alas, the more so on your side of the Atlantic than on mine. But these problems are worldwide—television's costly and complex technical facilities tend to lead to a homogeneity of product on the one hand and on the other have far outstripped our knowledge of the audience.

We know some things about our audience. In most cases we consider it to be very large. For instance, in Britain certain of our television shows can command an audience of up to forty percent of the adult population of the United Kingdom, that is, about twenty-two million people. This is the mass audience the advertisers and professional managers of television are interested in.

On the other hand the audience is very intimate and very small—the family circle grouped around the television set. This is the audience that the television producer should be interested in. For television is an intimate dialogue, a two-way interacting variable between producer and receptor: "a continuous, oscillating, fluctuating process, it's a cybernetic process, there's a feedback between man and his environment, a feedback between the inner man and the outer man." Forgive me for again quoting that definition of mind but that's what television should be about,

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and I suspect that in the case of a successful program "the oscillating processes" at both ends of the system produce an intellectual resonance in audience and also in producer.

To take an analogy from another area, this small intimate audience is the fundamental particle of which the mass audience is composed. Like the fundamental particles of physics it is subject to indeterminacy. That is, if you try to experiment with it the mere act of experimentation alters the nature of the experimental subject and therefore renders the experiment valueless.

The prime arts work at this quantum level. Composers, authors, painters don't try to gratify an audience. They try to communicate. If they communicate to a large number of those quanta of society so be it, but it is not their prime purpose in life. And it is working in this area of uncertainty and unpredictability, of having to rely on intuition rather than knowledge, that distinguishes the artist from the craftsman.

But for the manager with a large competitive stake in television this is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs. He can't afford failure and therefore he invokes mathematical statistics, for while the individual is unpredictable, the mass is only too subject to measurement.

Consider a scene that for me is even more important than those old visual clichés, the A-bomb explosion at Alamagordo or the rockets shooting up from Cape Kennedy: the grounds of Naworth Castle in England. It was under a rock overhang on those grounds in the year 1889 that Francis Galton first formulated the idea of mathematical correlation: an idea that made it possible to represent by a system of numbers the degree of relationship or of partial causality between the different variables of our ever-changing universe.

That picture should be the icon hung in the office of every television manager, for by using the techniques based on Galton's flash of intuition he can with some degree of safety ensure a mass audience for his product. And not merely this. The fabricators of his product have made it so bland that it suits all palates, for the ultimate discovery is that the television he has made to please a national mass audience will, with adjustment of language, gratify an international audience and travel with ease from country to country.

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In view of the fact, this odd thought occurs to me. C. G. Jung proposed the idea of a collective unconscious. I wonder if the spread of television is not more than playing its share in the formation of a collective conscious. As people for the first time really see each other on the screen, on one hand they might get an idea of each other's humanity, but on the other the process whereby man becomes a cell in an organism inevitably will be speeded up.

Throughout this paper I have stressed that television is something created by our times for our times. We live in an age where the information about our world is increasing exponentially. We live in an age where man is graduating from machines that amplify his energy and assist his muscles, to machines that amplify his mental capacity and assist his intellect in the control of his surroundings.

Television is something new and persuasive, one of the two media that can keep pace with the times. Perhaps the formation of this collective conscious is just the first step in the new directions that man is taking.

Recently in one of our programs we did a story on trends in science fiction, interviewing many authors. Since this genre had already predicted flights to the moon and telecommunication satellites as far back as 1910, we asked these writers what areas concerned them at this moment. Their answer was robots! And they saw man building parts of his robots into himself.

Clearly they see the emergence of "Homo cyberneticus." The new trend, this spiritual trade wind, is already discernible. Western man is desperately trying to come to grips with the machine. He sees his individuality being submerged in a tabulated mass, his ideas being catalogued in a memory store, his actions being predicted in the banks of calculating transistors. This trend explains the popularity of television shows that depict man in a dominant friendly or understandable relationship with a machine: "The Man From U.N.C.L.E.", "Dr. Who" (the Daleks), the James Bond stories. It also explains pop art, op art, recent sculpture and science fiction.

Unlike other intellectual revolutions, in which the thinking only slowly percolated through the strata of society, this revolution is likely to go quickly. Television has already started the work of

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feedback and information with unrivaled rapidity. But in operating at the predictable mass level, in so consciously attempting to please, the medium is throwing away opportunities, all too often wasting its potential in internal rivalry, failing to attract the best talent and thus not providing the motivations expected of any leader.

This situation grew out of the beginnings of radio, for this first precursor of television started in an atmosphere of hotly debated political compromise. In the United States it was decided that it should remain in the hands of private enterprise, in Britain it was thought too big to be dominated by advertisers, and so we started the B.B.C., whose independence was assured by the unwritten checks and balances in our own constitutional process. Since that time under your antitrust laws you've had to break up one network. We in Britain decided that monopoly was stifling and brought in a second television system, this one based on advertising.

Systems that have grown out of compromise are not necessarily the answer. They are too big, too heavily involved in getting audiences in order to prove their efficiency and justify their capitalization. Yet can any other system provide the amount of high standard continuous entertainment, information and education in such a widespread manner?

Why has nobody attempted to undertake a design study of a television system in present-day terms? I don't know what such a study would produce but the specification outlining the parameters of the design might be as follows:

"Mankind needs a system of television communication so designed and controlled that communication can occur between all levels of our audience and all levels of the culture represented by that audience. The audience should be able to select from any of these levels when and as it wishes. In order to achieve this, ways should be explored to ensure that the costs of television apparatus and production come down, thus reducing the operator's need for large audiences and enabling him to design programs for the unit rather than the mass."

The rub of the design problem would be to prevent such a system from becoming an Orwellian nightmare, for such a window on culture would be a two-way affair in which the image

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might well increase its transcendence over reality. Television receivers would become communicators; not only would they receive local network and international programs, but by means of wave guides (to provide the channels) and small cameras and cheap video recorders they would become a link between the viewer and his personal world, between the home, the library, and bank, the office, the shops and, of course, the Government.

To design such a machine is problem enough, but to design a system (no! let's call it a medium) not merely for social communication but also capable of responding to the whole range of values and spiritual needs is problem indeed. It is the very heart of the design challenge and of our present dilemma. For the paradox is surely this:

On the one hand mankind needs a large "machine" element in order to integrate with the new cybernetic culture so eagerly awaited. These machines, mechanical, mathematical and social, are utterly essential if mankind is to come to grips with and accept his new environmental surrogates, the equivalence of space, time, energy and mass.

On the other hand, man—the individual man—recognizes that in using these machines and adapting himself to their techniques, he must assume their attributes. This is the moment of terrible truth, for in gaining "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown," the individual risks submerging his humanity and becoming a digit in a socio-cybernetic system.

As a television man I know where I stand. I believe that it is not the job of mass communication to pander to mankind. Rather we should use our ubiquity to seek out and service the individual.

I believe that television, given the opportunities, can be more than of our times, out of our times and for our times. I believe it can be ahead of our times, providing crucial leadership, fostering man's awareness of his position, providing the feedback that enables us to utilize the full spectrum of our total vision. It will be and should be an open window on our culture, helping to ensure that "the single secret will still be man."

DAVID SOHN INTERVIEWS JERZY KOSINSKI

A NATION OF VIDEOTS

The interview took place during last year's NCTE convention, in a setting that was a media nightmare. In the lobby of the International Hotel—lots of noise—no coffee—Kosinski just back from a stunning lecture at the Secondary Section Luncheon (more about that later)—no outlet—the recorder running on batteries of unknown vintage—fingers crossed. He suggests we talk about media and communications. We begin.

In a matter of moments, all the distractions and difficulties fade into oblivion. Here is a man with a whiplash mind, a stiletto wit, a vision that fires off devastating perceptions probing the human condition to reveal startling ironies, jolting absurdities. Electrifying language spouts from him with the intensity of a jackhammer. I find myself in awe of his intense presence, blinded by the staggering brilliance of his darting asides, intent on the lean language that strips bare the kernel of each thought. It's like sitting quietly through the San Francisco earthquake.

Adding to my amazement is the fact that he has just delivered the most passionate speech I've ever heard at a teacher's conference. It happened by chance. The scheduled speaker was ill and Kosinski generously agreed to fill in. His words stunned the

David Sohn is Associate Editor of *Media and Methods* Magazine and Curriculum Consultant for Language Arts, District 65, Evanston, Illinois Public Schools. Jerzy Kosinski is a novelist, author of *The Painted Bird*, *Steps*, and *Being There*. This essay is reprinted from *Media and Methods* (April 1975) by permission of David Sohn.

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teachers, assaulting them with brutal facts: The average American watches about 1200 hours of TV each year, yet reads books for only five hours per year. There are 200,000 functional illiterates in New England alone. Gallup's research shows that more than half of us have never read a hardbound or paperback book, except for the Bible and textbooks.*

America, he said, has a "middle-class skid row," students living in "a mortuary of easy going." They seem incapable of reflecting: "Even though their stomachs are full like the exotic fishes of the Amazon, they swallow indiscriminately, quickly ejecting all as waste."

He concluded by underscoring the validity of the English language. "This search for inner strength," he said, "is mainly conducted through the language—literature, and its ability to trigger the imagination, that oldest mental trait that is typically human. It is finally the teacher of English who day after day refuses to leave students emotionally and intellectually disarmed, who forces them to face their very self and to cope with the unknown—their own existence. Because of this rescue mission that takes place every week in the classroom, the teacher of English is this country's major missionary force."

The audience leaped to a prolonged standing ovation. They had, by sheer accident, been profoundly shaken. Many may not have known Jerzy Kosinski before the pot roast and peas, but they surely knew him now: an extraordinary and eloquent human being who cares about humanity and its survival, and communicates his feelings even while he acts on them. The room emptied, each listener carrying a spark of inestimable value, a new depth.

* A more analytical way of presenting this information is offered by a recent Gallup Opinion Index. The figures are no less extraordinary. The Index found that Americans spend 46% of their leisure time viewing television. (14% of leisure time is spent reading.) This is an averaged figure, and the numbers are perhaps more important when examined in other ways. The amount of leisure time spent by college educated individuals in televiewing is 29%. The amount spent by those with high school education is 48%. And the time spent by those with grade school education is 67%. These figures *may* indicate, however, that those people with higher educational experience simply do not wish to admit to excessive televiewing. It is also very important to note that the 46% of leisure time figure has *not* changed since 1966. *Gallup Opinion Index*, Report Number 105, New York, March 1974. ED.

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I had hardly recovered from the lecture when we began the interview. I needed some respite, the gracious lull of small talk. It never happened. Kosinski, I immediately discovered, was just warming up.

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SOHN: Edmund Carpenter, the noted anthropologist, observed that every medium has its own grammar—the elements which enable it to communicate. McLuhan also—with his "the medium is the message"—talked about how a medium communicates.

KOSINSKI: I tend to think in terms of a medium's recipients, not in terms of the medium itself. In other words, it's not the church which interests me, but the congregation. I would rather talk about "the grammar" of a perceiver, the grammar of an audience. A television set without viewers doesn't interest me. Television as a technical process doesn't interest me either. Yet the role television plays in our lives does interest me very much.

SOHN: Isn't that related to what you were saying in your book, *Being There*?

KOSINSKI: The main character of *Being There*, Chance, has no meaningful existence outside of what he experiences on television. Unlike the reader of fiction who re-creates a text arbitrarily in his imagination, Chance, who cannot read or fantasize, is at the mercy of the tube. He cannot imagine himself functioning in anything but the particular situations offered him by TV programs. Of course, Chance is a fictional archetype. On the other hand, a number of teachers have told me that many of their young students resemble Chance. A child begins school nowadays with basic images from "his own garden"—television.

Children have always imitated adults, but "TV babies," with access to a world beyond that of their parents and siblings, often mimic TV personalities. They behave according to TV models, not according to their moods, and their actions reflect patterns they have picked up from television. They're funny à la Don Rickles or Chico or Sanford; they're tough like Kojak or Khan.

The basic difference, for me, between television and the novel as media is that television takes the initiative: it does the involving. It says, "You, the passive spectator, are there. Stay there. I'll do the moving, talking, acting." Frenetic, quick-paced,

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engineered by experts in visual drama, everything from a thirty-second commercial to a two-hour movie is designed to fit into neat time slots, wrapped up in lively colors and made easily digestible.

While viewing, you can eat, you can recline, you can walk around the set, you can even change channels, but you won't lose contact with the medium. Unlike theater or cinema, TV allows, even encourages, all these "human" diversions. TV's hold on you is so strong, it is not easily threatened or severed by "the other life" you lead. While watching, you are not reminded (as you would be by a theater audience, for instance) that you are a member of society whose thoughts and reactions may be valuable. You are isolated and given no time to reflect. The images rush on and you cannot stop them or slow them down or turn them back.

Recently I heard of a college class in media communication which had been assigned to watch two hours of television and record the content of those two hours. They were asked to describe each element—including commercials—in as much detail as possible, classifying every incident and every character in terms of its relative importance to the story. All these students had been raised in front of TV sets and were accustomed to being bombarded by TV images; many of them hoped to be employed in the communications industry after graduation. Yet, not a single one could complete the assignment. They claimed that the rapidity and fragmentation of the TV experience made it impossible to isolate a narrative thought-line, or to contemplate and analyze what they had seen, in terms of relative significance.

SOHN: Have you ever noticed, when you go to someone's house, that very often the television set will be on and it continues on? In fact, people leave it on all day.

KOSINSKI: Many of us do. I watch it a lot. In my apartment, for instance, my visiting friends often get very jittery around seven p.m. They want to see the news. I turn the television on and, for an hour, we all cruise around it. We're still talking to each other, or drinking with each other, but we have been disconnected—we are now *being there*, in that other world "brought to you by . . ."—the medium's crucial phrase.

Yet the viewer knows that he is not Columbo or Captain Kangaroo. He is separated from the stars not only by his patently different identity, being *here* while they are *there*, but also—and

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this is far more important—by the very process of watching, of having been assigned the role of spectator. In this process, the spectator occupies one world, while what he views comes from another. The bridge between the two is TV's absolutely concrete nature. Every situation it portrays is particular: every descriptive detail is given, nothing is implied, no blank spaces are left for the viewer to fill in.

Now, literature is general, made up of words which are often vague, or which represent many classes of things: for instance, "tree," "bird," "human being." A novel becomes concrete only through the reader's own imagining or staging-from-within, which is grounded in his memory, his fancy, his current reality. The act of reading mobilizes this inner process. Above all else, literature orients us towards our own existence as we individually perceive and define it. The child who easily imitates Don Rickles' "meaness" could not possibly imitate the Boy of *The Painted Bird* without having first fleshed out that character in his own imagination. To see that Boy, the reader must keep on inventing him in an internal imaginative process. The printed page offers nothing but "inking"; the reader provides his own mental props, his own emotional and physical details. From the infinite catalog of his mind, the reader picks out the things which were most interesting to him, most vivid, most memorable as defined by his own life.

Because it is uncontrolled and totally free, this process offers unexpected, unchannelled associations, new insights into the tides and drifts of one's own life. The reader is tempted to venture beyond a text, to contemplate his own life in light of the book's personalized meanings. Television, though, doesn't demand any such inner reconstruction. Everything is already there, explicit, ready to be watched, to be followed on its own terms, at the speed it dictates. The viewer is given no time to pause, to recall, to integrate the image-attack into his own experience.

SOHN: I'm intrigued by your analysis of how television influences our self-perception and behavior.

KOSINSKI: During the years when I was teaching, I invited several seven- to ten-year-old children into a very large classroom where two video monitors were installed, one on the left side and one on the right side of the blackboard. TV cameras were also

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placed on either side of the room. I sat before the blackboard, telling a story. Suddenly, an intruder from outside rushed into the room—prearranged, of course—and started arguing with me, pushing and hitting me. The cameras began filming the incident, and the fracas appeared on both screens of the monitors, clearly visible to all the children. Where did the kids look? At the event (the attacker and me), or at the screen? According to the video record of a third camera, which filmed the students' reactions, the majority seldom looked at the actual incident in the center of the room. Instead, they turned toward the screens which were placed above eye-level and therefore easier to see than the real event. Later, when we talked about it, many of the children explained that they could see the attack better on the screens. After all, they pointed out, they could see close-ups of the attacker and of me, his hand on my face, his expressions—all the details they wanted—without being frightened by "the real thing" (or by the necessity of becoming involved).

At another time, I showed short educational 16mm films on the video, while telling the children—again from seven to ten years old—that something fascinating was happening in the corridor. "Now those who want to stay inside and watch the films are free to remain in the class," I said, "but there's something really incredible going on outside, and those who want to see it are free to leave the room." No more than ten percent of the children left. I repeated, "You know *what's outside is really fantastic. You have never seen it before.* Why don't you just step out and take a look?" And they always said, "No, no, no, we prefer to stay here and watch the film." I'd say, "But you don't know what's outside." "Well, what is it?" they'd ask. "You have to go find out." And they'd say, "Why don't we just sit here and see the film first?" There it was: they were already too lazy, too corrupted to get up and take a chance on "the outside."

SOHN: That's an incredible indictment of television.

KOSINSKI: Not of television as much as of a society founded on the principle of passive entertainment. And young viewers have been affected by TV far more than we care to know. Once, I invited students (from ten to fourteen years of age) to be interviewed singly. I said to each one, "I want to do an interview with you, to ask you some very private and even embarrassing

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questions, but I won't record our conversation or repeat to anyone what you tell me. To start with, do you masturbate?" And the kids, quite shocked, usually answered, "Well, you know, I don't know what you mean." Then I asked, "Do you steal often? Have you stolen anything recently?" Again, the kids all hedged, "I don't know, uh, uh . . ." More mumbling. The girls were invariably more embarrassed than the boys.

When I finished, I said, "Now, I'll tell you why I asked you all those questions. You see, I would like to film the interview and show it on television for thousands and thousands of people to see." When they heard they would be on television, an instant change of mood occurred. They were eager to be on TV. I installed the monitors and the camera, and told the kids, "I want to make a show for the community, for everybody *out there*. Your parents, your friends, strangers, the whole country will see it. Do you mind if, once again, but this time for television, I ask you the same questions?" All the students assured me they were willing "to try harder" to answer them.

Once the equipment was installed, I started the video camera and addressed an invisible and, in fact, non-existent technician, "Bob, will you make the picture sharp, because I want every one of my interviewees to be recognizable." Each child was then asked to introduce himself or herself: full name, age, and address. They all answered without hesitation. "Is the picture clear, Bob?" "Perfectly. Everybody will recognize your guest," came the prerecorded assurance from "Bob." It was time to address my first "guest." "Now tell me," I asked Tom, "do you masturbate? If you do, tell our audience how and when you do it."

The boy, suddenly poised and blasé, leaned toward me. "Well, yes, occasionally I do. Of course I'm not sure I can describe it. But I can try . . ." An inviting smile stolen from "The Mike Douglas Show." After Tom described all, leaving nothing to the public's imagination, I changed the subject. I said, "Since we are going to show this interview on television, Tom, I want you to be very careful what you say. Now, everybody will be interested in your experience as a thief. Have you ever stolen anything?" Pensively, as if recalling a pleasant childhood incident, Tom said, "Every once in a while when I go to the five-and-ten, you know, I like to pick up something."

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"Now, Tom," I said, "you realize that you are speaking to a very large public. Your parents, your teachers, your friends are out there. And I don't know how they will react to your admissions. Are you sure that you're not saying anything on the air that only you should know?" "No, no, no, it's alright," he reassured me nonchalantly, "I don't mind." I broke in, "Should we arrange it so your face doesn't show?" "No, why?" "Well, if you want to describe your experience as a thief, maybe we should . . ." "No! I can talk about it. Honest, I don't mind," he insisted.

From about twenty-five kids, I got similar reactions. I don't think there was one boy or one girl who refused to be interviewed about the most incriminating subjects, ranging from less common sexual experiences to acts of violence, thievery, betrayal of one's family, friends, etc. This time, the girls seemed even less inhibited than the boys. As long as the camera was on and the students could see themselves on the monitor they talked and talked and talked. Often I pretended to be embarrassed by what they said. But, trained in the best talk-show tradition, the guests were not put off by their host.

Their manner was so familiar: the easy posture of the TV conversationalist, the sudden warmth and openness, the total frankness. Every interviewee answered candidly, looking directly into the camera with a straight face, mumbling a bit, pretending to reflect, but in fact covering up for a deeper verbal clumsiness. Suddenly, these youngsters seemed too old for their years: each one a blend of actor, author, professor, clown, talking with a bizarre ease about real or invented "forbidden" acts. Yet, judging by their manner, you'd think I was asking about yesterday's weather.

SOHN: Did you conduct any other experiments?

KOSINSKI: I did not think of these few *ad hoc* sessions as experiments. Rather, they were crude attempts to find out a bit more about the young. I don't know whether I "tapped" anything. And, since this took place some years ago, I don't know whether my results would be valid today. Still, I was very upset by some of them. When I was attacked by the intruder, for instance, the kids were less interested in the actual assault than in what the TV cameras were doing—as if they had paid to see a film, as if the incident had been staged to entertain them! And all during the

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confrontation—despite my yelling, his threats, the fear that I showed—the kids did not interfere or offer to help. None of them.

They sat transfixed as if the TV cameras neutralized the act of violence. And perhaps they did. By filming a brutal physical struggle from a variety of viewpoints, the cameras transformed a human conflict into an aesthetic happening, distancing the audience and allowing them an alternative to moral judgment and involvement.

SOHN: Did you question the students on their reactions?

KOSINSKI: Yes, later on I interviewed them about what had happened in the class. Most of them said, "Well, you know, these cameras were set up, and then, you know, this guy came and pushed you, and well, it was kind of, uh, you could see him and you on these screens very well. You looked so scared and he was so mean." I asked, "What do you mean, you could see it very well?" "Well, you know, you could see *everything* on those screens. They are great. How much does it cost to buy one of these videos?"

SOHN: That's eerie. What does it all mean?

KOSINSKI: I can only guess. It's obviously related to the fact that so many kids prefer to stay home and watch TV than to go to a museum, explore the city, or even play with their peers. They can see close-ups, and commercials, and when bored, shift to another channel. We've reached the point now where people—adults and children alike—would prefer to watch a televised ball game than to sit in some far corner of a stadium, too hot or too cold, uncomfortable, surrounded by a smelly crowd, with no close-ups, no other channel to turn to. Uncomfortable—like life often is.

SOHN: Again, it's the idea of the passive spectator, lounging, half-distracted. What else did you find?

KOSINSKI: After a while, I also turned to "another channel." I guess I just did not want to know kids anymore. They are, to me, a sad lot. Occasionally, I do talk to them and I try to engage them in an imaginary play, but for how long can I—or anyone—compete with all the channels? I haven't done any more "sessions." Many of my anthropologically inclined friends were critical of my "tricking" the children, of "exploiting" them in a non-scientific experiment. As if they could possibly be exploited

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more than they have already been as "viewers," or as if I wanted or needed to be scientific! Go into any high school and see how limited students' perception of themselves is, how crippled their imaginations, how unable they are to tell a story, to read or concentrate, or even to describe an event accurately a moment after it happens. See how easily they are bored, how quickly they take up the familiar "reclining" position in the classroom, how short their attention span is. Or talk to their teachers. They know more about youth's enervation than any parent ever will.

SOHN: Did you see any of the episodes of "An American Family"?

KOSINSKI: Yes, I've seen most of them.

SOHN: I was thinking of that in relation to what you were saying about television. Here are these people doing something similar. It was fairly frank. They were revealing their lives week after week, on TV.

KOSINSKI: You mean they were making acceptable the bigotry and the incriminating private stuff of their lives by performing it for public consumption. If thirty million viewers love it, it cannot be harmful, right? Well, that's where my "experimental" kids get their training, from "An American Family" to "All in the Family." Despite the differences between the Louds and the Bunkers, the two shows have a lot in common. "All in the Family" is about an American family that, the show claims, is fictional, but still a composite of us all. "An American Family" was about a "real" American family that ended up as a TV show, though it disintegrated as a family through the process that I'd call "televization."

SOHN: Right. Which is the reality and which is the fiction?

KOSINSKI: For me, the unusual aspect of television is that, unlike any other medium, it doesn't state its relationship to "reality" and to "art." A TV weather report doesn't claim that it is an art form. It is not introduced, for instance, as a video essay with weather as its main subject, with a gentle man speculating about an ungentle climate. On the other hand, television does not claim to be a "reality report" either, even though it often passes for one. Unlike theater or painting or photography or fiction, television makes no claim to have one "true nature." Therefore the difference between "All in the Family" and "An American

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Family" is, to me, a very relative one. Both are recorded, both are edited, both are TV shows. Reality? Of course not. Art? Not quite or not yet. Once a man knows that the cameras are recording him, he is turned into an actor. No spontaneity survives, except a "controlled spontaneity," a rehearsed one. We have become so accustomed to the presence of recording devices that even the Occupant of the Oval Office did not realize how incriminating his own recording set-up was.

SOHN: One interesting thing about "An American Family" is that they were perfectly willing to do this, they went into it, they got into it. But then, they became very upset.

KOSINSKI: Private reality catches up with us all. When the "show" is "brought to you by" yourself, its consequences can't be changed like a channel. Nor can the pain. The Ruthenian peasants among whom I grew up used to say that "to those who only watch the stars all suffering comes." How many of us are prepared for that encounter?

SOHN: What you're saying reminds me of a comment that McLuhan once made. He suggested that taking a slice of the environment and putting it into another medium—a novel, a television show, a film, whatever—has the effect of enabling you to see it more clearly. Do you think that has any validity?

KOSINSKI: Only in the sense that if it's really a work of art, then it—a play, a novel, a film—can elucidate our otherwise unstated reality. But the record of "An American Family" was not art; it was nothing more than an average TV soap opera. Instead of clarifying the "family environment," the show obscured it. Members of a family were turned into professional family members, all trained as actors and actresses on the spot through the process of being filmed.

SOHN: In regard to television and education, are there any beneficial effects that you can put your finger on?

KOSINSKI: For me, the word "beneficial" doesn't apply to television. TV is simply a part of contemporary life. I must confront it, think about it, accept it, or reject it.

SOHN: It's part of the environment, and therefore difficult to perceive.

KOSINSKI: Yes, perhaps because it exists in a very uneasy relationship with the environment. The medium is so overwhelm-

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ing. How do you assess the importance of an activity which accompanies you practically all the time? The average working American apparently watches it for 1,200 hours per year while, for instance, book-reading occupies only five hours of his time. How do you judge its role in our political life? The impact of its commercialism? Of its ordering of time? Of its ranking of what's important (therefore visible) and what's not (therefore left out)?

SOHN: You can notice certain things. For example, children coming to school these days have been affected by "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" and some of the other programs. When they come to kindergarten they already know their letters and numbers. In the same vein, older people suddenly have better access to the world, a chance to see much more than ever before.

KOSINSKI: Let's say better access to the world of *television*. In small European communities still without television, the old people remain physically active, mixing with the young, venturing out into the real world. Here, like their little grandchildren, they sit immobilized by TV. An American senior citizen once told me that his TV set gave him a sixth sense—at the price of removing the other five. I think that both young and old are acquiring, via television, a superficial glimpse of a narrow slice of unreality. I'm not certain how such "knowledge" is used, or what it does. Does it make real life more meaningful or individuals more active? Does it encourage adventure? Does it arm an individual against the pains inflicted by society, by other humans, by aging? Does it bring us closer to each other? Does it explain us to ourselves, and ourselves to each other? Does it?

For me, imagining groups of solitary individuals watching their private, remote-controlled TV sets is the ultimate future terror: a nation of *videots*.

One thing I am convinced of is that human conduct is primarily determined by human intercourse—by the relationship of one being with another being. So anything which is detrimental to that interaction, anything which delays it, makes it more uneasy, or creates a state of apprehension, is detrimental to the growing of society.

I look at the children who spend five or six hours watching television every day, and I notice that when in groups they cannot

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interact with each other. They are terrified of each other; they develop secondary anxiety characteristics. They want to watch, they don't want to be spoken to. They want to watch, they don't want to talk. They want to watch, they don't want to be asked questions or singled out.

TV also influences the way they view the world. On television, the world is exciting, single-faceted, never complex. By comparison, their own lives appear slow, uneventful, bewildering. They find it easier to watch televised portrayals of human experiences—violence, love, adventure, sex—than to gain the experience for themselves. They believe in avoiding real contests just as they believe in pain killers and sleeping pills. It was TV that first taught them to rely on drugs, that there was no need to suffer, to be tense or unhappy or even uncomfortable, because a drug would relieve all that. Even death is no longer a necessary part of existence for them. Its finality is gone because their hero, no matter how dead, would rise again.

So they grow up essentially mute. As teenagers, they are anxious to join an amorphous group—a rock band or a film audience. The music or the film relieves them of all necessity to interact with each other—the blaring sounds prevent communication, the screen above their heads is the focus of all their attention. They remain basically mute: sitting *with* each other, *next to* each other, but *removed from* each other by this omnipresent third party—music or film.

Silence and the absence of entertainment are more than discomforts to TV generations—they are threats. They cause anxiety.

SOHN: My grandfather used to say, when he was angry, "All I want is silence, and damned little of that."

KOSINSKI: I think silence is an invitation to reflection or to conversation, the prime terrors to videots. One of the TV talk show hosts once said to me that "this is the only country in the world where people watch conversation every night."

SOHN: On the other hand, another thing I've noticed—and it amazes me each time I see it—is children studying or reading with the television or radio on.

KOSINSKI: The constant companionship of distracting devices.

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SOHN: The need for silence, as far as they're concerned, doesn't exist. Somehow they've managed to cope with noise. Maybe.

KOSINSKI: I wonder how they really cope with anything. A lot of them don't cope at all. More and more parents leave their children in front of the TV as baby sitter, assuming that watching shows is safer than walking in the real streets outside their homes. But is it?

Unlike television, children grow older. For years they have been trained to control their little world by changing the channels when they were bored, and were accustomed to a simplified, unambiguous TV world in which everyone exists to amuse them. As adolescents, they are naturally threatened by the presence of real people they cannot control. Others push them around, make faces at them, encroach on their territory. And they can do nothing to stop this. They begin to feel that this real world unjustly limits them; after all, it seldom offers alternative channels.

Because this unpredictable real world doesn't function according to neatly ordered time slots and is full of ambiguities, children brought up as viewers naturally feel persecuted. Yet, even though our industrial state offers few situations that can be resolved in thirty minutes, and no clear-cut heroes and villains, video-addicts keep expecting an easy resolution. When it doesn't come, they grow impatient, then adamant or disillusioned. In this world of hierarchy and brutish competition and depression and unemployment and inflation, they are always challenged and often outranked by others. Soon they believe *they* are defective. Instead of coming of age, they're coming apart.

This process of creating weak and vulnerable beings seems to be a current general rule in America. Upperclass children have experiences that counteract TV's influence: they have opportunities to be involved with real horses, real forests, real mountains, things they can see, touch, experience. However, many middle-class and almost all poor children are at the mercy of television for many hours a day. For years now we have had a skid row composed of middle-class, college educated dropouts, or stopouts, as they often call themselves.

SOHN: When I asked you about silence . . .

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KOSINSKI: For me silence and solitude are necessary for self redefinition, for daily reassessing the purpose of my life. Silence occurs when I consider *who* I am, when I read fiction or poetry. Reading and writing are part of my confronting myself and society. Of my own rages and resignations.

SOHN: It would seem, then, that television may be robbing us of our fantasy life.

KOSINSKI: A TV show is a product of people, many of whom are first rank artists, profoundly creative, inventive, concerned with their work and with its impact on the public. But, by its very nature, a TV show is, above all, a result of a *collective* (not individual) fantasy. It is subjected to various collective influences, collective editing, collective simplifying, collective sponsorship, etc. In other words, "*Brought to you by . . .*"

But television has another characteristic as well, one that we tend to overlook. It's a portable multitheater. If, while viewing, you're upset by one of the programs, you don't have to get up, leave it, and walk the street to reach another theater and pay to see another show. You just press a button, and you are transferred to another place. Thus, at any time, you can step out of one collective fantasy and step into another. That effortless control over an activity that occupies so much of our time is profoundly affecting. After all, such effortless freedom doesn't exist in any other domain of our life.

Let's assume that, right now, in the middle of our conversation, you angered me and I decided to leave in midsentence, without warning. First, in order to define my anger, I would have to reflect, to decide why I don't want to sit with you anymore or why I should leave. Then I would have to decide how I should go about leaving: Should I push the table away and reveal my anger, or, rather, should I make up some excuse? Should I tell you what I think of you and expose myself to potential abuse, or should I say nothing? It would be a conflict situation, complex, difficult to resolve and painful. Still, quite common to us all.

Yet, watching a similar conflict on television would in no way prepare me emotionally to confront and handle such a situation in reality. As a teacher, what can I learn from "McMillan and Wife"? As a foreign-born, can I really absorb the idiom of "McCloud"? As

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a novelist, can I benefit from the calmness and insight of "Columbo"? And as an officer of P.E.N., would I imitate the practices depicted in "The Name of the Game"?

SOHN: We've explored some fascinating insights into the impact that television is having on us. And it looks so innocent: the fine wooden cabinet, or the contemporary molded design. We hardly suspect what it's doing to us.

But there is another question I wanted to ask you. It's about Joseph Conrad and yourself. You're both authors of Polish origin, and yet each of you wrote in English. Why is that?

KOSINSKI: I make no comment for Conrad. Frankly, when I arrived in America, what fascinated me most about the English language was that everybody spoke it here.

SOHN: Part of the environment.

KOSINSKI: Like television.

SOHN: But I'm intrigued . . .

KOSINSKI: I was a bilingual child; my parents were Russian but I grew up in Poland. As a boy I was mute for several years. When I regained my speech, the country was Stalinist. It lost its freedom of expression. That's why I never wrote in Eastern Europe. I expressed myself through photography. English, the language that I learned after I arrived here in 1957, doesn't evoke any emotionally negative responses grounded in my past. I became aware very quickly that it was easier for me to express my emotions even in my then rudimentary English than it ever had been in my Polish or Russian. In English, I was not afraid to be myself, I didn't feel personally threatened by what I said and I still don't—when I speak or write in English.

SOHN: Unless you're an Occupant of the Oval Office.

KOSINSKI: But even in the Oval Office you're threatened only if you record yourself. And you are still free not to do it—or to destroy your own tapes.

CURT McCRAY

KAPTAIN KRONKITE: THE MYTH OF THE ETERNAL FRAME

Criticism of American culture for its aridity and its rejection of artists is well known, particularly as it is aimed at this culture by elitist educators and artists. But it may be well to remind ourselves of the history of that criticism in a time when "popular" art and popular culture are becoming dominant themes in our literature and language, and most especially because the dominant media of that art, TV and cinema, with their mass audiences, are being touted as the new expanders of consciousness. Writers like D. W. Brogan have spoken of the unwelcome reception American artists of the nineteenth century found for their work. "[American culture] busy building itself up, completing the conquest of the frontier, assimilating the vast immigrant floods—could not be, or at any rate was not, very hospitable to the arts."¹ Major figures of American literary culture responded to mass American life with a hostility equal to that they received. Emerson, though he showed flashes of optimism, spent the last half of his life cut off from a people who would not listen to his most trenchant longings. Hawthorne and Twain looked darkly into the human situation and Melville found in human optimism (*Moby Dick* suggests that it

¹ "The Character of American Culture" from *America in the Modern World*, 1960.

Curt McCray is Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Saginaw Valley College. This essay was presented to the Popular Culture Association Convention, East Lansing, Michigan, 1971, and is printed here by permission of the author.

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was particularly American optimism) man's central irony: "Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings, but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only through numberless perils to the very point whence we started, whence those we left behind secure, were all the time before us." Fitzgerald, Sinclair, Hemingway, and Faulkner spin out a pessimism about American life that is at variance with the dominant mood, the "can-do" optimism, of that life. More recently writers such as Barth and Mailer, through irony and barbarism, have pointed to the separation between the attitude of American literary culture and the attitude that America is going some place. This separation in American culture is not simply a separation of style; it is, more critically, a separation of assumption, a separation of deep philosophical import, a separation over the question of the goodness of man and life.

The early history of this country was characterized as well by a wide separation between technology and art. Technology found its home with the optimistic frontier captains of industry as it became more and more a valuable tool for exploitation of the wilderness. More recently, however, it has moved closer and closer to the domain of the artist. And the artist has come to see himself more and more as the manipulator of environments, the illimator of interfaces. The tools that the technologist has designed become the palette and brush of the artist. Most recently, artists in electronics and plastics are full-fledged members of the technological community and many hold prestigious positions in some of the nation's powerful industries. McLuhan: "Technological art takes the whole earth and its population as its material, not as its form." This marriage of art and technology, or better, the consummation of that marriage, has produced a new unity which offers, at least, the possibility of a new life, a new man. Or so we would believe if we take seriously Marshall McLuhan and Gene Youngblood in his recent book, *Expanded Cinema*.

Youngblood's book is provocative enough that we might pause here to look at some of his ideas about television:

A culture is dead when its myths have been exposed. Television reveals the observed, the observer, the process of observing. There can be no secrets in the Paleocybernetic

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Age [i.e., 'primitive potential' plus the 'transcendental integrities of "practical utopianism" associated with Cybernetic']. On the macrostructural level all television is a closed circuit that constantly turns us back upon ourselves.

We see ourselves instantly through a sort of global "stop-action." The actions of my neighbors become my actions.

We become aware of our individual behavior by observing the collective behavior as manifested in the global video-sphere. We identify with persons in news events as once we identified with actors or events in fiction films. Before television we saw little of the human condition. Now we see and hear it daily. The world's not a stage, it's a TV documentary. Television extends global man throughout the ecological biosphere twenty-four hours a day. By moving into outer space, television reveals new dimensions of inner space, new aspects of man's perception and the results of that perception.²

This is heady stuff, but it is imagination with which we can agree. Or at the very least we can agree with the desirability of the vision. If Youngblood's analysis is correct mankind shares, or could share, in the same vision of self; all men could share the same imagination. Emerson looked for something of this in his "naked eyeball" and "over-soul." Of humankind he says,

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.

² *Expanded Cinema, 1970*, p. 78.

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Youngblood is not an Emerson, however, because technology has freed him in a way that the New Englander could never have dreamed of. Youngblood: "We're in direct contact with the human condition; there's no longer any need to represent it through art." Electronic extension of the human nervous system makes possible a vision that Emerson could only imagine and wish his readers would accept. We should note again, however, that Emerson failed to persuade his fellows and there is the ominous hint of a similar fate for Youngblood's vision when he alludes to popular culture, particularly to commercial television. "We recognize television's negative effect on the popular arts: that it induces a kind of sedentary uniformity of expression and generates a false sense of creativity." Commercial television merely panders to the basest desires of the mass of men; it evokes and answers the desires of its audience.

We've seen the urgent need for an expanded cinematic language. I hope to illustrate that profit-motivated commercial entertainment, by its very nature, cannot supply the new vision. Commercial entertainment works against art, exploits the alienation and boredom of the public, by perpetuating a system of conditioned response to formulas. Commercial entertainment not only isn't creative, it actually destroys the audience's ability to appreciate and participate in the creative process.³

Similar observations are emblematic of the attitudes of a history of American artists and were serious enough to send a number of writers packing in the earlier part of the century. Youngblood shares with literary America of the past the fear that patriotic America will not accept its vision; he senses that there is something different about the way they see the world and the way he sees it. He charges patriotic America with the aridity and inhospitality of which it has always been held guilty by the elite.

But is commercial television really this arid? We could multiply example after example of its failure to deal with public issues and of its utter banality before an otherwise dynamic world. But

³ *Expanded Cinema*, p. 59.

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arguments have also been offered to show that rather than demeaning and exploiting its audience, commercial television, as much as pulp novels, comic books, or radio shows, is constantly reinforcing and revising those myths that make meaningful the lives of the great mass of men. We need hardly mention the major role of the "western" in developing heroes for a country too young to provide its own. More generally, the historians and critics of popular culture have gone a long way toward delineating and honoring myths with regard to their function in the popular audience.

Given the power of commercial television, its dominant position in the home, and the number of hours that are spent watching it, it is difficult to believe that it is not having a vast effect in shaping our consciousness. But what is the shape of the consciousness? Is it as formulaic, as predictable, as fully exploited, as Youngblood believes; or does it have redeeming qualities that a poet working on the frontiers of consciousness can miss. The answer to the question is critical, for it may tell us whether the separation between the artist and the American audience that has existed for years can be overcome. We would like to know whether America can share the rich fruits of her artists or must be content with the stale and cast off chaff. If commercial television can be shown to be engaging man in the growth of his own self-perception, then perhaps the distance between that television and technological art is not as great as might seem. Shelley held that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." That is no less true today when poets and technologists are one. The question for us as we stand in awe of the power of electronic media is whether all men can be poets or will only a few manipulate that power. This essay cannot begin to answer this large question, but in what follows a limited attempt is made to discover what commercial television does to its viewers, how it shapes consciousness, and whether it extends that consciousness. The analysis is not developmental, but exploratory. What conclusions are reached are tentative and the most that can be hoped of them is that they will lead to fresh questions.

In *The Mechanical Bride* McLuhan is concerned with the way advertising in the 1940's was shaping consciousness. Noting that advertisements for ladies' stockings would show only a pair of legs, McLuhan speculated that ads like this did something to the

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consciousness of sex in the minds of the audience unfamiliar with thinking of legs as segregated parts of the whole human body. McLuhan joked, "Notice any very spare parts lately?" But as William Kuhns says, "The question had its heavier side: in a machine age, when everything from electric shavers to Boeing jets can be dissembled and reassembled, how do we look upon sex and the body?"⁴ Moreover, television, in shows and commercials, comes across much more strongly than newspaper or magazine advertising ever did. What does it do to our consciousness of sexuality, for example, that an ad for Close-up Toothpaste opens with a zoom-in on a voluptuous woman's mouth and then cuts to a phallic tube of Close-up which fills the screen as it slowly and steadily ejaculates red goo. What does it mean for us that Schlitz Malt-Liquor is consistently associated with a virile bull whose testicles are most prominently displayed as the animal roams the plain. But more painfully puzzling, perhaps, what does it mean that we cut away from a news story about the accidental death through bombing of twelve villagers in Laos to an ad in which a mildly constipated old woman comments on the wonderful frankness with which we discuss intimate matters these days and proceeds to tout the qualities of Pepto-Bismol. How much fantastic juxtaposition can an eighteen-inch screen hold?—that much and more. The yoking of fantasy and reality suggests that the psychological dimensions of the screen are enormous.

The fullest meaning of commercial television is a study that can take many directions: its genres, commercials, heroes, formulaic patterns, expectancies, and the life and death of shows. But I want to focus in this short paper on three significant structures and their effects and then move on to the relationships of those structures to *Captain Kangaroo* and *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*. The first major structure is that of the juxtaposition between reality and unreality. Sedulus, in *The New Republic*, complains that big money has bought professional athletics and that the mix of business and athletics on TV is disgusting to say the least:

⁴ *Environmental Man*, 1969, p. 110.

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On the Saturday afternoon that Apollo 14 prepared to return to earth, I watched, without stirring, ice skating, skiing, bobsledding, bowling, basketball, golf, and moon circling. Some of the world's great capitalists at NBC, ABC, CBS, Gillette, General Motors, General Foods, United Airlines, Bristol Myers, and NASA (my apologies to those I have inadvertently failed to acknowledge) had not only sweated forth all this testimony to man's vigor, but also mashed it into neat units for my edification. Hawaii and the moon were in conjunction. The lush and the barren. Cameras zoomed busily in and out of craters and sand traps. Arnold Palmer made a crucial 20-foot birdie putt, Alan Shepard made a hard dock. On the previous day Shepard had taken a practice, six-iron swing in the Fra Mauro Highlands. Would Palmer then soon be gathering moon rocks?⁵

Reasons for complaints of the same kind are many.

Similar oxymoronic schemes occur between children's shows, news reports, soap operas, and variety shows. The shows tumble across the screen like litter in the gutter after a London rain. Yet each show makes demands on the viewer which are special to the genre of the show itself. Humorous patterns, fantasy worlds, purgations, tragic curves, denouements, all vie one after the other to achieve credibility in the viewer's eyes.

The heaviest demands on credibility and the most jarring juxtaposition between reality and unreality, however, occur within the shows themselves and their commercials. While some ads, like those for Gulf Oil Co. during the Apollo 14 flight, attempt to meld their spiel with the show, the majority do not. On the late show one evening *Death of a Salesman* was interrupted by an undertaker's ad just after Uncle Ben told Willie that he went into the jungle and "by God I came out rich," and Willie's automobile suicide was followed by a used car salesman. The heartfelt pains and struggles of the heroine of *Search for Tomorrow* are punctuated by women made ecstatically happy by a shiny kitchen floor, by a man and a woman who discover true love in a creamy bar of soap, and by an

⁵ *The New Republic*, Feb. 20, 1971, pp. 31-32.

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old woman who finds her greatest pleasure in whispering, "toilet paper." White doves, near-eunuch Mr. Cleans, Swedish seductresses who ask us to "Take it all off," octopuses who sell underarm deodorant, all ask us to enter a world of fantasy some distance from the world of the show itself. The configuration of such commercials is complex, however, for the product (soap, cleanser, shaving cream) has immediate physical implication in the real world of the viewer, while the approach of the commercial is frequently fantastic. The gimmick may be to embellish the otherwise mundane product with the viewer's own fantasy life—certainly Playboy Bunnies who sell Pinto Fords suggest this is so.

The matter is tricky, however, for shows that would seem to be themselves the most fantastic frequently have the most realistic commercials. *Star Trek* had some of the more mundane commercials of the air waves and we should remember that the super-rational Mr. Spock took on a kind of reality for many viewers despite his unbelievable demeanor and appearance. Saturday cartoons seem to bear something of the same relationship. Animated shows frequently have the most realistic ads: flesh and blood girls playing with Barbie Dolls; the sons of sports figures like Whitey Ford endorsing cereals. On the other hand, shows which use flesh and blood boys and girls frequently have animated commercials. The levels are subtle, however, for Barbie Dolls and Yankee pitchers call forth a level of active fantasy that may be more engaging than either *Johnny Quest* or *The Bugaloos*.

This constant interplay between real and fantasy worlds demands a rapid shifting of frame if the viewer is to recognize the kind of world the screen is working with—and most frequently, I imagine, he fails to make the shift. It is very likely that the world of fantasy and reality overlap in the eye of the viewer. The classic inversion of television reality and fantasy was reported by a woman from North Carolina who said the trip to the moon and the moon walk were trumped up because she had seen a similar situation on *Twilight Zone*. Commercial TV may achieve a level of abstraction that would turn Coleridge in his grave: an unwilling suspension of disbelief.

Audiences of the poem, the novel, plays, or movies had a much easier task before them if they wished to choose between the

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fantasy world and the real. "The play's the thing" in which "to catch the conscience of a king," but that's Claudius' problem and not the audience's. For the audience can leave the theater or close the book. The sustained level of fantasy is finite. For the TV audience the pervasive tube, the screen, remains day after day, night after night. But more importantly, even when the screen is darkened, many of the commercial objects that populated that screen await the viewer in the medicine cabinet, the refrigerator, are on his walls, on his skin, in his mouth, adorn his wife, fill his house, and burst across most of his waking and sleeping life. And they carry with them that iconic mixture of real and fantastic.

The television commercial itself is the second significant structure that bears examination. What is most remarkable about recent TV advertising is the effort to make the product and the viewer become the same thing or, at any rate, to make them interdependent, pals. A recent Toronado ad displayed its cars as "broad-shouldered, massively male," and hence extended the desired qualities of the man into the automobile and by implication guaranteed the same qualities to the man if he owned the car. The ads for Marlboro's cigarettes placed them in "Marlboro country," not a geographical place but a neurological location somewhere inside the viewer's head. The cigarette was a companion on the range, in the snow, in the rain. Some recent ads pitched to children have pictured a child alone, whose friend is the product. An ad for Pals vitamins shows the young boy interrupting some would-be adult litter-bugs with the help of his animated Pals vitamins. The vitamins interact with him, talking, cajoling, even saving him from a runaway stage coach. Nestlé's Quick is offered to the children as having almost psychedelic properties—at any rate it can transform a dull day. A bored youth climbs up to the kitchen cabinet and immediately begins to fantasize, translating himself and his Quick into a world of roughneck cowboys where he handles the lawless. Quick is there on the draw. Volkswagen, Benson and Hedges cigarettes, and that panoply of portable electronic communication equipment (tape recorders, transistor radios, Shap computers) are advertised not especially as useful products, but as enjoyable companions, nice things to have around. When they are with us, the ads say, we are comfortable.

The series show is the third structural feature of commercial

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television that I wish to examine. The series is characterized by its repeated patterns of heroes, styles, and expectations met. This genre, if we may call it that, is a puzzle, for it depends heavily on its predictability for its success. Did we ever doubt Mat Dillon would get his man. Do we ever seriously believe that Ironside will fail to produce a solution to a complex crime; or for that matter, did we ever doubt that Perry Mason would save his client and beat Warren Berger. Has the Impossible Mission Force ever failed; I mean really failed. But shouldn't predictability bore us. Apparently not. What the success of the shows in the ratings suggests is that expectation is critical in determining whether an audience will return to a show or not. The audience is apparently secure in a situation in which the music, the hero's heroics, the denouement are predictable. Do we conclude that creators of such series are merely charlatans capitalizing on human insecurity or do we conclude that those who produce such shows have really tapped into basic human configurations and are satisfying deep and otherwise disturbing needs for certain patterns. I do not think the question can be answered directly, but it may be possible to strike certain parallels between the patterns of such series and the patterns of what is regarded as more serious art.

Let us turn now to *Captain Kangaroo* (CK) and *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* (WC) and examine the two shows in terms of the structures we have just discussed. The choice of these shows for examination is highly whimsical and emerges out of an earlier curiosity of mine; I believe, however, that the analysis will show that the pairing is not as odd as it seems. In fact, in terms of the three structures we've just discussed, CK and WC are very much alike. I first began to compare the two shows when I toyed with the preposterous idea that as CK functioned in the morning to begin the children's day, to raise the sun, so WC functioned in the evening to end the adult's day, to lower the sun. One was prologue: the other epilogue. The idea extended into joyful madness when I allowed myself to believe that Captain and Walter were the same man; CBS had created a juvenile dependence on a private delusion that became an adult dependence on a mass illusion. The bulk of this idea I abandoned, but having entertained it I began to wonder if there weren't more numerous relations between the two shows than I had suspected. More

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clearly than anything else, I saw that WC was a *show!* Both were closed circuit systems bound in this room earth feeding back to man, creating in him, the image of himself. As Captain ended his show with "Don't forget to say your prayers," so Walter ended his with "That's the way it is, Friday, April 9, 1971." The ultimate shaper of consciousness, our own consciousness.

If the child rises early, he can watch *The CBS Morning News* before CK. The world of muggings, political shysters, deaths in Viet Nam and special studies of the welfare problem offer curious appetizer to CK's world of toast and cocoa. As the cameras move across the world landscape, around and onto the moon, and zoom in on the earth from the moon, the fantasy of CK must pale considerably. Depending on where you are (a factor that bears heavily on the shaping of the consciousness of space and time, since the child can also watch CK at grandmother's or his friend's) CK is followed either by *Man Trap* (a quiz show in which women are depicted as giggling, gaggling, gossiping creatures after a paramour) or by the *Lucy Show*. WC is frequently preceded by *Gomer Pyle*, the *Mike Douglas Show*, or, on one day a week *Davey & Goliath*. It may be followed by the *Porter Wagoner Show*, *Buck Owens Show* or, if channels are changed, *Petticoat Junction*. If we assume context has considerable influence on the shape of those things we see, then both CK and WC must undergo major kinds of shaping in the minds of their viewers. Most startling perhaps is the juxtaposition of the morning news and CK, for the shifting of gears from supposed real world to fantasy world is extreme. Both shows come out of the same screen, into the same room, onto the same retina. As one show spills neurologically into the other, the real world of news becomes somewhat fantastic and the fantasy world of CK begins to appear real. Adult minds may make the shift between the two worlds (though I doubt it), but juvenile minds would surely boggle in attempting to define the two existences.

The advertisements of the two shows serve in two major ways to mix fantasy and reality. Like the deep moaning electric organ of the afternoon soap operas, the commercials weld together the programs surrounding CK and WC. They establish a theme between the various programs which otherwise may not exist. This is achieved in the least way by the same company advertising different products in one show and then another. Kellogg's cereals

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move quite smoothly from the morning news to CK. Bufferin appears as easily in WC as in *Petticoat Junction*. Of course, all of these real products are found somewhere in our homes. CK, however, has achieved a new level of mix between fantasy and reality. A "Captain Kangaroo" after all is not so very real when you first meet him: a bulky, middle-aged long-haired moustached man in flappy clothes with a flower in the lapel who goes around talking to cloth moose, stuffed rabbits, and verse-reciting grandfather clocks. But in juxtaposition to those anthropomorphized objects Captain himself begins to look quite real and soon Mr. Moose and his colleagues seem less and less fantastic. We are quite ready to accept, after a few days' viewing, then, Captain's talking to cotton-stuffed, cloth Pals vitamins and carrying on a dialogue with a giant tube of Colgate toothpaste. Where do we find reality in such a *mélange*? In the medicine cabinet, of course. And as the child holds in his hand the pink owl vitamin or fondles the tube of fluoroide toothpaste the reality of that physical world reverberates back through the fantasies of CK. Captain himself is no more real or unreal than the products he panders or the style he panders them with. When the child says his prayers, as Captain has commanded, giant visions of toothpaste tubes, vitamin capsules, cereals, and Schwinn bikes rise up before him.

WC reverses this process. The news, after all, is the most real show one can produce—this is serious business and it gathers its materials from the grist of our lives, not from the pen of a writer. Walter never barks the products himself, of course (he and other newscasters shunned the idea some years ago saying it would be unprofessional and would suggest a conflict of interest). But a bevy of alter Walters press about the newsdesk and before the camera in their engineering coveralls and lab coats pushing Fords, Motorolas, Scope, and Ex-Lax. Frank Gifford avoids the stigma of advertising on his own news show by selling Westinghouse appliances on WC. The commercials of WC punctuate the news with fantasy after fantasy and many of them are narrated by men easily as professional as Walter. A yet more subtle mergence of real news and fantastic ad is achieved by Bufferin. The shots of the moon that appeared behind Walter on the large monitor when he was reporting the *Flight of Apollo XIV* are curiously like the moon-shot sequences used by Bufferin on WC. It is not clear

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whether commercial America is bringing us the news or the news is bringing us commercial America. When Walter closes with "And that's the way it is . . .," we are not certain *what* is that way.

Perhaps the most interesting analysis of CK and WC occurs when we consider the two shows as series shows, like *Bonanza*, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*., or *Search for Tomorrow*. We said that series shows depend on fulfilling expectations, on predictability, on repeated pattern, and on heroes and style. At first blush CK would seem to meet the test, but not WC. Captain opens the doors of the Treasure House on cue as the familiar theme plays on. He hangs up his keys and the music stops. We know that he will lose carrots to Bunny Rabbit, be showered by ping-pong balls when Mr. Moose tricks him, and call on Mr. Greenjeans to display some animal or other. We know that the minor scrapes Captain's mild foolishness gets him into will lead to no harm. And we know that Captain will close the Treasure House as gently as he opened it. The patterns are all well-established, expectancies reinforced. Walter opens the doors of the CBS Newsdesk and all hell breaks loose, or so it seems. True enough, a great many of the news items within the show cannot be predicted—at least their content cannot be predicted. But the forms of those news items and the larger forms of the show itself never vary. The world may be in chaos but the contingencies of time and a commercial world will force that chaos to fit into neat pre-allotted packages. "Direct from our newsroom in New York, this is the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite and . . ." opens the show; "And that's the way it is . . ." closes the show. As the previews of news items to be covered are developed over the face of Walter (the previews themselves are part of the pattern of predictability) he sits at his desk, pipe laid aside, surveying the script before him. We've seen it once; we've seen it a thousand times. The camera pans in on Walter and we are on our way, on a journey to 7:00 p.m. When the show is almost over, the camera pulls away from him as he neatly stacks his script and adjusts his pipe, and an anonymous voice says, "This has been the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite." As surely as Captain calls on Mr. Greenjeans and Mr. Bainter for help so we know that Walter will seek Dan Rather at the White House, Roger Mudd at the Capitol, and Eric Sevareid at

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his desk in Washington for interpretation and comment. When we flip on the news at 6:30, we know where we are.

Captain and Walter are the title characters and heroes of their shows. As surely as Ben Cartwright will make the decisions, moral and metaphysical, of which we approve, so we know they will not disappoint us. Or, perhaps a better comparison is with the narrator in a novel like *Tom Jones*. That voice tells us where we are, supplies us with the moral norms with which to judge Tom, and reassures us that Tom will succeed despite desperate odds. Through the ups and downs of Captain's day, we never doubt that he will make it. In fact, we may enjoy his dilemmas more because we know he will succeed. Through the ups and downs of the World's day, as Walter reports them, we never doubt the world will make it. (Walter has been with us a long time. Who forgets his urging of Alan Shepard's Mercury flight—"go, baby, go"—or his reporting of the deaths of JFK and RFK.) Walter is there, as he has always been, presenting, refining, informing, narrating, and hence reassuring us that regardless of how bad the content of the news may seem, the form of the show guarantees that he will be back tomorrow and the next day and the next. Captain lifts his phone to call Greenjeans at the barn when he needs something fixed. Walter calls to his men in the field and seems to us on the other side of the camera to have at his disposal the command of both infinite knowledge and power: Sydney, Hong Kong, Berlin; he roams the world at will. Captain and Walter are heroes, centers of their shows. Indeed, they may be the shows. I can no more separate Walter from WC than I can separate Richard Burton from Hamlet or Laurence Olivier from *Othello*, or Richard Boone from the character of Palladin. When Walter is on vacation we are not satisfied with Roger Mudd (nor can we bring ourselves to be satisfied with NBC's replacements for Chet Huntley nor with ABC's almost daily shifting of narrative character). We like forms; they please us. But forms and heroes are inextricably bound together, as any reader of the epic knows, and the pleasure of watching a news program whose content may be grisly, is the pleasure of seeing a hero, our hero, stride through the landscape which is his form.

Is WC real? I don't know. Probably not. At least no more real than Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, or Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

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But reality may not be a valid test of the goodness of a TV show anyway. While I would make no claims for the ultimate artistic greatness of CK or WC, I would argue that formally the shows do tap us somewhere deeply in the recesses of our cultural consciousness. Or, to return to the original question of this essay, I do believe commercial television is engaging man in the growth of his own self-perception—the epic has always done that. I do not, however, as a result of this analysis see evidence that the mass of men shall participate in the making of human vision as Youngblood hopes. The rift between artist and audience, I fear, will remain.

ROGER ROSENBLATT

RESIDUALS ON "AN AMERICAN FAMILY"

A little over a year ago the William C. Louds of Santa Barbara, California were the most widely discussed and written about family in the United States. They were the stars and subjects of "An American Family," an experimental exercise in television verité, invented and undertaken by a director, Craig Gilbert. For 13 straight weeks the lives and characters of each member of this family were made plain to us. We responded by analyzing what we saw, and by inspecting our own feelings. In the very short time since, the Louds have been nearly forgotten.

This is confusing to the Louds, who regarded their initial stardom as merely the beginning of future risings. Only a few months ago they reconvened on the "Dick Cavett Show" where they had also appeared in their heyday, before Bill and Pat Loud got their divorce. On the second appearance Pat was unsuccessfully promoting her book, *Pat Loud: A Woman's Story*, and the children, all five, were frantically promoting themselves as a hard rock group. They performed a song written by Lance Loud called "Muscle Boys," but again, no sale. The Louds talked with Cavett about their enormous disappointment in not being able to sustain their renown.

Roger Rosenblatt is Literary Editor of *The New Republic*. This essay is reprinted from *The New Republic* (November 23, 1974) by permission of the publisher. © 1974 by The New Republic, Inc.

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"An American Family" was, I think, one of the most significant events of our recent popular culture. The Louds would have a right to be surprised at their fading, were it not for the fact that all events in popular culture, no matter how big and brassy, are ephemeral. It is a tenet of popular culture that things come and go. The disappearance of an item is as essential as its rise and prominence.

But the disappearance of the Louds presents a special problem. The family's prominence did not merely wane; it was obliterated, as if by popular demand. There were those who simply disliked the show or found it boring. There were more who deeply hated the show and the idea of the show as well. "An American Family" has not been rerun. It flourished within popular culture, but it also did something to popular culture, something that even popular culture, which accepts all things, could not abide.

At a time when questions of censorship were being put so ardently in the press, it is interesting how smoothly the Louds passed by. People who debated *Deep Throat* and *Last Tango in Paris* did not include "An American Family" in their conception of debilitating and tasteless influences. The reason may be that the Louds were not naked in their episodes, not naked in the sense of performing without clothing. Their intimacies, where they occurred, were merely verbal, thus evidently more tolerable, despite the fact that once a week we all sat down to watch an organization of human beings deliberately set out to psychologically murder each other. Despite the accuracies achieved by television verité, we started out viewing most aspects of the Louds' behavior as the antics of a family of some other country. However, as the show progressed public criticism of "An American Family" became quite personal. One judged the success of each episode, and the whole series, by deciding whether one liked the Louds, a decision that hinged on our surface identifications with, and correspondences to, the family, and gradually became refined to the point where we declared some Louds better than other Louds—healthier, more honest more entertaining. Eventually we began to root for our favorite Loud.

This is a procedure with which we are quite familiar, and it is accomplished almost by reflex. Every radio and television show, movie and comic strip built on the family format has required of

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us the same superficial discriminations. Even as the Louds were asserting their presence in their medium, they were in direct competition with shows of the sort that continue to succeed today: "The Brady Bunch," "All in the Family," "Family Affair," "My Three Sons," "The Partridge Family" and more. It may be argued that "An American Family" was real-life drama and ought not to be yoked with "The Brady Bunch," but theoretically a semblance of reality is the aspiration of "The Brady Bunch," and of the other shows as well. The questions of propriety raised by "An American Family" were no different in kind from those raised by the Bunker family, which has been both hailed and scorned solely because of its proximity to reality.

It is far less interesting that the Louds were real than that we reacted to them as if they were not. Because they came to us on a regular schedule each week—the same cast, the same setting—because they engaged in a new and complete adventure every episode, edited largely in the same patterns, and because our appreciation and apprehension of them increased according to the sequence of the performances, we reasonably took the Louds to be fictitious. If they had been on radio, they would have brought to mind "One Man's Family." On television they became the new Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, a notable American family of another age, whose appeal, like the Louds', derived from their being the same family off-stage and on. Like the Louds, Ozzie and Harriet had teenage children, and a nice house, and confusions and misunderstandings. Ozzie did something for a living—it was never clear what—but his family, like the Louds, never wanted. Ozzie was a "good guy," just like Bill. Ricky was a rock 'n' roll star, just as Grant and Kevin hoped to be (Delilah sought to become a tap dancer).

We focused mainly on Mrs. Loud because, like Harriet, she ran her show. She answered everybody's questions, and solved all problems. She arranged airplane tickets, reminded the children of their school calendar, reinforced various routines. She insisted on the role of stabilizer and organizer—"I've got enough mutinous troops around here"—and the others conceded her that role eagerly. In fact, they made her assumption of it necessary, a fine

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courtesy, by affecting chaos and disorder at every opportunity. Even when the Louds simply walked together, they loped distractedly like water birds in an open zoo.

The principal difference between the two women was that Harriet used to urge on the maturity of her boys to the point of the show's survival through David's and Ricky's marriages. Harriet had the advantage over Pat of being confined by her director to the business of making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, so her benign toleration of everybody else's changes was born partly of circumstance. Mrs. Loud quite openly did not wish her family to change. When Kevin returned from overseas, he showed signs of independence that Pat resented, and tried to tease him out of. She much preferred her neurotic Lance, who was down and out in Europe. On the phone one time Pat told Bill to wire Lance another \$50, and when Bill protested, "he's got to do it for himself," she treated his comment as an aphorism.

This difference aside, Pat and Harriet could have played each other. More than any superficial similarity, they shared the fundamental condition of being simultaneously the firm foundations of their families and the romantic idols in which great dreams had been invested. Each was her Juno, of O'Casey's play, married to a dreamer and bungler whose wildest dream (and biggest bungle?) was she herself. Eventually the object of the dream had to become the solidifying agent because the dreamer wished to go on dreaming. The stability of the family came to depend entirely on her. She initially had been the end of romance, and now encouraged romance in others (the tap dancers, the rock 'n' roll stars) in order to hold on to her power. In Harriet this was theater, in Pat, life, but it was the same part played.

To parallel real and fictitious characters in this way should be an offensive idea. The suggestion it carries is that the real person is diminished by the comparison, her complexities and variations, which are the human signs, reduced to the simplifying elements of melodrama. Yet Pat was not diminished in the slightest by her identification with fiction. Indeed her complexity was enhanced by it, because she seemed purposefully to cultivate the trappings of simple-mindedness, as if she sought to be fictitious herself.

She came on from the start as a woman who had absorbed all the components of attractiveness without permitting herself to

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become attractive. Always informal—her white slacks were startling—she gave the impression of having studied long and hard to look so smart. By now her appearance came automatically, and the outfits that were supposed to be casual were worn like a kind of uniform. She descended to breakfast each morning like a piece of machinery, yet it was clear that she was aware of her rigidity. Instead of working counter to it, she elaborated on it, just as the children elaborated on their own loose-jointedness.

Her props were her glasses—oversized, stylish, worn like a visor. Her voice, like Harriet's, had the tone of instructions piped through earphones on a museum tour. Neither warm nor cold, it sustained rather than created conversation, a family trait. Mrs. Loud has thick dark hair, which she tied back like a young girl's, but she did not look young because of it. Nor did she look old, nor old trying to look young. She looked as if she were frozen at 35, though at the time of the show she had reached 46, yet the question of age did not really crop up. The control she exerted over herself, her body and gestures, so dominated the impression we took of her that in a sense the force of that control, which ordinarily should have been repellent for its dehumanizing effect, was her most attractive feature.

But Mrs. Loud would not allow even that attraction. She had mastered the craft of withholding herself: from her clothing, her voice, her homosexual son with whom she played a perpetual Venus and Adonis. On her visit to Lance in New York, she lolled about his pad like the siren of a world that might have been. Then she was off again, to a Baltimore shipping depot, or to a shoe store to buy taps for Delilah, or to a bookstore. When she called her husband long-distance, even before they officially became estranged, she sounded as if it were she who had answered the phone. He tried to pump up their talk, as if with an organ bellows. She gave him the time and the weather.

The terrible thing, or what ought to have been the terrible thing, was, as we learned in one of the later episodes, that Mrs. Loud knew what we thought of her. Deciding after 20 years that she would divorce her husband because of his countless infidelities, she brought her case to her brother and sister-in-law. They

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discussed divorce over a barbecue. Pat said that the pain Bill had put her through caused her to become "unlovable." The word was not only exactly right, but brought Bill to mind; Bill who was constitutionally lovable, who did not withhold himself, who was born with a face that takes everything (nothing) seriously, and bears the expression of a man eternally in line for something, like a TV taping. Bill always gave his all, which was also all surface and above board; yet Pat was leaving him for his dishonesty, his disingenuousness, which she said made her unlovable.

She told her in-laws that her husband had made his philantherings so obvious to her that she could only suppose he meant them to be discovered. What she did not say directly is that when she made the discoveries, she had reacted to them on her own terms. She had ordered Bill from the house on those earlier occasions, and would do so this time as well. She would make a "scene," even though it is not certain that a scene is what Bill was seeking when he so obviously planted the evidence of his guilt. But it is a scene he would get, nevertheless, because a showdown, for all its stomping and screaming, would still be in Pat's control. It would require no thinking of anybody, no revelations and no changes. Just like Ozzie caught dancing too close to his old flame at the class reunion, Bill Loud was in the doghouse.

The divorce of the Louds, the central action of the series, was a great sadness. Why were we so unmoved? Strangely, we would have been more disturbed by the sight of Harriet going through the same experience, sitting down collectedly with Thorny the neighbor, and painfully unburdening herself of her contempt for the simpleton Ozzie, the tedium of his golf playing and boyish fakery, for David the straight, Wheaties-grown dullard, for Ricky with his narcotized eyes, for her own infernal sandwiches, and their whole vacant, sun-drenched life. Done right, that scene would have stunned us powerfully. But not Pat Loud. When she laid bare her life, it seemed as if she were talking about someone else.

Her evasion was well suited to television. In television's terms it was realism at its best. The main reason television is so offensive an instrument is that it attempts to create its own brand of realism, and to destroy our idea of reality in the process. Ordinarily this effort might not be deemed offensive because in

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one way or another everything that pretends to realism attempts to destroy our idea of reality, and does so, as television does, by substituting its own. What is called "realistic" in literature is always much harsher and tougher than what we recognize as real life, and the "realistic" decisions we are occasionally asked to make are inevitably the ones that disfavor us or belittle our very real imaginations. In television, however, realism represents neither the excessively harsh nor excessively practical. It is our crises, the points of highest intensity, that television calls real, and it seeks to obliterate our own sense of what is real by bombarding us with continuous and undiscriminated excitements until we are unable to tell the exciting from the tedious, the important from the trivial, and ultimately until we are unable to tell what is happening at all.

The Louds' divorce was a real event; it actually occurred. Never was there greater realism on television except in the murders of Oswald and Robert Kennedy. Nevertheless the event seemed staged because it took place within a context in which almost every event was treated with equal fervor. There is no question that the Louds and their children were upset over this business, but in fact appeared no more upset than they had been elated about Delilah's tap dancing solo in school. Nor did the family seem any more or less excited by that than by their casual breakfast conversation that inaugurated the series. Everything the Louds did and apparently felt was always at the same pitch, always an extravaganza. When it came to divorce, therefore, nothing was left to heighten the situation or make it seem that it was anything but another adventure dictated by the script.

This pervasive and predominant sense of melodrama was the heart of the Louds' troubles. The reason each member of the family was interchangeable with some stock counterpart is that the Louds were playing "American Family," not living it, just as they had played "American Family" long before Craig Gilbert hit upon his brainstorm. I do not mean that the editing of the series produced an artificial dramatization. I mean that the Louds did so themselves, that they created and managed an imitation of life passing for the real thing because it was a careful imitation, accurate to the letter. The Louds were born a TV program waiting

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to be discovered. They had always thought of themselves as a family show.

The show they finally became was both production and reproduction, the fact and the copy. The desire to reproduce life and art accurately has become vitally important to us in the past few years. In many obvious ways we have substituted reproduction for invention, our lives made plentiful through Xerox. Photographic equipment, particularly the close-up lens, is enormously expensive, yet people buy it up eagerly. The standard for excellence in phonograph recording is "high fidelity," the precise recapturing of sound. Prints and lithographs have become very special and valuable works of art. Tape and cassette recorders are commonplace. Even video tape machines do well—all such mechanisms made and distributed in the interests of the detailed replay of our existence.

"An American Family" was a very high fidelity recording: as precise and complete a record as one could make of experience. Yet our sense of the product in this instance was that it was not true to life, that it was in fact terribly and infuriatingly false. There is a curious correspondence here with Richard Nixon, who was the real Nixon on tape, and the fake, the liar, when not on tape. This is one reason we sought those tapes so avidly: to see the real person in the nation's trust. The Louds, however, had more integrity than Nixon. They were equally unreal on and off camera, so infinite reproductions of their lives would never produce a variant. Nor were they more or less attractive or successful as reproductions of themselves than they were in the first edition. We could not see the difference; there was no difference to see.

At the first installment of the series Craig Gilbert was careful to point out that he was about to present us with *an*, not *the*, American family. His caveat was both unnecessary and untrue. Nothing could be clearer than that the Louds were chosen for presentation because of their seeming typicality, because they had teenagers, a suburban life, multiple cars, a swimming pool, because they photographed well, and because they were Californians. They were meant to be identifiable as types, and were so. No one knew this better than the Louds. Yet precisely because the externalities of their lives declared them to be *the* American

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family, they did not know what it is to be *an American family*, or any kind of family for that matter. They knew they were typical, all right, but believed that people are supposed to be typical. Their pathos was not that they resembled the Nelsons, but that they were pursuing the Nelsons' reality.

Where did they get such an idea? From popular culture itself, the culture in which they thrived and by which they were supported. Like the Louds, popular culture carries the illusion of intensity, but allows for no genuine tragedy, heroism or stature. Like "An American Family," too, it is to be taken seriously, but is not serious itself. At base it is the culture of the critical mind, the culture by which, if we care to, we may see most clearly our frailties and self deceptions. High culture demonstrates someone else's nobility. Popular culture plays to our own weaknesses.

The false typicality of the Louds was the cause of their downfall both as family and show. Yet in the framework of our intellectual history the Louds were indeed typically American, heirs in their way to Franklin and Whitman, a landmark in the progress of democracy. The most noticeable feature of the Loud family was their freedom. Bill was the model of free enterprise in his strip mining equipment business. The children were children of nature, free to do almost anything. Lance was free to choose the clownish and miserable character of his life. Pat was free to let it happen. The Louds were also free to destroy: the land and eventually themselves. Their ultimate exercise of freedom was to be free of each other, yet clearly before their separation was made legal, they had been free of each other, of responsibility, of feeling, consecutive thought and especially of history.

The Louds were in fact so free that they seemed constitutionally unable to make connections with any things or people. Ironically "An American Family" put a temporary end to that. Here was a context, a work of art, in which such connections could be made possible and with a vengeance. When the Louds finally became the event toward which they had been tending, they did at last reach others, ourselves, which is the function of art, popular and otherwise. What they reached us with, however, was the truth of their falsity, which was a perversion of the democratic ideal in

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cultural, historical and personal terms. The Louds were intensely free. Their last great freedom was the freedom to disintegrate, which we wished on them because of their falsity and because of our potential for a similar falsity, of which they served as repugnant and glittering examples.

Robert Warshow asked, what use can we make of our experience in a world of mass culture? The answer, as he knew, is that mass culture produces the art of mass experience, individual experience distended into types and categories that spread over the land confusing and distorting our taste, and threatening our need for authenticity. The striving toward fictional normality shaped the Louds, tore them asunder, and left them naked before us. Their unconscious pretense was what we felt close to, and could not bear.

ROBERT LEWIS SHAYON

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"*By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me? . . .*"

The "stopping" in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* presumably is designed to deliver the Wedding Guest to the Mariner, as another in the latter's long line of unwilling but receptive hearers of his tale: that, traditionally, has been the understanding and interpretation of the arrest. If we take the long leap, however, from the first verse of the poem to the penultimate and final verses, another explanation becomes possible:

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding Guest
Turned from the bridegroom's door.

To turn the Wedding Guest away from the Wedding Feast—that is the ultimate motive of the Mariner; the telling of the tale, with its traumatic impact, is merely the method by which the Mariner accomplishes his true aim:

Robert Lewis Shayon teaches at the Annenberg School of Communication. He was formerly Radio-TV critic for *Saturday Review* and is the author of several books about television. This essay, originally published in various issues of *Saturday Review*, is reprinted from "Consumers, Commercials, and Men About Town" from *Open to Criticism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), by permission of the author and of *Saturday Review*.

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He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn . . .

I have already alluded to the "stunning" effect of the Mariner's tale, in its application to the ends of critical signification, discovery, and transformation. I should like now to direct the reader's attention to the fact that the Wedding Guest was "forlorn" of sense—which may be interpreted to mean that he has "forsaken" sense. The word "sense" also takes on a special meaning. "The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide," the Wedding Guest remonstrates, when the Mariner accosts him:

And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.

A wedding is a joyous occasion: beneath the conventional ceremonial artifice, the ritual, the often shallow conviviality, lies an undeniable stratum of profound human experience susceptible of being properly sanctified with secular or religious approbation. But neither can anyone deny that usually the free food and drink, generously provided by the hosts, for their invited guests' unlimited indulgence, are an attractive concomitant of the more solemn aspects of the event. Physical gratification and worldly pleasure, from their innocent, diverting, and useful modes to their more dubious measures, may be subsumed under the meaning of "sense," as we find it in Coleridge's poem. At an even deeper level, we may attribute to it an allegedly more negative materialism, which is at the opposite pole from presumably more "ethereal" values.

The transient as opposed to the lasting, the appearance versus the reality—these are other terms by which we can try to capture the sense of "sense" that we are entertaining here. That the Wedding Guest misses the actual wedding, by virtue of his being "held" by the Mariner, is not so important for him as the fact that he turns away from the Wedding Feast that follows. The feast may have been what he really came for—with all due respect to the bride and groom. But the Wedding Feast is our important symbol. The Mariner "hath his will" in order to turn the Wedding Guest

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from the inferior forms to their superior ideas. In Nietzschean terms, it is the familiar struggle between the Dionysian and the Apollonian ways of life, the way of the instincts versus the way of the mind, of reason. "Socratic ethics, dialectics," wrote Nietzsche, "the temperance and cheerfulness of the pure scholar—couldn't these, rather than their opposites, be viewed as symptoms of decline, fatigue, distemper, or instincts caught in anarchic dissolution?"

The German Dionysian was contemptuous of the Greek ironist. He would have scorned and laughed at the Ancient Mariner's final message to the Wedding Guest:

O sweeter than the marriage feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!

For Nietzsche, disorder, chaos, and mystery were part of "the true being of things"; community lay not in amalgamation with the herd, the multitude, but in the separation, the individuation, of men with an urge to power from the men with slave morality who constituted most of mankind. Appearances, shifting, changing, were the closest approximations to truth; reality is bottomless. Nietzsche rejected transcendental consolations, and he doomed man, in striking affinity to the Mariner's experience, to "the loneliest of all sea voyages."

"Follow me," the Mariner says to the Wedding Guest, "after I am gone. Walk in my footsteps: that is the best way to go." Socrates spoke similarly to all whom he taught. Plato, in his dialogue *Gorgias*, confronts his mouthpiece philosopher with "the three wisest Greeks of our day," Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. They are Sophists, rhetoricians, the professional dispensers of knowledge, with whom Socrates contended all the days of his teaching. Since the dialogue is Plato's play—and Socrates is his man—the three are vanquished in the end for their lack of dialectical skill. Socrates proves to them that it is a higher form of statesmanship to make men better than to flatter them. Gorgias is a venerable, celebrated persuader; Polus is an impetuous youth; but it is the figure of Callicles that dominates the trio.

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"In Callicles," B. Jowett wrote, in his Introduction to the dialogue, "far more than in any other sophist or rhetorician, is concentrated the spirit of evil against which Socrates is contending, the spirit of the world . . ." Callicles is a "man about town," an Athenian gentleman, who anticipates Nietzsche. He despises mankind and deprecates philosophers. Philosophy, he asserts, is fine for effeminate, immature men; but maturity ought to make one wise and show him that the pursuit of wealth and power and the satisfaction of the passions are the only desirable ends for men of honor, ability and courage. Might is right, not virtue. Stop splitting words and surrounding yourself, he tells Socrates, with a few admiring youths who know nothing, and use your talents in the marketplace, among real men who are ambitious, unscrupulous when necessary, cynical, materialistic, and shrewd in assessing the main chance. Callicles, as we have seen in the exploits of the Mad Hatters of television, is very much a figure of the contemporary television scene.

To him Socrates, at the conclusion of the dialectical combat, delivers one of his most earnest exhortations:

Follow me, then, and I will lead you where you will be happy in life and after death . . . And never mind if some one despises you as a fool, and insults you if he has a mind . . . When we have practised virtue together, we will apply ourselves to politics, if that seems desirable, or we will advise about whatever else may seem good to us, for we shall be better able to judge then. In our present condition we ought not to give ourselves airs, for even on the most important subjects we are always changing our minds; so utterly stupid are we! . . . the best way of life is to practise justice and every good virtue in life and death. This way let us go; and in this exhort all men to follow, not in the way to which you trust and in which you exhort me to follow you; for that way, Callicles, is nothing worth.

It is the "nothing worth" from which the Mariner wishes to save the Wedding Guest, as he stops him at the Bridegroom's door. It is the "nothing worth" of contemporary television and radio against

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which the critic of broadcasting inveighs. "Stop!" he says to the people of television and to their vast audiences; not from using and enjoying this remarkable medium of human communication, but from using it badly, immorally, for inferior purposes. The Wedding Feast is the "sense" world, the world of "common sense"; make of it a medium for uncommon sense. It is only a distorted vision that would condemn television utterly; but it is also a distorted vision that would debase it to degraded ends.

For "Wedding Feast" read the acquisitive-consumption orientation of commercial broadcasting, and you will have the touchstone with which to encounter the eleven pieces which follow. Their major theme is the tragic waste of the potential of broadcasting in this country. Would that the water served at this feast, as at another wedding in a certain Mediterranean scene, could be turned into wine—the wine of community as opposed to collectivity! The reader may note that the critic offers no formula for accomplishing the miracle. In later chapters, some suggestions may come into view; however, if a critic is to play philosopher-king, as well he might, it were better that he lean more heavily on the side of philosophy than of kingship. It is more necessary for a critic to maintain detachment than to become altogether involved; for in total involvement lies the danger of dogma, whereas the very essence of the critical spirit is that it be ever ready to negate its own negation, should that become desirable in order to reach a higher affirmation, and so on.

The question of choice ought to be answered: why this particular combination of pieces of all the possibilities? The answer, candidly, is—I think these are among the best. Probably my judgment is colored by the fact that they express my special biases. When a critic has freedom of choice concerning the objects to which he will give his attention, he generally tends to be guided by his own selective perception—that is, he more often than not chooses to attend to those objects which afford him the richest opportunities to express his own prejudices. By prejudices, I do not necessarily impute to him a negative attitude; rather, I mean that he seeks constantly to allow his rivers of conviction to run in expedient channels. The pieces that I have selected cannot, of course, adequately represent the whole range of subjects that I

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have covered in two decades: they represent some of the high points.

In reading and rereading them, in sifting, combining, rearranging, in order to discover integral coherences, I have been struck with a number of things which the reader might reflect upon. The first is the push, in most pieces, for universals, large universals, which exist, before their connection, at great distances from the objects of critical attention. In his Introduction to Plato's *Republic*, Jowett wrote of Book VII:

All things in which there is opposition or proportion are suggestive of reflection. The mere impression of sense evokes no power of thought or of mind, but when sensible objects ask to be compared and distinguished, then philosophy [read criticism] begins.

Earlier in the same Introduction, Jowett also makes a comment, on the search for universals, which we apply to criticism:

There seem to be two great aims in the philosophy of Plato,—first, to realize abstractions; secondly, to connect them. According to him, the true education is that which draws men from becoming to being, and to a comprehensive survey of all beings. He desires to develop in the human mind the faculty of seeing the universal in all things; until at last the particulars of sense drop away and the universal alone remains. He then seeks to combine the universals which he has disengaged from sense . . .

The critic finds a strain of irony in these pieces, an attempt to see television whole, to warn the reader, to wake him up to the institutional arrangements which are the hard, tough underbelly of television and radio. There is an ineradicable hope, a yearning for escape, for freedom from the oppressive misuses of the medium; but one cannot overlook the deepening note of anxiety and frustration—as irrationality and grotesque absurdity intrude—and ultimately the fear of complete loss of identity. "Stop!" the

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critic calls to the readers, as he meets them at television's door. "Turn from the Wedding Feast and its appearances. Follow the Mariner—to reality."

Of the eleven pieces that follow, all but the first require no accompanying note. They appear to be self-explanatory, even for readers who may never have seen the programs mentioned and who are not aware of the contexts of the subject matters that are treated. The first piece, "The Tragedy of \$64,000," invites the following . . .

Commentary

"The \$64,000 Question" was an early luminary in the television trend, during the 1950's, to high-money-stake quiz programs. It was inspired by a radio show called "Take It or Leave It," in which contestants, answering questions that were put to them by a quizmaster, could elect to play for higher and higher stakes, leading to the ultimate win—\$64.

"The \$64,000 Question," a dramatic escalation of the original formula, spectacularly heated up the acquisitive gambling instincts of the nation's television audience. Its contestants, generally obscure individuals, rocketed almost overnight to great reputations. The answers to the questions asked of the contestants were guarded between programs by personnel of the Manufacturers Trust Company, to assure secrecy. The contestants offered themselves as experts in particular fields—baseball, opera, history, etc. The cameras peered at them through the glass windows of "isolation booths" where, hearing only the voice of the quizmaster, they agonized over their suspenseful answers, as described in the piece; the cameras also caught remarkable portraits of empathic suspense in the faces of even more agonized individuals in the studio audience.

The "plateaus" referred to in the piece were the increasing amounts of money that they became eligible to win, as, week after victorious week, surviving all challengers, the winners successfully mounted the ladder of encyclopedic glory, rich financial rewards, and international notoriety. Eventually, the bubble of the quiz programs burst with shuddering impact on a cheated nation's

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offended resentment at being "suckered." It was revealed that many winners, including a celebrated academic, were given knowledge of the answers before they went on the air. Their nail-biting moments of breathless suspense, while the audience waited to hear whether or not they would be demoted as champions of wisdom were, after all, mere masquerades, executed at the instructions of program directors. The cheating came to light on one particular high-stake program, "Twenty-One": but in the subsequent furor, which even prompted the Congress of the United States to investigate, other programs were involved, and rather widespread collusion was revealed among the networks, advertising agencies, sponsors, and program producers. Careers were ruined and reputations tarnished in the debacle.

This critic shared neither the ignorance of this deception nor the sense of outrage at its discovery. In a column written before the storm broke ("What Would You Do?" *sr*, June 8, 1957), he had written:

"Twenty-One" is not even an honest test of a man's hoard of facts . . . any contestant . . . could be stopped the first week . . . as any quiz writer will tell you—if the mass media masquerade were ever to be played in earnest. (To wit: "Name the Pharaohs of the Third, Ninth, and Sixteenth Dynasties, according to Manetho.") The technique of the Big Quiz is simple: get an interesting personality and keep him on from week to week till the public gets bored.

The critic had taken exception, in that same piece, to the adulation, as a national hero, of a certain professor who was a champion of the program "Twenty-One." The critic had decried the "confusion between wide reading plus a retentive memory and the far more subtle complex of philosophic attitudes and values which are loosely described by the word 'intellectual' . . ." He had observed that the professor had "poorly served the better intellectual qualities of mind and spirit by encouraging the public's mistaken identification of the intellectual as a grown-up quiz-kid."

In harmony with the critic's bias toward universals, when the

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scandal became public he went on, in a later piece ("Havoc Up One Sleeve," *SR*, October 31, 1959), to inveigh against the "evident evils of inadequate self-regulation by the industry." "Is there no indignation left in the house," he asked, "for that sponsor-dominated morality the end of which is to hold audiences by whatever means it can get away with?"

Quiz shows subsequently returned to television, after a period of circumspect absence. Many advertisers and broadcasting professionals never could understand why such a storm had been blown up over what they considered to be merely a traditional, innocent expression of the spirit of theater, in which actors play "let's pretend" roles for the entertainment of willing audiences. There are more modest quiz shows on television today: they still trade largely on the acquisitive instincts, but the accent now is on winning expensive consumer products rather than the old cupidity-cell-firing windfalls of cool cash.

*The Tragedy of \$64,000** September 24, 1955

The Greeks had a word for "The \$64,000 Question": tragedy. Sophocles' audience, the whole population, came early, prepared to spend the day in the bleachers (Frances Ferguson tells us in the brilliant work *The Idea of a Theatre*); "the actors were not professionals in our sense, but citizens selected for a religious office, and Sophocles himself had trained them and the chorus." The bold, imaginative Louis G. Cowan, who created the Revlon international episode (Tuesday nights, CBS-TV), would blush, I am sure, to be joined to such august company as the author of *Oedipus Rex*, and yet the analogue is accurate. Gino Prato, Gloria Lockerman, Captain McCutchen, *et al.*, are citizens, not actors in the professional sense. But "religious office"?

The point is: there on the Revlon stage, as on the platform in Sophocles' time, a modern scapegoat is to be offered who will purify us of our baser lusts for certified checks, harmonize our obscurities and frustrations, and render our unpublicized, individual lots palatable till "the next plateau." Gino Prato a scapegoat?

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But \$32,000, four press agents, a \$10,000-a-year job, reunion with Papa on a mountain in Statale, Italy, after thirty-three years? Alas, scapegoat, indeed.

One has merely to follow Gino Prato's itinerary, from standing ovation at La Scala, in Milan, to sidewalk cafe in Rome with Madame Ambassador Claire Luce and ex-outfielder Joe DiMaggio, to appreciate the parallel. From the time of Oedipus' exile from Thebes (according to the play's sequel, *Oedipus at Colonus*) he became a sort of sacred relic, like the bones of a saint; perilous, but "good medicine" for the community that possessed him. Antigone, his daughter, went with him on his blind wanderings. Of Gino recently the Associated Press reported that he "climbed a mule trail on foot to reach his birthplace in the north Italian mountains. Church bells rang and nearly every resident gathered in the town square to welcome him." Riding beside him on a mule was—his daughter.

But what of the scapegoat theory? Struggle, dismemberment, death, and renewal—this was the passion, the pathos of the perennial winter-spring conflict which underlay the Greek theater. Now, consider the Revlon isolation booth, into which the tragic heroes of "The \$64,000 Question" must enter when they approach the ultimate mystery of pumpernickel bread and antidisestablishmentarianism. Regard the agonizing loneliness of the spotlighted figure in the soundproofed booth. He is face to face with the very meaning of his life, with the most desperate crisis of his aspiration. And the community, the audience, the 50,000,000 who pity and fear, who echo the unutterable prayer of a Mammon-culture—observe (courtesy of the clever, naked, searching camera's eye) how they are dismembered by the trial, the suspense, the unendurable torment of the hero who is expiating publicly their private, unacknowledged sin of greed.

Aristotle, who set forth on the basis of the Greek plays spread out before him some still-viable insights into the art and value of the tragic drama, would have appreciated the cunning of "The \$64,000 Question." Even as the television public appreciates and commends and enjoys its success. Aristotle was no old, moralizing fogey like Plato. Aristotle opined that the end of poetry (or literature or tv) was—simply and unashamedly—"delight."

Nevertheless, this program, passing a phenomenon as it may be,

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has struck so big a note precisely because it is an unconscious communal ritual. We, the people, imitate here not rites of fertility. The womb of "The \$64,000 Question" glitters with the appearance of life. Still, it is sterile. Oedipus was an essentially noble human being, innocent, affectionate, of uncalculating benevolence and public spirit. At Colonos he died, redeemed from the consequences of his errors (patricide and incest) and at peace. Mr. Prato, kindly man, is but the instrument, in these paragraphs, of a literary device. We wish him the fulness of his innocent good fortune—and all the other conquerors of the golden plateaus. But their roles in the Revlon rites suggest sobering afterthoughts. Let us hope that another and perhaps greater Sophocles will arise to purge the Thebes of our national conscience of the sinister corruption that lives behind the window where no sound comes save the riddle of the Manufacturers Trust Company.

*The Missing Dimension** April 27, 1968

Martin Luther King, Jr., had planned to lead a march in Memphis, Tennessee, on behalf of the city's striking garbage collectors. The day after King was buried in Atlanta a statement was expected from the mayor's office in Memphis that the strike had been settled. The striking city employees, it was anticipated, would win at least three of the eleven issues involved in the labor dispute: 1) union recognition and a written contract; 2) a payroll check-off for union dues; and 3) an hourly wage increase. The average pre-strike wage had been \$1.75 per hour. The garbage collectors had demanded \$2.35 to \$3 per hour; the mayor had offered an immediate increase of 8 cents an hour; the city council offered 10 cents; indefinite further increases had been promised for July.

In order to get this information, I had to call the city desk of *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis. In the five traumatic days and nights of close, continuous attending to TV and radio, from the moment Martin Luther King's murder was reported to the final memorial services, I never once heard mention of the specific demands of the striking city employees. I participated emotionally

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in a historically unique national ceremonial catharsis, but the experience afforded me not the smallest understanding of the immediate goal for which the martyred black American hero offered himself as an easy target for an assassin's bullet.

Therein lies a commentary on the role that broadcasting can play—and does play—in our national life. The facts about the garbage collectors' strike were specific. The tv and radio coverage provided a setting for anguish and dignity, compelling mass response but diverting attention from the bargaining that was going on beyond the national spotlight, in negotiations involving inequalities of wealth, concrete benefits, and allocation of public resources. The ritual undoubtedly "cooled" the nation. It gave us all images of heroism, greatness, and nobility. But in quieting resentments and allaying doubts, it probably dulled needed critical faculties.

The fact that black men and white participated as actors and spectators merely underscores the panic felt by both races at the tragic events which shook the tree of American beliefs and loosened the underpinnings of social order. Their joining of hands and aspirations in the throngs that marched in Atlanta reflected, in part, their mutual efforts to persuade each other of the usefulness of the experience.

Since many Americans accept the proposition that all share the guilt for Martin Luther King's murder, let us look at the media's performance. The images of the Negro that tv and radio have delivered in the past, it may be plausibly argued, have contributed to the black stereotype—a servant who helps white America live the good life, if he keeps his place, but who becomes a violent threat when he makes demands, justifying counterviolence. The stereotype is blurred by contradictions aroused by Martin Luther King's Christian love and nonviolent behavior, which stir guilt in persons educated in the Judeo-Christian belief system. The ambivalence exists on both sides, black and white—a tension of compassion and threat, love and violence. It becomes unbearable. After the shooting there is a mass outpouring of emotions. Television, particularly, resonates and magnifies it with enormous power.

Bills are accelerated through legislatures as evidence of good faith—bills which alter basic patterns much too slowly. All the

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while, the cameras continue to offer images of tenderness, brotherhood, idealism. Negative images are screened out: Black militants are nowhere to be heard or seen on the air. Perhaps by pure coincidence, black men and women suddenly appear in greater numbers than ever before on tv commercials. In panel discussions interspersed in the long memorial services, the talk is always about power and equality in broad terms, never in specific details—such as the particular issues in the garbage collectors' dispute. Pictures of lootings and burnings in other cities also seem to exude the general symbolic imagery. It is all useful magic: it restores law and order and moves the race problem, hopefully, another painful inch toward justice.

What the public really needs, if the democratic reality and not the symbol is to prevail, is more attention by the media to the hard economic dimensions of the problem, as exemplified by the off-camera details of the garbage collectors' negotiations. The key to Martin Luther King's kingdom on earth is not in the moving account of his apotheosis offered by tv, but in the medium's more scrupulous reporting of private and public acts of government in everyday life.

*The Art of Bamboozlement** July 29, 1967

In his new book *The New Industrial State*, John Kenneth Galbraith has a number of references in the index to television, radio, and advertising. *The Affluent Society*, by the Harvard professor of economics, published in 1958, contained not a single index reference to any of these subjects, although both works scrutinize the impact of the corporate economy on the quality of modern life. It may be counted as a sign of progress that an outstanding economist, who writes against the grain of the conventional wisdom in his discipline, should be reaching out to a recognition of the advertising-broadcasting dimensions of changing economic theory.

Mr. Galbraith, in fact, chides "solemn social scientists" who tend to think of "any institution which features rhymed and

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singing commercials, intense and lachrymose voices urging highly improbable enjoyments . . . and which hints implausibly at opportunities for antiseptic seduction, as inherently trivial." "The industrial system," asserts the author, "is profoundly dependent on commercial television and could not exist in its present form without it. Economists who eschew discussion of its economic significance, or dismiss it as a wicked waste, are protecting their reputation and that of their subject for Calvinist austerity. But they are not adding to their reputation for relevance."

Galbraith is very relevant in the serious attention he has paid to the world of show biz and hard sell, although he still has nothing to say about the actual programs which, presumably, are the modern equivalent of the old free lunches in the saloons which drew the customers to the counters where they bought the beer. His next book, hopefully, will remedy that defect, for, just as the economist alone cannot construct the comprehensive theory of the consumption society—without the help of law, psychology, sociology, etc.—so the subtle and complex description of the author's "technostructure" must include the relationship between commercials and entertainment, as well as the connections between corporate growth, planning, production of goods, and managed consumer demand. Galbraith's main thesis is that the consumer is not "sovereign," as the textbook economists hold. He does not tell product-makers what he wants; he does not "vote" by his purchases in a "free" market.

The truth is, says the Harvard economist, that the product-makers cannot risk random choice in the buying of products. They manage demand through mass persuasion: The consumer has the illusion of freedom; actually he is in the "benign servitude of a household retainer who is taught to love her mistress." Granted this explanation is adequate to explain buying for psychic gratification, but the question arises: Is the demand for programs similarly "managed"? Evidence to support Galbraith's theories about the commercials may be found abundantly in the broadcasting trade journals every day. A radio-tv vice president for a Hollywood advertising agency recently stated: "I am convinced the right kind of radio commercials can make a teen-ager do your bidding in most any direction."

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A "tv commercial experimental laboratory" opened recently in New York. It announced that it would bring "new, unique effects in film to television by use of abstract forms, color, and music . . . which call the viewer's emotions into play, eliminate the 'debate' on his part, and allow the essential meaning of the message to come through with deeper penetration." Mr. Galbraith, in his new book, however, might be guilty of some self-deception of his own. This is suggested by the unsatisfactory explanation he gives for the effectiveness of television commercials in motivating people to buy the products that they advertise. He accuses the producers of commercials of "well-considered mendacity." They do not, he says, believe their own lies, but take some professional pride in "workmanlike bamboozlement."

Consumers, also, don't really believe the commercials. They make a "nearly total discount for all forms of advertising." Yet, he maintains, they respond "automatically," where the purchase does not merit a great deal of thought, despite the fact that they dismiss the claims of the commercial messages on television.

The psychology of this explanation is ambiguous. People act on lies, knowing that they are lies, because of some cumulative, fantasy image. It needs refining. Galbraith himself has a possible answer in another part of his book, where he writes: "It is possible that people need to believe that they are unmanaged, if they are to be managed effectively."

To believe that some intangible, imprecise mechanism makes us do the buying is a serviceable myth that protects the ego. Galbraith may be committing a common elitist error in assuming that, because he is on to the bamboozlers, everyone else is. He may actually be perpetuating the dangerous illusion by telling people that they don't believe the commercials—the people who produce them as well as those who act on them at the market. Better to face the possibility that the new industrial state, for its inevitable but limited social purposes, has brought most of us to the condition where we take as truth the daily small lies in the vast mass media apparatus for the management of demand. In that recognition may lie the first step toward freedom.

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*The Lollipop Trap** January 1, 1966

The mountain behind which the Pied Piper led all the children of medieval Hamelin Town has exploded and poured its moppets into Hollywood and Madison Avenue to be sorted interminably through television's programs and commercial messages. This is the foremost impression left by the first half of the 1965-1966 television season. It is the year of the child actor in the world of the small screen. The phenomenon is so pervasive that one is tempted to view it as a historic turning point, a moment of truth. The shape of advertiser-supported television—so long evolving, so long anticipated with mixed feelings—has finally been made clear. It is not education's panacea: it is not entertainment's apotheosis. It is merely a lollipop trap—a pattern of prime-time entertainment programing planned, produced, and directed primarily at the twelve- to seventeen-year-old viewer. Under this teenage umbrella it is assumed that subteens can also be attracted, along with older viewers, particularly young adults.

Certain sponsors who manufacture geriatric products do aim at viewers over thirty-five; and all sponsors do not mind having all age groups represented in their audiences. The main thrust of television's programing, however, is delivered at the crucial teenage center because it is the teenager who has the headiest love affair with the TV set, who starts its electricity flowing most frequently, and who sets the pace for the nation's viewing habits. Younger children generally like to watch what their teenage brothers and sisters enjoy. Parents in one-set homes often face the triple choice of overruling their children's program preferences, of watching along with them, or of abdicating the TV set to them. Generally, in the permissive American manner, they abdicate. Television's descent into the lollipop trap began with an original, historic marriage between radio and children. In the early 1920's—when radio broke upon the American scene—it was the teenagers who built the first "crystal sets" in their workshops. When receivers became standardized and expensive, adults purchased them: radio listening, as an early novelty, was primarily a family affair in American homes.

The novelty of television, after World War II, brought a fresh

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cycle of family viewing. There were popular kiddie shows ("Howdy Doody," "Kukla, Fran, & Ollie"), but prime-time evening programming was adult oriented. Then a number of things combined to spring the lollipop trap. Television's novelty faded and adults cut their viewing time. Television also began to feel the impact of the rapidly growing "youth market." Consumer research, developing sophistication after the war, had already discovered it in other media. Movies had nurtured their own teenage cinema subculture, ranging from macabre horror to sex, sand, surfing, and how to stuff a bikini. Teenagers had become the darlings of the record industry; and their music tastes had captured radio. In the field of magazines, the editors of *Seventeen*, an outstanding success, boasted that "teenagers are the most powerful, influential, affluent chunk of the population today." Kids have always been the most important factor in entertainment; and adults have indulgently looked over their shoulders—but today's youth binge is headier, hipper, and commercially harder.

Teens experiment with tastes; and exploiters carefully scan fan clubs for new trends; but they also shrewdly feed back stimuli into the young groups and help to develop marketable fads. Matthew S. McLaughlin, assistant general manager of the Ford Division, told members of the New York Advertising Club recently: "We live in a youth-oriented society. The young people of this country are the pace-setters, not only in society but in our economy as well. So far we have experienced only the leading edge of the youth explosion in our population. The crest of the wave is yet to come." When Leonard H. Goldenson took control of the American Broadcasting Company in 1953, his network was Number Three to CBS and NBC. As he added affiliate stations he pursued an aggressive "counter-programing" policy, predicated on action-adventure programs aimed at the "young adult" market. They relied, to an unprecedented degree in broadcasting history, on sex and violence ("The Untouchables," "Maverick," "Cheyenne," "77 Sunset Strip").

ABC was so successful that CBS and NBC had to follow its lead. All three networks programed on the same "flow of audience" principle—children were served in the early evening hours; progressively, they went to bed and the programs served adults;

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until, presumably, in the late time-periods, there were few children left. Many parents began to express concern over the possibly harmful effects of TV's programming on children. Congressional committees hailed network executives to Capitol Hill and made headlines with negative images. Network heads rolled; and program suppliers, in an effort to mute the criticism, turned to the situation comedy as an inoffensive, staple brand of programming. This was the penultimate trap to the lollipop trap. While all this was happening, the Beatles came along. Ed Sullivan, the dean of variety programmers, found that whenever he featured the long-haired thumpers and screamers, his ratings shot up spectacularly. In radio, advertising agencies producing commercials for clients, discovered that whenever they introduced the rock-n-roll beat into their sponsors' messages, and used teenage music combos, retail shelves were swept clean of the advertised products.

ABC put "Shindig" on the air—the first regularly scheduled night-time teenage show. Its success prompted NBC to schedule "Hullabaloo." The climactic event which, by then, had pushed television utterly into the lollipop trap, was the publication of the 1960 U. S. Census Bureau figures. The census projections predicted that by 1970 roughly half the nation's population (111,000,000) would be under twenty-five years of age. Fifty per cent of today's brides are under twenty years of age. Young adults, accumulating income and possessions, constitute the "acquisitive" heartland of America's rich consumer market. "Get your brand in the pot early," is a key Madison Avenue maxim. It means that children must be taught at a tender age to recognize and accept standard brands.

You furnish them with a model of their own world in its most general, superficial, and childishly captivating aspects. You give them other children with whom to identify; you picture the child as the center of the universe, with the adult revolving in secondary orbits around the youthful hub. Programs that fit these specifications can offend few viewers. You are successfully and harmlessly ensconced in the lollipop trap. Paul L. Klein, director of research for NBC, rejects the proposition that teenagers dominate TV. "Since there are three networks," he said in a conversation, "to have a solid hit, you must win at least a one-third share of the audience. How can the teens dominate TV viewing when only 30

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per cent of TV homes have teenagers in them?" Edgar Sherrick, vice president, ABC-TV network programs, said: "Of course we're interested in the teenage market. Anyone in the entertainment world would be an ostrich to ignore the population breaks."

John A. Schneider, president of the CBS Television Network, asserted that his comedy shows are not consciously aimed at teenagers. "We have to have broad-based family shows," he said. "But if the teens are having a greater impact on our culture, our responsibility is to reflect it. This is cultural democracy." At Young & Rubicam, Warren Bahr, director of media, was philosophical. "National sales," he said, "reflect a powerful lot of committed baby-sitter money. The electronic media are basically for entertainment. It's a matter of filling time. The Romans had circuses: we've got mass leisure and television." At another advertising agency, an executive, too cautious to be quoted, said candidly: "At this shop, if a program is not for kids, forget it." David Levy, executive producer for "The Addams Family" (ABC) admitted that his show's "greatest strength lies with kids and young housewives." The most impressive evidence for the lollipop trap thesis, however, can be found in the new television programs presented this season on all three networks. Half of the thirty-three new shows feature children as members of the cast—mop-pets to teenagers.

"Please Don't Eat the Daisies" has kids: "My Mother the Car" has kids: so has "Lost in Space," "O.K. Crackerby," and "The John Forsythe Show." "Gidget" is a teenager: so is "Tammy." "Hank" is Horatio Alger working his way, unregistered, through college—but he has a kid sister. "Camp Runamuck" opened the season with a shot of probably one hundred boy campers tramping along a country road in charge of allegedly adult counselors. Halfway through the season recently, "The Man from UNCLE" raised the kiddie ante to a new high with "Children's Day Affair," an episode in which THRUSH trained little boys in a European school to be sinister, deadly assassins. A few of the new shows have fared poorly in the ratings race and will be cancelled; but juvenilia marches on night after night. Sad testimony to the power of the teenage market is the capitulation of the variety programs. Red Skelton, Danny Kaye, Perry Como, and Steve Lawrence have followed Ed Sullivan in paying profitable obeisance with guest

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spots for teenage music combos. Sammy Davis, Jr., was the only adult performer on a Thanksgiving Day special. The upward teen trend may also be detected in daytime television, particularly on ABC. "Where the Action Is," a remake of the Dick Clark "Bandstand" program, is scheduled afternoons on the presumption that teenagers hurry home from school to "come alive." ABC has also given a more youthful treatment to its soap opera schedule, switching from the emotional problems of the middle-aged woman to those of "the young marrieds." In the commercials day and night, the young in heart and in pocketbook march across the American television consciousness in unremitting hosts. Children badger mothers about Teflon pots, teenagers weep at unkempt hair until witches sparkle their tresses into loveliness with shots of magic spray, older daughters compare watchbands with young-looking mothers, and young housewives, only twenty-four, shudder at the first appearance of dry skin.

And what of the future? The key to tomorrow's television success, many Hollywood producers believe, is the pop music act which is a teen-age favorite. Dick Friedberg, of Premier Talent Associates, a New York talent agency which handles Herman's Hermits and Freddy and The Dreamers, said in an interview that he had been "inundated" with offers from west coast television studios. "Screen Gems, Warner Brothers, MGM and others want us to provide the acts, and they'll build pilots around them for situation comedies. The trouble is, our acts are making so much money in public appearances that they can't afford to commit their time to a television series. Herman's Hermits earns \$25,000 a day in personal appearances. MGM Pictures paid the group \$50,000 and a Cadillac limousine for singing two songs in the film *Where the Boys Meet the Girls*. Freddy and The Dreamers were guaranteed a sum of money in the seven figures to do Coke commercials on the radio. They were such a hit that they used up the guarantee in five and a half weeks and are now in the higher rates for residuals. How can we afford to spend six months doing a twenty-six-week TV series? But the studios say they'll shoot around us—do four or five shows a week. We're considering it."

The networks seem to have found the level they want to perform on. The lollipop trap will diminish further television's standing among the better educated; but the industry does not

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seem to mind its own arrested development. In a culture which worships the myth of perpetual youth, the realities of aging must inevitably clash with desperate attempts to obey the culture's mandate to stay young. Older people are robbed in such a neurotic situation of the expansive, integrating experience of maturity. Children want and need adults to set the reasonable limits of their innovating, exploring, and rebelling. Youth and maturity are necessary partners. We upset the sensitive balance if we give more weight to one than the other. Today, television is playing back to children nothing more than a distorted, market-substitute of their own natural, adolescent exuberance. There are no models of maturity for youth to admire in television.

Parents think too lightly about television. They believe that if it is ever proved that their children are being harmed by the medium, they can take command. What is seen, heard, absorbed, and done in childhood will be there in the adult. The young—denied their heritage of maturity; the aging—rejected in their traditional role of guide and mentor. These are the present fruits of the lollipop trap. The biblical judgment—Paul's wise summary to the Corinthians: "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things"—cannot be spoken of contemporary American television.

*Daniel (Bubblegum) Boone** *September 5, 1964*

A new television series, "Daniel Boone," makes its debut on the NBC network September 24. Whatever its quality, its "merchandising" potential must have contributed greatly to its success in winning a place in the network's prime-time evening schedule. In merchandising a program "property," the owners grant licenses to retailers who pay for the privilege of "tying in" their products with the program (for instance, a clothing manufacturer might sell Buck Rogers sweatshirts). The tie-in television industry, according to one estimate, "now grosses some \$200 million a year (com-

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pared with total TV broadcast time sales of \$1,318 million and with time sales of \$591 million for AM and FM radio in 1961)." The impressive figure reflects the thickening blur in the line between broadcasting's advertising context and its non-advertising content.

The first legendary hero of the American frontier enjoys great stature with the kids. Fess Parker plays him in the new television series, and he did pretty well with "Davy Crockett" on TV, as parents with long memories will recall. The real Daniel Boone was a man of extraordinary courage and considerable simple dignity, which even the coolest of modern historians have not denied him. He was not averse to publicity in his later years, and he even tried unsuccessfully to make some money out of his memoirs. But the clash of this American legend with television's cash-nexus tie-ins has its ironic overtones. An NBC publicity release indicates that even before "Daniel Boone" hits the air, the merchandising market will exceed the bullish expectations of its promoters.

The first meeting devoted to merchandise tied in with the series was "an overwhelming success," reports NBC's manager of merchandising enterprises. "It attracted an overflow crowd of ninety-five buyers, whose enthusiasm indicates an even greater selling response than the 'Davy Crockett' campaign of 1954. Forty licenses have been signed to date: T-shirts, pajamas, sweat shirts, frontier jackets and trousers, bubblegum with frontier trading cards, toy wagons and canoes, and toy forts with soldiers." Other tie-ins include a Daniel Boone-Fess Parker look-alike doll, a special frontier-style lunch kit, and a comic book that will contain application blanks for membership in Trail Blazer Clubs (monthly distribution: 5,000,000). "A special plaque is being designed . . . in conjunction with logos, identification patches, hang tags, and labels . . . Many variations are available . . . covered-wagon displays, Log Cabin syrup containers, powder horn packages . . . etc."

An Indian tepee, a pioneer cabin (suitable as a Trail Blazer Clubhouse), a Fess Parker-Daniel Boone knapsack, and a birch-bark canoe—"self-liquidating premiums"—somehow don't harmonize with the hardships, cruelty, and death that attended the savage Indian wars on "old Kaintuck's dark and bloody

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ground." The feeling persists that the kids are being exploited. They are trading their childish credulity and admiration for a culture hero for a mess of Log Cabin syrup and comic books. "Nonsense!" counters the acquisitive spirit. "You're being much too solemn; it's all perfectly harmless, and useful to the national economy."

Boone himself might not have frowned upon the tie-in. His whole life was "A great speck" (speculation), to borrow one of his favorite phrases. He loved wilderness hunting and scouting, but they also had a purpose. He traded in furs, surveyed land for real estate developers, and dreamed of owning his own vast acres as the payoff for his opening of the Wilderness Road and establishing the first settlement beyond the Appalachians. He was actually rich for a time. But he was a poor businessman and ran into bad luck; and in the end he had but a few paltry acres in Missouri to show for his service to his country. Kentucky sold ten thousand acres of his property for back taxes the very same year it honored Boone by naming a county after him. He was an exploiter, it may be fairly said also, along with the rest of the nation as it pushed its early eighteenth-century Manifest Destiny. He persuaded the Cherokees, in 1775, to sell 20,000,000 acres to a land company for 10,000 pounds of "Indian goods." When the "merchandise" was parceled out, "one disgusted brave complained that his share was only a shirt that he could easily have earned in a day's hunting on the land they had given away."

The deal with the Cherokees probably seemed reasonable and harmless to Boone and his associates. The universal myth of superabundance in land and game was abroad. Having exploited Indians and having been exploited himself, he might see no harm in his exploitation by television. He might even find in Fess Parker, the actor who plays him, the embodiment of the American dream. "Although Fess Parker is the personification of pioneer America before the cameras," relates an NBC biography, "away from TV he is a far-sighted fellow with diverse interests. He is a sportsman, investor, businessman, and developer. In Santa Barbara, California, he is part owner of Rancho Santa Barbara, a \$1,500,000 mobile-home park."

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*How Not to Make a Decision** October 31, 1964

In the spring of 1963 Jackie Cooper, an actor, proposed to James T. Aubrey, Jr., of CBS Television, that he play the part of a Peace Corps volunteer in a new television series. Merle Miller and Evan Rhodes describe the scene in their new and nervously hilarious book, *Only You, Dick Daring! or How to Write One Television Script and Make \$50,000,000* (William Sloane Associates). "He [Aubrey] said, 'I don't like snoopers' . . . Then he leaned back in his chair . . . 'I see a man in a dusty pickup in the Southwest . . . wearing a Stetson and khaki pants. I don't know exactly what he is, but he's not a cop; he doesn't carry a gun. I don't want him to be a policeman or a law enforcement officer.'"

It was an expensive vision. Seven months later it had cost \$346,000, written off in some financial report as "corporate development" for a fifty-two-minute pilot program on film at \$7,000 per minute. "After the conference . . . Cooper went to Washington to find out what kind of a guy wore a Stetson, khaki pants, and drove a dusty pickup. Somebody told him about county agents." Merle Miller (collaborating later with Evan Rhodes) was called in and invited to write the plot of "Calhoun," a television series based on the life of a county agent. CBS Television offered no objection, and Miller and Rhodes commenced a saga of television pilot writing that lasted five months and eight days. "The script for 'Calhoun,'" writes Miller, "was totally rewritten at least nineteen times by me; it was partially rewritten by me and Evan 782,946.17 times. It was tampered with unnumbered times by people I have never seen and by people I have seen."

A film was finally shot from the endlessly tortured script, but it failed to find a place in the CBS Television schedule. "Later, James T. Aubrey, Jr.—'I see a man in a dusty pickup in the Southwest'—said that he had never liked the county agent idea much anyway." On the final product Miller and Rhodes say: "There was not . . . any indication of who a county agent was or what he did . . . There was also nothing to move, enlighten, arouse, enlarge, or entertain anyone."

Why an experienced television executive should have believed

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that a series about a county agent could be sold for prime-time TV is a mystery. Typically, the real county agent is an amiable agronomist whose daily activities offer small prospect of violence, sex, melodrama, or physical action. "In the first thirty seconds a pilot should go like this," lectures another program executive in the book. "Fifty thousand murderous Berbers are headed toward Cairo, and only you, Dick Daring, can stop them . . . You have to keep everything moving at all times, moving, moving, moving. Fast, fast. Action. No studying of the navel, no introspection." Mr. Miller naively made the intellectual's mistake of challenging television's Berber mystique by doing intensive research among live county agents, reading books, compiling cartons of notes, and hoping eventually to do a story about "a dedicated man who believes that the human being comes first."

Out of the incredible fantasy of their experience (to which Mr. Miller clung for economic and psychological reasons, not to mention the obvious chance for a writer's-revenge book after it was all over), the authors have fashioned a "fast, fast" exposé of decision-making in television, a record with flashes of the navel and some introspection. Other writers in the industry have lived through similar macabre jests but have kept their lips sealed, preferring to hold onto their employment opportunities. Mr. Miller, who has written seven novels and two nonfiction books, has not feared to burn his bridges. Executives, agents, producers, directors, writers are all revealed in the full scale of their professional value systems. The authors are gentle with their cast, describing them as "picaresque—lovable rogues and vagabonds." The implications, nevertheless, are oppressive. Not all pilots are failures. Those that succeed rarely face demands of the no-navel school of television programs.

Mr. Miller and Mr. Rhodes have rendered the public a genuine service with their chronicle of the times in television. It is easy to split one's sides over the absurd antics and egocentric posturings of the prime pillar of our popular culture. But underneath the laughter is the tragic waste of human potential. The authors underscore the point that one of the principals in the story is a product of Phillips Exeter Academy and a graduate of Princeton, cum laude. His associates generally are talented, intelligent men. Someday someone may write a book, illuminating the mystery of

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how the best education our society can give comes out looking like fifty thousand murderous Berbers.

*The Relevant Question** December 14, 1963

It was Sunday morning, November 24. For almost forty-eight hours the nation's television and radio audiences had been following broadcasting's greatest, saddest drama. The epic events in Dallas and Washington had unfolded with a cruel, bewildering mesmerism. Television viewers had shared with great public figures and anonymous spectators a numbing sense of shock, bewilderment, and grief. The collective solemnity with which the participants and reporters strove to overcome the heavy weight of the irrational tragedy had been transmitted with full force. The protagonists and artifacts of the crisis had been delivered to the nation with instant immediacy—the poignant, heroic President's widow, the uncomprehending children, the flag-draped casket, the riderless horse, the arrest of a suspect, Lee H. Oswald. The experience had begun in anarchy and ended in ritual, and through it all the sound and sight media had triumphantly demonstrated the healing catharsis of broadcasting in which practically nothing is allowed to stand in the way of events as they are.

By this bright and chilly Sunday morning, only one thing was missing. It was as if this story, too, had to have the obligatory ending—the visible lesson that crime does not pay. Though the mind may utterly reject the notion, there is a contagion in public violence; our learned disciplines have far from plumbed the obscure connections between individual deed and collective thought. And on that Sunday, television provided the missing murder in full view of an estimated 15,000,000 viewers.

As this is written, therefore, we may never know, beyond doubt, who assassinated President Kennedy. We have been told in press and pulpit that political and racial extremists bear a measure of indirect guilt. In the mood of self-examination that often follows sorrowful events of great moment, we must ask what share television played in the killing of Lee Oswald by Jack Ruby.

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The networks and stations rendered a great service to the nation in its three-day ordeal. Broadcasters not only responded to the general mood of sad unity—they helped to create that mood. The industry suffered severe financial loss and displayed resourcefulness and taste in the job of improvising, directing, and sustaining the coverage.

Yet the question persists: Should Oswald have been moved from the Dallas city jail in the presence of cameras, microphones, and the attendant clutter of onlookers? It was, of course, the Dallas police who permitted the coverage. They may have sincerely thought that the people had a right to see the man they had publicly accused. But whatever their motive, they overlooked the fact that our government is founded on law that seeks to protect the individual in the long perspective against the immediate clamor of well-meaning or evil forces. The broadcasters, in the same manner, gave this point no consideration if they thought of it at all. May they properly lay the responsibility at the door of Dallas and claim that if the police chose to do it, they had the moral right to cover it? Is it true that the media are only brokers, serving the needs of the public, and that the public insisted on seeing the alleged assassin at that particular moment?

There is the long and the short of the public—the public of the now and its immediate thrusts of attention, and the public of our religious and secular heritage and our future. The immediate public has a right to know—but not at the price of violation of the great tradition that embraces all publics, past and present. Should the broadcasters have exercised restraint and refused to cover the transfer of Oswald in so volatile a situation? If some had refused, would the competition have scored a beat? The problem is ethical. Where does one draw the line between the drive to get the story and the discipline that respects the long perspective of justice?

Nor is this an idle query. Assassinations of great men may be rare, but television's handling of accused individuals is common. Answers are not easy; but at least we can ask the relevant question. And the relevant question is not always "Will it succeed?" Sometimes it may be "Is it right?"

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*The History Game** October 30, 1965

Education on television is not exclusively the domain of educational television stations. Commercial television can be educational, too. Take history. Any day or evening you can probably find an old movie that tells a World War II story. *Action in the North Atlantic*, for example, was recently available, starring Humphrey Bogart in a merchant marine convoy adventure. *Tomorrow the World* was another Nazi story, with Frederic March. There was a movie about smuggling rubber out of Japanese-occupied Malaya. *Heroes Die Young* told the story of the daring American air raid on the Ploesti oil fields in Europe. *All Through the Night* dealt with Nazi spies.

This educational matter is not limited to old movies. Television series like "Combat," which deals with American infantrymen in Europe, and "12 o'Clock High" episodes recalling the sacrifice and gallantry of our fliers, reinforce the heroic image of our soldiers and the abominable portrait of the enemy. Nor does fiction exhaust television's teaching about World War II. The documentaries, in series and in special programs, unfold around the great central figures (Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Truman, Hitler, Mussolini) and give the factual outlines of the cataclysmic seven-year conflict. On this side the angels; on that the devils, clear and unmistakable. They invite—nay, they command—strong, polarized emotions of hate and admiration.

Now comes the new television season, and several programs add another educational dimension to the World War II image of the enemy. The new picture of the Nazis and Japanese clashes sharply with the images perpetuated by the old war movies and their small-screen derivatives. There's "Hogan's Heroes" on CBS, a fast-moving, rowdy farce about Allied prisoners of war in a Nazi POW camp. They suffer no deprivation, cruelty, or psychological isolation. They run a successful escape center for Allied soldiers streaming out of Germany. They are resourceful and have constructed an underground pleasure palace with all the comforts of home. And, in doing this, they outfox, blackmail, and make utter fools of the Nazi commanders and guards. The terrible Teuton is played for laughs. He has become a vain nitwit or a fat,

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bumbling clown—in either case, utterly harmless. The fangs were also pulled from the sibilant, hissing Japanese in an incident on the first episode of NBC's World War II comedy, "The Wackiest Ship in the Army." The USS *Kiwi*, a wooden sailing ship, is really a secret espionage vessel. It encounters a two-man Japanese sub on a shakedown cruise. Inside the sub, we encounter two ragged, bewildered Japanese sailors who disagree about whether to surrender or die in a suicide attack. The winner of the debate conks the loser over the head with a wrench, and submits happily to being taken in tow.

The enemy in an early episode of "Convoy," NBC's new series about the North Atlantic run, turned out to be a beautiful lady physicist kidnapped by British commandos from a heavy-water project in Norway. Hardly the world-conquering Aryan, she professed scientific neutrality to politics and war. Our hero, skipper of a destroyer, battled not only for the safety of his ship in getting away from the Nazi hunters, but also for the soul of the sexy enemy. Home, at dockside, he won. "I want to join your world," she said. "This is a most unusual farewell." "You are a most unusual enemy," the skipper replied. "Perhaps we will meet again."

Now, all this is, as we started to say, educational. Confronted by the old *vs.* the new image of the Nazi and Japanese, we conclude that they teach valuable lessons in history. Obviously, in order to fight a war, you must persuade your people that the enemy is subhuman. This the instruments of communication do well in wartime. Then comes the victory, and the enemy quickly becomes your ally. It is difficult, so soon, to love him, but an adjustment must be made. So our entertainers, subtle antennae of our culture, play the middle alternative. They deprecate, laugh at, romanticize, and thereby neutralize the old hateful image.

The lesson may be carried further. The present enemy is the Vietcong in Asia, who leaves us little room for subtle shades of good or evil. But is this enemy destined, too, twenty years from now, to be played for laughs? If so, are we, in a sense, laughing already at our fighting men who are dying there? Exactly what are history's claims, and how much are they worth in television's own terrible struggle with its mortal enemies—silence and darkness and thought? Perhaps little. Perhaps education itself, which

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searches for the truth of the past so that we may more humanely shape the future, is only a situation comedy.

*No Exit** *August 7, 1965*

Life with the mass media in the privacy of the home, where you can make choices, is difficult enough: the true test of character comes when one is confronted by the media in public. I flunked the test in recent weeks, in a plane over the Pacific, a restaurant in Philadelphia, a home in Boston, a taxi in New York, and a motel near the Canadian border. The last stop taught me a lesson and I pass it on to all fellow-sufferers in this sermon for a hot summer afternoon. Flying to Honolulu, there was a mix-up in my ticketing and I couldn't get dinner aboard the plane. I offered to pay the stewardess, but she said she couldn't sell me the dinner, and I ruefully watched her throw the food away—but I got a free movie in color. I didn't want the movie: I wanted to do some work; but the lady in back of me cheerfully inquired if I would lower the back of my chair so she could see Frank Sinatra. The sound track was blissfully secreted in the plug-in earphones; but there loomed Sinatra on the rectangular screen ahead; and fuming, I finally quit and suffered the mob their taste. Back on the mainland a few weeks later, I dined at a small, pleasant restaurant in Philadelphia, enveloped by the *high-volume* signal of a local radio station. I knew it would be fruitless (and bad form) to ask the manager to switch off; but I couldn't resist asking him why he kept the station on.

The other diners would immediately complain, he said, if he tuned out. "People need it," he shrugged. "They really don't listen, but it makes a noise in the background and it permits them to talk. If there was silence, there wouldn't be any conversation. It would be dead in here."

The Boston experience came shortly after. I visited a home in the suburbs, where a woman was alone. She sat in a large room: the TV was on (it was early afternoon); but she was intent on a cross-word puzzle. Two rooms away, the radio was turned on,

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playing to nobody. In New York, another day, I got into a taxi at Penn Station. It was the evening rush hour; the hot city's garment center was clashing and raucous with west-side traffic: the cabbie had his dashboard radio belting above the din. I moaned inwardly but hid my frustration with another taxicab survey. "Do you have that radio on all the time?" I asked in a friendly fashion. "All the time. Never without it a minute," the driver answered.

"What do you usually listen to?" "Nothing," said the driver. "I don't hear a thing. No program. No commercial. I just have it on." "But why?" He turned the knob and shut off the radio. "See for yourself," he said. "I'd miss it. It's monotonous without it, driving all day." He turned the radio on again. "People get in the cab and start telling me their troubles. Like the guy who said he loved his wife but was going out with another dame. What should he do? he asks me. What do I care what he does? But I can't tell him that, so I turn up the radio real loud . . . like this . . . and they keep on jabbering away . . . and once in a while I throw them a yeah . . . yeah . . . yeah . . . but I don't hear a thing . . . not them . . . not the radio . . . nothing."

A few weeks after that, I was in Potsdam, New York, on a lecture engagement. I had breakfast at a motel's restaurant. The cheery waitress had her transistor radio atop the refrigerator the other side of the counter—and with my orange juice I had some bright and upbeat country music. The local newspaper couldn't assuage my resentment. "Is there no surcease anywhere from this ubiquitous, tribal, electronic collectivism?" I grumbled to my All-Bran.

Suddenly I stopped in the middle of a grumble. The announcer had spoken a familiar name—mine. Along with other items of local news, he was mentioning the talk I was scheduled to give at a nearby college that morning. The music came on again; I went back to the newspaper; but I had been hit—dead on target. All that horrible noise which other people listened to—had instantaneously been transformed into something clear and significant when the right index clue had come up—my own specific involvement. I recalled the taxi-driver who said: "The only time I listen is when they come on with traffic bulletins. Then I tune in—with my mind." At all other times the medium of radio was without message: its sound, to him, was shelter from the job's

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monotony, escape from the unwanted signals of his passengers. To the lady in the Boston home, the unattended tv and radio sets were barriers against loneliness: to the diners in the Philadelphia restaurant the radio's chatter and music were curtains for privacy. The transistor atop the refrigerator in the Potsdam motel met some felt need of the waitress, probably without verbal content. The excommunication of boredom—or fear: this was the meaning of the color film aboard the plane bound for Hawaii. There is no escape: the public media have interlocked us all. The only response is to learn tolerance—each to his own involvement.

*Idiot's Delight** June 7, 1969

A recent, unusual Huntley-Brinkley NBC newscast raises the interesting question: What is the best way to beat the grotesquely absurd when we meet it on television? The answer is, to quote a Polish critic, "calling the absurd by its own name; *reductio ad absurdum* to its pure state." Only in this way can we see and be liberated.

Saturday, May 10, was a light news day perhaps. Or perhaps the production unit joined together odd pieces of unused film. Or perhaps they planned it just the way it happened. In any case, the thirty-minute program (Brinkley soloed; Huntley was off) was actually a unified documentary, even an editorial, devoted to the war in Vietnam.

Only one item (brief text without pictures) departed from the military theme—a light touch about the Irish providing an oversize bed for the extra-tall de Gaulle, while he vacationed in their country to escape the political campaign in France.

Dispersed throughout the entire program, however, were seven commercials, promoting the sale of Peter Pan peanut butter, S&H Green Stamps, Geritol tonic with iron in it, Sominex pills for sleep, Johnson's foot soap for tired, aching feet, Lanacane for any itching problem ("break that itch cycle!"), and Ocean Spray cranberry juice cocktail.

This was the show—a schizophrenic adventure in the bizarre,

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the cruelly ludicrous, and the fantastically incongruous. For on one track ran the tragedy and the solemnity, the heartbreak of the war, while on the other—darting in and out like a lunatic Toonerville trolley—chortled the monadic, machined happiness of the consumer in a paradise of food and drug products, and barbells for the paunchy man in the family, courtesy of S&H.

Mr. Brinkley and his colleagues, reporting in from remote locations, drew a somber, moving picture of the impact that the war has had in the last twelve months since the peace talks began in Paris. They covered the political front in Hanoi, Saigon, and Washington. They traced the uninterrupted coming and going of troops (500,000 leaving and the same number returning) through Travis Air Force base in California. They interviewed young GI's in Vietnam on patrol; one shy, candid youth said, "I don't care too much for killing. I'd rather walk all day and come back without finding anything."

There were the depressing figures about the war's continuing heavy cost in money—\$2.3 billion a month. Soldiers in training in South Carolina were shown risking courts-martial as they encouraged an anti-war spirit in a coffeehouse near a camp. Wounded veterans in hospitals wondered wistfully why the talk goes on in Paris and no troops move out in American withdrawal.

The climactic story, done in two sections, was the case history of a young man, a sergeant, killed in action and returned home to California in a flag-draped coffin. The cameras showed his young widow at the funeral services, and his seven-month-old daughter whom he had never seen. An Army "escort officer" held the infant in his arms outside, while within the mother wept over the coffin. Then the interment—the minister's intoning, "a free nation spending for liberty, justice, and the rights of all"; the volley over the grave; the giving of the rolled-up flag into the hands of the seated widow; and the ceremonial depositing by officers of white flowers before her.

It was impossible not to be overwhelmed: the emotion had been cumulative, unlike that generated in fragments by discontinuous news shows of the standard pattern. The message was unmistakable—the war that almost nobody wanted, yet a year after the beginning of the peace talks, it went on still. And at four linkage points that joined the war to the commercials, the solemnity

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passed without a misstep into the rhythm of the peanut butter and the aching feet.

It was shocking, but Americans accept similar grotesqueries in newscasts every day. Why? Is a professional viewer aware of such subtleties, because he watches television searchingly? Do the average viewers mentally tune out the commercials and feel no dissonance? Or do they tune out the horrible news and hear only the happy messages, because that's the only way to keep one's sanity? Perhaps, if they were made aware, they, too, would feel outrage.

Ask any viewer: Suppose you stood near, in real life, to a young neighbor as she heard a messenger tell her that her husband had been killed in action in Vietnam. And suppose that as she wilted under the message, the messenger suddenly began to sing and dance to the tune of a jingle eulogizing itching powder. Would you not think that the messenger had gone mad? Why, then, is the very same action on television glossed over, as if the joining of death-in-war and Sominex pills for sleep to one another were perfectly appropriate, as though they were of equal or congruent value?

Only by awakening to perceive the grotesquely absurd on what, in this case, is truly the "idiot box," can we ever escape the price that we pay for suffering it—namely the truth that we ourselves are grotesquely absurd and do not know it.

*Trobriandish** April 25, 1970

WINS, New York, the first of three Group W (Westinghouse Broadcasting Company) radio stations to adopt an all-news format, recently passed its fifth anniversary. I would guess, however, that the event was not noted on the air by any of the station's announcers, reporters, or commentators. To have done so would have expressed an interest in historical causation and recognized that the present is the climax of some chronological, lineal order—a pattern of behavior distinctly un-Trobriand Islanderish.

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The Trobrianders of New Guinea, as described by the late Bronislaw Malinowski, make no temporal connections between objects. There is a series of beings in their codification of reality, but no becoming. Value for the Trobriander lies not in change, but in sameness, in repeated pattern. His world is comprised of acts that lead nowhere; they are an aggregate of bumps that jerk along, like his speech, repeating the known, maintaining a point, incorporating all time in an undisturbed monotony.

All-news radio, as practiced by Group W stations in New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles (and by other conglomerates, including some CBS and some Time-Life radio stations), is very much Trobriander. The news is often billed as "stories in the making." They emerge from nowhere; they live briefly and blend indistinguishably into new emergences. One-sentence headlines, flecky details, weather, traffic, sports, stocks, compressed catastrophes, affairs of state, revolutions and coups, stabbings, shoot-outs, local fires, fender-benders, the jingle and sell of endlessly pro-creating commercials—they drone, they clip (fast, fast, no introspection, no navel) without emphasis, change of pace, or emotional tone in a sort of instant omnipresence, never *to or from*, only *at*, the re-creation of a mythical pattern of "nowness."

In a presciently non-Trobriand manner, the Group W people planned it that way. They are well aware that their listeners are not Trobrianders but lineal codifiers of reality in the Western tradition who have the line, the linkage, and the sequence bred into them from birth. As such, no one can stay in the all-news world for more than ten minutes at a time. For the lineal mind, instant omnipresence is dreaded nothingness; so people drop in and out (or vice versa), and this is fine for the all-news broadcasters. They operate on the principle of random tuning: Somebody is always tuning in, to decide whether to take an umbrella, to avoid a traffic jam, or to keep in touch; when they leave, someone else arrives.

In such random haphazardness, Group W listeners may miss short bursts of some of the finest commentary that current radio offers. Rod MacLeish, Group W's chief correspondent, writes the best prose on TV or radio. Erwin Canham, Simeon Booker, Sid Davis, Bernard Redmont, and others comprise a staff of knowledgeable roving observers of the world scene; but they are

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uncharted points in a sea of anecdotes. Pitched into the schedule at irregular, unpredictable times, one never knows when they are imminent. To spot them predictably would make great lineal sense, of course, but would violate the principle of randomness and might scare some people away (commentary, after all, is a very lineal thing; it has a point of view, a sense of the past and future, an instinct for relationships and meaning). Joel Chaseman, president, Group W Radio, calls all-news radio "the ultimate refinement of McLuhan's 'global village.'"

The concept makes money for Group W and renders brief, small services; but our culture, unlike that of the Trobrianders, is presumably deliberately purposive—we have ends and means. All-news radio never asks why and it never says because. Its definition of news is antiquarian. A century ago, in a relatively stable world, it made sense to define news as the extraordinary, the violent, the sensational. Our world today is all three: News, in a global village, is paradoxically that which integrates, cements, and binds.

For listeners who get all their news from radio, the randomized violence and trivia of Group W's codification of reality provides false, undesirable models. It legitimizes the horror of an essentially irrational world. The Trobrianders are welcome to their codification of reality; we are stuck with ours. Would that Group W could conceive it so in the next five years. We would enjoy making the customary felicitations, but how can you say happy birthday to someone who has no sense of his own identity?

JOHN R. SILBER

TELEVISION: A PERSONAL VIEW

1

Since I am supposed to offer a personal view of television, I want to tell you something about myself and my qualifications to speak on the subject of television. I have fifteen years' experience. My contact with television began in 1951 when I was a graduate student at Yale University and watched the fights each Friday night at the corner television store. Two years later, coincident with my appointment to the faculty of Yale College, I bought my first television set. In those days a Yale faculty member who owned a television set lived dangerously. In the midst of an academic community, he lived in sin. Nevertheless, in an act of defiance, we put our television set in the living room instead of the basement or the garage where most of the faculty kept theirs, and we weathered the disapprobation of colleagues who did not own or would not admit to owning this fascinating but forbidden instrument.

Now, of course, television has become a respectable and even indispensable article in the academic home. Admittedly, professors of the old school claim that they watch television only for

John R. Silber is President of Boston University. This essay is reprinted from *The Meaning of Commercial Television*, ed. Stanley Donner, by permission of the University of Texas Press and the author. Copyright © 1967 by the University of Texas Press.

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Huntley-Brinkley, political speeches, or an occasional lecture by Leonard Bernstein. And if this isn't true, at least it's progress. So much, then, for my expertise and experience in television.

It is also important for you to know that I speak to you as a philosopher—and that implies certain unmistakable disadvantages. As a philosopher I must acknowledge a very high respect for the rational or reasonable way of thinking or doing things. I feel like a square when I hear Marshall McLuhan heaping scorn on deductive and sequential reasoning, as if it were somehow inferior to the instantaneous meaninglessness of electronic circuitry. I feel so old fashioned in saying that even the speed of light is finite; hence, that there is nothing instantaneous about electronic "thought"—even on the false assumption that electronic machines think. I must remind McLuhan, who knows all this, that human brains lack electronic circuitry or even workmanlike copper wiring, that our poor brains carry neurological impulses by means of brackish salt-water circuitry at speeds well under two hundred miles per hour. And doltishly, but disastrously for the McLuhan thesis, I must point out that human *thought* is no faster in the post-than in the pre-electronic age. Man has been an enemy of time ever since Zeus attacked Chronos, but time has endured and human experience has been ineluctably temporal. The instantaneous is as far removed from human experience as the eternal. I can't forget such facts even in the midst of a hilarious speech by McLuhan, who is surely the funniest stand-up comic in the Western Hemisphere. A philosopher, alas, is bound to earth and to reason.¹

If we are to converse with any hope of mutual understanding or knowledge, we must agree on a few conditions. First, we must have some humility before logic, accepting the falseness of that which is irrational and logically impossible. If a person's position is shown to rest on or contain contradictory elements that cannot be removed, he is under an obligation to abandon his position. If he refuses to do so, there is nothing more to say to him. If he does not accept rational criteria for thought and inquiry, he cannot be

¹ Those readers who have an aversion to philosophy are invited to skip to Part 2. Perhaps they will be interested in reading the balance of Part 1 after they have read Part 2.

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given reasons for doing so. On the other hand, if he accepts reason as a guide, as a necessary condition for sound thinking, he doesn't need them.

If any of you are prone to reject reason or logic as a necessary guide to sound thinking, let me, in desperation, propose this little test. If you think you can do better without your mind than with it, then do all your greatest efforts while you are thoroughly intoxicated, or give yourself a psychic lobotomy like the one we had last night, and see if you then cope more effectively with your most difficult problems. Irrationality never helped anyone come to terms with reality. Radical nonsense, however amusing, is not the way of truth, and laughter alone is no adequate substitute for insight.

We must also be humble, and this is the second condition, before the facts. If I continue to insist that the sun is shining and the ocean is blue, while we all observe that it is raining and the ocean is gray, there is no point in your speaking further with me. There is no point in trying to carry on a discussion with a person who refuses to alter his views when confronted by contravening evidence. One must also be prepared to look at and assimilate new facts, and this may require him to suspend belief on some of his most familiar and cherished theories. If one refuses to look at new facts (like the priests who would not look through Galileo's telescope) he forfeits an essential condition of sound inquiry.

A third condition for rational discourse is shared experience. Unless those engaged in discussion share the experiences necessary to the comprehension of what is being discussed, there is no point in their talking together. I remember the heated arguments I used to have with my best boyhood friend over which was better, a Ford or a Chevrolet. You realize, of course, that we were small boys; neither of us could drive; neither of us knew a camshaft from a piston. But it is sobering to recall that our ignorance did not keep us from arguing or fighting over this issue. And it is frightening to observe how much contemporary political, moral, and economic discourse is pursued in the absence of shared experience on which peaceful, rational solutions depend.

As the fourth condition for rational discourse, we must recognize and try to make correction for the irrational impulses that are influential in all of us. Rationality is not an ever-present defining

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characteristic of man; rather, it is one of his rarest achievements. If Aristotle had been more empirical, he would have said "Man is the animal who ought to be rational, because he is an animal who, with great effort and good will, can be rational." But the achievement is far too rare to sustain Aristotle in saying that man is rational. We must recognize and guard against the wide variety of irrational impulses that make objective, rational inquiry so difficult. In the university, for example, we have learned to discount the bias of parents in their assessment of their children. We must ask farmers to discount their special interests in assessing the merits of parity. And comparable dispassion must be asked of television owners and advertisers when they discuss issues of importance to themselves.

Of the many varieties of irrational impulse against which we must guard, one is of pre-eminent importance. It is the irrationality that is bred of fear. I think it is truly said that fear can, and usually does, produce immediate intellectual blindness. What besides fear could account for the automobile industry's response to Ralph Nader? While flying to Asilomar, I read *Time*—thus showing that I'm no stranger to mass culture—and I noticed the report of Henry Ford's speech about Nader. Ford is reported to have said: "Frankly, I don't think Ralph Nader knows very much about automobiles. He can read statistics and he can write books, . . . but I don't think he knows anything about engineering safety into automobiles." Ford's response to attack is as typical as it is irrational. It may be true that Nader does not know how to engineer safety into automobiles. For that matter, neither does Ford. But Nader's incompetence as an engineer does not disprove his capacity accurately to assess the dangers inherent in existing automobiles and to propose, with the help of expert engineers, safety features that can and should be built into new models. Ford is an intelligent man capable of writing an intelligent speech; he is also a wealthy man, capable of hiring an intelligent speech-writer. So how do we account for the obtuseness of his response to Nader? I think it exemplifies blind defense against attack, the response from fear instead of intelligence.

And so I hope you will not allow yourselves to respond in fear to anything I might say; you must not, since the emotion of fear will prevent you from meeting the fourth of the conditions for

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rational inquiry. If you and I can meet the four conditions I have proposed, we can anticipate substantial agreement in our discussion. Or if we fail to reach complete agreement, we should certainly be able to arrive at some enlarged understanding of the problems.

Please bear in mind, also, that I am not primarily interested in whether we agree. Agreement is not the pre-eminent value. Ultimately we may hope that rational accord is possible on most serious issues, but discussion, argument, and controversy are essential stages in the development of any sound position. And in a world changing as rapidly as ours, any position that is sound for one day will have to be reviewed and renewed through controversy if its soundness through change is to be assured. We must be prepared to argue with each other in good will, with candor, with all the knowledge we possess, and with due regard for the four conditions of rational inquiry.

For the past two days I have heard you dismiss every objection or criticism of television by saying, "Well, that is just so-and-so's personal opinion." Many of you seem to talk and act as if by showing that a statement is someone's personal opinion, you have robbed it of all objective significance. But it is a mistake to suppose that a personal view is *ipso facto* subjective or that only an impersonal or nonpersonal opinion is objective. All opinions, all theses—whether objective or subjective—are personal. If objectivity is defined by the absence of any trace of the individual human mind, hand, or experience, then objectivity is obviously defined out of existence. The difference between objective and subjective views consists in the extent to which views are supported either by arguments or by evidence such that the views of one person have a claim upon the assent of all other persons. An objective view is one for which such strong support can be given, that other persons ought to accept it, that others have difficulty rejecting it without violating some of the basic conditions of rational inquiry.

Now suppose you have a child who insists that $2 + 2 = 5$ no matter how carefully you explain the number system or show him how to count. In a case such as this you do not tell the mathematician that he was wrong in saying that $2 + 2 = 4$; you do not tell the mathematician that this mathematical truth is just his opinion or that the child's opinion that $2 + 2 = 5$ is just as

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true as his. Rather you conclude that the child is either stupid or obstreperous. The truths of mathematics are not merely subjective though they are always the opinions of persons. They are not subjective even though there may be differences of opinion about them.

Though disagreement about an issue does not prove that there is no truth concerning it or no basis for an objective opinion about it, there are instances in which disagreement reveals the inadequacy of the support for a position. Disagreement may arise because the problem has not been carefully thought out, because the facts are in dispute, and so on. But even after there is complete agreement on the issues and the facts, disagreement may still continue because the parties to the dispute have personal interests in the issue that are incompatible. One hundred years ago Northerners and Southerners could not agree on a solution to the question of slavery. Agreement might have been impossible even if all Southerners had agreed with Northerners on the moral wickedness of slavery. Lincoln was of the opinion that the disagreement was due largely to the fact that Southerners had a property interest in slaves which the Northerners lacked, and he might have found a peaceful solution to the issue had the Northerners been prepared to assume an equal financial burden with the Southerners in the abolition of slavery. Under such an arrangement, the cost to both sides would have been substantially less than the price paid by each in the Civil War.

With these methodological considerations behind us, let me now propose a philosophical principle of fundamental importance to any discussion of values and, hence, to any discussion of values in television. (My presentation will be so brief that it may sound dogmatic, but I hope I can offer sufficient supporting evidence later in discussion.) We must recognize and accept that I shall call the "dependency principle" or the "nonparasitic principle." This principle is essential to any political or personal philosophy that can claim objective validity. This principle can be variously formulated. We might say, for instance, "One must not fail to provide his share of support for the conditions on which he depends." Or more simply, "One ought not be a parasite." This principle would not be so important were we not continually confronted by individuals who claim special privilege as self-made

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men. There never was a self-made man because individuals do not develop to self-consciousness, to the level of conscious thought and symbolic communication, without an enormous dependence on other people. Man is not merely physically dependent; he is socially, culturally and economically dependent as well. And therefore if he is to act rationally in accordance with the dependency principle, he must acknowledge his dependence and provide his fair share of support for the institutions and individuals who have supported him. If he is dependent for his existence on a society, he is then obligated to help continue the existence of that society. The man who fails to help provide the conditions of survival for his society while wishing to live himself is in serious contradiction; he refuses to recognize the implications of his dependence. Without society, he cannot exist; hence, if he wills his own existence, he must will the existence of that society on which his own existence depends. This is an old Platonic argument, and I think it is as objective and powerful today as it was when Plato first presented it.

But the principle of dependency is not necessarily or automatically observed. It can be and often is violated. After a man is fully developed and educated he can refuse to support the individuals or the society to which he owes his life and development. That is, he can act irresponsibly with impunity. The implications of this fact for social and personal ethics are profound. This means that ethical or value principles are normative and not descriptive; their validity does not imply their being observed, for men can do what is wrong or bad. Earlier we noted that belief is not necessarily true; now we note that behavior is not necessarily right or good. But the man who violates the dependency principle does not thereby justify his violation. He merely shows that it is possible. And we can still hold him accountable for the violation of the sound principle.

Let me illustrate these points by means of a particularly relevant contemporary situation. There are many medical doctors who, after receiving their education at the expense of the state or national government, assert that all socialized forms of medicine are wrong and refuse to cooperate with Medicare or any other public medical program. But how can a doctor justify such conduct? Can he explain why the society that has spent between

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thirty and sixty thousand dollars educating him cannot expect him to return a part of this gift in service to other people in that society? The dependency principle does not require that doctors support Medicare or some form of state control of medicine. But the principle does require either that doctors accept leadership from Congress on these issues or that the profession itself devote time and money to the creation of a viable alternative.

This dependency principle provides the basis of most of our civic and familial obligations. As we uncover the network of our dependencies we discover our responsibilities. And of equal if not greater importance, we discover ourselves and separate ourselves off from the world and the society about us by coming to understand the limits of our dependencies. As we become aware of the extent to which we are independent, we become more acutely aware of the problem of utmost concern to every fully developed individual—the problem of the meaning of one's own life.

Every human being wants some sense of his own worth, of the meaning and significance of his life. And because it is so terribly difficult to find a satisfactory or reassuring answer to this question, men try to silence the question by escape techniques. The popularity of alcohol and drugs is largely a function of man's desire to escape from self-knowledge when the failure to find significance in his own life becomes apparent. I do not mean that man uses alcohol primarily or always for escape. He may use it for entertainment, to add pleasure and more meaning to an existence he has already come to terms with. But alcoholism and drug addiction are more commonly modes of distraction for the man who has not come to terms with himself or his basic existence.

The most basic response by men to life is the animal or infantile response of the crassest, most immediate pleasure-seeking. The infant wants immediate gratification of his present desires. And this basic approach to life continues to be dominant long after the person learns to restrain his demand for immediate gratification in order to complete the activities that make it possible. The capacity to delay one's gratification of desires until the optimum conditions for their gratification have been achieved is a mark of maturity. And pleasure-seeking in this more or less adult form has been one of the most popular modes followed by men in their attempt to

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live meaningful lives. The popularity of hedonism derives from its minimal demands upon the individual.

But the radical inadequacy of this means for achieving meaning in one's life is also quite obvious. It has been refuted in theory and in experience countless times. Hegel's and Kierkegaard's refutations are perhaps as good as, or better than, others. The pleasure-seeker is doomed to failure because he finds meaning only in the momentary immediacy of gratification. The passage of time consumes his moment and all his meaning. He is like a man who tries to make a career of eating ice cream, but cannot find it in eating ice cream, for the ice cream either melts or he swallows it—and either way, it is gone. It must be followed by yet another pleasure. Perhaps a candy bar or another ice cream—and so on to indigestion or boredom. The pattern of this mode of life is repetition. And, as Kierkegaard pointed out, the net result of repetition is boredom, a tired rejection of the value of pleasures after they have been repeated too many times. Don Juan exemplifies this way of life. His insatiable desire to seduce is gratified again and again. But since it is insatiable, it is never really gratified. And its fleeting gratification leaves no residue of order or structure behind. There is only repetition. This life never provides the fulfillment, direction and meaning in existence that human beings want. They want pleasure and immediate gratification. But pleasure alone is not enough. And the boredom and frustration that follow, when pleasure is all there is, are intolerable.

Aestheticism through the arts is another way of life and another kind of escape. One thinks of Berenson creating a beautiful villa and a beautiful life about himself. The pace of repetition is slowed. But it is a life of possibilities never achieving any necessity. This is one way of living; but why this way rather than another? And one wonders whether boredom lurks in the wings. The aesthete often develops a record collection but then never listens to it.

Intellectualism, Kierkegaard argues, is a third way of life. One can become preoccupied with intellectual problems as a way of forgetting that he is a man for whom life poses the problem of meaning. One can forget the meaninglessness of his own existence by occupying himself with scientific experiments of dubious import. Countless scientists and scholars are spending their lives

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in the search of truths that are irrelevant to them. The intellectual runs the risk of losing all subjective relevance in a life of meaningless objectivity. What difference does it make to the working scientist that certain uniformities obtain between certain phenomena? What is the value of purely objective truth? Kierkegaard demonstrates the madness of objectivity in his example of the man who walks down the street with a ball tied by a string to his waist. As he walks, the ball slaps him on the leg. And every time the ball slaps him, he says, "The world is round." Of course the man is locked up. And as he is being put away he asks, "Does the world require yet another martyr for the round earth theory?" Who cares if the world is round? Is a man sane if he preoccupies himself with the search for objective truth, for truth that has no relevance for his own individual life? The absorption in objective problems can become nothing more than an escape from self-consciousness and self-reflection, a release from coming to terms with the meaning of one's own existence, another way of living without meaning.

In his search for meaning, man is basically concerned with time. Time is the very matrix of human existence, and this empty or repetitive succession must be given direction and significance. Unlike us, animals are timeless. They graze, fight, procreate and die in an eternal present. But we, because of memory, foresight, and thought, live in a past, in a present, and in a future. We endure. Our basic problem in life becomes that of building a structure or pattern of significance into our lives. The quest for meaning can be stated in terms of ordering the time of our lives in a manner faithful to our temporal natures. This means that since we are in time and growing older, we have different responsibilities, obligations, and proper functions depending on our changing age. A child should be a child and not an adult. An adult should be an adult, occasionally childlike perhaps, but never childish. Our lives are made worse or even destroyed when the temporal order is not respected. A child can be destroyed or his life as an adult made unbearable if he is projected, while still a child, into an adult world for which he is not ready. A child is predominately a presexual creature until adolescence. This biological innocence must be reflected in the organization of society and in the education of the child. In youth the problems of sex are dominant

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and must receive attention in all our institutions. Special problems likewise attend the aged, and the concerns of an old man have as much relevance to the search for meaning in life as the concerns of the very young.

The process of living, or to be more specific, the process of maturing and of dying, is a process that goes on spiritually and intellectually no less than physically. Just as surely as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny in the development of the body, the individual recapitulates the race in his intellectual development. That is to say, if the individual develops intellectually and spiritually to a significant degree, he must discover, live with, and then discard basic responses of the race to human existence. In educating college students, for example, I have to expose them first to the claims and attractions of hedonism before this way of life can be replaced by a more profound response to the problem of human existence. I cannot begin by giving them the latest word on the subject of ethics: If I did, they might mouth the right conclusions, but they would be likely to regress to an earlier position. They must live through positions and grow out of them just as they grow notochords and gill slits before discarding them for spines and lungs. Genetic development requires our physical recapitulation of biological history, and the genetic development of knowledge requires our recapitulation of intellectual history. We have substantial choice and control in determining the direction and content of intellectual development. But we are bound to a process of recapitulative development. Unless important stages of thought and experience are learned and lived and rejected, intellectual and spiritual growth is impossible. And there is a rough correlation between the number and quality of the recapitulated stages and the extent and profundity of the individual's intellectual development. Only after living through a developmental process do human beings acquire depth, range, strength, and flexibility as persons.

2

Now let me apply this basic point of view about the centrality of meaning and time in the life of each developing person to the critical evaluation of television. When I give you my assessment of

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television programs, you may be prone to say "Well, that is just your opinion." It will be my opinion all right, but it need not be just my opinion. It may be a carefully considered and well-supported objective judgment. Let us consider a series of examples.

Some programs on commercial television are educational no less than entertaining. They are appropriately judged on the basis of educational no less than entertainment criteria. In education we are concerned to inform the mind and perhaps to develop character; hence, we judge educational shows on the basis of their capacity to achieve these ends. Let us take Hallmark's *Connecticut Yankee* and *Disraeli* as two examples. The *Connecticut Yankee* fails in important respects on the issue of information. Justice Holmes was, above all, a great judge. His opinion in *Gitlow v. New York*, for instance, is of capital importance in the cause of free speech. It is a profound statement of what democracy and free speech really mean. But no one who watched the program heard about *Gitlow v. New York* or saw anything that adequately accounted for Holmes' greatness. Perhaps it is impossible for a mass audience to understand the fine legal reasoning on which Holmes' reputation is based.

But *Connecticut Yankee* has many redeeming features to offset its historical shortcomings. It is good entertainment and technically superb. But, more important, the program handles with insight and subtlety the transition of a man from youth to old age, both his development and his decline. And it portrays the shifts in the balances of emotion and power in a marriage that lasted half a century. One sees quite clearly the different values that waxed and waned in the lives of Justice Holmes and his wife as they passed from youth to old age. The show is faithful to time. In it many of our children see a very old lady up close for the first time. They see how an old man begins to be sentimental and silly. These are essential experiences for American children reared in post-depression, atomic families of never more than two generations.

When I think of our children's ignorance concerning the aged, I wonder how cruel the treatment of the elderly will be in another twenty years. We think the Eskimos are barbarians because they set grandmother out on the ice when she is too old to work, and we pride ourselves on our refinement in sending her to an old ladies' home. What will our next generation do with grand-

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mother? Americans, I believe, are profoundly wrong in thinking that grandparents should not be in the home to help with the education of children and, above all, to show the children what the passage of time involves, and what time will do to them. *The Connecticut Yankee* helps to overcome this loss. At least it shows children the decrepitude of old age. They see old Holmes' falling apart on the screen. It is vivid and intimate. It contributes to our children's realization of what life is like, that death is coming, and that they, too, are in time.

Disraeli was, by contrast, quite excellent in transmitting historical information. The leading figure was obviously much more accessible than Holmes to a mass audience. The people could understand why *Disraeli* is famous. *Disraeli* was a superbly successful piece of mass education and entertainment, though it had neither the limitations nor the greatness of *Connecticut Yankee*.

In *Bonanza* we have middle-brow to low-brow entertainment and some very fine educational bonuses. *Bonanza* is the fighting rejection of the Dagwood Bumstead image of the American father. It is the perfect antidote to *Father Knows Best* and other idiotic shows that seem designed solely to discredit and destroy the male authority figure. It is fine to have at least one older man who is respected by his sons, and who sets and enforces the limits of their freedom. Ben Cartwright's example of parental responsibility has undoubtedly given moral support to many American fathers. *Bonanza* plays honestly with man's essential character as a creature in time. Time is sequential. A boy doesn't know as much as a grown man, unless the man is defective. The grown man needs to teach the boy, and it is important that the boy accept this fact. Little Joe does. And since the mass audience does not read Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance," it is beneficial that they can derive its message, after a fashion, by watching *Bonanza*. In one program the plot turns on whether the youngest son will be allowed to fight a duel. The father's reluctance to give the boy his head is very nicely counterbalanced by the older brother's insistence that the kid must at some point be allowed to make his own mistakes. The situation is sufficiently basic to be understood by the lower ranges of the mass audience and sufficiently subtle to satisfy the upper.

But there is one serious danger in *Bonanza*. It is creating another

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Texas politician, and we don't need any extras. Dan Blocker may be as fine in real life as Hoss is on *Bonanza*. But there is no evidence that his qualifications for public office exceed those of George Murphy or Ronald Reagan. That their talents are modest seems obvious enough, whatever their success at the ballot box.

The Beverly Hillbillies is without appeal to me; yet all of my children seem to like it. And it does reinforce the basic American claim that we are a classless society by showing that money is all that is required for an American to move from one social class to another. And it develops the corollary that there are many ways to get rich (such as striking oil) that require neither brains, hard work, nor the Calvinist virtues. It is clear that a little luck helps. And basically this is sound doctrine, particularly if one remembers that it is a matter of luck (or grace) whether one is talented or intelligent. In this respect *The Beverly Hillbillies* is a wholesome corrective to Goldwater Republicanism and the pseudothought of Ayn Rand. It seems amazing that such straight-forward, simple wholesomeness can be produced in California. The Hillbillies have, moreover, a three-generation family dominated by a foxy Grandma who makes a convincing case for matriarchy. She may not be pretty, but she isn't contemptible. And except for the periodic transvestitism of Jethro, whose clothes provide no disguise when he appears as Jethrine, the tastelessness of the "Hillbillies," though omnipresent, never approaches the classic heights reached on the Red Skelton or Ed Sullivan shows.

The Defenders has provided more education and no less entertainment than almost any other program on television, not excluding educational TV. The poison-fruit doctrine, the justification of the Fifth Amendment, the responsibility of the advocate to defend a guilty client, and the issue of capital punishment have been presented with dramatic effect and technical accuracy on this program. When it is viewed without interruptions for advertising, as it is on BBC in England, it has striking dramatic power.

Wagon Train was very good both on religion and race in its early years. I remember in particular a program about an old-fashioned, stem-winding revivalist. To present this man as a faith-healing fraud was a useful service. It may have helped television atone for the presentation of religious quackery at its virulent worst on Sunday mornings.

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Gunsmoke has a mixed record. It is too stale to be entertaining, but it continues to have appeal as ritual. Judged socially, it has perpetuated the "Lone Ranger" mistake. In almost every program, it undervalues the importance of social institutions in maintaining law and order and exaggerates the importance of one isolated individual with a good will. It is important to recognize the role of the individual in maintaining law and order, but it is wrong to ignore the framework of legal and social institutions in which that role should be played. *Gunsmoke* is a continual invitation to take the law into one's own hands out of one's concern for civilization. And Matt Dillon is so incredibly incompetent. He is expert only at killing the villain after the villain has killed everyone he wanted to kill. Dillon never shows the slightest comprehension of the value and importance of preventive law enforcement. Kitty tells him that Joe is about to kill Gus. The peg-legged nit-wit tells him, and Doc tells him. Three or four boys on the street tell him. Joe's horse kicks him, and Gus's dog bites him. But to no avail. So Joe kills Gus and then—but only then—Matt rises to his full height of seventeen feet two inches and kills Joe. There is no triumph of law and order; there is only the vindictive pleasure of knowing that the bad guy got his.

But that is not the whole story. Matt Dillon has been superb on the race question. Here, incidentally, is where you missed your chance after Harry Ashmore's speech. Your response to him was like Henry Ford's response to Nader. You tried to say clumsily and unconvincingly that he didn't know anything about television. But you could have made a better showing by saying "Look, Harry, *Gunsmoke* has done more to improve race relations than any group of ministers or public officials in the United States. *Gunsmoke* uses the Indian to establish the rights of the Negro. Every Indian on *Gunsmoke* is a Negro in disguise. People say about Indians what racists say about Negroes. And then Matt Dillon says, 'Now look here; he's a human being'; he makes the Indian his deputy, and the public is educated just a little on the race question." I think Matt Dillon, or the writer, producer, or sponsor of *Gunsmoke*, has made an enormous contribution to the enlightenment of the South and the nation on this question. It is far easier for a racial bigot to accept enlightenment from Matt Dillon than from Martin Luther King.

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Now let's talk about some of the really serious faults in commercial television. So far I've been saying very nice things about you. And you haven't complained that I know nothing about television. And you may have noticed that my assessment of various shows has not been based merely on my feelings or subjective emotions, but on basic views of the nature of society and human life. Although I may be mistaken in some of my judgments, my criteria are derived from an analysis of what it takes to develop an individual and maintain a just society.

Turning now to the negative case, I think television has been absolutely irresponsible in its use and display of violence. I do not think you members of the industry know enough about human motivation to play around with violence the way you do.

I am not speaking of shows like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* which presents a fanciful, stylized variety of violence. One karate blow follows another, but they are all obviously faked, because it is too dangerous to simulate karate realistically. And *U.N.C.L.E.* has all those terribly bizarre weapons. You never know if Illya is wearing an earring or carrying an atomic bomb, or if when Napoleon picks his nose the room will explode. There is so much whimsy in the use of violence that it becomes a kind of passive, non-violent violence. *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* is doing good things for international politics, too. The producer's decision to cast only comedians in the spy parts was sheer genius. We all know that *U.N.C.L.E.* is fighting C.O.M.S.A.T. or some such sinister enterprise, but the struggle does not evoke national loyalties. No one really knows who are the good or who are the bad guys. The man from *U.N.C.L.E.* always wins, but only for fun, with a light, debonaire touch, and never on behalf of the Grand Old Flag.

The Spillane shows, *The Untouchables*, and the series of Gore Enterprises Unlimited are something else again. In these shows commercial television reveals its utter contempt for the welfare of the community on which it depends. Children, young adolescents, and adults, with blood-lust rising, watch passively as men are killed, cut up, broken by hammers, burned, or beaten into insensibility with fists or pipes or chains. Much of television is just an unending series of violent assaults upon the person. I wonder if we aren't facing the situation that Mark Antony prophesied when, standing over Caesar's dead body, he said,

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Blood and destruction shall be so in use
And dreadful objects so familiar
That mothers shall but smile when they behold
Their infants quartered with the hands of war,
All pity chok'd with custom of fell deeds;

I am afraid this is already happening—violence has become so commonplace that we no longer find it terrifying; worse, we find pleasure in watching it. Of course, I may be wrong. But I submit that you directors of commercial television do not know that I am wrong. And on an issue of this importance, you would be well advised to know that your unending portrayal of violence is harmless before you inflict it on a community that must avoid violence and respect persons if it is to survive.

Thus far I have focussed on programs, but now I want to speak briefly about advertising. Let me assure you at once that advertising is essential to commercial television, and that both are as American as free enterprise. But we all know that we could have good television programs without having commercial television or advertising; the United States could decide to support a public, noncommercial system through taxation. Or, we could require advertisers to present their ads in blocked, magazine promotions that would not interfere with the entertainment programs. This last system works very well in Germany. All advertisements are in half-hour blocks, and all programs are free from interruptions. But on the basis of the nonparasitic principle, I will admit that the success of German television depends upon its using programs purchased from American commercial television. I will grant, moreover, that the highly competitive American system has advanced the medium far beyond the limits reached by any European country, and that advertising has paid for America's creative experiments. Still, won't you grant that it would be pleasant to view some of our finer programs without commercial interruptions?

These interruptions are trivial aesthetic impedimenta, however, which we can endure. But I doubt that we can survive the transforming effects of advertising upon ourselves and our society. Advertising's only purpose is to create desires, and the commercial success of advertising is proof enough that it can fulfill its

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purpose. It creates desires that call forth new products; it creates new demands that make old and better products obsolete. National advertising campaigns have produced a nation of insatiable citizens, a nation of good customers but discontented people. Is this a blessing? A person cannot be healthy or happy in a state of insatiability. But how can he be satisfied when he is continually informed of new possibilities, and new ways to spend money? How can he achieve self-restraint when he is continually told that restraint is unnecessary and that easy credit plans are available? Advertising makes our people want what they can't afford, or reminds them of what they have gone too far into debt to buy.

Worst of all, advertising creates the idea that pleasure-seeking and immediate gratification are the best ways of life open to man. These are merely the most infantile and animalistic ways of life. Advertising is so single-minded in its efforts to create desires and encourage instant gratification, that it never bothers to distinguish good from bad desires or good from bad pleasures.

Advertisers prefer to abet the ruin of thousands of lungs rather than forego the profitable cigarette accounts. And look at our automobile advertising. Borrowing the basic concepts of motivation from our leading psychologists and psychoanalysts, we have structured our ads in terms of them. If we are Adlerians, we stress the power of our cars, and the car becomes a totemic source of power for ourselves. If we're Freudians, the motivation is sex. Whatever our views of human motivation, they are built into our advertising. And behind all the explicit appeals in automobile advertising, we may find an implicit appeal to the death instinct.

But I find nothing in advertising quite so offensive as the corrupt use that some advertisers make of children. A recent and flagrant example is the Cheerios ad in which a little girl of five or six years appears dressed in a bikini. She is put through a series of offensive sexual gyrations. She recites the "virtues" of Cheerios, and then, with a wiggle, says something like "If you'll get your mother to buy Cheerios, maybe you'll get a bikini too."² This particular advertisement gave me the same terrible shock I received when I first read Svidrigailov's dream in Dostoyevsky's

² Editor's note: The officials of General Mills, having seen the offensiveness of this commercial, had just withdrawn it from the air.

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Crime and Punishment. Svidrigailov dreamed of a little girl whom he wanted to seduce, and just as he was about to approach her, she winked at him like a common whore. This was Svidrigailov's nightmare. And advertisers put that nightmare on television! This ad exemplifies what I mean by violating the time of childhood. We have no right to portray children as sex objects. We are not supposed to sell jock straps to little boys or brassières to little girls; rather, we must show respect for the pre-sexual character of their temporal order.

Coffee advertisements are still relatively harmless, but even they seem to be losing touch with reality. Isn't it more sobering than Folger's coffee to think that an American housewife needs Mama Olsen to help her brew a cup of coffee? With even less purchase on reality, Maryland Club goes all out in what it promises the housewife with every cup. She serves a cup of Maryland Club that is said to have "heft." The man who drinks the coffee asks, "Where do you get this heft business?" and a dirty old man off camera, with a leer in his voice, says, "She'll get it." Pow! The man and woman embrace in a way that foretells an orgy, and I ask: have we contributed to the good life by transforming coffee into an aphrodisiac?

What then are the limits of responsible advertising? Are there any? Do advertisers in their pursuit of wealth have the right to misuse our children, encourage use of harmful products, create insatiability, encourage over-spending, and corrupt our sense of the true nature of things? Do advertisers have the right to divert the nation from its proper goals and distract it from its basic needs?

It is profoundly important that our country find a solution to the problem of poverty. If families with incomes under \$3000 a year had the homemaking skills and the self-restraint of the average European family, they would have some chance of getting by. With \$3000 a year a family could enjoy nourishing food, but it would have to eat oatmeal rather than Cheerios. Advertising, unfortunately, has made oatmeal obsolete, and is making our people want to spend more money for less nourishing food. How can we help our ignorant poor while television advertising teaches them to prefer the expensive worse over the inexpensive better?

Perhaps we may take solace in the scriptural assurance that our

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poor shall always be with us. But I am far less confident that our democratic form of government will survive unless commercial television is transformed. Without radical change, we shall see the development of a plutocracy in which the people have no effective voice in the selection of political candidates. We will continue to have elections between two candidates. But the only candidates will be those who can find the financial support to pay for a television campaign. Candidates who cannot find such support will have no chance of being elected.

Consider what this means in a state like Texas. It costs \$25,000 to be on statewide television for thirty short minutes. Ten appearances cost one quarter of a million dollars. If one advertises his television appearances in newspapers to gather the maximum audience for them, the cost climbs to \$400,000. In simple English this means that no man without private wealth can hope to compete for statewide office in Texas unless he is prepared to sell his office to someone or some group.

So the aspiring politician goes to see the contractors to talk about what he will give them and what he will get in return. Then he goes to the labor unions to find out what kind of deal can be made with them. And he discovers that he can be bought by both sides. If his major support is from liberal groups, he may expect contributions from conservative groups that want to take out insurance in case he wins. And vice versa. He also discovers that the same firms that have supported him are also supporting his opponent. And before long he discovers that both he and his opponent are talking very much alike on every issue because they have made essentially the same deals with the same people to finance their campaigns. The high costs of television campaigns are forcing all candidates toward the dull middle of the road, because major financial support comes from essentially middle-of-the-road groups.

Unless we free our candidates from dependence on the monied interests, we shall forge, in spite of ourselves, a system very like Russia's. Instead of a central committee of a party, a central committee of business and financial interests will select all candidates by deciding which men will receive campaign funds adequate to allow them to appear on television. Two men very much alike will be selected so that the financial interests will get

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their man no matter who wins, and the people will be left with a vote but without a choice.

Now you have my evaluations and grave doubts about commercial television. From the point of view of the individual, television is both a cornucopia and a Pandora's box. I am convinced that an opportunity is matched to every problem. But what are the steps that will eliminate the problems while actualizing the opportunities? ³

3

The solution to the political crisis that I have just described demands passage of legislation to require the provision of free time by major networks and individual stations for political speeches. Congress must redefine the relationship of stations to the networks and make stations more responsible to them. If the networks are required by law to broadcast a certain number of speeches by each major candidate for national office, there must be some way to require stations affiliated with the networks to carry the speeches.

In local races the equal-time provision can be made to work if each candidate for a given office is required to post a bond sufficient to cover the cost of all broadcasts should he fail to receive a certain percentage of the vote. The requirement of a bond would either compensate the station for time used by cranks or discourage cranks from using broadcast time.

As a compromise measure, stations and networks might be required to provide a certain number of hours of time for candidates in congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial races in which there are no more than two or perhaps three candidates. Congress needs to begin at once to experiment with a variety of solutions to this critical problem. And commercial television will be well-advised to cooperate in this. Otherwise, the government

³ *Editor's note:* At the conference Professor Silber concluded his talk before he proposed his solutions, saying that he would not bother the audience with his views unless they asked to hear them. After a coffee break he was asked to propose his solutions for a variety of problems. In this printed version he has replaced the question-answer form of the conference discussion by an expository version of his proposals on a few central problems.

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will be forced to establish a government network, along the French pattern, to solve this problem. It is quite clear that voluntary action by networks and stations is unsatisfactory. They have consistently failed to meet their obligations, as Mr. Henry has shown with careful documentation in the *Congressional Record*.

It is far more difficult to find a way for the networks to increase variety in programming. I have been appalled by your reports of the intensity of competition between networks. We cannot introduce experimentation and radical novelty into network programming unless we can reduce the competition between networks. If you would stop competing with such intensity for over-priced talent, production costs in television would certainly decline. There is obvious duplication and waste under the present system. It may be necessary to introduce specific alterations in the antitrust laws to encourage greater cooperation and reduced competition between networks; national interest might be far better served if, as a result, more variety and daring were introduced into programming. And special labor laws will probably have to be written to permit use of student talent by networks.

Perhaps the best way to provide greater variety in programming would be to decentralize an important part of our television system. I think we must establish a national education network that is independent from both governmental and commercial control. It should be financed by means of a special licensing tax on every television station. This tax should be graduated according to the income of each station and should produce at least 100 million dollars per annum, or a million dollars annually for each of the one hundred affiliated stations. Commercial networks and stations would be prohibited by law from making any direct money payments to stations in the educational network.

In order to encourage the greatest amount of local civic pride and in order to encourage individuality and variety in our mass culture, each station in the educational network would be required to produce one-third of its programs from talent recruited within the range of its antenna. And these stations would not be barred from using professional talent, such as union musicians, in productions directed and staffed by students.

The best programs produced by local stations would be

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broadcast nationally by all stations in the educational network, thereby filling out their schedule of programs while encouraging smaller communities to develop theaters and orchestras in order to participate more fully in the cultural life of the nation. These programs might effect a great national awakening as we become aware of our resources of talent, scattered throughout one hundred different areas instead of concentrated in New York and Hollywood. And we might then be able to view television offering the novelty and variety that has been driven out of commercial television by uniform, competitive programming. The new network might even encourage the rejuvenation of commercial television by bringing abundant new talent to the attention of commercial producers. Under most adverse circumstances, an independent educational network could not fail to increase decentralization, variety, and interest in television production in America. Under most auspicious circumstances, it might provide the stimulus for an entirely new national awareness. It would not replace, but it would substantially supplement, and perhaps transform, commercial television.

III

DEFINING TELEVISION

The original title of T. W. Adorno's essay "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture" was "How To Look at Television." The question implied in that earlier title is the question that informs all the essays in this section. How is television different from other media? Adorno is most concerned with the content of television in relation to similar content presented in other media. He wants to know how the medium is best defined *by* its content. That concern leads him to the later title and enables him to place television and its content in the larger context of mass culture.

Schroeder, Newcomb, and Taroni are more concerned with the forms of television. They want to know what television does *to* its content. They are intent on distinguishing television from other media in technical and conceptual ways.

Obviously, the two types of essay are aware of the false distinction between form and content. The essays on form cite examples of particular types of content. The essays on content discuss the ways in which the formal limitations help illuminate ideas. And it is only with the sort of analysis that was found in Part I that these final comments on television aesthetics can be made. These more general comments, like those in Part II, rest on the careful observation and description of individual programs. The theories presented here can be tested in terms of those earlier essays. And, in turn, the earlier essays can be seen as examples of these more general theoretical statements. In these

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ways we can begin to understand television more thoroughly than we have before. Each of us can become a television critic when we learn to see, to think about what we see, to define our thought.

T.W. ADORNO

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The effect of television cannot be adequately expressed in terms of success or failure, likes or dislikes, approval or disapproval. Rather, an attempt should be made, with the aid of depth-psychological categories and previous knowledge of mass media, to crystallize a number of theoretical concepts by which the potential effect of television—its impact upon various layers of the spectator's personality—could be studied. It seems timely to investigate systematically socio-psychological stimuli typical of televised material both on a descriptive and psychodynamic level, to analyze their presuppositions as well as their total pattern, and to evaluate the effect they are likely to produce. This procedure may ultimately bring forth a number of recommendations on how to deal with these stimuli to produce the most desirable effect of television. By exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television, which often operate under the guise of fake realism, not only may the shows be improved, but, more important possibly, the public at large may be sensitized to the nefarious effect of some of these mechanisms.

T. W. Adorno (1903–1969), a sociologist and student of mass culture, taught both in Germany and in the United States. This essay originally appeared in *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television*, Vol. 8, No. 3. © 1954 by The Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission of The Regents.

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We are not concerned with the effectiveness of any particular show or program; but we are concerned with the nature of present-day television and its imagery. Yet, our approach is practical. The findings should be so close to the material, should rest on such a solid foundation of experience, that they can be translated into precise recommendations and be made convincingly clear to large audiences.

Improvement of television is not conceived primarily on an artistic, purely aesthetic level, extraneous to present customs. This does not mean that we naïvely take for granted the dichotomy between autonomous art and mass media. We all know that their relationship is highly complex. Today's rigid division between what is called "long-haired" and "short-haired" art is the product of a long historical development. It would be romanticizing to assume that formerly art was entirely pure, that the creative artist thought only in terms of the inner consistency of the artifact and not also of its effect upon the spectators. Theatrical art, in particular, cannot be separated from audience reaction. Conversely, vestiges of the aesthetic claim to be something autonomous, a world unto itself, remain even within the most trivial product of mass culture. In fact, the present rigid division of art into autonomous and commercial aspects is itself largely a function of commercialization. It was hardly accidental that the slogan *l'art pour l'art* was coined polemically in the Paris of the first half of the nineteenth century, when literature really became large-scale business for the first time. Many of the cultural products bearing the anticommercial trademark "art for art's sake" show traces of commercialism in their appeal to the sensational or in the conspicuous display of material wealth and sensuous stimuli at the expense of the meaningfulness of the work. This trend was pronounced in the neo-Romantic theater of the first decades of our century.

Older and Recent Popular Culture

In order to do justice to all such complexities, much closer scrutiny of the background and development of modern mass media is required than communications research, generally limited to present conditions, is aware of. One would have to

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establish what the output of contemporary cultural industry has in common with older "low" or popular forms of art as well as with autonomous art, and where the differences lie. Suffice it here to state that the archetypes of present popular culture were set comparatively early in the development of middle-class society—at about the turn of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries in England. According to the studies of the English sociologist Ian Watt, the English novels of that period, particularly the works of Defoe and Richardson, marked the beginning of an approach to literary production that consciously created, served, and finally controlled a "market." Today the commercial production of cultural goods has become streamlined, and the impact of popular culture upon the individual has concomitantly increased. This process has not been confined to quantity, but has resulted in new qualities. While recent popular culture has absorbed all the elements and particularly all the "don'ts" of its predecessor, it differs decisively inasmuch as it has developed into a system. Thus, popular culture is no longer confined to certain forms such as novels or dance music, but has seized all media of artistic expression. The structure and meaning of these forms show an amazing parallelism, even when they appear to have little in common on the surface (such as jazz and the detective novel). Their output has increased to such an extent that it is almost impossible for anyone to dodge them; and even those formerly aloof from popular culture—the rural population on one hand and the highly educated on the other—are somehow affected. The more the system of "merchandising" culture is expanded, the more it tends also to assimilate the "serious" art of the past by adapting this art to the system's own requirements. The control is so extensive that any infraction of its rules is *a priori* stigmatized as "highbrow" and has but little chance to reach the population at large. The system's concerted effort results in what might be called the prevailing ideology of our time.

Certainly, there are many typical changes within today's pattern; e.g., men were formerly presented as erotically aggressive and women on the defensive, whereas this has been largely reversed in modern mass culture, as pointed out particularly by Wolfenstein and Leites. More important, however, is that the pattern itself, dimly perceptible in the early novels and basically

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preserved today, has by now become congealed and standardized. Above all, this rigid institutionalization transforms modern mass culture into a medium of undreamed of psychological control. The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance.

When the journalist Defoe and the printer Richardson calculated the effect of their wares upon the audience, they had to speculate, to follow hunches; and therewith, a certain latitude to develop deviations remained. Such deviations have nowadays been reduced to a kind of multiple choice between very few alternatives. The following may serve as an illustration. The popular or semipopular novels of the first half of the nineteenth century, published in large quantities and serving mass consumption, were supposed to arouse tension in the reader. Although the victory of the good over the bad was generally provided for, the meandering and endless plots and subplots hardly allowed the readers of Sue and Dumas to be continuously aware of the moral. Readers could expect anything to happen. This no longer holds true. Every spectator of a television mystery knows with absolute certainty how it is going to end. Tension is but superficially maintained and is unlikely to have a serious effect any more. On the contrary, the spectator feels on safe ground all the time. This longing for "feeling on safe ground"—reflecting an infantile need for protection, rather than his desire for a thrill—is catered to. The element of excitement is preserved only with tongue in cheek. Such changes fall in line with the potential change from a freely competitive to a virtually "closed" society into which one wants to be admitted or from which one fears to be rejected. Everything somehow appears "predestined."

The increasing strength of modern mass culture is further enhanced by changes in the sociological structure of the audience. The old cultured elite does not exist any more; the modern intelligentsia only partially corresponds to it. At the same time, huge strata of the population formerly unacquainted with art have become cultural "consumers." Modern audiences, although probably less capable of the artistic sublimation bred by tradition, have become shrewder in their demands for perfection of technique and for reliability of information, as well as in their desire for

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"services"; and they have become more convinced of the consumers' potential power over the producer, no matter whether this power is actually wielded.

How changes within the audience have affected the meaning of popular culture may also be illustrated. The element of internalization played a decisive role in early Puritan popular novels of the Richardson type. This element no longer prevails, for it was based on the essential role of "inwardness" in both original Protestantism and earlier middle-class society. As the profound influence of the basic tenets of Protestantism has gradually receded, the cultural pattern has become more and more opposed to the "introvert." As Riesman puts it,

. . . the conformity of earlier generations of Americans of the type I term "inner-directed" was mainly assured by their internalization of adult authority. The middle-class urban American of today, the "other-directed," is, by contrast, in a characterological sense more the product of his peers—that is, in sociological terms, his "peer-groups," the other kids at school or in the block.¹

This is reflected by popular culture. The accents on inwardness, inner conflicts, and psychological ambivalence (which play so large a role in earlier popular novels and on which their originality rests) have given way to unproblematic, cliché-like characterization. Yet the code of decency that governed the inner conflicts of the Pamelas, Clarissas, and Lovelaces remains almost literally intact.² The middle-class "ontology" is preserved in an almost

¹ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1950), p. v.

² The evolution of the ideology of the extrovert has probably also its long history, particularly in the lower types of popular literature during the nineteenth century when the code of decency became divorced from its religious roots and therewith attained more and more the character of an opaque taboo. It seems likely, however, that in this respect the triumph of the films marked the decisive step. Reading as an act of perception and apperception probably carries with itself a certain kind of internalization; the act of reading a novel fairly close to a *monologue intérieur*. Visualization in modern mass media makes for externalization. The idea of inwardness, still maintained in older portrait painting through the expressiveness of the face, gives way to unmistakable optical signals that can be grasped at a

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fossilized way, but is severed from the mentality of the middle classes. By being superimposed on people with whose living conditions and mental make-up it is no longer in accord, this middle-class "ontology" assumes an increasingly authoritarian and at the same time hollow character.

The overt "naïveté" of older popular culture is avoided. Mass culture, if not sophisticated, must at least be up to date—that is to say, "realistic," or posing as realistic—in order to meet the expectations of a supposedly disillusioned, alert, and hard-boiled audience. Middle-class requirements bound up with internalization—such as concentration, intellectual effort, and erudition—have to be continuously lowered. This does not hold only for the United States, where historical memories are scarcer than in Europe; but it is universal, applying to England and Continental Europe as well.³

However, this apparent progress of enlightenment is more than counterbalanced by retrogressive traits. The earlier popular culture maintained a certain equilibrium between its social ideology and the actual social conditions under which its consumers lived. This probably helped to keep the border line between popular and serious art during the eighteenth century more fluid than it is today. Abbé Prévost was one of the founding fathers of French popular literature; but his *Manon Lescaut* is completely free from clichés, artistic vulgarisms, and calculated effects. Similarly, later in the eighteenth century, Mozart's *Zauberfloete* struck a balance between the "high" and the popular style which is almost unthinkable today.

The curse of modern mass culture seems to be its adherence to the almost unchanged ideology of early middle-class society, whereas the lives of its consumers are completely out of phase

glance. Even if a character in a movie or television show is not what he appears to be, his appearance is treated in such a way as to leave no doubt about his true nature. Thus a villain who is not presented as a brute must at least be "suave," and his repulsive slickness and mild manner unambiguously indicate what we are to think of him.

³ It should be noted that the tendency against "erudition" was already present at the very beginning of popular culture, particularly in Defoe who was consciously opposed to the learned literature of his day, and has become famous for having scorned every refinement of style and artistic construction in favor of an apparent faithfulness to "life."

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with this ideology. This is probably the reason for the gap between the overt and the hidden "message" of modern popular art. Although on an overt level the traditional values of English Puritan middle-class society are promulgated, the hidden message aims at a frame of mind which is no longer bound by these values. Rather, today's frame of mind transforms the traditional values into the norms of an increasingly hierarchical and authoritarian social structure. Even here it has to be admitted that authoritarian elements were also present in the older ideology which, of course, never fully expressed the truth. But the "message" of adjustment and unreflecting obedience seems to be dominant and all-pervasive today. Whether maintained values derived from religious ideas obtain a different meaning when severed from their root should be carefully examined. For example, the concept of the "purity" of women is one of the variables of popular culture. In the earlier phase this concept is treated in terms of an inner conflict between concupiscence and the internalized Christian ideal of chastity, whereas in today's popular culture it is dogmatically posited as a value *per se*. Again, even the rudiments of this pattern are visible in productions such as *Pamela*. There, however, it seems a by-product; whereas in today's popular culture the idea that only the "nice girl" gets married and that she must get married at any price has come to be accepted before Richardson's conflicts even start.⁴

The more inarticulate and diffuse the audience of modern mass

⁴ One of the significant differences seems to be that in the eighteenth century the concept of popular culture itself moving toward an emancipation from the absolutistic and semifeastal tradition had a progressive meaning, stressing autonomy of the individual as being capable of making his own decisions. This means, among other things, that the early popular literature left space for authors who violently disagreed with the pattern set by Richardson and, nevertheless, obtained popularity of their own. The most prominent case in question is that of Fielding, whose first novel started as a parody of Richardson. It would be interesting to compare the popularity of Richardson and Fielding at that time. Fielding hardly achieved the same success as Richardson. Yet it would be absurd to assume that today's popular culture would allow the equivalent of a *Tom Jones*. This may illustrate the contention of the "rigidity" of today's popular culture. A crucial experiment would be to make an attempt to base a movie on a novel such as Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*. It is almost certain that the script would be rewritten and edited so often that nothing remotely similar to the idea of the original would be left.

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media seems to be, the more mass media tend to achieve their "integration." The ideals of conformity and conventionalism were inherent in popular novels from the very beginning. Now, however, these ideals have been translated into rather clear-cut prescriptions of what to do and what not to do. The outcome of conflicts is pre-established, and all conflicts are mere sham. Society is always the winner, and the individual is only a puppet manipulated through social rules. True, conflicts of the nineteenth-century type—such as women running away from their husbands, the drabness of provincial life, and daily chores—occur frequently in today's magazine stories. However, with a regularity which challenges quantitative treatment, these conflicts are decided in favor of the very same conditions from which these women want to break away. The stories teach their readers that one has to be "realistic," that one has to give up romantic ideas, that one has to adjust oneself at any price, and that nothing more can be expected of any individual. The perennial middle-class conflict between individuality and society has been reduced to a dim memory, and the message is invariably that of identification with the *status quo*. This theme too is not new, but its unfailing universality invests it with an entirely different meaning. The constant plugging of conventional values seems to mean that these values have lost their substance, and that it is feared that people would really follow their instinctual urges and conscious insights unless continuously reassured from outside that they must not do so. The less the message is really believed and the less it is in harmony with the actual existence of the spectators, the more categorically it is maintained in modern culture. One may speculate whether its inevitable hypocrisy is concomitant with punitiveness and sadistic sternness.

Multilayered Structure

A depth-psychological approach to television has to be focused on its multilayered structure. Mass media are not simply the sum total of the actions they portray or of the messages that radiate from these actions. Mass media also consist of various layers of meanings superimposed on one another, all of which contribute to

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the effect. True, due to their calculative nature, these rationalized products seem to be more clear-cut in their meaning than authentic works of art, which can never be boiled down to some unmistakable "message." But the heritage of polymorphic meaning has been taken over by cultural industry inasmuch as what it conveys becomes itself organized in order to enthrall the spectators on various psychological levels simultaneously. As a matter of fact, the hidden message may be more important than the overt, since this hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be "looked through," will not be warded off by sales resistance, but is likely to sink into the spectator's mind.

Probably all the various levels in mass media involve *all* the mechanisms of consciousness and unconsciousness stressed by psychoanalysis. The difference between the surface content, the overt message of televised material, and its hidden meaning is generally marked and rather clear-cut. The rigid superimposition of various layers probably is one of the features by which mass media are distinguishable from the integrated products of autonomous art, where the various layers are much more thoroughly fused. The full effect of the material on the spectator cannot be studied without consideration of the hidden meaning in conjunction with the overt one, and it is precisely this interplay of various layers which has hitherto been neglected and which will be our focus. This is in accordance with the assumption shared by numerous social scientists that certain political and social trends of our time, particularly those of a totalitarian nature, feed to a considerable extent on irrational and frequently unconscious motivations. Whether the conscious or the unconscious message of our material is more important is hard to predict and can be evaluated only after careful analysis. We do appreciate, however, that the overt message can be interpreted much more adequately in the light of psychodynamics—i.e., in its relation to instinctual urges as well as control—than by looking at the overt in a naïve way and by ignoring its implications and presuppositions.

The relation between overt and hidden message will prove highly complex in practice. Thus, the hidden message frequently aims at reinforcing conventionally rigid and "pseudo-realistic" attitudes similar to the accepted ideas more rationalistically propagated by the surface message. Conversely, a number of

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repressed gratifications which play a large role on the hidden level are somehow allowed to manifest themselves on the surface in jests, off-color remarks, suggestive situations, and similar devices. All this interaction of various levels, however, points in some definite direction: the tendency to channelize audience reaction. This falls in line with the suspicion widely shared, though hard to corroborate by exact data, that the majority of television shows today aim at producing, or at least reproducing, the very smugness, intellectual passivity, and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds even if the explicit surface message of the shows may be antitotalitarian.

With the means of modern psychology, we will try to determine the primary prerequisites of shows eliciting mature, adult, and responsible reactions—implying not only in content but in the very way things are being looked at, the idea of autonomous individuals in a free democratic society. We perfectly realize that any definition of such an individual will be hazardous; but we know quite well what a human being deserving of the appellation “autonomous individual” should *not* be, and this “*not*” is actually the focal point of our consideration.

When we speak of the multilayered structure of television shows, we are thinking of various superimposed layers of different degrees of manifestness or hiddenness that are utilized by mass culture as a technological means of “handling” the audience. This was expressed felicitously by Leo Lowenthal when he coined the term “psychoanalysis in reverse.” The implication is that somehow the psychoanalytic concept of a multilayered personality has been taken up by cultural industry, and that the concept is used in order to ensnare the consumer as completely as possible and in order to engage him psychodynamically in the service of premeditated effects. A clear-cut division into allowed gratifications, forbidden gratifications, and recurrence of the forbidden gratifications in a somewhat modified and deflected form is carried through.

To illustrate the concept of the multilayered structure: the heroine of an extremely light comedy of pranks is a young schoolteacher who is not only underpaid but is incessantly fined by the caricature of a pompous and authoritarian school principal. Thus, she has no money for her meals and is actually starving.

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The supposedly funny situations consist mostly of her trying to hustle a meal from various acquaintances, but regularly without success. The mention of food and eating seems to induce laughter—an observation that can frequently be made and invites a study of its own.⁵ Overtly, the play is just slight amusement mainly provided by the painful situations into which the heroine and her arch-opponent constantly run. The script does not try to "sell" any idea. The "hidden meaning" emerges simply by the way the story looks at human beings; thus the audience is invited to look at the characters in the same way without being made aware that indoctrination is present. The character of the underpaid, maltreated schoolteacher is an attempt to reach a compromise between prevailing scorn for the intellectual and the equally conventionalized respect for "culture." The heroine shows such an intellectual superiority and high-spiritedness that identification with her is invited, and compensation is offered for the inferiority of her position and that of her ilk in the social setup. Not only is the central character supposed to be very charming, but she wisecracks constantly. In terms of a set pattern of identification, the script implies: "If you are as humorous, good-natured, quick-witted, and charming as she is, do not worry about being paid a starvation wage. You can cope with your frustration in a humorous way; and your superior wit and cleverness put you not only above material privations, but also above the rest of mankind." In other words, the script is a shrewd method of promoting adjustment to humiliating conditions by presenting them as objectively comical and by giving a picture of a person who experiences even her own inadequate position as an object of fun apparently free of any resentment.

Of course, this latent message cannot be considered as uncon-

⁵ The more rationality (the reality principle) is carried to extremes, the more its ultimate aim (actual gratification) tends, paradoxically, to appear as "immature" and ridiculous. Not only eating, but also uncontrolled manifestations of sexual impulses tend to provoke laughter in audiences—kisses in motion pictures have generally to be led up to, the stage has to be set for them, in order to avoid laughter. Yet mass culture never completely succeeds in wiping out potential laughter. Induced, of course, by the supposed infantilism of sensual pleasures, laughter can largely be accounted for by the mechanism of repression. Laughter is a defense against the forbidden fruit.

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scious in the strict psychological sense, but rather as "inobtrusive"; this message is hidden only by a style which does not pretend to touch anything serious and expects to be regarded as featherweight. Nevertheless, even such amusement tends to set patterns for the members of the audience without their being aware of it.

Another comedy of the same thesis is reminiscent of the funnies. A cranky old woman sets up the will of her cat (Mr. Casey) and makes as heirs some of the schoolteachers in the permanent cast. Later the actual inheritance is found to consist of the cat's valueless toys. The plot is so constructed that each heir, at the reading of the will, is tempted to act as if he had known this person (Mr. Casey). The ultimate point is that the cat's owner had placed a hundred-dollar bill inside each of the toys; and the heirs run to the incinerator in order to recover their inheritance. The audience is given to understand: "Don't expect the impossible, don't daydream, but be realistic." The denunciation of that archetypical daydream is enhanced by the association of the wish for unexpected and irrational blessings with dishonesty, hypocrisy, and a generally undignified attitude. The spectator is given to understand: "Those who dare daydream, who expect that money will fall to them from heaven, and who forget any caution about accepting an absurd will are at the same time those whom you might expect to be capable of cheating."

Here, an objection may be raised: Is such a sinister effect of the hidden message of television known to those who control, plan, write, and direct shows? Or it may even be asked: Are those traits possible projections of the unconscious of the decision-makers' own minds according to the widespread assumption that works of art can be properly understood in terms of psychological projections of their authors? As a matter of fact, it is this kind of reasoning that has led to the suggestion that a special sociopsychological study of decision-makers in the field of television be made. We do not think that such a study would lead us very far. Even in the sphere of autonomous art, the idea of projection has been largely overrated. Although the authors' motivations certainly enter the artifact, they are by no means so all-determining as is often assumed. As soon as an artist has set himself his problem, it obtains some kind of impact of its own; and, in most

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cases, he has to follow the objective requirements of his product much more than his own urges of expression when he translates his primary conception into artistic reality. To be sure, these objective requirements do not play a decisive role in mass media, which stress the effect on the spectator far beyond any artistic problem. However, the total setup here tends to limit the chances of the artists' projections utterly. Those who produce the material follow, often grumblingly, innumerable requirements, rules of thumb, set patterns, and mechanisms of controls which by necessity reduce to a minimum the range of any kind of artistic self-expression. The fact that most products of mass media are not produced by one individual but by collective collaboration—as happens to be true with most of the illustrations so far discussed—is only one contributing factor to this generally prevailing condition. To study television shows in terms of the psychology of the authors would almost be tantamount to studying Ford cars in terms of the psychoanalysis of the late Mr. Ford.

Presumptuousness

The typical psychological mechanisms utilized by television shows and the devices by which they are automatized function only within a small number of given frames of reference operative in television communication, and the socio-psychological effect largely depends on them. We are all familiar with the division of television content into various classes, such as light comedy, westerns, mysteries, so-called sophisticated plays, and others. These types have developed into formulas which, to a certain degree, pre-established the attitudinal pattern of the spectator before he is confronted with any specific content and which largely determine the way in which any specific content is being perceived.

In order to understand television, it is, therefore, not enough to bring out the implications of various shows and types of shows; but an examination must be made of the presuppositions within which the implications function before a single word is spoken. Most important is that the typing of shows has gone so far that the spectator approaches each one with a set pattern of expectations

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before he faces the show itself—just as the radio listener who catches the beginning of Tschaikowsky's Piano Concerto as a theme song, knows automatically, "Aha, serious music!" or, when he hears organ music, responds equally automatically, "Ah, religion!" These halo effects of previous experiences may be psychologically as important as the implications of the phenomena themselves for which they have set the stage; and these presuppositions should, therefore, be treated with equal care.

When a television show bears the title "Dante's Inferno," when the first shot is that of a night club by the same name, and when we find sitting at the bar a man with his hat on and at some distance from him a sad-looking, heavily made-up woman ordering another drink, we are almost certain that some murder will shortly be committed. The apparently individualized situation actually works only as a signal that moves our expectations into a definite direction. If we had never seen anything but "Dante's Inferno," we probably would not be sure about what was going to happen; but, as it is, we are actually given to understand by both subtle and not so subtle devices that this is a crime play, that we are entitled to expect some sinister and probably hideous and sadistic deeds of violence, that the hero will be saved from a situation from which he can hardly be expected to be saved, that the woman on the barstool is probably not the main criminal but is likely to lose her life as a gangster's moll, and so on. This conditioning to such universal patterns, however, scarcely stops at the television set.

The way the spectator is made to look at apparently everyday items, such as a night club, and to take as hints of possible crime common settings of his daily life, induces him to look at life itself as though it and its conflicts could generally be understood in such terms.⁶ This, convincingly enough, may be the nucleus of

⁶ This relationship again should not be oversimplified. No matter to what extent modern mass media tend to blur the difference between reality and the aesthetic, our realistic spectators are still aware that all is "in fun." It cannot be assumed that the direct primary perception of reality takes place within the television frame of reference, although many movie-goers recall the alienation of familiar sights when leaving the theater: everything still has the appearance of being part of the movie plot. What is more important is the interpretation of reality in terms of psychological carry-overs, the preparedness to see ordinary objects as though some

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truth in the old-fashioned arguments against all kinds of mass media for inciting criminality in the audience. The decisive thing is that this atmosphere of the normality of crime, its presentation in terms of an average expectation based on life situations, is never expressed in so many words but is established by the overwhelming wealth of material. It may affect certain spectator groups more deeply than the overt moral of crime and punishment regularly derived from such shows. What matters is not the importance of crime as a symbolic expression of otherwise controlled sexual or aggressive impulses, but the confusion of this symbolism with a pedantically maintained realism in all matters of direct sense perception. Thus, empirical life becomes infused with a kind of meaning that virtually excludes adequate experience no matter how obstinately the veneer of such "realism" is built up. This affects the social and psychological function of drama.

It is hard to establish whether the spectators of Greek tragedy really experienced the catharsis Aristotle described—in fact this theory, evolved after the age of tragedy was over, seems to have been a rationalization itself, an attempt to state the purpose of tragedy in pragmatic, quasi-scientific terms. Whatever the case, it seems pretty certain that those who saw the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus or Sophocles' *Oedipus* were not likely to translate these tragedies (the subject matter of which was known to everyone, and the interest in which was centered in artistic treatment) directly into everyday terms. This audience did not expect that on the next corner of Athens similar things would go on. Actually, pseudo-realism allows for the direct and extremely primitive identification achieved by popular culture; and it presents a façade of trivial buildings, rooms, dresses, and faces as though they were the promise of something thrilling and exciting taking place at any moment.

In order to establish this socio-psychological frame of reference, one would have to follow up systematically categories—such as the normality of crime or pseudo-realism and many others—to

threatening mystery were hidden behind them. Such an attitude seems to be syntonic with mass delusions such as suspicion of omnipresent graft, corruption, and conspiracy.

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determine their structural unity and to interpret the specific devices, symbols, and stereotypes in relation to this frame of reference. We hypothesize at this phase that the frames of reference and the individual devices will tend in the same direction.

Only against psychological backdrops such as pseudo-realism and against implicit assumptions such as the normality of crime can the specific stereotypes of television plays be interpreted. The very standardization indicated by set frames of reference automatically produces a number of stereotypes. Also, the technology of television production makes stereotypy almost inevitable. The short time available for the preparation of scripts and the vast material continuously to be produced call for certain formulas. Moreover, in plays lasting only a quarter to half an hour each, it appears inevitable that the kind of person the audience faces each time should be indicated drastically through red and green lights. We are not dealing with the problem of the existence of stereotypes as such. Since stereotypes are an indispensable element of the organization and anticipation of experience, preventing us from falling into mental disorganization and chaos, no art can entirely dispense with them. Again, the functional change is what concerns us. The more stereotypes become reified and rigid in the present setup of cultural industry, the less people are likely to change their preconceived ideas with the progress of their experience. The more opaque and complicated modern life becomes, the more people are tempted to cling desperately to clichés, which seem to bring some order into the otherwise ununderstandable. Thus, people may not only lose true insight into reality, but ultimately their very capacity for life experience may be dulled by the constant wearing of blue and pink spectacles.

Stereotyping

In coping with this danger, we may not do full justice to the meaning of some of the stereotypes which are to be dealt with. We should never forget that there are two sides to every psychodynamic phenomenon, the unconscious or id element and

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the rationalization. Although the latter is psychologically defined as a defense mechanism, it may very well contain some nonpsychological, objective truth which cannot simply be pushed aside on account of the psychological function of the rationalization. Thus some of the stereotypical messages, directed toward particularly weak spots in the mentality of large sectors of the population, may prove to be quite legitimate. However, it may be said with fairness that the questionable blessings of morals, such as "one should not chase after rainbows," are largely overshadowed by the threat of inducing people to mechanical simplifications by ways of distorting the world in such a way that it seems to fit into preestablished pigeonholes.

The example here selected, however, should indicate rather drastically the danger of stereotypy. A television play concerning a fascist dictator, a kind of hybrid between Mussolini and Peron, shows the dictator in a moment of crisis; and the content of the play is his inner and outer collapse. Whether the cause of his collapse is a popular upheaval or a military revolt is never made clear. But neither this issue nor any other of a social or political nature enters the plot itself. The course of events takes place exclusively on a private level. The dictator is just a heel who treats sadistically both his secretary and his "lovely and warmhearted" wife. His antagonist, a general, was formerly in love with the wife; and they both still love each other, although the wife sticks loyally to her husband. Forced by her husband's brutality, she attempts flight, and is intercepted by the general who wants to save her. The turning point occurs when the guards surround the palace to defend the dictator's popular wife. As soon as they learn that she has departed, the guards quit; and the dictator, whose "inflated ego" explodes at the same time, gives up. The dictator is nothing but a bad, pompous, and cowardly man. He seems to act with extreme stupidity; nothing of the objective dynamics of dictatorship comes out. The impression is created that totalitarianism grows out of character disorders of ambitious politicians, and is overthrown by the honesty, courage, and warmth of those figures with whom the audience is supposed to identify. The standard device employed is that of the spurious personalization of objective issues. The representatives of ideas under attack, as in the case of the fascists here, are presented as villains in a ludicrous

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cloak-and-dagger fashion, whereas those who fight for the "right cause" are personally idealized. This not only distracts from any real social issues but also enforces the psychologically extremely dangerous division of the world into black (the outgroup) and white (we, the ingroup). Certainly, no artistic production can deal with ideas or political creeds *in abstracto* but has to present them in terms of their concrete impact upon human beings; yet it would be utterly futile to present individuals as mere specimens of an abstraction, as puppets expressive of an idea. In order to deal with the concrete impact of totalitarian systems, it would be more commendable to show how the life of ordinary people is affected by terror and impotence than to cope with the phony psychology of the big-shots, whose heroic role is silently endorsed by such a treatment even if they are pictured as villains. There seems to be hardly any question of the importance of an analysis of pseudo-personalization and its effect, by no means limited to television.

Although pseudo-personalization denotes the stereotyped way of "looking at things" in television, we should also point out certain stereotypes in the narrower sense. Many television plays could be characterized by the sobriquet "a pretty girl can do no wrong." The heroine of a light comedy is, to use George Legman's term, "a bitch heroine." She behaves toward her father in an incredibly inhuman and cruel manner only slightly rationalized as "merry pranks." But she is punished very slightly, if at all. True, in real life bad deeds are rarely punished at all, but this cannot be applied to television. Here, those who have developed the production code for the movies seem right: what matters in mass media is not what happens in real life, but rather the positive and negative "messages," prescriptions, and taboos that the spectator absorbs by means of identification with the material he is looking at. The punishment given to the pretty heroine only nominally fulfills the conventional requirements of the conscience for a second. But the spectator is given to understand that the pretty heroine really gets away with everything just because she is pretty.

The attitude in question seems to be indicative of a universal penchant. In another sketch that belongs to a series dealing with the confidence racket, the attractive girl who is an active participant in the racket not only is paroled after having been sentenced

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to a long term, but also seems to have a good chance of marrying her victim. Her sex morality, of course, is unimpeachable. The spectator is supposed to like her at first sight as a modest and self-effacing character, and he must not be disappointed. Although it is discovered that she is a crook, the original identification must be restored, or rather maintained. The stereotype of the nice girl is so strong that not even the proof of her delinquency can destroy it; and, by hook or by crook, she must be what she appears to be. It goes without saying that such psychological models tend to confirm exploitative, demanding, and aggressive attitudes on the part of young girls—a character structure which has come to be known in psychoanalysis under the name of oral aggressiveness.

Sometimes such stereotypes are disguised as national American traits, a part of the American scene where the image of the haughty, egoistic, yet irresistible girl who plays havoc with poor dad has come to be a public institution. This way of reasoning is an insult to the American spirit. High-pressure publicity and continuous plugging to institutionalize some obnoxious type does not make the type a sacred symbol of folklore. Many considerations of an apparently anthropological nature today tend only to veil objectionable trends, as though they were of an ethnological, quasi-natural character. Incidentally, it is amazing to what degree television material even on superficial examination brings to mind psychoanalytic concepts with the qualification of being a psychoanalysis in reverse. Psychoanalysis has described the oral syndrome combining the antagonistic trends of aggressive and dependent traits. This character syndrome is closely indicated by the pretty girl that can do no wrong, who, while being aggressive against her father exploits him at the same time, depending on him as much as, on the surface level, she is set against him. The difference between the sketch and psychoanalysis is simply that the sketch exalts the very same syndrome which is treated by psychoanalysis as a reversion to infantile developmental phases and which the psychoanalyst tries to dissolve. It remains to be seen whether something similar applies as well to some types of male heroes, particularly the super-he-man. It may well be that he too can do no wrong.

Finally, we should deal with a rather widespread stereotype

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which, inasmuch as it is taken for granted by television, is further enhanced. At the same time, the example may serve to show that certain psychoanalytic interpretations of cultural stereotypes are not really too far-fetched; the latent ideas that psychoanalysis attributes to certain stereotypes come to the surface. There is the extremely popular idea that the artist is not only maladjusted, introverted, and *a priori* somewhat funny; but that he is really an "aesthete," a weakling, and a "sissy." In other words, modern synthetic folklore tends to identify the artist with the homosexual and to respect only the "man of action" as a real, strong man. This idea is expressed in a surprisingly direct manner in one of the comedy scripts at our disposal. It portrays a young man who is not only the "dope" who appears so often on television but is also a shy, retiring, and accordingly untalented poet, whose moronic poems are ridiculed.⁷ He is in love with a girl but is too weak and insecure to indulge in the necking practices she rather crudely suggests; the girl, on her part, is caricatured as a boy-chaser. As happens frequently in mass culture, the roles of the sexes are reversed—the girl is utterly aggressive, and the boy, utterly afraid of her, describes himself as "woman-handled" when she manages to kiss him. There are vulgar innuendos of homosexuality of which one may be quoted: the heroine tells her boy friend that another boy is in love with someone, and the boy friend asks, "What's he in love with?" She answers, "A girl, of course," and her boy friend replies, "Why, of course? Once before it was a neighbor's turtle, and what's more its name was Sam." This interpretation of the artist as innately incompetent and a social outcast (by the innuendo of sexual inversion) is worthy of examination.

We do not pretend that the individual illustrations and exam-

⁷ It could be argued that this very ridicule expresses that this boy is not meant to represent the artist but just the "dope." But this is probably too rationalistic. Again, as in the case of the schoolteacher, official respect for culture prevents caricaturing the artist as such. However, by characterizing the boy, among other things by his writing poetry, it is indirectly achieved that the artistic activities and silliness are associated with each other. In many respects mass culture is organized much more by way of such associations than in strictly logical terms. It may be added that quite frequently attacks on any social type seek protection by apparently presenting the object of the attack as an exception, while it is understood by innuendo that he is considered as a specimen of the whole concept.

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ples, or the theories by which they are interpreted, are basically new. But in view of the cultural and pedagogical problem presented by television, we do not think that the novelty of the specific findings should be a primary concern. We know from psychoanalysis that the reasoning, "But we know all this!" is often a defense. This defense is made in order to dismiss insights as irrelevant because they are actually uncomfortable and make life more difficult for us than it already is by shaking our conscience when we are supposed to enjoy the "simple pleasures of life." The investigation of the television problems we have here indicated and illustrated by a few examples selected at random demands, most of all, taking seriously notions dimly familiar to most of us by putting them into their proper context and perspective and by checking them by pertinent material. We propose to concentrate on issues of which we are vaguely but uncomfortably aware, even at the expense of our discomfort's mounting, the further and the more systematically our studies proceed. The effort here required is of a moral nature itself: knowingly to face psychological mechanisms operating on various levels in order not to become blind and passive victims. We can change this medium of far-reaching potentialities only if we look at it in the same spirit which we hope will one day be expressed by its imagery.

FRED E. H. SCHROEDER

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During the early years of television, magazine advertisements for television receivers depicted slim, elegantly dressed personages, tastefully deployed about a television set, upon which was invariably to be found the image of a ballerina. With the advent of color television, the viewers remained about the same, but the *danseuse* now alternated with a brightly made up circus clown. The intended symbolism is obvious; the dancer represented culture and motion; the clown color and pageantry. Yet the symbolism unmasks the negative truth that the expressive scope of television is extremely limited. Neither ballet nor the circus can be successfully transposed into the video medium, because both ballet and circus are entertainment art forms that require that the audience be enveloped in a total experience, not in a tubular view of facial close-ups and minuscule long shots. The essence of ballet is to be found in the total composition of dancers' bodies within a three-dimensional stage, with light and sound waves invigorating a space shared by audience, dancers, and dance. And the circus is all of this—and popcorn, sweat, smoke and dung besides. Thus, television cannot but fail in its attempts to express the arts of dance and of the three-ring world.

Fred Schroeder teaches Humanities at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. This essay is reprinted from *The Western Humanities Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4 (Autumn 1973), by permission of the publisher and the author. Copyright © 1973 by The Western Humanities Review.

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As a matter of fact, television has not only failed to transfer other arts into its form, but television has almost completely failed to find any expressive art form which is peculiarly its own. My recognition of the lack of a genuine video aesthetic or experience started a few years ago when my family and I lived in a cabin in the woods of northern Minnesota. Our only source of electricity was a gas-powered generator that wouldn't start when the temperature was below zero, which was usually, and so we ordinarily had neither electric lights nor television. But by our second year in the woods, we had discovered that we preferred candles anyway, and we discovered too that one rarely needed a television picture to enjoy television.

Some of our local television stations have audio bands that reach into the FM radio portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, and so it became our practice to sit by candlelight and listen to television programs on our battery-operated radio. It made for very good radio. All of the situation comedies turned out to be radio programs, even those television shows that seem to depend upon sight gags. For example, we heard the first of the *Get Smart* series without a picture, and when a few years later we saw reruns of those programs, we found that we had accurately imagined almost everything except the faces. My son was at the Saturday morning cartoon age at the time, and he enjoyed cartoons as old time radio shows, for most of the sound tracks were made up of highly expressive sound effects, along with voices of such radio personalities as Ned Sparks, Clifton Finnegan, Senator Claghorn and Gabriel Heatter. We also discovered that most mysteries and dramas are auditory expressions, although western movies and the finales of adventure films posed a problem, because the radio listener only receives thundering hoofbeats, screaming tires—and chase music.

But there was among the television shows one newcomer that we were unable to visualize. It was called *Mission Impossible*, and all that the audio brought through to us was whirrings, clicks, long silences, and occasional tough dialogues between people speaking the thoughts of Juan Peron and John Foster Dulles in heavy Guatemala-Hungarian accents. *Mission Impossible*, in other words, was the only regular television entertainment program that was artistically—that is, aesthetically—a truly *video* experience. It was

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not written as a radio show, and neither was it filmed as a movie with Hollywood cinematic long shots, panoramic sweeps and cluttered pageantry. Instead, it employed close shots, slowly evolving mechanical processes, and rapid cuts to sharply distinctive faces registering emotional and intellectual responses. Just as radio had developed a corral of distinctive voices to compensate for its one-dimensionality, *Mission Impossible* employed sharply differentiated faces for its regulars, at least during its first years. Later, however, *Mission Impossible* retreated from the aesthetic frontier, and by the time the series was cancelled in 1973 the verbal exchanges among the totalitarian Esperanti had increased to the point of converting the series into a radio program with pictures.

Of course there is nothing "wrong" about television programs that are aesthetically radio; total aesthetic consistency is not required for one's deriving enjoyment from television or, for that matter, from any other art form. People who enjoy Broadway musicals or symphony concerts would be silly to reject phonograph recordings of music just because the music is not where it "should be" performed, in a theatre or concert hall. Anyone is free to enjoy any art in any form he chooses, for personal enjoyment is one legitimate standard for aesthetic judgements; but this rationale puts grandma's delight in the Sunday School Christmas pageant into the same bag with George Bernard Shaw's delight in *Das Rheingold*; that is, they both "liked the show." Thus, while I am not questioning the right of anyone to enjoy and to approve of television programs that are essentially radio programs or ones that are wide-screen movies squished into a television screen, I am saying that any medium or mode of artistic expression has characteristics that make it unique, and that it is most effective when expression is consistent with the medium. This has long been one aesthetic standard for judging art: to assess the appropriateness with which form and content are applied to a given medium. A poet who wants to tell an adventurous story does not pick a sonnet as his expressive form; indeed, today he is not likely even to choose a poem as his medium of expression. Not if he wants anyone to read his story.

And that brings up one more aesthetic standard, one of particular importance in popular arts such as television. This is the

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Nielsen rating aesthetic, which is a standard that has always stood in the way of pure art, the art that exists irrespective of audience. Pure art does exist, but in reality, almost every artist has to do something in the attention-getting mode of Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*, if only to assure himself of an audience, and the history of music since the renaissance has been full of what the music trade calls "New Sound," all the way from antiphonal singing and Beethoven's trombones, to Mahler's *Symphony for a Thousand*, which is about as far as attention-getting techniques can go, at least in the mode of symphonic tonality. Mahler's *Symphony* is an instance of the stegosauri of art which mark the effective end of developmental line, when a mode of expression has been stretched to its limits. Television seems to have reached its expressive limits by 1970 in *Mission Impossible*, *Laugh-In* and *Batman*.

In its earliest days, commercial entertainment television was quite self-conscious about what it would be. It never considered itself to be radio, it was constantly admonished not to be cinema and it felt it must be something more than a mere converter of circus and ballet; yet nearly all of its functions were these three: radio with pictures, film with an ill-focused minuscule screen, and converter of other entertainment forms. The one exception was the Chicago School-Playhouse 90 achievement, which was stage theatre, live, immediate, and with the viewpoint of Mr. First-nighter looking at a stage with a circular proscenium, something like a vertical theatre in the round.

Early television's unsureness of what it might be was a situation similar to that of the young Charles Dickens, who started *The Pickwick Papers* as a collection of short sketches in the mode of the day, competent but conventional, and not quite sure what he or it might be, until he found midstream that he should be writing a Dickens novel, which thereupon he did. The similarity of Dickens' technique and viewpoint to that of cinema has been noted by Sergei Eisenstein, and much of what Eisenstein wrote applies to video, but there is the additional similarity that Dickens operated under the same Nielsen-rating aesthetic restriction as television. Television, like radio, was competing with movies, which used lavish extravagance to draw people from their homes; and television, like radio, and like Charles Dickens, adopted the technique of building an audience by means of weekly serial

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installments. Serial publication or broadcast places other restrictions on all three of these popular art forms, the double requirements of prescribed chapter length and a cliffhanger ending to bring the audience back next week. Part of Dickens' achievement that made his popular art into great art is that he preserved an overall unity throughout the serials, and that he created an artistic and dramatic inevitability that carries readers through the novels even today. Serial radio never achieved this, and the closest parallel in American television was *The Fugitive* and its various spawn, such as *Run For Your Life* and *The Invaders*. But *The Fugitive* possessed the same weakness as a novel that should be a short story—the fugitive's weekly close calls contributed in no way toward the final episode, which contained the whole story. British television followed the practice of placing a hero in a situation that carries throughout infinite episodes with Patrick McGoohan's *The Prisoner*, but then, in *The Forsyte saga*, the British took the lesson of the Victorian novel in toto; and finally, in such mini-series as *The Wives of Henry VIII*, produced unified, original video serial drama, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The video success of *Henry VIII* can be affirmed by applying a simple aesthetic test: could it be effective as a one-sitting film, or as a radio program, or as a stage drama or as another theatrical form? The answer is "no" to all of these, and the reason is partly because of the Dickensian serial novel technique.

But that is only part of the explanation. The quest for a video aesthetic is not only a matter of how one holds the audience; it is also a matter of how one uses the television screen. This is a problem of artistry; the popular audience doesn't really care beyond wanting to see things clearly, and yet the two interact. The artist cannot ignore the simple demands of the audience, indeed, he must share them, and the audience responds to the artistic improvements by rejecting less sophisticated styles with the derogatory term "old-fashioned." It is, after all, the sophisticated audience that can watch old movies with interest; the popular audience wants only the latest thing. But while television was dealing with the initial problem of how to show a clear picture, cinema was asking other hard questions of art, for when commercial television began to force the closing of movie theatres in the early 1950s, filmmakers began to ask, what can theatre film do

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that television cannot, and what are the inherent limitations to both these media? The answers are implied in wide-screen cinemascope and stereophonic sound, for it was rightly concluded that the smallness of the television screen and the tinniness of the sound were the vulnerable limitations of the competition. But what this answer did *not* tell was how to use a wide screen and stereo sound. The first artistic attempts in the new form were *The Robe* and *Shane*, in 1953; the former using the screen for "casts of thousands," and the latter, for photographing wide landscapes. These two practices remain standard good uses of the medium, as for example, in *Dr. Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Yet these boil down to "Same Thing, Only Bigger," and do not explain how to use the wide screen in interiors and close-ups. The total use of wide-screen and stereophonic sound in American cinema had to wait for the 1955 production of Jack Webb's *Pete Kelly's Blues*, which opened with a view of a New Orleans funeral band marching across the screen and across the audience consciousness, both visually and aurally. Thematically the film is about jazz of the 1920s, and thus the new sound system is an inherent part of the experience. Interior scenes were staged to exploit the medium, as, for example, placing Peggy Lee, in the role of schizoid ex-torch-singer, at the extreme end of an expansive empty room in an insane asylum, pathetically isolated from her interlocutor at the other end of the screen. An entirely different effect was produced in the film climax, which was shot in a cavernous empty dance hall, with a revolving mirror-studded ball filling the screen and enveloping the audience in a firmament of scattering lights, punctuated stereophonically with a crossfire of gunshots. These are contrived devices that might explain why *Pete Kelly's Blues* seems never to be included in art film programs, but, on the other hand, film societies are usually tied to 16mm projection so that they are ill-equipped for looking at a film that is aesthetically bonded to the wide-screen stereophonic sound media.

Applying the same sort of test as was given to *Henry VIII*, it is clear that *Pete Kelly's Blues* is pure cinemascope expression, and could not communicate the same experience in television, radio or narrow-screen cinema. In other words, Jack Webb exploited the medium instead of merely applying the proven techniques of

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other media. This is notable in itself, but it is even more remarkable when it is remembered that Webb achieved the same kind of artistic success in television, in the *Dragnet* series. The very fact that *Dragnet* successfully returned to television after a long recess, and that its video techniques were extended without alteration to *Adam-12* points up the effectiveness of the Webb television style, which is in polar opposition to his *Pete Kelly's Blues* style. Webb's television series are essentially radio shows (*Dragnet* and *Pete Kelly's Blues* both started on radio), containing almost nothing that is indispensably visual, but unlike most television programs that were contemporaries of early *Dragnet*, they did not attempt to crowd film or stage perspectives into a television screen. Rather, they gave the popular viewer what he wanted, an easy-to-see unambiguous picture. Jack Webb exploited the television medium within its severe limitations as he was to do with *cinemascope*.

The inherent limitations of television as an art form are myriad. The screen is small, virtually square in shape, and the image does not allow for fine detail, or for nuance in shading. These factors combine to make of television a two-dimensional medium. It is difficult to create an image that can draw a viewer into a background or to surround him with a panorama. Not only is the screen incapable of creating the illusion of space in depth, but it cannot create lateral space either, at least not without reducing significant objects to a few insignificant electronic dots. In addition to this, the television camera cannot sweep over a scene or record rapid motion. The *Dragnet* answer to these restrictions, as everyone knows, is staccato dialogue with staccato facial shots, interposed with close-ups of telephones ringing, car doors opening, doorbells being pressed, and all the other visual irrelevancies that Webb inherited from Alfred Hitchcock. But such close-ups are, in primitive form, the same techniques that were to be refined and used to tell a story visually in *Mission Impossible*.

Ironically, for a time *cinemascope* filmmakers borrowed these techniques from television with the result that theatre audiences have had to accustom themselves to being enveloped in Brobdingnagian cleavages and in dinosauric close-ups of actors' pores and pimples. The close-up problem of wide-screen cinema has only recently been solved by such devices as are employed in *Androm-*

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eda Strain to mask out and to divide the screen into appropriate smaller areas.

Between *Dragnet* and the present time, however, television directors and cameramen have experimented and found new techniques to compensate for the two-dimensional restrictions of television. First was the use of unusual camera angles which either create such extreme foreshortening that the viewer is forced to accept the existence of a third dimension (overhead shots of people conversing, for example), or shots which place an actor, who stands in middle distance, inside a frame of a close-up vase, or a chair bottom, or, in the extreme of video pixiness, from inside Frank Nitti's wall safe in *The Untouchables*. For a truly aesthetic use of these video techniques, *The Untouchables* was probably the most effective serial drama until *Mission Impossible*. In addition to using the *Dragnet* camera techniques, which deal with a third dimension by ignoring it; and in addition to using unusual camera angles and brilliant framing to evoke the third dimension, *The Untouchables* conquered the television screen's inability to show subtle shading, by surrendering, and using instead contrasty chiaroscuro and dramatic sidelighting. Sometimes it was a little hard to see where anyone was, it is true, but eventually and invariably a beer-truck would arrive upon the scene to lend a caravagian headlight. In spite of the arty camera effects and the beautiful exploitation of the television screen, however, *The Untouchables* was a radio program, even to its heavy reliance on Walter Winchell's voice as narrator, and the brilliant character actors who played the villains—Harold J. Stone, Victor Buono, Harry Morgan, Nehemiah Persoff, and Bruce Gordon are men with voices as distinctive as their faces.

Another camera technique was borrowed by television drama from its own medium. Television sportscasting, of course, suffered the same ills that afflicted theatrical television, but the zoom lens came to the rescue, and a zoom-boom hit the viewer in the eye with such unnatural effects as that of suggesting that the human eye picks out an object in a distant scene by zooming in 10:1. Used excessively, this is as disconcerting as would be any sixty-minute trombone concert, but used judiciously, the zoom effect does evoke the third dimension.

More recent among television's overcompensations is the use of

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audio transitions to shift from one video scene to another. The most extreme form of this is the device of employing a close-up microphone to record conversations of people, in automobiles, in the distance, as they move from set to set. This is honest in its way; very few shots in filmmaking have ever had their sound tracks recorded simultaneously with the filming on location, and for very practical reasons. However, on television, this frank admission of what is ordinarily hidden technique, carries along with it an implied frank admission that video is often irrelevant, and (as the television lawyers say) immaterial. Because the video dramas are so largely radio dramas, the close-up sound track only serves to emphasize that most visual elements are only used as padding. This is illustrated in many series, but *Longstreet* may have led the field. But the device is not new; *Buck Rogers* comic strips in 1929 showed Buck and Wilma speaking in "audio balloons" issuing at full volume from distant rocket ships.

This may seem trivial, yet the artistic issue here is greater than one viewer's feeling of irritability at an artificial technique. Art, after all, is artifice. It is not "real," although art may depict, or represent, or interpret reality. And in so doing, any art form can choose the course of verisimilitude, that is, the imitation of reality; or it can choose the course of stylization. If verisimilitude is the course taken, artifice must be disguised. There are degrees of artifice, of course, but no stage drama has been helped by letting the audience see that the canvas "walls" flutter when a prop door is closed. Television serial drama, like Hollywood cinema, tends toward verisimilitude rather than stylization. Popular audiences, after all, prefer the familiar, and in modern society, mundane reality is familiar. But verisimilitude requires that the art always keep its guard up, so that its techniques of artifice never obtrude into the viewer's consciousness.

Stylized theatre has similar demands for consistency, of course, but stylized art is built upon suspended disbelief and upon the audience's imaginations. Thus, television is on shaky ground when it tips its hand as in *Longstreet* or *Eddie's Father* and brings its own realism into question. By contrast, Hollywood cinema, which thrived on imitation of reality, even in its animated cartoons never revealed that almost all voicetrack was dubbed in. Television, it

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seems, is once more pushing its expression beyond its own limitations as a popular art form.

My remarks up to now apply particularly to monochromatic television. Color was expected to add a new dimension to the medium. Most viewers will remember the anticipation of color as the panacea for television's shallow aesthetics. Walt Disney ushered in regular color programming, as he had contributed to early color cinema, yet his success in both cases resulted from the use of flat primary colors or simply structured two-dimensional figures. But beyond the use of color for animation, there is little to be said for color television as an artistic medium. The overall effect of television color on the audience is about the same as it has been in cinema; it causes the first minutes of any black-and-white program that follows to pale, and it makes the scenery the star. Consequently, the great moments of color television are not to be found in human drama, which knows no color prejudice, but in the nature films of Disney's *Real Life Adventures*, or *National Geographic* specials, or of Jacques Cousteau's *Underwater Worlds*. Aside from these and aside from color animations, color television's artistic effects have been limited to variations on programs of garishly caparisoned newscasters set against a background of flamboyant weather maps. As one variation of this technique, *Laugh-In* may have been the visual peak of color television human entertainment.

There is one other effect of color television that most viewers are quick to ignore. This is the compromise that the eye makes between the television spectrum and the natural spectrum. Excepting where the television people have deliberately reduced the studio spectrum to flat primaries, television color cannot hold a candle to movie color. There is nothing dishonest in this visual compromise—after all, we totally ignore the blueness of "black-and-white"—but aesthetically, it permits little nuance.

The limitations of television as an expressive medium, possessing its own aesthetic, appear to have been exploited to the extreme. Most television drama is either radio (with pictures added), or movies (with bad focus, color and scope). With few exceptions, the attempts to make the best of the limitations of the medium have produced frenzied camera effects with concertina

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zooms, fanciful angles, freeze frames and garish color schemes. Put all of these together, and the logical outcome was *Batman*. *Batman* is worthy of further commentary, not because of its cute and obvious burlesques of comics and television, but because the program's term "guest villain" provides a key to understanding the characteristics of serial aesthetics. The "guest villain" is the differentiating factor not only in *Batman* drama, but in *Mannix*, *Peter Gunn*, and *Dragnet*; in *Johnny Dollar*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *The Shadow*; in *Dick Tracy* and *Superman*; and in *The Perils of Pauline*. In short, the overall aesthetic of television drama is a *serial aesthetic*, and this designation places most television drama into the same category as serial radio, serial comics and serial films. All of these depend upon the guest villain, whose office is that of providing a fresh problem for a resident staff of heroes to solve. Ultimately, the serial aesthetic is the product of serial printing, and, while I suppose that we could trace it back through Dickens and Sir Roger de Coverley, I think it more likely that the serial aesthetic, as it operates in television, starts with the development of the hero and sidekick pattern: Tom Swift's Ned Newton and Eradicate Jones; Sherlock Holmes' Watson, Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson. The possible examples are countless, but it is clear that successful serial drama demands a little society of set characters whose Good Life would be a deathless Eden, were it not for the guest villains. Any serial that does not create a little permanent society is in danger of losing a popular audience. It is true, however, that Horatio Alger, Kathleen Norris, Zane Grey and other popular book authors succeeded in varying the characters, but they could not vary the types. Furthermore, theirs is not serial literature in the same sense that the *Rover Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, *Tugboat Annie* and *Jeeves* are serial literature.

P. G. Wodehouse's *Jeeves* exists in the slightly different genre of literary situation comedy, which is different from "serious" drama in that it does not require a guest villain. The antecedent for serial comedy is *commedia dell' arte*, and the reason that comedy does not require a guest villain is inherent to the little societies of *commedia*. Unlike the hero and sidekick pattern, which permits to the little society only comradeship and sycophancy, the *commedia* pattern is composed of a set of humor characters who are designed to *conflict*.

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rather than to cooperate, and thus a guest villain is not needed, although an outside irritant may be used to trigger the humor conflicts. Therefore, *Dick Van Dyke*, *The Honeymooners*, *Andy Griffith*, *Lucy* and other situation comedies offer viewers the tantalizing security of continuous intramural conflict. This, then, is the serial aesthetic (comic sub-group). Given this analysis, some of the most popular television shows are explainable. *Gunsmoke*, for example, has a hero with a *commedia* group-sidekick, and various other series have succeeded with similar blends of the two modes: *Bonanza*, *Ironside* and *I Spy* are but three.

The serial aesthetic is not peculiar to television, but it is nevertheless the aesthetic glue that binds television to the other popular and mass arts, and it is the aesthetic barrier that stands between television and high art. The adherence of television to the serial format is also the main reason that video art, as an art in itself, has been ignored, or disdained, or, more often, has been confused with its aesthetic in-laws—theatre, film, and radio. As is so often the case while a popular medium is developing important techniques, the cultivated critics keep looking for the techniques of established art forms in the popular medium. This, I suspect, is what is behind the critical acclaim awarded the early "Chicago School" live drama: it was theatre, and theatre critics applauded.

Serial art, of course, has achieved great moments in television, but the great moments get lost in the series, and are almost irretrievable when the series dies, or when the series is rerun *in toto*. Possibly cassette television will produce a television equivalent to art film societies, and some of the great series shows will go into repertory.

But I doubt it. I do, though, have some candidates, as I am sure everyone does. For example, Boris Karloff's greatest performance is buried in an *I Spy* episode, where the aging Karloff plays the part of a contemporary Don Quixote. Somewhere in the *Checkmate* files is a Charles Laughton-Sebastian Cabot master duel; somewhere in *Mannix* is an episode wherein Mike Connors and Victor Jory raised detective serials to the level of profound drama of father-son relationships. But these, like many other episodes, are victims of the serial art form. They are individuals lost in stereotype and in popularity, and they do not have the possibility

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of redemption that was built into Charles Dickens' serials, that is, a consciously wrought total structure. No, television is caught in the aesthetic of the comic strip.

This is a bleak pronouncement, but the effective truth of popular television's having reached its limits is borne out by the return of *Dragnet*, by the retreat of *Mission Impossible* from the video style it once had, by the loss of audiences to the reborn movie theatres in downtowns and shopping centers all over the country, and by the intense interest young people are exhibiting in older films and old radio programming. For middle-aged people, listening to golden age radio recordings can be explained as nostalgia, but for the generation that has grown up on television, radio and film represent mind-stretching new media of expression.

Does this mean that television has run its course? Far from it. But it has carried video expression as far as it is likely to go. The techniques have been tried that can be used for highly characteristic creative expression, and particularly if they are not tied to the endless series that operate in response to the Nielsen aesthetic, they can be as effective as the *Henry VIII* mini-series. The television commercial techniques have only been applied to a children's educational program, *Sesame Street*, and still await an artist to employ them in expressive adult entertainment. There are video frontiers beyond *Henry VIII* and *Mission Impossible*, but they are most likely to build upon the techniques already developed, to use them as a video aesthetic vocabulary. But television will also have to be recognized as having as its main quality what its name means: *to see far away*. The medium is the message, for television is not so much a medium for expression as it is an immediate extension of the sense of sight. Consider what have been the great moments in television. Early live drama. The 1952 Democratic Convention. The events following the assassination of President Kennedy. The Vietnam War. The moon walk. There have been many others, but all of them share the characteristic of immediacy, the feeling that "you are there." And as an entertainment medium, television's prime function has again been that of distant seeing, of bringing into our homes movies, sporting events, drama—and ballet and circuses—never equalling the real thing, it is true, but often achieving a closeness and intimacy that no other medium can match.

HORACE NEWCOMB

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Defining television as a form of popular art might lead one to ignore the complex social and cultural relationships surrounding it. In his book *Open to Criticism*, Robert Lewis Shayon, former television critic for *The Saturday Review*, warns against such a view.

To gaze upon this dynamic complexity and to delimit one's attention to merely the aesthetic (or any other single aspect of it) is to indulge one's passion for precision and particularity (an undeniable right)—but in my view of criticism it is analogous to flicking a piece of lint off a seamless garment.

The mass media are phenomena that transcend even the broad worlds of literature. They call for the discovery of new laws, new relationships, new insights into drama, ritual and mythology, into the engagement of minds in a context where psychological sensations are deliberately produced for non-imaginative ends, where audiences are created, cultivated and maintained for sale, where they are trained in nondiscrimination and hypnotized by the mechanical illusion of delight. When the symbols that swirl about the planet Earth are manufactured by artists who have placed their talents at

Horace Newcomb teaches American Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. This essay is reprinted from *TV: The Most Popular Art* by permission of Anchor Press/Doubleday. Copyright © 1974 by Horace Newcomb.

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the disposition of salesmen, criticism must at last acknowledge that "literature" has been transcended and that the dialectics of evolutionary action have brought the arts to a new level of practice and significance. [Boston, 1971, pp. 48-49]

Humanistic analysis, when used to explore aesthetic considerations in the popular arts such as television, can aid directly in that "discovery of new laws, new relationships, new insights into drama, ritual and mythology," which Shayon calls for. In doing so it is necessary to concentrate on the entertaining works themselves, rather than on the psychological effects of those works on and within the mass audience. In those areas the social scientific methodologies may be more capable of offering meaningful results. But we should also remember that most of the works we have dealt with are highly formulaic in nature, and if we think of formula, in John Cawelti's words, as "a model for the construction of artistic works which synthesizes several important cultural functions," then it is possible to see how the aesthetic point of view and the social scientific point of view might supplement one another in a fuller attempt to discover the total meaning of the mass media.

Television is a crucially important object of study not only because it is a new "form," a different "medium," but because it brings its massive audience into a direct relationship with particular sets of values and attitudes. In the previous chapter, where we examined works that are less formulaic, we should still be able to recognize the direct connection, in terms of both values and the techniques of presenting them, with more familiar television entertainment. In those newer shows, where the values may become more ambiguous, more individualized, we find an extension and a development of popular television rather than a distinct new form of presentation. The extension and development have demonstrated that even in the more complex series, popularity need not be sacrificed.

To the degree that the values and attitudes of all these shows are submerged in the contexts of dramatic presentation, the aesthetic understanding of television is crucial. We have looked

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closely at the formulas that most closely identify television entertainment. We have been able to see how those formulas affect what has been traditionally thought of as nondramatic entertainment or as factual information. We have determined some of the values presented in each of the formulas in terms of their embodiment in certain character types, patterns of action, and physical environment. In approaching an aesthetic understanding of TV the purpose should be the description and definition of the devices that work to make television one of the most popular arts. We should examine the common elements that enable television to be seen as something more than a transmission device for other forms. Three elements seem to be highly developed in this process and unite, in varying degree, other aspects of the television aesthetic. They are intimacy, continuity, and history.

The smallness of the television screen has always been its most noticeable physical feature. It means something that the art created for television appears on an object that can be part of one's living room, exist as furniture. It is significant that one can walk around the entire apparatus. Such smallness suits television for intimacy; its presence brings people into the viewer's home to act out dramas. But from the beginning, because the art was visual, it was most commonly compared to the movies. The attempts to marry old-style, theater-oriented movies with television are stylistic failures even though they have proven to be a financial success. Television is at its best when it offers us faces, reactions, explorations of emotions registered by human beings. The importance is not placed on the action, though that is certainly vital as stimulus. Rather, it is on the reaction to the action, to the human response.

An example of this technique is seen in episode twelve of Alistair Cooke's "America: A Personal History." In order to demonstrate the splendor of a New England autumn, Cooke first offers us shots of expansive hillsides glowing with colored trees. But to make his point fully he holds a series of leaves in his hand. He stands in the middle of the forest and demonstrates with each leaf a later stage in the process from green to brown, stages in the process of death. The camera offers a full-screen shot of Cooke's hand portraying the single leaves. The importance of this scene,

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and for the series, is that Cooke insists on giving us a personal history. We are not so much concerned with the leaves themselves, but with the role they play in Cooke's memories of his early years in America. To make his point immediate, he makes sure that we see what he wants us to see about the autumnal color. The point about the process of death is his, not one that we would come to immediately, on our own, from viewing the leaves.

Commenting on the scene, Cooke praised his cameraman, Jim McMillan. It was McMillan, he said, who always insisted on "shooting for the box," or filming explicitly for television. Such filming is necessary in the series if Cooke's personal attitudes are to be fully expressed visually as well as in his own prose. (Alistair Cooke, concluding comments at a showing of episode twelve of "America: A Personal History" at the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, April 1973)

Such use of technique is highly self-conscious. More popular television, however, has always used exactly the same sense of intimacy in a more unconscious fashion. It is this sense that has done much of the transforming of popular formulas into something special for television. As our descriptions have shown, the iconography of rooms is far more important to television than is that of exterior locations. Most of the content of situation comedies, for example, takes place in homes or in offices. Almost all that of domestic comedy takes place indoors, and problems of space often lead to or become the central focus of the show. Even when problems arise from "outdoor" conflicts—can Bud play football if his mother fears for his safety—are turned into problems that can be dealt with and solved within the confines of the living room or kitchen.

Mysteries often take us into the offices of detectives or policemen and into the apartments and hideouts of criminals. In some shows, such as "Ironside," the redesigning of space in keeping with the needs of the character takes on special significance. Ironside requests and receives the top floor of the police headquarters building. In renovating that space he turns it not only into an office but into a home as well. His personal life is thereby defined by his physical relationship to his profession and to the idea of fighting crime. He inhabits the very building of protection. He resides over it in a godlike state that fits his

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relationship to the force. The fact that it is his home also fits him to serve as the father figure to the group of loyal associates and tempers the way in which he is seen by criminals and by audience. Similarly, his van becomes an even more confined space, also a home, but defined by his handicap. It is the symbol of his mobile identity as well as of his continued personal life.

Such observations would be unimportant were it not for the fact that as we become more intimately introduced to the environment of the detective we become equally involved with his personality. It is the character of the detective, as we have seen, that defines the quality of anticrime in his or her show. The minor eccentricities of each character, the private lives of the detectives, become one of the focal points of the series in which they appear. It is with the individual attitudes that the audience is concerned, and the crimes are defined as personal affronts to certain types of individuals.

Nowhere is this emphasis more important than in the Westerns. In the Western movie, panorama, movement, and environment are crucial to the very idea of the West. The films of John Ford or Anthony Mann consciously incorporate the meaning of the physical West into their plots. It may be that no audience could ever visually grasp the total expanse of land as depicted in full color, but this is part of the meaning of the West. The sense of being overwhelmed by the landscape helps to make clear the plight of the gunfighter, the farmer, the pioneer standing alone against the forces of evil.

On television this sense of expansiveness is meaningless. We can never sense the visual scope of the Ponderosa. The huge cattle herds that were supposed to form the central purpose for the drovers of "Rawhide" never appeared. In their place we were offered stock footage of cattle drives. A few cattle moved into the tiny square and looked, unfortunately, like a few cattle. The loneliness of the Kansas plains, in the same way, has never properly emerged as part of the concept of "Gunsmoke."

What has emerged in place of the "sense" of the physical West is the adult Western. In this form, perfected by television, we concentrate on the crucial human problems of individuals. One or two drovers gathered by the campfire became the central image of "Rawhide." The relationship among the group became the focus.

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Ben Cartwright and his family were soon involved in innumerable problems that rose out of their personal conflicts and the conflicts of those who entered their lives. Themes of love and rebellion, of human development and moral controversy, were common on the show until its demise. On "Have Gun—Will Travel" Paladin's business card was thrust into the entire television screen, defining the meaning of the show as no panoramic shot could. This importance of the enclosed image is made most clear in "Gun-smoke." The opening shots of the original version concentrated on the face of Matt Dillon, caught in the dilemma of killing to preserve justice. The audience was aware of the personal meaning of his expression because it literally filled the screen, and the same sorts of theme have always dominated the program content. Even when landscape and chase become part of the plot, our attention is drawn to the intensely individual problems encountered, and the central issue becomes the relationships among individuals.

This physical sense of intimacy is clearly based in the economic necessities of television production. It is far more reasonable, given budgetary restraints, to film sequences within permanent studio sets than on location, even when the Western is the subject. But certainly the uses of intimacy are no longer exclusively based on that restriction. The soap operas, most financially restricted of all television productions, have developed the idea from the time when audiences were made to feel as if they were part of a neighborhood gossiping circle until today, when they are made to feel like probing psychiatrists. Similarly, made-for-television movies reflect this concern and are often edited to heighten the sense of closeness. A greater sense of the importance of this concept is found in those shows and series that develop the idea of intimacy as a conceptual tool. It becomes an object of study, a value to be held. In such cases the union of form and content leads to a sense of excellence in television drama.

The situation comedies such as "All in the Family," "Maude," "Sanford and Son," and "M*A*S*H" have turned the usual aspects of this formula into a world of great complexity. As we have seen, their themes are often directed toward social commentary. The comments can succeed only because the audience is aware of the tightly knit structures that hold the families together. It is our intimate knowledge of their intimacy that makes it

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possible. Objects, for example, that are no more than cultural signs in some shows become invested with new meanings in the new shows. In the Bunker home a refrigerator, a chair, a dining table, and the bathroom have become symbolic objects, a direct development from their use as plot device in more typical domestic comedy. They have become objects that define a particular social class or group rather than the reflection of an idealized, generalized expression of cultural taste. They are now things that belong to and define this particular group of individuals. Similarly, our knowledge of the characters goes beyond a formulaic response. Jim Anderson, of "Father Knows Best," was a type, his responses defined by cultural expectation. Archie Bunker is an individual. Each time we see him lose a bit of his façade we realize that his apparently one-dimensional character is the result of his choice, his own desire to express himself to the world in this persona. With his guard down we realize that he cares about his wife, in spite of the fact that he treats her miserably most of the time.

In the mini-series of the BBC the technical aspects of this sort of intimacy have been used to explore the idea itself and have resulted in moments of great symbolic power. In the adaptation of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, for example, we begin with a novel crucially concerned with problems of intimacy. The series is then filled with scenes that develop the idea visually. Such a sequence occurs during the days before Adam Verver asks Charlotte to be his wife. Though he does not realize it, Charlotte had at one time been the mistress of his daughter's husband, the Prince. She is considerably younger than Verver, and in order to establish a claim for her marriage, he suggests that they spend time together, in the most decorous manner, in his country home and in Brighton. In the midst of rooms filled with candles, furniture, paintings, and ornaments, the camera isolates them. Even in the huge ornate rooms they are bound together, the unit of our focus. One evening as Charlotte turns out the lamps, pools of light illuminate them, circled in the large dark rooms.

In one of the most crucial scenes of this sequence the camera moves along the outside of an elegant restaurant. Through the rain, through the windows, couples are framed at dining tables. A waiter arrives at Verver's table as the camera stops its tracking

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motion. The couple begins to laugh; we hear them faintly as if through the actual window. Then, apparently at Verver's request, the waiter reaches across the table and closes the drapes. We are shut out of the scene, and we realize how closely we have been involved in the "action." We are made more aware of private moments. In the closing scene of the episode the camera movement is repeated. This time, however, Charlotte has agreed to the marriage and the couple is celebrating. Again we are outside. But as the episode ends, we remain with Verver and Charlotte, participating in their lamplit laughter.

Finally, this same motif is used in another episode. Charlotte and the Prince have again become lovers. They meet for a last time, realizing that their secret is known. The camera frames their hands, meeting in a passionate grip. It is like an embrace and it fills the entire screen. Suddenly the camera pulls back and the two people are shown in an actual embrace. Again, suddenly, the camera zooms out and the couple is seen from outside the window. It is raining again, as it was in Brighton, and a rapid torrent of water floods over the window, blurring the picture in a powerful sexual image.

Clearly, in the adaptation of a novel so concerned with matters of intimacy, the attempt has been to convey that concern with a set of visual images. In "The Waltons," however, we are reminded that this visual technique parallels a set of values that we have found operating in popular television throughout our survey of formulas. Intimacy, within the context of family, is a virtue, and when "The Waltons" uses specific techniques to make us aware of intimacy, it is to call our attention not to the form, but to the ideas, of the show.

In that series each episode closes with a similar sequence. John Boy sits in his room writing in his journal. He has learned the requirement of solitude for his work, and his room has become a sacred space into which no one else intrudes. Other children in the family must share rooms, but he lives and works alone in this one. At the close of each story he narrates for us the meaning that he has drawn from the experience. We see him through a window as his voice comes over the visual track in the form of an interior monologue. As he continues to talk, the camera pulls back for a long shot of the house. It sits at the edge of the forest like a

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sheltered gathering place. It conveys the sense of warmth and protection, and even when there has been strain among the members of the family, we know that they have countered it as they counter their social and financial problems and that they will succeed. John Boy's window is lighted, usually the only one in the otherwise darkened home. As his speech ends, his light also goes out. We are left with the assurance of safety and love, as if we have been drawn by this calm ending into the family itself.

This sense of direct involvement can be enhanced by another factor in the television aesthetic, the idea of continuity. The sort of intimacy described here creates the possibility for a much stronger sense of audience involvement, a sense of becoming a part of the lives and actions of the characters they see. The usual episodic pattern of television only gives the illusion of continuity by offering series consisting of twenty-six individual units. The series may continue over a period of years, revolving around the actions of a set of regular characters. As pointed out, however, there is no sense of continuous involvement with these characters. They have no memory. They cannot change in response to events that occur within a weekly installment, and consequently they have no history. Each episode is self-contained with its own beginning and ending. With the exception of soap operas, television has not realized that the regular and repeated appearance of a continuing group of characters is one of its strongest techniques for the development of rich and textured dramatic presentations.

This lack of continuity leads to the central weakness of television, the lack of artistic probability. We have seen that many shows now deal with important subject matter. Because the shows conclude dramatically at the end of a single episode, and because the necessity for a popular response calls for an affirmative ending, we lose sight of the true complexity of many of the issues examined. This need not be the case, however, for we have seen two ways in which television can create a necessary sense of probability which can enhance the exploration of ideas and themes.

Probability in television may come in two major ways. The first is the one with which we are most familiar. We see the same characters over and over each week. Often it is this factor that is most frustrating in its refusal to develop probability among the

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characters. But in a series such as "All in the Family" this becomes an advantage, for the Bunkers continually encounter new experiences. Though most of the episodes are thematically related to the idea of Archie's bigotry, we have seen in analysis some of the ways in which reactions are changed. Some of the shifts may be starkly bitter, a strong departure for television comedy. Similarly, the continual introduction of new characters who appear on a regular basis allows the world to grow around the central family. Even the slight shifts in more formulaic shows, such as "Owen Marshall" or "Marcus Welby," aid in this direction when the characters appear on one another's shows. The appearance is of a world of multiple dimensions.

Another sort of probability is made possible by the creation of continued series. The soap operas provide the key to this understanding, and even though they are distorted by their own stereotypical views, the values of the shows are expressed far more clearly because of the continuous nature of the programming. Even with the distortions the shows offer a value system that may be closer to that of the viewer than he or she is likely to find in prime-time programming.

The BBC productions, however, adaptations of novels and original historical re-creations, offer a much more rounded sense of probability. As with historical fiction and movies, these productions are interpretations. Anyone who has watched the TV versions of the great novels is aware that choices and selections have been made in the adaptation of one medium to another. In both cases the result has been the creation of a new work of art. The central innovative factor in these productions has been their refusal to be dominated by the hour-long time slot. They do not end in a single episode. They range from the twenty-six episodes of "The Forsyte Saga" to three- or five-week adaptations of other novels. In this way we are allowed a far more extensive examination of motivation, character, and event than we are in the traditional television time period. The extension of time allows for a fuller development of the idea of intimacy, for we are allowed a broader as well as a deeper look at individuals. The use of narrators to deal with compressed time has been highly effective, especially in "The Search for the Nile."

These factors indicate that the real relationship with other

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media lies not in movies or radio, but in the novel. Television, like the literary form, can offer a far greater sense of density. Details take on importance slowly, and within repeated patterns of action, rather than with the immediacy of other visual forms. It is this sense of density, built over a continuing period of time, that offers us a fuller sense of a world fully created by the artist.

Continuity, then, like intimacy, is a conceptual as well as a technical device. It, too, grows out of popular television and finds its fullest expression in the newer shows. The third factor that helps to define the aesthetic quality of television is also essential to its less sophisticated formulas, for we have seen from the very beginning how television has been dependent on the uses of history for much of its artistic definition.

The importance of history to the popular arts has been carefully dealt with by John Cawelti in an essay, "Mythical and Historical Consciousness in Popular Culture" (unpublished essay, 1971). The root of this distinction, which Cawelti takes from myth theorists such as Mircea Eliade, lies in the perception of time. In the mythical consciousness "time is multi-dimensional. Since mythical events exist in a sacred time which is different from ordinary time, they can be past and present and to come all at the same time." For modern man, however, history is unilinear and moves "from the past, through the present, and into the future."

Within the popular arts one can discover a similar distinction, and as an example might compare two types of Westerns. Resembling the mythical consciousness is the Lone Ranger. "Though from time to time the audience is reminded that the Lone Ranger brought law and order to the West, the advance of civilization plays a negligible role in the hero's adventure. . . . Instead . . . the manner of presenting the saga of the masked hero reflects the multi-dimensional time of the mythical consciousness" (*ibid.*, p. 12). The contrasting example is Owen Wister's *The Virginian* in which ". . . the symbols and agents of advancing civilization play a primary role in the story. Indeed, they are commonly a major cause of the conflicts which involve the hero" (*ibid.*).

Another type of modification occurs among works that might be grouped within the mythical dimension. It is this form that depends most strongly on a sense of shared cultural values. At

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times as the values themselves begin to change there must be a shift in expression.

. . . to achieve the mythical sense in its traditional form, the writer must create and maintain a highly repetitive almost ritualistic pattern. This is one reason why series characters like Deadwood Dick, the Lone Ranger, and Hopalong Cassidy in regularly issued publications or weekly programs have been such a successful format for popular formulas. But the potency of such ritual-like repetitions depends on the persistence of underlying meanings. In ancient societies the fixed patterns of myth reflected continuity of values over many generations. In modern America, however, one generation's way of embodying the mythical pattern in cultural conventions tends to become the next generation's absurdities. [Ibid., p. 5]

It is the sort of shift in expression defined here that is most important for the television formulas we have examined. Shifts in underlying meanings occur more frequently than in the past, and instead of the changing patterns of generational attitudes it is almost as if America discovers new sets of values overnight. There seems to be little sense of value consensus. In spite of this, television manages to entertain vast numbers of viewers with patterns of action and with characters who seem familiar to the cultural consciousness.

Our analyses have shown, however, that there is little resemblance, in terms of underlying meaning, between the Western or the mystery as we know them on TV and the forms from which they emerge in literature, cinema, and radio. Similarly, the creation of special versions of families, of certain types of doctors and lawyers, indicates a type of formula that can cut across value distinctions and definitions that might have been embodied in these various formulas at one time.

The television formula requires that we use our contemporary historical concerns as subject matter. In part we deal with them in historical fashion, citing current facts and figures. But we also return these issues to an older time, or we create a character from

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an older time, so that they can be dealt with firmly, quickly, and within a system of sound and observable values. That vaguely defined "older time" becomes the mythical realm of television.

The 1973 season premier of "Gunsmoke" offered us all the trappings of the mythic and historical Western. There was a great deal of "on location" film (a common practice for season openers of the show, which then returns to the studio for most of the season) so that the environment created its sense of agency. The central plot involved the stealing of white women by Comancheros, and all the traditional villains, heroes, good and bad Indians appeared. The dual focus of the show, however, forced us to consider a thoroughly contemporary version of the problem. In one conflict we were concerned with the relationship of an orphaned child and a saloon girl. In the end the problems are resolved as the saloon girl gives up her own way of life in order to stay on a lonely ranch with the child and her grandfather. In another conflict we were concerned with the relationships of another orphan, a young man raised as a criminal by the Comanchero leader. In the end this young man must kill his surrogate father, escape with a haughty white girl, and be killed by her as he waits to ambush Marshal Dillon. In his dying words he says that he must have been a "damned fool" to believe that the girl loved him enough to overcome her class snobbery and go away with him. The ambiguity here forced us to admit the degree of goodness in the two outlaws and the saloon girl, to condemn racism in many versions, and to come to terms with the problems of the orphans in a particular social setting.

Although such generational and class conflicts could arise in any time and in any culture, they are framed so as to call attention to our own social problems. What has happened is that we have taken a contemporary concern and placed it, for very specific reasons, in an earlier time, a traditional formula. There the values and issues are more clearly defined. Certain modes of behavior, including violent behavior, are more permissible.

Detectives serve the same function. Ironside's fatherlike qualities aid in the solution of problems traditionally associated with the detective role. They also allow him to solve personal problems which appear to be large-scale versions of our own. Either by working out difficulties within his own "family team" or by

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working with the criminal or by working at the root cause of the crime, he serves as an appropriate authority figure for a society in which authority is both scarce and suspect.

In an even more striking television adaptation of history, we see families in domestic comedy behave as if they lived in an idealized nineteenth-century version of America. And our doctors and lawyers are easily associated with that same period. As if our time somehow mythically coexisted with that of an easier age, we create forms that speak in opposition to their contemporary settings. We turn our personal and social problems over to the characters who can solve them, magically, in the space of an enclosed hour. We have, in effect, created a new mythic pattern. It cuts across all the formulas with which we are familiar, transforming them and changing their force. Our own history is the one we see in these types, not the history common to the formula itself. Our history is all too familiar and perplexing, so to deal with it we have created the myth of television.

This aspect of television formula has enhanced the popularity of many widely viewed and accepted shows. Doubtless, one reason for the popularity of these successful series is the way in which they deal with contemporary problems in a self-conscious manner. They are highly "relevant" programs. They purport to question many issues. Such questioning is obviated, however, by the very structure of the shows. Always, the problems are solved. In most cases they are solved by the heroic qualities of the central characters. Whether the heroics take on the sterner aspects of frontier marshals or the gentler visage of kindly doctors, the questions that we take to our television stars are answered for us satisfactorily.

As with the other factors we can turn again to the newer shows to see the fuller development of the aesthetic sense of the use of history. With "The Waltons" it is possible to see a number of linked factors with the sense of history at the core. We are admitted to a tightly knit circle; we are intimately involved with a family, the central symbol of television. Because we share experiences with them, watch the children grow and deal specifically with the problems of growth and development, there is a strong sense of continuity to the series. The continuity is

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enhanced by a sense of community, of place and character, developed by different aspects of the series.

The great power of the program, however, develops out of its historical setting, the America of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The show demonstrates that the Depression period now carries with it a sense of mythical time. Frozen in the memory of those who experienced it, and passed on to their children, it is crucial to a sense of American cultural history, popular as well as elite. Indeed, it is crucial in part because it is the period that determines many contemporary American values. Much of the power of the show rises out of the realization that that time was much like our own—fragmented and frightening.

Like other mythical times, this period becomes, for television, a frame in which to examine our own problems. But the Depression does not yet have the qualities of the Western or detective story. Because it was a time of failure more than of success, it does not purport to offer heroic solutions to the problems. The solutions are those of "common" people, and we know that we will see the same characters in the following week and that they will have other problems of a variety not found in Westerns, mysteries, doctor and lawyer shows. Consequently there is little of the sense of a world made right by the power of the wise father. In the larger sense the continuing social context of the show, the unresolved Depression, brings to bear the feeling of a larger ill that cannot be corrected by strong, authoritative figures such as detectives and marshals.

The productions in the Masterpiece Theater series go a step further and refuse to offer firm final solutions to many problems confronted in the content of the shows. Many of the works raise complex moral and social issues. In many of them the central characters, far from serving as paternalistic guides and problem-solvers, die in the end. History is used here both to insulate the audience from the immediate impact of these unresolved issues and to demonstrate, at the same time, that the issues are universal, unbounded by history and defined by the fact that we are all human.

Finally, in shows such as "All in the Family" the mythical frame dissolves and the history we see is our own. Again, the sense of

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that history is strong and is a crucial part of the show. Our sense of class and economic reality, the distinctions among groups of persons within American society, allows us to confront problems directly. To a degree the comic context replaces the comforting removal of a more remote time. But by breaking the frame of the typical situation or domestic comedy, by questioning the very premises on which television is built, these shows force the audience into some sort of evaluation of its own beliefs. Their consistently high ratings indicate that the television audience is ready to become involved in entertainment that allows at least some of its members a more immediate examination of values and attitudes than is allowed by more traditional forms.

The interrelationships among these shows, the historical and comparative relationships between simpler and more sophisticated versions of formulas, indicate that television is in the process of developing a range of artistic capabilities that belies the former one-dimensional definitions. The novel can offer entertainment from Horatio Alger to Herman Melville, mysteries from Spillane to Dostoevski. The cinema can range from Roy Rogers Westerns to *Cries and Whispers*. So, too, can television offer its multiple audiences art from the least questioning, most culturally insulated situation comedy to "All in the Family," from Adventures in Paradise" to "The Search for the Nile," from "The Guiding Light" to "The Forsyte Saga."

In the past one did not speak of any television programs as "art." The aesthetic viewpoint was ignored, at times excluded from the process of understanding and explaining the extraordinarily powerful economic, social, and psychological effects of television. But it should no longer be possible to discuss "violence on television" without recognizing the aesthetic structure within which that violence occurs. It should no longer be possible to categorize the audience in terms of social and cultural values without examining the artistic context of those values as presented on television.

Intimacy, continuity, and a special sense of history are not the sole defining aesthetic attributes in the broad world of televised entertainment. Like many of the popular arts, television is the expression of multiple talents. Good writing, fine acting, technical excellence, and the sure hand of directors and producers go into

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making the best of television. Similarly, production necessities, overtaxed writers, formulaic actors, and imitative directors and producers can contribute to the worst of it. But intimacy, continuity, and history are devices that help to distinguish how television can best bring its audience into an engagement with the content of the medium. It is precisely because the devices are value expressions themselves, and because the content of television is replete with values, judgments, and ideas deeply imbedded in our culture that we must continually offer new and supplementary ways of observing, describing, and defining it. In this manner we can better understand how television is different from other media. We can begin to understand how it has changed the style and content of popular entertainment into forms of its own, and we can examine the ways in which those forms have changed within television's own development. For more than three decades we have viewed television from many perspectives without having come to grips with what it is for most of its audience. TV is America's most popular art. Its artistic function can only grow and mature, and as it does, so must its popularity.

EVELINA TARRONI

THE AESTHETICS OF TELEVISION¹

Is Television An Art?

The question most frequently asked about television concerns its actual nature: is television an *art* or is it merely a technical means of transmission which adds nothing to, and introduces no change in, the subject matter transmitted?

Experts differ widely on this subject. Some flatly deny that television is an art. Marty asserts that "television is simply a vehicle."² Quéval and Thévenot maintain that "even if we accept that the frontiers of art are not fixed, television treatment does not encourage the highest hopes."

"Television is made from theatre, cinema, literature, painting and music."³ The list of experts who do not believe in the artistic possibilities of television could be extended indefinitely, but the list of those who are convinced of these possibilities is just as long.

¹ This paper was commissioned by Unesco to serve as a discussion document at the International Meeting on Film and Television Teaching held at Leangkollen, Oslo, in October 1962.

² Rudolph Marty. *La TV et son aspect culturel et sociologique*, Paris, Editions du Tembourinaire, 1958.

³ Jean Quéval and Jean Thévenot. *TV*. Paris, Gallimard, 1957.

Evelina Tarroni is on the staff of Centro Nazionale Film de la Juventud, Rome. This essay is reprinted from *Screen Education: Reports and Papers on Mass Communication*, No. 42 by permission of Unesco. © 1964 by Unesco.

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It may perhaps be well to examine more closely the arguments advanced by those who maintain that television is an art.

Renato May (Italy) observes that "the school of thought which supports the 'magic' of the camera has some justification for strongly affirming . . . the natural possibility of an independent language . . ." But he also observes that only research to define the means used by television can show us the process of historical development of an art of television.

May attempts to find in each element of the language of television the factor which differentiates it from cinematographic expression. Bretz gives a very clear definition of the art of television, based on the *immediate, spontaneous* and *topical* nature of televised communication. "The audience watching a television programme is attracted, precisely, by the real and immediate nature of the picture. The public derives several kinds of satisfaction from watching a television programme, but the satisfactions due to the three qualities of immediacy, spontaneity and topicality belong to television alone."

D'Alessandro, for his part, seeks the characteristic language of television in the human element: "The essential subject of every good televised picture is man." "Television is the art of imitative movement."⁴ It may now be asked why opinions concerning the nature of television are so conflicting. In my view there are two entirely different reasons for the prevailing disagreement between theorists of television.

The first reason is the richness and variety of the programmes transmitted. The television screen can show viewers a documentary film, a feature film, a play performed in the studio, a quiz game, a concert, a football match, a religious service or a news story. This means that in one evening the viewer is confronted with entirely different situations: the reporting of a real event, a theatrical performance, or a game in which he is asked to take part. He must *believe*, for what he is shown is *taking place at the same time* as he sees it; he must *exercise his critical faculties* for he is watching a more or less artistic performance; he must take part in the game, and he engages in a kind of dialogue with the person

⁴ Angelo D'Alessandro, "TV, arte del movimento mimico," in *Lo spettacolo televisivo*. Rome, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1957.

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conducting it. Such examples could be multiplied, but those already given are sufficient to explain and justify the uncertainties of the theorists. On the basis of the great diversity of the programmes transmitted, it is easy to conclude that television is a vehicle "more like an aeroplane or a car than the cinema or the radio."⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that some theorists, considering things from this viewpoint, have stressed the content rather than the form of programmes.

Nevertheless, there is an altogether different reason for the disagreement of the critics on the nature of television.

The point is that with television, much more than with radio and the cinema, we come to grips with entirely new facts to which our mental processes are not accustomed. Our aesthetic concepts, which we have inherited from a 2,000 year old tradition, relate to works of art which are, so to speak, crystallized in solid material—marble, paper, canvas, etc. . . .

But radio, cinema and television cannot be included in these traditional concepts. Here we are dealing with light and shade, vibrations of sound and light (especially in radio and television) which die away even as they come into being. Nothing remains of them. That is why we are tempted to deny their existence.

But we must try to weave a web that can capture these new experiences of life. In other words we need to find a new aesthetic formula for analysing their characteristics.

Leaving aside the traditional formulas, we might try to define art as a series of actions carried out by man with specific instruments (the pen, the brush, the chisel, etc.) and with different materials (paper, canvas, marble or wax), to make his inner visions *perceptible to others*, i.e. to arouse particular sensations in others. (Every artist, moreover, uses a technique peculiar to his art—the painter's way of laying on his colours, for instance.) There can be no art without a public, for ultimately art is only *communication*. Works of art *cannot exist without the perceptive capacity of the public*. By using an instrument, a material and a technique, the artist *gives concrete form* to his work.

As soon as an *instrument*, a *material* and a *technique* become available, man has a new art form at his disposal, at least potentially. This applies, precisely, to television.

⁵ Rudolph Arnheim. *La radio cerca la sua forma*. Rome, Hoepli, 1957.

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In television we have, without any possible doubt, an instrument (the camera and other technical equipment), a material (for after all, sound waves and light waves are themselves a *material*), and a technique (the artist must carry out a series of operations which are by no means identical with those carried out by a film director or the producer of a play).

Television can therefore legitimately be regarded as a new art, at least potentially. This certainly does not mean that every television programme must be a work of art, or was intended to be.

Another question arises here which was raised in almost identical terms at the advent of the cinema and, before that, at the advent of printing.

The cinema, printing and television may serve as vehicles for the most widely different communications. The printer may use the same type for a poem by Rimbaud or an advertising poster. In television, the cathode ray tube may offer us, on its lines, the latest political news, a commercial announcement, or the *Persae* of Aeschylus. The *technique* used to make these different subjects *perceptible* and to give them *existence* is undoubtedly identical in the three cases.

The same conclusions must be drawn as have already been drawn in regard to the cinema, printing and radio, namely, that television is *always*, and above all, a means of *communication*, even though in some cases it can be an art.

It now remains to be seen how we can define the means of expression peculiar to television as an *art*. In other words what, if any, are its specific features? We must also consider and evaluate its limitations and possibilities as a means of *communication*.

Television Between the Cinema and the Radio

The first question which arises in a discussion on the art of television is that of the nature of television. Its similarities to the radio, on the one hand, and the cinema, on the other, are striking. Like radio, it is broadcast by electro-magnetic waves and is received in the home, reaching the family circle never penetrated by entertainments before the popularization of Marconi's inven-

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tion. Like the cinema, it communicates by pictures and words simultaneously.

It is here, precisely, that controversy begins. Is television radio enriched by pictures or, conversely, is it cinema broadcast in the same way as radio? The question is not as vain as it seems. For those who maintain that television is derived from radio also believe that speech plays a more important part than pictures in televised communication. On the other hand, those who maintain that television and cinema are "two aspects of the same phenomenon, two different aspects of the art of expressing oneself in moving pictures"⁶ give pictures the predominant rôle—which is bound to affect both the critical assessment of programmes and the actual style of their presentation.

In an interview with a journalist from *Cinémonde*, in 1953, René Clair observed: "I have never seen anything on television which could not be shown on a cinema screen." Philip Bate, on the other hand, asserts that "television is nothing but an extension of . . . radio. Pictures have been added to sound, just as thirty years ago sound was added to pictures in the cinema."⁷

It is true enough that television and radio have more than one characteristic in common: both use electro-magnetic waves; both can transmit events or performances instantaneously; both are put out by a broadcasting company.

The similarities between television and cinema are also quite evident. The small screen "conjugates" pictures and sound to make a significant communication. There is no doubt that the movement of the pictures, the manner of cutting and camera distance are factors which help to retain the spectators' attention. It is equally obvious that television writers cannot neglect the picture and its significance and rely solely on speech for communication.

It must not be forgotten that in television the picture is not as impressive as it is in the cinema; it is subject to limitations of different kinds. The question this raises is, precisely, that of the limitations of television as an art form and as a means of

⁶ Renato May, *Civiltà delle immagini*, Rome, Cinque Lune, 1956.

⁷ Philip Bate, "Ballet, Opera and Music," *Television in the Making*, Ed. Paul Rotha, London, The Focal Press, 1956, pp. 69-76.

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communication—a question which will be examined more thoroughly later on. For the present, we must consider the effects of two different concepts of the nature of television on the structure of television entertainment and communication, on the choice of programmes and on the rôle which television itself must play in relation to the other means of communication.

Marcel L'Herbier⁸ considers that "television is generally more phonic than pictorial", while H. Billen and A. Brincourt affirm that eloquence retains its rights in television and, hence, that exclusive rights cannot be accorded to the picture alone. Georges Barnes⁹ confirms that the public should be *guided* by speech. This predominance of speech is accompanied by a particular quality of speech on television, a quality which is also to be found in radio speech: the quiet, intimate, confidential quality of speech "from the heart to the ear" (O. Foerster). The friendly and confidential quality of televised communication obviously could not fail to affect the relationship between television and its public. But it also has its effect even in the extremely important matter of choosing entertainment programmes and the contents of news reports.

If one takes this view of television, stressing its confidential, quiet and intimate character, the most suitable programme material is undoubtedly intimate theatre. Iglesia, for example, admits that he has chosen "the path of invention and fiction" because, in his opinion, television lends itself better to the creation of works of art than to the objective reproduction of reality.

On the other hand, there are those who maintain that television and the cinema are akin, and who consequently emphasize the importance of the picture for purposes of televised communication. R. Greene of Columbia University maintains that the key to visual writing is the charade, by which he means an idea expressed and represented by means of a symbolic representation. The idea may originally have been expressed in words but the charade transposes it symbolically.

According to this theory, the picture, and especially the televised picture, is only a reflection of the real world. (Marcel

⁸ Marcel L'Herbier, "Pouvoirs de la télévision" in *Lo spettacolo televisivo*, op. cit.

⁹ Georges Barnes, "Radiodiffusion et TV," *Cahiers de Radio-Télévision*, Paris, No. 11, 1958.

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L'Herbier says it would be possible not to call it a picture at all, since the television screen does not produce pictures, but only lines composed of intermittent electronic signals.) According to N. Vedrès, television has the faculty of continually destroying its prefabricated pictures and substituting more and more *living* pictures. Several critics are convinced that *video* is only a translucent crystal which filters the images of reality—that it does not convey *documents*, but reality itself, or rather, the shadow or reflection of reality.

If television is considered from this very different angle, it is clear that its content will also change completely. According to L'Herbier, "Reality is the spice of television . . . this margin of unpredictability gives live transmissions an incomparable interest . . ." Above all, television has the faculty of capturing the dramatic element in events and human encounters. That is the opinion of the Italian critic, T. Kezich, and of many other writers.

According to this second theory, television, being an instrument available to modern man for knowing and representing the reality of human life, can above all be used as a means of civic and social education.

The fact of tracing the origin of television back to radio or, conversely, to the cinema, is not without its effects on the structure of the language of television, the choice of programmes, the emergence of new types of entertainment (televised games, variety shows, surveys etc.) and, lastly, on the relationships between television and its audience. We might draw the following diagram:

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Radio	Cinema
Speech	Picture
Intimacy and surrealism	Realism
Contemplation or evasion	Awareness and
Dreams	social education

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But this diagram, though convenient like all diagrams, is nevertheless rather far from reality.

The fact is that the concept of the cinema and television as two distinct manifestations of the language of pictures can no longer be maintained. The error, which results from the way the problem is presented, lies in having placed speech beside pictures and treated it as an adjunct to them. Neither the cinema nor television confines itself to representing reality by pictures, while using speech only to fill in the gaps in those pictures. The cinema tends increasingly towards the integral representation of reality. In this framework, speech is *inside* the picture, not *beside* it.

Television is not cinema but, in my opinion, it is following the same course, for it was born of the same need: to *represent* reality completely but by means of different *instruments*, a different *material* and a different *technique* in other words, by a *different art*.

The greater or lesser emphasis on speech or picture in each programme is due solely to the different sensibilities of the authors. We are dealing with a new art; and every art develops in three directions, which are determined by three different factors: the development of tools and techniques; the demands of the social environment; and the personalities of the artists who lead the development of the art in one direction or another by using these techniques and trying to satisfy these demands.

The problem which now confronts us is this: who, primarily, is the television author? And next, what are the difficulties and limitations he has to overcome? What is the series of operations he has to perform in producing his work? How do they differ from the operations performed by a film author?

We shall now attempt to find an answer to each of these questions.

The Television Author's Work

Several experts have frequently observed that it is difficult to define a television author. It may be considered that the author is the person who puts over a programme conceived by others, or the *producer*, i.e. the person who chooses the text, the director, the actors, etc. . . . In other cases, the author may be the writer of the

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text or even the person who presents it. Finally, the author of a television programme is the person who stamps it with his personality. The person generally called the author, however, is the director, who begins his work with a text he has chosen himself or which has been chosen for him. It is on his reading and interpretation of that text that his creative work depends. The text exists before it is *transposed* or *translated* (these terms are very important here). That is why several experts are inclined to deny the possibility of an art of television and to assert that, on the contrary, television is merely a means of transmitting different forms of artistic expression.

If this view is not accepted, at what point does the original creative work of the television author begin? It is evident that the transposition of an already existing text (drama, comedy, novel, etc.) from one form to another raises a series of problems and difficulties, whether it is the text of a play, a novel or a film. There are problems of narrative structure which arise when the work is transposed from one means of communication to another. It might be thought that such difficulties arise mainly with novels or stories, but they also arise with plays and films. It is readily accepted that the story line of a novel cannot be faithfully followed on the television screen. It would be almost impossible to follow the author in all the twists and turns of his story. Besides, the situation of a television viewer is quite different from that of a novel reader, who devotes much more time to his recreation. The first task of the television author is to make a time synthesis, which will lead him to eliminate certain parts of the literary work and to emphasize others. In the second place, he must cast the leading characters in the novel, and his choice will clearly depend on his sensibility and imagination. Lighting, camera angles and sets are also important factors in achieving a successful result and a felicitous interpretation of the text the author has before him. The quality of the text may differ very widely, however; it may range from a mere outline to a famous work by a great writer. In the latter case, can the director be given all the credit for the merits of the transmission? For in the case of a novel by Balzac or Dostoievsky or a play by Shakespeare, we must recognize that the man who invents the characters, the inherent logic of their actions, the coherence of their personalities and the dramatic

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events of their lives is the true creator of the *drama*, the *poet* in the etymological sense of the word. The director who translates the work into good television pictures remains, in this case, a *director* and not an *author* in the true sense of the term. His work shows skill (in the highest sense of the term), but not art. If he has no more than a mere outline in which the characters are only very vaguely suggested, his creative work will necessarily be more intense and more personal. In other words, there will be a gradation in his work, an inverse ratio between the quality of the written text and the creative value of its transposition to television. It may also happen that the author is not provided with a text and writes one himself. The reasons why this does not happen very often are quite accidental, and derive from certain well established production habits (not only in television, but even in the cinema). It is, in fact, very difficult to entrust the production of a text to its author, even where this is practicable, for experienced directors are preferred. This again confirms that directing is regarded as a *craft* rather than as an *art*.

The same problem arises in film productions, and it may be said that in recent years, when producers have shown a preference for subjects taken from great literary works, the misunderstanding has become even more evident.

Indeed, the difficulty of formulating an unambiguous theory concerning the author of a televised or even a filmed work, arises precisely from the fact that the relationship between the director and the writer of the text varies from one case to another, from the vaguely sketched idea which is no more than a stimulus for the director, to the great novel or famous play in which the characters have been created once and for all. D'Alessandro observes, in this connexion, that the attitude an author adopts towards the text proposed to him may be of three kinds: faithfulness to the spirit of the work, faithfulness to the spirit and the form, complete independence in regard to both these elements. In this context, we could go from *craft* to *art*, and from *translation* to *creation*.

The Limitations and Possibilities of Television

In trying to define what we mean by art, we referred to the instrument, the material and the technique. These terms will now be

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very helpful for understanding the work of the television director.

The first difference which strikes us in attempting to distinguish between films and television is the smaller size of the television screen as compared with the cinema screen. It may be added that, in recent years, the cinema has shown a tendency to develop its spatial possibilities. Television, on the other hand, develops its pictures in depth, wherever possible, never in width. The consequences, within the framework of a standard television language, are multiplications: the foreground becomes the essential element in television; general views must be avoided; the number of actors appearing on the screen at once cannot be more than three or four. It might be said that, with its limitations, the television screen seems destined to be a frame for the human face. And it is a fact that in technical television terminology camera distance is defined not by the space surrounding the actor, but by his size. In television, space is defined according to the movements and actions of the actor. It is impossible to imagine an original television production using a shot like those of Charlie Chaplin seen from behind as he walks away down a long, long road.

But in the end, what should be one of the main limitations of televised expression has led to one of its new possibilities—namely, a capacity for psychological penetration of the character which neither the cinema nor the theatre possesses.

Several experts have remarked on this essential characteristic of the language of television. May asserts that "the first and essential object of every effective television picture is man." Norman Swallow, referring to the documentary commentator, says that "television is and will remain a medium linked to a personality."¹⁰ D'Alessandro develops a theory of televised communication, which he defines as "the art of mimic movement". It is, indeed, the movements of man which outline space in television.

The validity of this theory is confirmed by the success of televised games, which are essentially bound up with the human personality as it really is.

Compared with the film director, however, the television director has a great obstacle to overcome.

¹⁰ Norman Swallow, "Documentary, TV, Journalism," *Television in the Making, op. cit.*

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Whereas the film author carries out his work in different phases, which range from collaboration in cutting to the final editing of the various sequences, the television author is obliged to choose, in the control booth, the pictures which will immediately appear on the screens of thousands of viewers. He cannot afford any mistakes or hesitation. The pictures have barely appeared on the screen before they vanish, and their creator is no more able than the viewer to go back and correct or improve them. These facts have two consequences: one which defines the author's personality and, basically, his *vocation*, and another which relates to the time taken to represent reality on television.

In order to understand the significance of the first point, concerning the relationship between the author's personality and his work, it will be useful to consider the difference between a good writer and a good speaker.

It is well known that there are writers renowned for the perfection of their style, who cannot speak in public. On the other hand, there are able speakers who can capture the attention of an audience by the direct and spontaneous character of their eloquence. It is obvious that the mental processes of the two groups are not the same: whereas the former need to reflect and concentrate in order to express their thoughts, the latter have quicker reactions which enable them to find an effective form of expression at once. The same applies to television and film authors. The relationship between films and television is the same as that between a book and a speech.

Here again we come up against the essential characteristics of television: immediacy, spontaneity and topicality.

Television is thus a kind of *immediate communication*, which amounts to saying that in television *expression* and *representation* coincide, i.e. that the time for creation is the same as the time for showing the work, that the time element is the same for the director as it is for the spectator. Can we therefore conclude that television time is identical with real time, whereas cinema time is, so to speak, artificial? In my opinion, such a conclusion cannot be drawn. In an artistic creation, time is always idealized. The author of a television programme, even if it is a report on a real event, can never respect the exact time. Consider, for example, a televised reportage of a religious or social ceremony. Neither the camera,

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nor the cameramen can be everywhere at once. Then again, even if several cameras are used, the author must make a selection and confine himself to the parts which he considers the most important. At a later stage we shall consider what effect this has on the objectivity of news reporting. For the present, it is sufficient to have shown that the author of a television broadcast, whatever its object (documentation, news, creation of an original work), must remember that there is no later stage at which he can change the story line of his work. He must find a time synthesis there and then to satisfy the public.

The small size of the screen, the absence of any subsequent editing, the immediate and spontaneous nature of the communication, the need to develop the story or drama by concentrating it, so to speak, in the faces of the leading characters and entrusting it to their movements, are, in short, the limitations within which the television author must operate in performing his work.

These very limitations, however, may give rise to possibilities for original expression, to the extent that authors succeed in mastering them and turning them to their advantage.

The television screen can gain in depth what it lacks in width. The television author will find it difficult to show us the grandeur and beauty of the physical world in which men live and work; but he can show us its reflection in the eyes and faces of men. What is more, he can make us discover the human face in all its complexity and beauty and depth of expression.

The picture which television manages to offer us has, as yet, nothing of the marvelous beauty captured by the cinema image. This obliges authors to limit the elements within the frame as much as possible.

Yet this limitation may itself be transformed into an advantage for the author who knows how to get the best out of it. For here we come to one of the greatest possibilities of the art of television. By concentrating the dramatic conflict in a single character or a few characters, it can come closer to the spectator and make him participate in a way which, though less emotional and impassioned than participation in the cinema, is no less lively because it is more conscious. In other words, the television viewer can participate even at the rational level.

Moreover, the author enjoys greater freedom in his narration.

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For instance, he can refer to his character in the third person, i.e. he can disassociate himself from the character whenever he considers it appropriate. He can use the *inner voice*. The character on the screen does not move his lips, but the voice we hear is his—it is his *inner voice*: we, the spectators, are thus inside the character himself and achieve maximum participation. The thoughts and feelings expressed by his words are reflected like waves in his eyes and face. This is one of the possibilities of television: representation of a drama, not in its external development (the facts), but in its psychological development. In this connexion, D'Alessandro says that the narrative structure of the television drama should, indeed, be based on the development of the characters.¹¹

Within the framework of this new prospect, we can again consider the problem of the relationship between pictures and speech in television. It is obvious that in a world in which the main, if not the only, element is man, speech is much more important than it is in films. In the film world, man is often only one of the elements in the landscape. Hence speech cannot be substituted for pictures; but in the world which television describes, speech is one of the most important elements.

So far, at least—since we can make no assumptions about the future—the limitation is in the representing of the world of nature. Televised travelogues and documentaries are generally affected by this limitation. Many of them owe their success to the concentration of interest on human encounters and the discovery of a common level of humanity among the persons shown. In certain cases this is a genuine discovery which we owe to television. So once again the language of television owes its originality to its peculiar limitations (which recall Arnheim's theory of cinema language) in so far as the author is able to turn them to his advantage.

This discussion of the technical limitations of television cannot be concluded without touching on the problem of the television actor, for the actor accustomed to playing film or stage parts finds himself subject, in the television studio, to a number of limitations which present many difficulties for him to overcome.

¹¹ Angelo D'Alessandro. *Lo scenario televisivo*, Milan, Corticelli, 1959.

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Giorgio Albertazzi, a stage actor who has worked for Italian television, recognizes that there are special difficulties in television acting: "In television, the actor is faced with special difficulties, such as the need to know his lines by heart and to synchronize action and words to the second and to the millimetre . . .

. . . As soon as the little red light on the camera goes on, the actor must feel in advance that it is his turn, for it is essential not to be caught *in repose* . . . Moreover, he must be conscious of the distance between him and the audience, which is sitting no more than two yards from the screen; he must keep himself in a state of constant tension and maintain an uninterrupted flow of expression, because he is so close to the viewer. . . . The television actor, revealed to the uttermost in the economy of his movements and the measure of his artistic expression, has at least as much responsibility as the director for his *discourse* with the public. . . ."¹²

These confessions by a stage actor who has gone over to television are useful for an appreciation of the very special difficulties which television entails for its interpreters. Brincourt rightly observes that the television actor may be compared to an acrobat working without a net. As a result, his style of performance must be wholly different from that of the stage actor, and especially the film actor. It is mainly on facial expression, rather than movements of the whole body, that the television actor must rely to create his character. He must therefore develop an entirely different style of acting characterized by authenticity. He must master all the resources of mime at his disposal, to the greatest possible extent. His delivery must, in a sense, be a "micro-delivery," for the slightest tensing of his facial muscles will have an effect on the public. It has been pointed out that television compels the actor for the first time to ask himself what expression Nero must have worn when watching Rome burn. Another Italian stage actor, Paolo Stoppa, admitted to a journalist from the *Radiocorriere* that television had given the public, and even actors themselves, a taste for truth. "Television," he added, "is inexorably destroying a certain type of outdated, rhetorical and conventional acting . . ."

¹² Giorgio Albertazzi. "La TV e l'attore," *Sipario*, January 1954.

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Here again, we have a very important example of the advantages which an intelligent and sensitive author can derive from the technical limitations of television. For in television the author can establish a creative collaboration with the actor of which no other examples are to be found in the traditional theatre. It might even be said that, when he is really aware of his possibilities, the television actor is, in a sense, co-author of the televised play. At the same time his performance, confined as it is within such narrow and rigid limits, penetrates deep into the psychology of the character, showing us, as it were, the full extent of the inner landscapes of whose range and beauty we were only dimly aware.

Finally, it seems clear from this very brief examination of television's technical limitations, that they can always be converted by a skilful and intelligent author into so many potentialities and advantages.

The limitations of television, however, are not solely technical. There are limitations of other kinds, in particular, sociological and ideological limitations, which are not so easy to overcome. We shall assess their importance and extent in connexion with televised news reporting.

Authenticity and Distortion of Televised News

As regards news reporting, there is no doubt that television, no less than radio, should be considered as one of the most important socio-cultural conditioning factors in our society.

Televised news appears to be the most authentic form of news presentation. It has the tremendous advantage of the picture which enables us, or should enable us, to participate, as it were, in the events which the television report or news service is presenting. In addition, television shows us these events *at the same time as* they occur. This is why experts on information media have said that television gives the spectator the gift of ubiquity. After examining the situation more closely, however, it is easy to see that it is not as favourable as it may appear.

In reality, before reaching the public, information about real events, which should be the main object of television as a means of communication, passes through a number of filters which leave

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it irremediably mutilated and distorted. These filters are of several kinds and operate at different levels.

First of all, it must be borne in mind that the range of television news coverage is not as great as might be supposed, for the complexity of the technical equipment (cameras, microphones, cables, control trucks, etc.) in fact makes television much less mobile than radio or the press.

It must also be remembered that major political, social or cultural events cannot always be covered, and that even where they can, the observation conditions in which reporters and cameramen have to work are not ideal.

At the lowest level, therefore, i.e. that of the technical conditions for the work, television reporting suffers some mutilation. Among the numerous events of the day, it is necessary to select *those which can be shot*. Of these events, it is again necessary to select only those aspects which come within the field of view of the camera, depending on its position. Finally, the selection made is affected by the reporter's personality, which means that it is not entirely objective.

At a higher level, that of organization, we come on still finer filters. It must be recognized, at this stage of our inquiry, that the structure of the television organization exerts a remarkable influence on television news reporting.

The great mass communication media, television and radio in particular, are now faced with an almost insoluble dilemma: if they are able to escape the influence of ideological propaganda, which is exerted in totalitarian countries, they inevitably succumb to economic forces, which use them as tools, subjugating them to the tyranny of advertising. It is not difficult to understand how this twofold tyranny is imposed on the public through television news reporting, especially if, for cultural reasons or merely on account of age, the public is immature in its critical faculties. Television reporting which appears to have the objectivity of the picture can, on the other hand, be manipulated, shaped and altered by a great many expedients: the amount of coverage given to a news item, its place among other items, the choice of shots, etc. An apparently objective documentary on events occurring in a country whose régime has a different ideology from that of the country to which the television organization belongs, will show

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badly dressed people, poor houses etc. The scenes themselves may perhaps be authentic, but they will be deliberately chosen to give a certain impression of *the way things are in the country shown*. That is only one example, but any number of others could be given, for television is even more subject than other information media to the forces which dominate society.

On the other hand, television news reporting provides an element of participation which is lacking in other information media. If television reporting of an event of interest to the community is carried out under normal conditions, its value lies in the immediate character of the communication. The reporter transmits to us, direct, those aspects of the subject which he considers most significant. He has neither the time nor the means to correct his impressions. In this case the visual information explains itself by its wealth of detail and gives the viewer a knowledge and an understanding of the event which may perhaps go beyond the intentions of the reporter and the directors of the television organization.

This result cannot be obtained, however, if viewers are not able to *read* the television pictures. We have already observed that a television broadcast always constitutes a dialogue and that, in discussing television, one must not forget one of the participants—certainly not the least important—namely the public.

We must now examine the sociological composition and the psychological situation of the television public.

The Television Audience: Problems of Criticism

One of the phenomena that is most characteristic of the television audience is its extremely rapid growth, especially in certain regions. In Italy, for example, the number of licensed viewers increased from 360,000 in 1955 to 1,000,000 in 1958, and 2,800,000 in 1961. In the United States the same growth curve was to be observed from 1952 (17,000,000 viewers) to 1955 (37,410,000 viewers).*

* These figures, of course, are thirteen years old in 1976, and they reflected European viewing when they were current. For more recent figures see footnote, p. 138.—Ed.

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It would be very interesting to consider the changes in this curve, which is never uniform. But what concerns us here is the composition of the audience and its demands on the small screen.

Several experts have carried out research on this subject and we shall endeavour to summarize their results.

The keenest interest in television is shown in the lower age groups: from 5 to 7 years. According to a survey carried out in Cambridge (Massachusetts), American children spend two and a half hours a day watching television.

The results of a survey conducted in Italy show that interest in television programmes begins as early as the first year and remains strong until the tenth year. The geographical and socio-cultural environment greatly affects the interest curve.

As regards the relationship between the cultural level and interest in television, the figures are equally instructive; interest in television is inversely proportional to the cultural level. A survey carried out by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1950 confirmed that out of several families, the one which first purchases a television set will probably be the one with the lowest educational level.

The major survey conducted by Unesco in 1954 produced similar results; it was found that television enjoys a particularly marked success among children, illiterate adults and poorer families. This last named point conflicts with the forecasts made in the early days of television. In view of the high cost of television sets, it had been expected that television would remain a means of recreation for wealthier families. It has now been found that on the contrary, it appeals to the poorer classes and especially to people living in underdeveloped areas.

To these facts must be added another point which is also very important, at least in Italy. It is not only people who have bought television sets who watch television programmes. A very large amount of viewing takes place in public places (bars, parish halls, cultural clubs etc.). Statistics compiled by the *Servizio Opinioni della Radiotelevisione Italiana* show that certain programmes are watched by about 13,000,000 people, of whom 58 per cent have only an elementary education and 7 per cent a university education. Various data are also available concerning children and adolescents. Our inquiry showed a very high degree of interest, up to 98

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per cent, between the ages of 8 and 12; 66 per cent of children in the south and 59 per cent in the north watched television daily.

The data summarized above are sufficient to show the special responsibilities which a communication medium such as television should assume towards its audience, especially an audience which, as we have seen, is characterized by a generally low level of education or by extreme youth.

Matters are still further complicated by the fact that the television public comprises groups which differ very widely from the socio-cultural viewpoint. It is here that the most difficult problem arises: how to find a common denominator for groups which differ as to age, education, habits, tastes and needs. Television authors must prepare scripts which the majority of viewers can understand, which do not disturb their consciences, which do not cause fear or panic (the television audience is very easily alarmed), and which are educational.

We may now consider the psychological situation of the television audience and whether it differs from that of the cinema audience.

This problem has already been investigated in connexion with different age levels by psychologists and sociologists. It is clear that the situation of the television viewer is very different from that of the cinema spectator; and this difference might be summed up by saying that the television viewer is in a position to make a rational criticism, in the sense that he regards television mainly as a means of disseminating real information. The cinema spectator, on the other hand, by plunging, as it were, into the film world, seeks to forget his own world and the reality of his daily life.

The viewer *believes* in television, for generally speaking, he is convinced that the small screen, unlike the large screen, opens a window on the real lives of other people. The cinema spectator, on the other hand, knows that what he is being offered is only a dream, and accepts it as such. Of course, this no longer applies when the film is of some artistic merit or the audience has the capacity to criticize it. But as we know, artistic films represent a very small proportion of current production and the majority of cinema audiences are utterly untrained, especially adolescents and children.

Referring to the difference between the situation of the cinema

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goer and the television viewer D'Alessandro, taking a view so far accepted by all the authorities on films, observes that the interest aroused by a film is like that aroused by a dream. As regards television, he maintains that "The television picture, no matter what the environment in which it is shown, can hardly exert sufficient fascination to make us lose critical control of our sensations and plunge into the drama, whatever the quality of the transmission, for, on the contrary, we are compelled to use our full capacity for concentration, and hence to exercise our critical faculties."¹³

For children, the situation is different. They believe in television because the characters they see every day on the small screen have an almost magical prestige in their eyes. These characters are *real* because they speak to the children and look them in the eyes (which is very important). Their existence, however, is not the same as that of parents or teachers. Their qualities can only be defined by the word "magic."

Given the sociological composition and the psychological situation of the television audience which we have attempted to describe, what is the rôle of criticism?

It has often been said that confronted with television, the critics seem bewildered and uncertain.

Moreover, their uncertainty is quite justified in view of the uncertainty which still prevails about the theoretical aspects of television.

It is obvious that the principles on which critical judgments should be based are not yet firmly established. Is television an art or merely an instrument for disseminating other forms of art and for communication? Or, is it rather both at once? It must not be forgotten that television occupies a very special situation with regard to its audience, which makes the task of television critics even more complex. They are too much inclined to attempt aesthetic and intellectual evaluations which, whatever their merits, clearly do not suffice to change or improve the cultural policy of television organizations.

Before specifying what the basic principles of television criticism should be, it is necessary to clarify the very special relationship between television authors, critics and the public.

¹³ Angelo D'Alessandro, *op. cit.*

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The functions of criticism in regard to literature, the theatre and the cinema are sufficiently clear: it intervenes between author and public, to explain to the latter what the author meant, its task being not only to judge, but also to interpret.

In the case of television, the relationship is reversed. The critic's task is rather to enlighten the author on the public's reaction to his work; he is not only the interpreter of the author to the public, he is also the interpreter of the public to the author.

Hence criticism should be conducted at three different levels:

- (a) Criticism of the choice of text from the sociological viewpoint (appropriateness, possible reactions etc.);
- (b) Criticism of the content of the work (subject matter, aims, etc.);
- (c) Criticism of the means of expression employed by the author.

At each of these different levels, criticism must take the sociological viewpoint into account, given the importance of the public in the dialogue which television conducts with its audience.

Education in Television and in the Cinema

Confronted with the very keen interest displayed by children and illiterate adults in the new means of communication, many educationists are tempted to adopt a negative attitude, for they consider that television, being mainly characterized by its availability, constitutes a distraction and a waste of time which are by no means offset by the cultural advantages to be derived from it. A number of teachers in public schools in Italy admit that their work is largely frustrated by the influence of the new communication media, and of television in particular.

They also admit that when very popular television programmes are shown in the evening adult education classes are practically deserted.

Although these complaints are justified, it must be recognized that educationists in general have not yet properly understood the new rôle played by television in our time.

The writer believes that one of the most important tasks for educationists today is, precisely, to build a bridge between the

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training provided by schools and the influence of the mass communication media. It is no longer a question of rejecting these media, but of deriving the maximum benefit from them, which can be done by awakening an active critical spirit towards the new techniques among young people.

Given the abundance of entertainment which these techniques shower on our society, it is obvious that the first object of education in them should be the rejection of programmes. The first step is *to know when to switch off*.

The negative attitude of the educationist should stop there, however, for he then has two equally important tasks: education *by means of* the new techniques and education *in* them. We have heard a great deal about education of the young through films; television is now beginning to be discussed in this connexion. It might now be asked whether cinema teaching and television teaching can follow the same course.

In my opinion, all that has been said so far should suffice to convince the reader that the aims and methods of television teaching and cinema teaching are as different as the situation of cinema spectators and that of television viewers.

We have already seen that a cinema goer (especially an adolescent or a child) tends to *plunge* into the film as into a dream.

On the other hand, a television viewer (especially an illiterate or a child) regards television as a means of acquiring knowledge. This is shown very clearly by a survey carried out in Italy by the *Centro Italiano Femminile*. Three classes of persons were questioned: boys, mothers and school-teachers. Ninety per cent of the mothers and boys recognized that television taught them many things they could not have learned by other means.

It is obvious that the attitude of these children towards television was not a dream attitude; the situation of the television viewer (and the data mentioned above confirm this) is more rational than emotive, unlike the attitude towards films. Whereas one of the main concerns of the leader of a film society must be to arouse the audience from the *dreamlike* state into which it lapses, the leader of a television club is not faced with this task.

There is a second fundamental difference between cinema goers and television viewers. The *reading* of television pictures differs from the reading of a film. Whereas film pictures are linked

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together emotionally, the links connecting television pictures are more of a rational nature, because of the need to make the audience understand. The pace of television is usually slower than that of the cinema. Here again, therefore, there is a fundamental difference as regards education in the two techniques.

It might be thought at this point that, as television is less emotional than the cinema, it does not raise such serious educational problems. But the matter is not as simple as it may appear.

The author's personality is more in evidence in films than in television. Television remains a medium which is more rigidly controlled by the forces dominating modern society, whether economic or ideological. Hence education in television is necessary as an essential corollary to democratic education; and precisely for this reason, aesthetic appraisal of programmes is only its last achievement.

On the basis of these principles, it will not now be difficult to outline a basic plan for education in television.

It must not be forgotten, however, that education in television involves, essentially, education through television.

The following are what the writer considers to be the fundamental stages of education in television:

1. Correct reading of the picture. As we have seen, every detail may be of great importance for the reception of televised information.
2. Evaluation of the technical methods by which the pictures were obtained. This leads to an understanding of the limitations and possibilities the author has to work with in making his communication.
3. Knowledge of the organization for which the author is working—which influences what he can tell us or would like to tell us, in one direction or another.
4. Knowledge of the personality or personalities which express themselves in the televised production. Viewers frequently do not know who are the authors of different broadcasts.
5. Finally, aesthetic appraisal of the value of the broadcast.

This plan, which is, of course, merely an outline that every teacher will alter and amplify according to his own experience, enables us to proceed from rational understanding to evaluation

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of the technical resources, the merits and the social and ideological significance of programmes, to reception of the author's message, if any, and, finally, to an aesthetic appraisal, which will merely be the last step in television education and perhaps not the most important one.

Television can be, and sometimes certainly is, an art; but it is also an instrument by which men can communicate and come to know one another.

Television: The Critical View

Edited by Horace Newcomb

Some of the best examples of the growing body of criticism that seeks to establish and define the role of television in American culture are brought together in this unique anthology. In its broadest sense a collection of humanistic criticism, it extends beyond journalistic criticism which at its best is often as ephemeral as the medium itself, and supplements the social scientific research that deals primarily with audience responses rather than with the content of television.

Television: The Critical View reminds us that we have not yet created for television what one commentator has called a "climate of criticism." We are aware that television occupies a central position in American culture, yet those who are most conscious of cultural attitudes are often among the people who have neglected or scorned television without giving it proper attention. A true climate of criticism will require that most of the population take a serious approach to television.

The twenty essays in *Television: The Critical View* are directed toward the education of televiewers. The first section, *Seeing Television*, contains essays on specific popular shows like "The Waltons," "All in the Family," and "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" as well as more general selections on soap operas, comedies, westerns, news programs, and all of Norman Lear's productions. This section offers models for more practical television criticism and interpretation. The essays in the second section, *Thinking About Television*, consider the role of television in our culture—how it affects our view of the world and of ourselves. Does it distort our values as a nation, or reinforce them? The final section, *Defining Television*, presents articles on the aesthetics of television which compare it to other art forms and other media. The premise of each selection is that television, as a serious art form, must be analyzed in regard to both its content and what it does to its content.

About the Editor

Horace Newcomb teaches American Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County Campus, and has also taught at Cornell College, Iowa, and at Saginaw Valley College, Michigan. He is a former television critic for the *Baltimore Sun*, and the author of *TV: The Most Popular Art* (1974).

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