

The Popular Arts in America: A Reader

William M. Hammel



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edited by

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Preface

In *The Popular Arts in America: A Reader* I have tried to provide a balanced and comprehensive coverage of popular culture in its major manifestations. I have chosen to emphasize the critical examination of each manifestation in order to reveal the actual and potential values each offers as an art. After a general examination of "sense and sensibility" in the popular arts, four areas are considered in readable and provocative selections by a variety of influential writers: (1) the movies, (2) television and radio, (3) popular music (rarely treated in anthologies), and (4) newspapers, magazines, and popular reading. I have set substance, currency, relevance, intrinsic interest, and reasonable length as the principal criteria for my choices.

The questions and suggested topics for discussion or writing will, I hope, enhance the book's usefulness in courses ranging from English and mass media to communications or journalism, all of them aimed at developing critical judgment in the popular arts.

For suggestions and encouragement in shaping this anthology I would like to give special thanks to Professors Theodore Peterson of the University of Illinois, Donald Schueler and Cresap S. Watson of Louisiana State University in New Orleans, Thomas Inge of Virginia Commonwealth University, Reuel Denney and J. M. Neil of the University of Hawaii, Rod Whitaker and Richard Byrne of the University of Texas, Ted Perry of New York University, and to William A. Pullin of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, who inspired the project.

WILLIAM M. HAMMEL

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**The Popular Arts
in America: A Reader**

Introduction

Current usage defines "popular arts" as those arts that appeal to the masses and that do not require a high level of intellectual or cultural refinement. Such works as James Joyce's Ulysses and T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, much contemporary symphonic music, and abstract art have a far more restricted audience than do films like The Sound of Music or Love Story, rock music, or pop art. We could say that the popular arts are more "democratic" since they are accessible to larger numbers of people and that "high art" tends to be "aristocratic," the province of the more cultivated.

The popular arts often depend on a mass audience for their very existence. Writing costs the author little except his time, and books are relatively inexpensive to print; but the technology involved in producing a film or TV show requires a huge investment that must be recouped through wide distribution. Thus the producer of a film, TV show, or rock album must pay greater attention to the factors that will ensure a large audience: accessibility, in-offensiveness, and so on; the novelist, the poet, and the artist are significantly freer from such mundane pressures.

The contents of this book give evidence of another quality of many popular arts: their newness. Whether they are new media (movies, TV, radio) or new forms of traditional media (rock and soul music, the "non-fiction novel," the multi-media happening), many popular arts have not been around long enough to acquire the aura of classical forms (even if they strove for such status). Folk arts, such as ballads, originated in prehistory, but the current

explosion of the popular arts was made possible only by modern technology, which gave the masses enough affluence and leisure to become an audience for the popular arts. Moreover, many critics have shown how each new form or new medium has been greeted with scorn by the intellectual establishment. When the first English novels appeared in the eighteenth century, they were considered fit only for occupying the idle hours of indolent young ladies. It was not until much later that the novel attained the eminence of a major literary form. Similarly, in a recent film (set in the future), one of the characters is upset when his "classic" book collection—original Superman and Batman comics—is seized to pay his debts. On the other hand, many people have suggested that the popular arts are part of our disposable culture, designed not to last, and that it is the exceptional popular work of art that will endure.

The case of movies is an interesting and relevant one for our consideration. First condemned as vulgar and noxious, the motion picture has gained significantly in stature. Many people now speak of the film as an art, without feeling the need to specify "popular"; indeed, many of today's films could hardly be called popular, for they are obviously aimed at an intellectual elite. As yet, few people speak of television or rock music as arts. Even though they might speak of a seventeenth-century diary or an ancient Scottish folk song in terms of art, they would not apply the magic word to a network news special or to a major work of the Beatles or Bob Dylan. This collection of essays is intended to help correct this situation by demonstrating that these new arts contain some of the most exciting artistic developments of our time and that anyone who seriously hopes to understand contemporary American culture cannot possibly ignore the popular arts.

*These statements should not be interpreted to imply that Simon and Garfunkel's *The Sounds of Silence*, for instance, is an artistic achievement equal to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Although both works can be seen in the context of an artistic tradition and both deal with twentieth-century man's alienation and rootlessness, there is little doubt that Eliot's is the more subtle and fully orchestrated piece. But the point is that each work exists for a different purpose and appeals to a different esthetic taste. We need not choose between them. Ideally, we should be able to appreciate what is worthwhile in both the popular and the aristocratic arts.*

The different kinds of arts—fine art, folk art, popular art, high art, low art—serve two principal purposes: entertainment and instruction. We read a book, magazine, or newspaper, see a

film or TV show because we enjoy using and expanding our minds, our senses, and our emotions.

Twentieth-century man is surrounded with informational, communicative, and esthetic productions on a scale that would have astounded even the wildest visionary of the last century. The new media of radio, movies, and TV have truly shrunk the world to something of a "global village," to use one of McLuhan's phrases, and despite pronouncements and predictions to the contrary, printed matter is still very much with us. Books are selling at record rates every year, national magazines still boast enormous numbers of subscribers, and newspapers, though fewer in number, are still very much a part of our daily lives.

Studying this ever-increasing variety of mass communicative devices that are the popular arts presents some difficulties. One problem is that the popular arts lend themselves to an almost infinite number of approaches. The sociologist or cultural anthropologist might wish to study the nature of the society that supports these popular arts; the Freudian psychologist might consider the homosexual wish-dreams of famous comic-book duos; the theologian might look at the religious significance of the Peanuts comic strip; the historian of music might find Bach lingering in a Beatles song; the literary critic might see much worthwhile in the narrative structure of a film. The essays in this collection have not been chosen because they represent one approach to the popular arts; actually they represent a multiplicity of approaches. They have been selected in an attempt to clarify what the popular arts are doing and what they should be doing better.

If the artist has "the human ability to make things" (as one dictionary defines art), the critic judges how well the artist makes things. The criteria for judgment will of course differ with the form or medium. For example, we might ask that a newspaper be accurate, present a balance of opinions and sufficient variety and breadth of material, and be pleasingly arranged. We might demand that a film have polished technique, good acting, interesting plot or subject, an awareness of the complexity of the issues it deals with, and so on.

Such considerations crystallize into a second major problem in studying the popular arts, the problem of taste. Although taste can never be absolute, it does seem to develop with practice. The more we read, see, hear—in short, the more we are exposed to—the easier it becomes to differentiate the imaginative from the banal, the creative from the cliché, the truly original from the merely flashy, the honest from the manipulative. Since the popular arts

are so very dependent on a mass audience, the level of cultural development or education of the people has a direct bearing on the quality of these arts. Today's popular arts are quite a bit more sophisticated than they were twenty years ago, a fact that speaks well for today's mass audience.

The essays in this book, representing as they do a wide variety of backgrounds and opinions, have one thing in common: they all seek to understand and explain what the popular arts are, what they are doing, and why. By identifying patterns and raising vital questions, these selections contribute to our understanding of our popular arts, ourselves, and our society.

1

THE POPULAR ARTS

The Popular Arts and the Popular Audience

Russel Nye

Russel Nye is a professor of English at Michigan State University and author of the recent study of popular arts entitled The Unembarrassed Muse, from which this essay on the relationship between popular art and its audience is taken.

The arts that have most validity for the greatest part of the population are not considered arts at all.

—JOHN DEWEY

The term “the popular arts” cannot be used accurately to describe a cultural situation in Western civilization prior to the late eighteenth century. Certainly large numbers of people before that time found pleasant and rewarding ways of cultural diversion, but not until the emergence of mass society in the eighteenth century—that is, until the incorporation of the majority of the population into society—could either popular culture or popular art be said to exist.

Obviously, there had always been two artistic traditions—the high and low comedy of Greece, the drama and circuses of Rome, medieval cathedral plays and street fairs, Renaissance court-drama and tavern farces—separated by lay and ecclesiastical controls. The appearance of a predominantly middle-class civilization in the Western world, accompanied by the decrease in size and importance of the so-called “elite” and “lower” classes, drastically changed the cultural pattern. The eighteenth century thus saw the establishment of a triple artistic tradition—the folk and high art of the past, plus a new popular level of art (although the lines of demarcation were never so clear cut). Prior to the eighteenth cen-

tury the serious artist created for a relatively small minority on whom his subsistence depended. Though Sam Johnson looked for a patron, he succeeded without one, for by his time the elite no longer could legislate culturally for the powerful middle class.

The primary condition for the emergence of popular culture was a great leap in population growth in Europe and the Americas, and the subsequent concentration of people into cohesive urban or near-urban units with common social, economic, and cultural characteristics. The result was the creation of a huge market for entertainment, with identifiable desires and responses. The existence of what is now called "the entertainment industry" can be easily recognized as early as 1750, when marketable cultural goods began to be manufactured in quantity to meet the needs of this mass public, to the profit of those who produced them.

After revolution broke the domination of cultural standards by the upper classes, the spread of education and literacy through the great middle class and below created a new audience which represented the tastes of the population at large. Control of the means of cultural production and transmission passed from a previously privileged elite to the urbanized, democratized middle classes. By the middle of the nineteenth century nearly everyone in the United States (except slaves and Indians) was minimally literate; by the middle of the twentieth three-quarters of American adults possessed a high school education or better. This mass society had much more leisure time, much more disposable income, and it needed a new art—neither folk nor elite—to use the one and fill the other.

Popular culture was also a product of modern technology and its new techniques for duplicating and multiplying materials (high speed presses, cheaper paper, new ways of graphic representation) along with much more efficient methods of production and distribution. Print became pervasive in nineteenth-century society, as machines widened and cheapened the public's access to the printed page. The twentieth century opened other channels of cultural communication to even large audiences by introducing quite revolutionary methods of reproducing and transmitting sound and image—the phonograph, film, radio, television. Print is no longer the chief means of contact between artist and public, for the mass of today's population is accessible in a variety of ways. The average American between his second and his sixty-fifth year spends three thousand entire days, almost nine years of his life, watching television; by the time the average five-year-old enters

kindergarten, he has spent more time before the family television set than the average college student has spent in classrooms over a four-year span.

The growth of a large popular audience, increasingly accessible through the mass media, caused in turn a demand for artists to satisfy its cultural needs. To these artists success lay not in pleasing a rich patron and his small, aristocratic, cultural circle, but in satisfying an increasingly broad "popular" audience. By the middle of the eighteenth century a large number of artists, especially novelists and dramatists (genres most adaptable to mass consumption) aimed their work directly at this new, general audience. The popular artist had to make his own tradition by investigating his market, calculating its desires, and evolving devices (many of which he adapted from folk art) for reaching it. He became a kind of professional (personified clearly, for example, by Daniel Defoe in England), who created for profit the kind of art that the public wanted.

The appearance of a *popular* artistic tradition, therefore, derives from a shift—initiated in the eighteenth century and completed during the nineteenth—from the patronage of the arts by the restricted upper classes to the support offered by a huge, virtually unlimited, middle-class audience, within the context of great technological, social, and political change. Modern mass society was fully formed by the middle of the nineteenth century; the modern mass media, in various stages of development, already provided the dominant forms of communication. Popular culture developed with it. The twentieth century established both more securely.

Although rather clear boundaries lie between popular and folk art on the one hand, and elite art on the other, the line between the first two is vague and easily crossed. The folk artist is usually satisfied with somewhat more anonymity; he is less concerned with aesthetic context, and less with specifically aesthetic purpose, though he wants to satisfy his audience, as does the popular artist. His art, however, tends to be thematically simple and technically uncomplicated, its production—the folk song, the duck decoy, the tavern sign, the circus act—not so strongly influenced by technological factors.

Popular art is folk art aimed at a wider audience, in a somewhat more self-conscious attempt to fill that audience's expecta-

tions, an art more aware of the need for selling the product, more consciously adjusted to the median taste. It is an art trying to perfect itself, not yet complete, not yet mature.

Elite art is produced by known artists within a consciously aesthetic context and by an accepted set of rules, its attainment (or failure) judged by reference to a normative body of recognized classics. The subjective element—that is, the presence of the creator or performer—is vital to its effectiveness. Elite art is exclusive, particular, individualistic; its aim is the discovery of new ways of recording and interpreting experience. Technical and thematic complexity is of much greater value in elite art than in folk or popular art; in fact, technique may become a vehicle for thematic expression, or may simply become an end in itself.

Popular art, aimed at the majority, is neither abstruse, complicated, or profound. To understand and appreciate it should require neither specialized, technical, nor professional knowledge. It is relatively free of corrective influences derived from minority sources; its standards of comprehension and achievement are received from consensus; it must be commonly approved, pervasive in the population, “popular” in the sense that the majority of people like and endorse it and will not accept marked deviations from its standards and conventions. More individualized than folk art, but less so than elite art, popular art tends to be more dependent than either on the skill of the performer.

Popular art confirms the experience of the majority, in contrast to elite art, which tends to explore the new. For this reason, popular art has been an unusually sensitive and accurate reflector of the attitudes and concerns of the society for which it is produced. Because it is of lesser quality, aesthetically, than elite art, historians and critics have tended to neglect it as a means of access to an era’s—and a society’s—values and ideas. The popular artist corroborates (occasionally with great skill and intensity) values and attitudes already familiar to his audience; his aim is less to provide a new experience than to validate an older one. Predictability is important to the effectiveness of popular art; the fulfillment of expectation, the pleasant shock of recognition of the known, verification of an experience already familiar—as in the detective story, the Western, the popular song, the Edgar Guest poem.

Popular art must be adaptable to mass production, and to diffusion through the mass media. It is irretrievably tied to the technology of duplication; to the popular artist the machinery of production and distribution may be as important—or more so—to what he does than either technique or content. Popular art,

therefore, must be produced under conditions which make it possible to reach the widest possible audience in the most efficient way, a fact of life which the popular artist must accept as one of the stipulations of his craft.

Popular art assumes its own particular kind of audience, huge, heterogeneous, bewilderingly diverse in its combination of life styles, manners, interests, tastes, and economic and educational levels. This audience is much less self-conscious than an elite art audience; its standards are less clearly defined, its expectations less consistent and integrated. The audience for elite art possesses commonly held aesthetic and intellectual standards and has its own specialized idiom of appreciation and criticism. But those who respond to the popular arts are not sure why. Their standards are never precisely formulated or articulated and they are flexible and impermanent to a much greater degree than those of the audience for folk or elite art.

The relation of the popular artist to his audience is unique. The elite artist knows that his audience views his art in a context of certain predispositions; he anticipates success or failure within a definable framework of theory and achievement. His audience is acutely aware of him as an individual, knowing that his primary concern is the interpretation of his individual experience, and that he is personally involved with the content and technique of his product. The popular artist, however, works under no such set of rules, with a much less predictable audience, and for much less predictable rewards. His relationship with his public is neither direct nor critical, for between him and his audience stand editors, publishers, sponsors, directors, public relations men, wholesalers, exhibitors, merchants, and others who can and often do influence his product.

The elite artist is governed by traditional conventions of genre and technique, and knows that he will be judged by them. Since his accomplishment is measured by comparison with what others have done or are doing at his artistic level, he clearly understands the objectives and standards set for him by his critics and fellow artists. The popular artist, however, is subject primarily to the law of supply and demand; his aim is to win the largest possible audience in the marketplace. Neither what others have done, nor what critics say must be done, will necessarily guarantee success. The criterion of his success is contemporary, commercial, measured in terms of the size and response of his public. He competes not with his medium, nor with a preconceived set of critical standards, nor even with other popular artists, but with the audience under

whose indirect control he must work—a notoriously fickle audience of unknown size and composition.

The popular artist must communicate with his audience through the mass media—with their interminably recurrent need for materials, unalterable publication deadlines, and vast amounts of empty space and time to be filled—which tends to depersonalize him, to remove him from close involvement with his art. The novelist writing for the little magazine or the prestige publisher, and the Western specialist writing for the mass-circulation weekly stand at completely different positions in relation to their materials and audiences, because they reach their audiences through media which make quite different demands and impose quite different conditions upon them.

The elite and popular arts are also distributed to their audiences in quite different ways, which in turn influence their product. Galleries, concerts, the quality press, the hardback book trade, academic discussion, self-improvement clubs and societies are not for the popular artist; he finds his public via the newsstand, the movie screen, the television, the paperback. His audience sees him less as an individual than as its own surrogate; his personal vision takes on meaning and effectiveness only when it reflects a wider, majority experience. He expresses not only what he feels, but also what many others feel.

The popular audience expects entertainment, instruction, or both, rather than an "aesthetic experience." To create for such an audience means that the popular artist cannot take into consideration the individualities and preferences of minority groups. Since the popular arts aim at the largest common denominator, they tend to standardize at the median level of majority expectation. The popular artist cannot disturb or offend any significant part of his public: though the elite artist may and should be a critic of his society, the popular artist cannot risk alienation.

The popular artist, then, hopes to do the very best he artistically can within the rigorous limits set by his situation. His accomplishment is measured by his skill and effectiveness in operating within the boundaries of the majority will and the requirements of the mass media. Since he hopes to make money, he aims at one thing—the largest possible audience—and whether it be a best seller, a high program rating, a four-star feature, or a "golden disc," his talents (which may be considerable) are directed toward mass response.

This does not mean that what the popular artist does is not worth doing, or personally unsatisfying, or aesthetically bad, or

commercially cheap. It merely means that he must develop certain kinds of specialized skills to accomplish it, for his product must pay the medium and show a profit. And since popular art, to be successful, must be immediately popular, the artist must use those forms and media to which his audience has easiest access—movies, radio, television, the phonograph record, the magazine, the paperback book, the popular song, the newspaper, the comic book, and so on—and which it can most easily understand.

The fact that the mass audience exists, and that the popular artist must create for it, are simply the primary facts of life for the popular arts. Popular art can depend on no subsidy, state, or patron; it has to pay its way by giving the public what it wants, which may not always agree with what the artist may feel to be the most aesthetically apt. Satisfying a large audience involves no less skill than pleasing a smaller or more sophisticated one; popular artists can and do develop tremendous expertise and real talent. A best-selling paperback is not *ipso facto* bad; a song is not necessarily worthless because people hum it; a painting is neither bad because many look at it with pleasure nor good because few do.

Sometimes, with skill and talent alone, a popular artist may transmute mediocre material into something much better than it is, something even good; the gradual improvement over the years of standards of performance in the popular arts provides sufficient proof of this. A brief glance at the almost unbelievable banalities and ineptitudes of early movies, radio, television, fiction, or popular theater, in comparison with today's products, makes it abundantly clear that contemporary popular artists have developed tremendous technical skill, and that their sophistication and subtleties of performance are much greater than those of their predecessors. The distance between the movies of William S. Hart or Mary Pickford (or even of some Chaplin), between the comedy of Gallagher and Shean or Amos and Andy, between the music of the Wolverines or Paul Whiteman, and today's equivalents is incredibly wide. Over the years, the simple literalness of Tom Mix and Edward G. Robinson has become the symbolic, multileveled popular art of *High Noon* and *Bonnie and Clyde*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Nye describes the popular artist as "a kind of professional . . . who creates for profit the kind of art that the public wants." Comment on this concept of the popular artist. Are the popular arts therefore bound to a capitalistic economy?

2. According to Nye, "Popular art confirms the experience of the majority, in contrast to elite art, which tends to explore the new. . . . To create for such an audience means that the popular artist cannot take into consideration the individualities and preferences of minority groups." Do you think these observations are borne out by the TV programs and movies you have seen recently? Obviously representation of minorities has increased. Do you think TV and movies have helped blaze this trail or merely reflected social change? Discuss.

3. Nye states that "though the elite artist may and should be a critic of his society, the popular artist cannot risk alienation." Is this altogether true? Have any films, TV shows, or rock songs seriously criticized society? Discuss.

4. Nye speaks of popular culture as a product of modern technology and its new methods for duplicating and multiplying materials (Apple Records, for instance, uses as many as sixteen tape tracks). Do you feel depersonalized by this widespread use of technology with all its machines?

5. In an article in the Spring 1971 edition of the *Journal of Popular Culture*, Nye posed an interesting question:

Who can say that the TV watcher gets less "genuine" value—at his level of experience—than a professor reading James? I have never quite understood why, if a Ph. D. settles down with a Scotch and soda to read Ross MacDonalld (who was recently favored with front-page *Times* and *Newsweek* reviews) it's sophistication, whereas a tool-and-die maker from Oldsmobile who watches *Mannix* on TV with a can of beer is automatically a slob. Whose values are more genuine?

Comment on Nye's observation.

6. In the same article, Nye wrote: "We have lived for three-quarters of a century with mass culture, and we are culturally no worse off than before; in fact, there is reason to believe we may be better off." Do you think there has been any measurable progress or decline in the popular arts in the last few years? Discuss.

7. In the essay that follows, Leo Rosten maintains that the masses prefer "the frivolous as against the serious, 'escape' as against reality." Do you agree? What do you think Nye's attitude toward such a statement would be?

The Intellectual and the Mass Media

Leo Rosten

In this essay Leo Rosten, a noted writer on popular culture, contends that the reason trivial, escapist entertainment fare dominates the mass media is not the irresponsibility or mendacity of the media themselves, as intellectuals claim, but the preferences of the general public.

Most intellectuals do not understand the inherent nature of the mass media. They do not understand the process by which a newspaper or magazine, movie or television show is created. They project their own tastes, yearnings, and values upon the masses—who do not, unfortunately, share them. They attribute over-simplified motivations to those who own or operate the mass media. They assume that changes in ownership or control would necessarily improve the product. They presume the existence of a vast reservoir of talent, competence, and material which does not in fact exist.

A great deal of what appears in the mass media is dreadful tripe and treacle; inane in content, banal in style, muddy in reasoning, mawkish in sentiment, vulgar, naïve, and offensive to men of learning or refinement. I am both depressed and distressed by the bombardment of our eyes, our ears, and our brains by meretricious material designed for a populace whose paramount preferences involve the narcotic pursuit of “fun.”

Why is this so? Are the media operated by cynical men motivated solely by profit? Are they controlled by debasers of culture—by ignorant, vulgar, irresponsible men?

Many intellectuals think so and say so. They think so and say so in the face of evidence they either do not examine or cannot bring themselves to accept: that when the public is free to choose

among various products, it chooses—again and again and again—the frivolous as against the serious, “escape” as against reality, the lurid as against the tragic, the trivial as against the serious, fiction as against fact, the diverting as against the significant. To conclude otherwise is to deny the data: circulation figures for the press, box-office receipts for the movies and the theater, audience measurement for radio and television programs.

The sad truth seems to be this: that relatively few people in any society, not excluding Periclean Athens, have reasonably good taste or care deeply about ideas. Fewer still seem equipped—by temperament and capacity, rather than education—to handle ideas with both skill and pleasure.

The deficiencies of mass media are a function, in part at least, of the deficiencies of the masses. Is it unfair to ask that responsibility for mental laziness and deplorable taste be distributed—to include the schools, the churches, the parents, the social institutions which produce those masses who persist in preferring pin-ball games to anything remotely resembling philosophy?

Intellectuals seem unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that their hunger for more news, better plays, more serious debate, deeper involvement in ideas is not a hunger characteristic of many. They cannot believe that the subjects dear to their hearts bore or repel or overtax the capacities of their fellow citizens. Why this is so I shall try to explore later. At this point, let me remark that the intellectual, who examines his society with unyielding and antiseptic detachment, must liberate himself from the myths (or, in Plato's term, the royal lies) by which any social system operates. It is ironic that intellectuals often destroy old myths to erect and reverence special myths of their own. A striking example is found in the clichés with which they both characterize and indict the mass media. Let us consider the principal particulars in that indictment.*

“The mass media lack originality.”

They certainly do. Most of what appears in print, or on film, or on the air, lacks originality. But is there any area of human endeavor of which this is not true? Is not the original as rare in science or philosophy or painting as it is in magazines? Is not the original “original” precisely because it is rare? Is it not self-evident

* For the best general summary, and critical comment, see Chapter XV in *The Fabric of Society*, by Ralph Ross and Ernest van den Haag (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1957), a work of remarkable lucidity and good sense.

that the more that is produced of anything, the smaller the proportion of originality is likely to be? But is the absolute number of novel creative products thereby reduced? Are we dealing with Gresham's Law—or with imperfect observation?

The mass media are not characterized by endless inventiveness and variation. But they are considerably more varied and inventive, given their built-in limitations, than we give them credit for. Consider these limitations: neither life nor truth nor fiction offers infinite choices: there is only a limited number of plots or stories or themes; there is only a limited number of ways of communicating the limited body of material; audiences develop a cumulative awareness of resemblances and an augmented resistance to the stylized and the predictable; and even the freshest departures from routine soon become familiar and routine. Besides, originality is often achieved at the price of "balance" or proportion: the most arresting features in, say, *The New Yorker* or *Time* often incur the displeasure of scholars precisely because they prefer vitality to a judicious ordering of "all the facts."

The artist, of course, wrests freshness and new insight from the most familiar material; but true artists, in any field at any given time, are so rare that their singularity requires a special word—"genius."

The mass media are cursed by four deadly requirements: a gargantuan amount of space (in magazines and newspapers) and time (in television and radio) *has* to be filled; talent—on every level, in every technique—is scarce; the public votes, i.e., is free to decide what it prefers (and it is the deplorable results of this voting that intellectuals might spend more time confronting); and a magazine, paper, television or radio program is committed to periodic and unalterable publication. Content would be markedly improved if publications or programs appeared only when superior material was available. This applies to academic journals no less than to publications or programs with massive audiences.

"The mass media do not use the best brains or freshest talents."

Surely the burden of proof is on those who make this assertion. The evidence is quite clear that talent in the popular arts is searched for and courted in ways that do not apply in other fields: seniority is ignored, tenure is virtually nonexistent, youth is prized. In few areas is failure so swiftly and ruthlessly punished, or success so swiftly and extravagantly rewarded.

And still—talent is scarce. It is a woeful fact that despite several generations of free education, our land has produced relatively few first-rate minds; and of those with first-rate brains, fewer have imagination; of those with brains and imagination, fewer still possess judgment. If we ask, in addition, for the special skills and experience involved in the art of communicating, the total amount of talent available to the media is not impressive.

“The best brains” in the land do not gravitate to the media—if by brains we mean skill in analyzing complexities, or sustaining abstract propositions for prolonged intellectual operations. But the best brains would not necessarily make the best editors, or writers, or producers, or publishers—at least they would not long survive in a competitive market.

The media are enterprises, not IQ tests. They feed on inventiveness, not analytic discipline. They require creative skills and nonstandardized competences. Their content has, thus far at least, resisted the standardized and accumulative statement of propositions of a Euclid or an Adam Smith.

“The mass media do not print or broadcast the best material that is submitted to them.”

To edit is to judge; to judge is, inevitably, to reward some and disappoint others.

The assumption that a vast flow of material pours into the editorial offices of the media—from which publishers or producers simply select the worst—is simply incorrect. A huge proportion of what finally appears in magazines, radio, and television was “dreamed up” inside the media offices, and ordered from the staff or from freelance writers. And as often as not, even when the best talent is employed, at the highest prices, and given complete freedom, the results disappoint expectations. Excellence is not necessarily achieved because it is sought.*

“The mass media cannot afford to step on anyone’s toes.”

The following recent articles in popular magazines most conspicuously stepped on quite powerful toes: What Protestants Fear About Catholics; Cigarettes and Lung Cancer; Birth Control; The

* Yet consider that the mass media have recently presented to the public such indubitable highbrows as, say, Jacques Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert Oppenheimer, Edith Hamilton, Aldous Huxley, Warren Weaver, Edith Sitwell, Jacques Barzun, James Bryant Conant, and Julian Huxley.

Disgrace of Our Hospitals; Fee-Splitting by Doctors; Agnosticism; Financial Shenanigans and Stock Manipulations; A Mercy Killing; The Murder of Negroes in the South.

The movies and television recently offered all but the deaf and blind these scarcely soporific themes: miscegenation; adultery; dope addiction; white-Negro tensions; the venality of television; the vulgarity of movie executives; the cowardice of a minister, a banker; hypocrisy in business and advertising; big business and call girls; the degeneracy of Southern whites.

It was long assumed that the most sacred of sacred cows in a capitalist society is the Businessman or Big Business as an institution. But in recent years we have been exposed to a striking number of revelations about Business. Advertising men and methods, presumably too "powerful" to expose, much less deride, have been raked with coals of fire—in media which depend upon advertisers and advertising. "The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit" became a symbol of conformity to the masses, no less than the intellectual, through the mass media.

It is worth noticing that the sheer size of an audience crucially influences the content of what is communicated to it. Taboos, in movies or television, are not simply the fruit of cowardice among producers (though their anxiety is often disproportionate, and their candor unnecessarily hampered by pessimistic assumptions of what public reaction will be). Taboos are often functions of audience size, age-range, and heterogeneity. Things can be communicated to the few which cannot be communicated (at least not in the same way) to the many.

Books, magazines, and newspapers can discuss sex, homosexuality, masturbation, venereal disease, abortion, dope addiction, in ways not so easily undertaken on television or film. The reader reads alone—and this is a fact of great importance to those who write for him.

"The mass media do not give the public enough or adequate information about the serious problems of our time."

Never in history has the public been offered so much, so often, in such detail, for so little. I do not mean that Americans know as much as intellectuals think they ought to know, or wish they did know, about the problems which confront us. I do mean that the media already offer the public far more news, facts, information, and interpretations than the public takes the trouble to digest. I

find it impossible to escape the conclusion that, apart from periods of acute crisis, most people do not want to be *involved*, in precisely those areas which the intellectual finds most absorbing and meaningful.

Consider these recent authors and subjects in popular journalism: Winston Churchill on the war; Harry S. Truman on the presidency; Geoffrey Crowther on United States-British relations; William O. Douglas on Russia; Dean Acheson on Berlin; Joseph Alsop on Suez; George Kennan on Europe; Henry Kissinger on nuclear weapons; Adlai Stevenson on nine different countries and their problems; Nehru on India and the West; Ben-Gurion on the Middle East.

I wonder how many academic journals have been more relevant or edifying.

Do intellectuals find it unnoteworthy that, year after year, four to five times as many citizens in New York City choose the *Daily News* as against the *New York Times* or *Herald Tribune*? Or that for decades the citizens of Chicago have preferred the *Chicago Tribune* to competitors closer to the intellectuals' heart? Or that for decades the people of Los Angeles have voted in favor of the *Los Angeles Times*, at the expense of less parochial competitors?

"The aesthetic level of the mass media is appalling: truth is sacrificed to the happy ending, escapism is exalted, romance, violence, melodrama prevail."

The mass media do not attempt to please intellectuals, on either the aesthetic or the conceptual plane. Some commentators believe that if the media offered the public less trivia, the taste of the public would perforce be improved. But if the media give the public too little of what they want, and too much of what they don't want (too soon), they would simply cease to be mass media—and would be replaced by either "massier" competitors or would drive the public to increased expenditures of time on sports, parlor games, gambling, and other familiar methods of protecting the self from the ardors of thought or the terrors of solitude.

The question of proportion (how much "light stuff" or staple insipidity to include as against how much heavy or "uplifting" material) is one of the more perplexing problems any editor faces. It is far from uncommon to hear an editor remark that he will run a feature which he knows will be read by "less than 5 per cent of our readers."

I suspect that intellectuals tend to judge the highbrow by its peaks and the nonhighbrow by its average. If we look at the peaks in both cases, how much do the mass media suffer by comparison? American movies, for instance, caught in staggering costs (and, therefore, risks), have produced, in a short span of time, such films as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Marty*, *The African Queen*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Defiant Ones*, *High Noon*, *The Sheepman*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, etc.

Television, beset by the problem of a heterogeneous audience, and submitting to the disgraceful practice of advertisers permitted to exercise editorial censorship, has produced some extraordinary news and documentary programs, and such dramas as: *Middle of the Night*, *Patterns*, *Little Moon of Alban*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *The Winslow Boy*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*. CBS's "Camera Three" recently presented, with both skill and taste, three programs dramatizing Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground*, *A File for Fathers* (scenes from Lord Chesterfield, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde), *Père Goriot*, Chekhov's *The Proposal*.

In my opinion, some of the more insightful work of our time can be found in the mass media, for example, the comic strip *Peanuts*, which throws an original and enchanting light on children; the comic strip *Li'l Abner*, which is often both as illuminating and as savage as social satire should be; the movies of, say, William Wyler, George Stevens, Jules Dassin, John Huston, David Lean, Delbert Mann.

Intellectuals generally discover "artists" in the popular arts long after the public, with less rarefied aesthetic categories, has discovered them. Perhaps there is rooted in the character structure of intellectuals an aversion, or an inability, to participate in certain sectors of life; they do seem blind to the fact that the popular can be meritorious. This changes with time (e.g., consider the reputations of Twain, Dickens, Dumas, Balzac, Lardner). And a Jack Benny or Phil Silvers may yet achieve the classic dimension now permitted the Marx Brothers, who—once despised as broad vaudevillians—have become the eggheads' delight.

"The mass media corrupt and debase public taste; they create the kind of audience that enjoys cheap and trivial entertainment."

This implies that demand (public taste or preference) has become a spurious function of manipulated supply. Here the evidence

from Great Britain is illuminating: for years the government-owned BBC and the admirable Third Program offered the British public superior fare: excellent music, learned talks, literate discussions. For years, the noncommercial radio defended the bastions of culture. Yet when the British public was offered choices on television, it dismayed Anglophiles by taking to its heart the same silly quiz shows, panel shows, Westerns, melodramas, and "situation comedies" which the critics of daily newspapers deplore both in London and New York.

Or consider what happened in March 1959 when the Granada TV network, a British commercial chain, presented *The Skin of Our Teeth* with no less a star than Vivien Leigh—and in her first appearance on television. The noncommercial BBC ran, opposite the Wilder play and Lady Vivien, a twenty-five-year-old American movie, *Follow the Fleet*, with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. The English critics sang rare hosannahs for Thornton Wilder's play, its glamorous star, the script, the direction, the production. But for every seventeen homes in London that chose the Pulitzer Prize play, sixty-six preferred the twenty-five-year-old musical. Outside of London, the ratio was even more depressing. Viewers by the millions, reported Reuters, switched their dials away from Wilder and Leigh to Fred and Ginger. The head of the Granada network even castigated the BBC in the press, urging that it be "ashamed of itself" for seducing a public that might have adored Art by offering it Entertainment. (A similar *contretemps* occurred on American television when the magnificent production of *Green Pastures* lost viewers by the millions to the ghastly *Mike Todd Party* in Madison Square Garden.) The final and crushing irony lies in the fact that *Follow the Fleet* put a BBC program among the first ten, in popularity, for the first time in the year.

Doubtless the mass media can do more, much more, to elevate what the public reads, sees, and hears. But the media cannot do this as easily or as rapidly as is often assumed. Indeed, they cannot get too far in front of their audiences without suffering the fate of predecessors who tried just that. There is considerable evidence to support the deflating view that the media, on the whole, are considerably *ahead* of the masses—in intelligence, in taste, in values, e.g., the vocabulary in almost any popular journal, not excluding fan magazines, is often too "highbrow" for its readers.

It seems to me a fair question to ask whether the intelligence or taste of the public is really worse today than it was before the mass media came along.

"The mass media are what they are because they are operated solely as money-making enterprises."

Publishers and producers are undoubtedly motivated by a desire for profits. But this is not *all* that motivates them. Publishers and producers are no less responsive than intellectuals to "ego values"; they are no less eager to win respect and respectability from their peers; they respond to both internalized and external "reference groups"; they seek esteem—from the self and from others.

Besides, producers know that a significant percentage of what they present in the mass media will not be as popular as what might be substituted—but it is presented nonetheless. Why? Partly because of nonpecuniary values, and partly because of what critics of the crass profit-motive seem blind to: the fact that part of the competitive process involves a continuous search for products which can win favor with audiences not attracted to, or satisfied by, the prevailing output. New and minority audiences are constantly courted by the media, e.g., the strictly "egghead" programs on television, the new magazines which arise, and flourish, because they fill a need, as *Scientific American*, *American Heritage*.

Whenever profits, used as either a carrot or a stick, are criticized, it is tacitly assumed that reliance on other human impulses would serve man better. Is this so? Do virtue, probity, self-sacrifice guarantee excellence? It seems to me that most of the horrors of human history have been the work not of skeptical or cynical or realistic men, but of those persuaded of their superior virtue.

To replace publication for profit by publication via subsidy would of course be to exchange one set of imperfections for another.* The postal system offers scant support to those who assume that nonprofit enterprise is necessarily better than private competition (I hasten to add that in some fields, e.g., public health, it clearly is).

It should be noted, parenthetically, that anyone who enters the magazine or newspaper field in the expectation of high profits

* It is unthinkable, for instance, that any open competitive system would have barred from the air someone like Winston Churchill—who was not given access to BBC, for his then-maverick opinions, from 1934 to 1939. Nor is it likely that a government-controlled network would be able to withstand the furore that followed CBS's initial interview with Nikita Khrushchev. Nor would a governmentally supervised program dare to present a show such as *The Plot to Kill Stalin*.

is either singularly naïve, extremely optimistic, or poorly informed: few areas of American business show so high a mortality rate, are plagued by such unpredictabilities, promise so many headaches, and return so low a net profit. Successful magazines earn as modest a profit as three percent on invested capital. To the purely profit-minded, business has long offered innumerable opportunities outside of publishing which far surpass it in profitability, security, or potential.

“The mass media are dominated—or too much influenced—by advertisers.”

The influence of advertising is often too great—even if that influence is one-tenth as potent as many assume it to be. The editorial function should be as entirely free of non-editorial influences as possible.

But publishers, producers, and editors would respond to power or influence *even if all advertising were abolished*. It is an inescapable fact of human organization that men adjust to power (that, indeed, is one of power’s attributes); that men consider, or try to anticipate, the effect of their acts on those who hold most of whatever is most prized in a society.

There is a reverse and paradoxical angle to advertising: when a newspaper or magazine, a radio or television station becomes successful, the advertiser needs it as much as the other way around. Revenues from many advertisers increase the capacity to resist pressure from individual advertisers. Organs which can be “bought” nearly always decline in prosperity and influence.

Purely professional calculations often override vested interest. Some news or stories are so significant that it is impossible to prevent their publication.

The instance of the cigarette industry, mentioned above, is worth notice. Tobacco companies represent one of the largest and most consistent sources of national advertising revenue.* Yet within an hour after medical reports appeared linking cigarette smoking to lung cancer, they were fully and dramatically presented to the public—not only on the front pages of newspapers but in radio and television reporting as well. The news was simply too big, too “newsworthy” to be suppressed (even though several discussion programs shied away from the subject). The deficiencies

* [This article was written before broadcast advertisements of cigarettes were banned.—EDITOR]

of automobiles, where safety is concerned, have been analyzed in magazines which receive huge advertising revenues from automobile companies.

This is not to say that all truths which threaten power—in business, in the arts, even in the groves of academe—always gain as swift and public an airing as they deserve. They often do not. They do not because men, even men in power, are often timid, or weak, or frightened, or avaricious, or opportunistic, or unwise, or short-sighted. Some media operators, like some politicians, some clergymen, some labor leaders, some economists, are overly sensitive to the side on which their bread is buttered.

There is another and telling body of evidence about advertising on which no one, so far as I know, has commented: motion pictures accept no advertisements, never did, never depended on it, and were never “at the mercy of advertisers.”* Yet of all the mass media, it is the movies which have been most parochial and timorous. Is it because movies do depend entirely on box-office receipts, and have no advertising revenues to subsidize independence?

Advertisers seem to me to exercise their most pernicious influence in television. For in television, advertisers are permitted to decide what shall or shall not appear in the programs they sponsor. This seems to me insupportable. An advertiser in a newspaper or magazine buys a piece of space in which to advertise his product. He does not buy a voice on the news desk or at the editorial table. But the television advertiser buys time both for his commercials and for *the time between commercials*; he becomes a producer and publisher himself. I am convinced that this is bad for the public, bad for television, and (ultimately) bad for the sponsors.†

“The mass media do not provide an adequate forum for minority views—the dissident and unorthodox.”

Producers and publishers give more space and time to minority views (which include the *avant-garde*) than numerical proportions require. They feel that it is the function of specialized jour-

* Some movie theaters show advertisements on their screens before and after a feature, but advertising is not to be found in movies.

† When I wrote a similar criticism in *Harper's Magazine* in 1958, certain television executives hotly denied this. That was eighteen months before the recent and sensational revelations of advertiser-control over quiz shows.

nals to carry specialized content. The popular media carry far more material of this kind than anyone would have predicted two decades ago.

The democratic society must insure a viable public forum for the dissenter—in politics, morals, arts. That forum will never be as large as the dissenters themselves want. But I know of no perfect way to determine who shall have what access to how many—at the expense of whom else—except to keep pressing for as free a market as we can achieve.

It may seem to some readers that I have substituted an indictment of the masses for an indictment of the mass media; that I have assigned the role of villain to the masses in a social drama in which human welfare and public enlightenment are hamstrung by the mediocrity, laziness, and indifference of the populace. I hope that detachment will not be mistaken for cynicism.

I should be the first to stress the immensity of the social gains which public education and literacy alone have made possible. The rising public appreciation of music, painting, ballet; the growth of libraries; the fantastic sales of paperback books (however much they are skewed by *Peyton Place* or the works of Mickey Spillane), the striking diffusion of “cultural activities” in communities throughout the land, the momentous fact that popular magazines *can* offer the public the ruminations of such nonpopular minds as Paul Tillich or Sir George Thomson—the dimensions of these changes are a tribute to the achievements of that society which has removed from men the chains of caste and class that hampered human achievement through the centuries. I, for one, do not lament the passing of epochs in which “high culture” flourished while the majority of mankind lived in ignorance and indignity.

What I have been emphasizing here is the inevitable gap between the common and the superior. More particularly, I have been embroidering the theme of the intellectual’s curious reluctance to accept evidence. Modern intellectuals seem *guilty* about reaching conclusions that were once the *a priori* convictions of the aristocrat. It is understandable that twentieth-century intellectuals should dread snobbery, at one end of the social scale, as much as they shun mob favor at the other. But the intellectual’s snobbery is of another order, and involves a tantalizing paradox: a contempt for what *hoi polloi* enjoy, and a kind of proletarian ethos that tacitly denies inequalities of talent and taste.

The recognition of facts has little bearing on motivations and

should surely not impute preferences. The validity of an idea has nothing to do with who propounds it—or whom it outrages. The author is aware that he is inviting charges of Brahminism, misanthropy, a reactionary “unconscious,” or heaven knows what else. But is it really heresy to the democratic credo for intellectuals to admit, if only in the privacy of professional confessionals, that they are, in fact, more literate and more skillful—in diagnosis, induction, and generalization, if in nothing else—than their fellow-passengers on the ship of state?

Perhaps the intellectual’s guilt, when he senses incipient snobbery within himself, stems from his uneasiness at being part of an elite, moreover, a new elite which is not shored up by ancient and historic sanctions. For intellectualism has been divorced from its traditional *cachet* and from the majesty with which earlier societies invested their elites: a classical education, Latin or Greek (in any case, a language not comprehensible to the untutored), a carefully cultivated accent, the inflection of the well born, the well bred, or the priestly. One of the painful experiences spared intellectuals in the past was hearing Ideas discussed—with profundity or insight—in accents which attest to birth on “the other side of the tracks.”

It may be difficult for shopkeepers’ sons to admit their manifest superiority over the world they left: parents, siblings, comrades. But the intellectual who struggles with a sinful sense of superiority, and who feels admirable sentiments of loyalty to his non-U origins, must still explain why it was that his playmates and classmates did not join him in the noble dedication to learning and the hallowed pursuit of truth. The triumph of mass education is to be found not simply in the increment of those who can read, write, add, and subtract. It is to be found in a much more profound and enduring revolution: the provision of opportunities to express the self, and pursue the self’s values, opportunities not limited to the children of a leisure class, or an aristocracy, or a landed gentry, or a well-heeled bourgeoisie. The true miracle of public education is that no elite can decide where the next intellectual will come from.

Each generation creates its own devils, and meets its own Waterloo on the heartless field of reality. The Christian Fathers blamed the Prince of Darkness for preventing perfectible man from reaching Paradise. Anarchists blamed the state. Marxists blame the class system. Pacifists blame the militarists. And our latter-day intellectuals seem to blame the mass media for the lamentable failure of more people to attain the bliss of intellectual grace. This

is a rank disservice to intellectuals themselves, for it dismisses those attributes of character and ability—discipline, curiosity, persistence, the renunciation of worldly rewards—which make intellectuals possible at all. The compulsive egalitarianism of eggheads even seems to lure them into a conspicuous disinterest in the possible determinism of heredity.

Responsibility increases with capacity, and should be demanded of those in positions of power. Just as I hold the intellectual more responsible than others for the rigorous exploration of phenomena and the courageous enunciation of truths, so, too, do I ask for better and still better performance from those who have the awesome power to shape men's minds.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you agree with Rosten that "the masses" prefer "the frivolous as against the serious, 'escape' as against reality"? Why or why not? If you do agree, do you think this preference has any relation to the nature of our society?
2. One chant that has become popular in recent years is "Power to the People!" If, as Rosten says, the masses prefer the frivolous to the serious, do you think "the people" are capable of handling this power? Discuss.
3. It has been said that movies, TV, and other forms of popular entertainment shy away from our most fundamental social problems. Why should the popular arts be expected to deal with the problems that surround us every day?
4. Compare or contrast Rosten's viewpoint about the people and the popular arts with Nye's.
5. Who are these "intellectuals" Rosten speaks of? Do you think they should have any special influence in determining the content of the mass media—what the people read, see, and hear? Discuss.
6. Critic Kenneth Tynan suggested in a January 1969 article in *Playboy* that the government should give financial aid to the arts. Do you think an already overburdened taxpayer should be asked to subsidize the arts when only a minority of the people can enjoy them? Or is there another side to the question? Discuss.

Mass Culture and the Creative Artist

James Baldwin

James Baldwin, one of America's most famous black writers, is a novelist, essayist, and critic. Here he presents a rather negative survey of mass culture in America.

Someone once said to me that the people in general cannot bear very much reality. He meant by this that they prefer fantasy to a truthful re-creation of their experience. The Italians, for example, during the time that De Sica and Rossellini were revitalizing the Italian cinema industry, showed a marked preference for Rita Hayworth vehicles; the world in which she moved across the screen was like a fairy tale, whereas the world De Sica was describing was one with which they were only too familiar. (And it can be suggested perhaps that the Americans who stood in line for *Shoe Shine* and *Open City* were also responding to images which they found exotic, to a reality by which they were not threatened. What passes for the appreciation of serious effort in this country is very often nothing more than an inability to take anything very seriously.)

Now, of course the people cannot bear very much reality, if by this one means their ability to respond to high intellectual or artistic endeavor. I have never in the least understood why they should be expected to. There is a division of labor in the world—as I see it—and the people have quite enough reality to bear, simply getting through their lives, raising their children, dealing with the eternal conundrums of birth, taxes, and death. They do not do this with all the wisdom, foresight, or charity one might wish; nevertheless, this is what they are always doing and it is what the writer is always describing. There is literally nothing else

to describe. This effort at description is itself extraordinarily arduous, and those who are driven to make this effort are by virtue of this fact somewhat removed from the people. It happens, by no means infrequently, that the people hound or stone them to death. They then build statues to them, which does not mean that the next artist will have it any easier.

I am not sure that the cultural level of the people is subject to a steady rise: in fact, quite unpredictable things happen when the bulk of the population attains what we think of as a high cultural level, i.e., pre-World War II Germany, or present-day Sweden. And this, I think, is because the effort of a Schönberg or a Picasso (or a William Faulkner or an Albert Camus) has nothing to do, at bottom, with physical comfort, or indeed with comfort of any other kind. But the aim of the people who rise to this high cultural level—who rise, that is, into the middle class—is precisely comfort for the body and the mind. The artistic objects by which they are surrounded cannot possibly fulfill their original function of disturbing the peace—which is still the only method by which the mind can be improved—they bear witness instead to the attainment of a certain level of economic stability and a certain thin measure of sophistication. But art and ideas come out of the passion and torment of experience; it is impossible to have a real relationship to the first if one's aim is to be protected from the second.

We cannot possibly expect, and should not desire, that the great bulk of the populace embark on a mental and spiritual voyage for which very few people are equipped and which even fewer have survived. They have, after all, their indispensable work to do, even as you and I. What we are distressed about, and should be, when we speak of the state of mass culture in this country, is the overwhelming torpor and bewilderment of the people. The people who run the mass media are not all villains and they are not all cowards—though I agree, I must say, with Dwight MacDonald's forceful suggestion that many of them are not very bright. (Why should they be? They, too, have risen from the streets to a high level of cultural attainment. They, too, are positively afflicted by the world's highest standard of living and what is probably the world's most bewilderingly empty way of life.) But even those who are bright are handicapped by their audience: I am less appalled by the fact that *Gunsmoke* is produced than I am by the fact that so many people want to see it. In the same way, I must add, that a thrill of terror runs through me when I hear that the favorite author of our President is Zane Grey.

But one must make a living. The people who run the mass media and those who consume it are really in the same boat. They must continue to produce things they do not really admire, still less, love in order to continue buying things they do not really want, still less, need. If we were dealing only with fintails, two-tone cars, or programs like *Gunsmoke*, the situation would not be so grave. The trouble is that serious things are handled (and received) with the same essential lack of seriousness.

For example: neither *The Bridge on the River Kwai* nor *The Defiant Ones*, two definitely superior movies, can really be called serious. They are extraordinarily interesting and deft: but their principal effort is to keep the audience at a safe remove from the experience which these films are not therefore really prepared to convey. The kind of madness sketched in *Kwai* is far more dangerous and widespread than the movie would have us believe. As for *The Defiant Ones*, its suggestion that Negroes and whites can learn to love each other if they are only chained together long enough runs so madly counter to the facts that it must be dismissed as one of the latest, and sickest, of the liberal fantasies, even if one does not quarrel with the notion that love on such terms is desirable. These movies are designed not to trouble, but to reassure; they do not reflect reality, they merely rearrange its elements into something we can bear. They also weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are.

What the mass culture really reflects (as is the case with a "serious" play like *J.B.*) is the American bewilderment in the face of the world we live in. We do not seem to want to know that we are *in* the world, that we are subject to the same catastrophes, vices, joys, and follies which have baffled and afflicted mankind for ages. And this has everything to do, of course, with what was expected of America: which expectation, so generally disappointed, reveals something we do not want to know about sad human nature, reveals something we do not want to know about the intricacies and inequities of any social structure, reveals, in sum, something we do not want to know about ourselves. The American way of life has failed—to make people happier or to make them better. We do not want to admit this, and we do not admit it. We persist in believing that the empty and criminal among our children are the result of some miscalculation in the formula (which can be corrected), that the bottomless and aimless hostility which makes our cities among the most dangerous in the world is created, and felt, by a handful of aberrants, that the lack, yawning everywhere in this country, of passionate conviction, of personal au-

thority, proves only our rather appealing tendency to be gregarious and democratic. We are very cruelly trapped between what we would like to be, and what we actually are. And we cannot possibly become what we would like to be until we are willing to ask ourselves just why the lives we lead on this continent are mainly so empty, so tame and so ugly.

This is a job for the creative artist—who does not really have much to do with mass culture, no matter how many of us may be interviewed on TV. Perhaps life is not the black, unutterably beautiful, mysterious, and lonely thing the creative artist tends to think of it as being; but it is certainly not the sunlit playpen in which so many Americans lose first their identities and then their minds.

I feel very strongly, though, that this amorphous people are in desperate search for something which will help them to re-establish their connection with themselves, and with one another. This can only begin to happen as the truth begins to be told. We are in the middle of an immense metamorphosis here, a metamorphosis which will, it is devoutly to be hoped, rob us of our myths and give us our history, which will destroy our attitudes and give us back our personalities. The mass culture, in the meantime, can only reflect our chaos: and perhaps we had better remember that this chaos contains life—and a great transforming energy.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *The German poet Goethe once said that the function of art is to disturb all settled ideas, and Baldwin seems to agree with him. Do you think this should be a function of the popular arts? Have you ever been "disturbed" by something you read, saw, or heard? If so, how?*
2. *Discuss Baldwin's statement that the American people have "the world's highest standard of living and what is probably the world's most bewilderingly empty way of life." Do you agree with his analysis of the American scene? Do you think "the American way of life has failed—to make people happier or to make them better"?*
3. *Baldwin is reporting on what he considers the state of the popular arts in a capitalistic society. Write an essay in which you compare or contrast the advantages or disadvantages of the arts under free enterprise with those under communism, socialism, or fascism.*
4. *Suggest and discuss one or two popular works (in any medium) that confront reality honestly and do not present simple solutions to complex problems. Or do you agree that "the creative artist . . . does not really have much to do with mass culture"?*

Kitsch

Gilbert Highet

Although much of essayist Gilbert Highet's piece on "kitsch" is concerned with humorously freakish literature, the concept of "kitsch" is helpful in any study of popular culture. Mr. Highet, a distinguished classicist and humanist, is a long-time member of the faculty of Columbia University.

If you have ever passed an hour wandering through an antique shop (not looking for anything exactly, but simply looking), you must have noticed how your taste gradually grows numb, and then—if you stay—becomes perverted. You begin to see unsuspected charm in those hideous pictures of plump girls fondling pigeons, you develop a psychopathic desire for spinning wheels and cobblers' benches, you are apt to pay out good money for a bronze statuette of Otto von Bismarck, with a metal hand inside a metal frock coat and metal pouches under his metallic eyes. As soon as you take the things home, you realize that they are revolting. And yet they have a sort of horrible authority; you don't like them; you know how awful they are; but it is a tremendous effort to drop them in the garbage, where they belong.

To walk along a whole street of antique shops—that is an experience which shakes the very soul. Here is a window full of bulbous Chinese deities; here is another littered with Zulu assegais, Indian canoe paddles, and horse pistols which won't fire; the next shopfront is stuffed with gaudy Italian majolica vases, and the next, even worse, with Austrian pottery—tiny ladies and gentlemen sitting on lace cushions and wearing lace ruffles, with every frill, every wrinkle and reticulation translated into porcelain: pink; stiff; but fortunately not unbreakable. The nineteenth century produced an appalling amount of junky art like this, and sometimes I imagine that clandestine underground factories are continuing to pour it out like illicit drugs.

FROM *A Clerk of Oxenford* by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954). Reprinted by permission.

There is a name for such stuff in the trade, a word apparently of Russian origin, kitsch*: it means vulgar showoff, and it is applied to anything that took a lot of trouble to make and is quite hideous.

It is paradoxical stuff, kitsch. It is obviously bad: so bad that you can scarcely understand how any human being would spend days and weeks making it, and how anybody else would buy it and take it home and keep it and dust it and leave it to her heirs. It is terribly ingenious, and terribly ugly, and utterly useless; and yet it has one of the qualities of good art—which is that, once seen, it is not easily forgotten. Of course it is found in all the arts: think of Milan Cathedral, or the statues in Westminster Abbey, or Liszt's settings of Schubert songs. There is a lot of it in the United States—for instance, the architecture of Miami, Florida, and Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles. Many of Hollywood's most ambitious historical films are superb kitsch. Most Tin Pan Alley love songs are perfect 100 per cent kitsch.

There is kitsch in the world of books also. I collect it. It is horrible, but I enjoy it.

The gem of my collection is the work of the Irish novelist Mrs. Amanda McKittrick Ros, whose masterpiece, *Delina Delaney*, was published about 1900. It is a stirring romantic tale, telling how Delina, a fisherman's daughter from Erin Cottage, was beloved by Lord Gifford, the heir of Columba Castle, and—after many trials and even imprisonment—married him. The story is dramatic, not to say impossible; but it is almost lost to view under the luxuriant style. Here, for example, is a sentence in which Mrs. Ros explains that her heroine used to earn extra cash by doing needlework.

She tried hard to assist in keeping herself a stranger to her poor old father's slight income by the use of the finest production of steel, whose blunt edge eyed the reely covering with marked greed, and offered its sharp dart to faultless fabrics of flaxen fineness.

Revolting, but distinctive: what Mr. Polly called 'rockockyo' in manner. For the baroque vein, here is Lord Gifford saying goodby to his sweetheart:

* The Russian verb *keetcheetsya* means 'to be haughty and puffed up.'

My darling virgin! my queen! my Delina! I am just in time to hear the toll of a parting bell strike its heavy weight of appalling softness against the weakest fibers of a heart of love, arousing and tickling its dormant action, thrusting the dart of evident separation deeper into its tubes of tenderness, and fanning the flame, already unextinguishable, into volumes of blaze.

Mrs. Ros had a remarkable command of rhetoric, and could coin an unforgettable phrase. She described her hero's black eyes as 'glittering jet revolvers.' When he became ill, she said he fell 'into a state of lofty fever'—doubtless because commoners have high fever, but lords have lofty fever. And her reflections on the moral degeneracy of society have rarely been equaled, in power and penetration:

Days of humanity, whither hast thou fled? When bows of compulsion, smiles for the deceitful, handshakes for the dogmatic, and welcome for the tool of power live under your objectionable, unambitious beat, not daring to be checked by the tongue of candour because the selfish world refuses to dispense with her rotten policies. The legacy of your forefathers, which involved equity, charity, reason, and godliness, is beyond the reach of their frivolous, mushroom offspring—deceit, injustice, malice, and unkindness—and is not likely to be codiciled with traits of harmony so long as these degrading vices of mock ambition fester the human heart.

Perhaps one reason I enjoy this stuff is because it so closely resembles a typical undergraduate translation of one of Cicero's finest perorations: sound and fury, signifying nothing. I regret only that I have never seen Mrs. Ros's poetry. One volume was called *Poems of Puncture* and another *Bayonets of Bastard Sheen*: alas, jewels now almost unprocurable. But at least I know the opening of her lyric written on first visiting St. Paul's Cathedral:

*Holy Moses, take a look,
Brain and brawn in every nook!*

Such genius is indestructible. Soon, soon now, some earnest researcher will be writing a Ph.D. thesis on Mrs. Amanda McKittrick

Ros, and thus (as she herself might put it) conferring upon her dewy brow the laurels of concrete immortality.

Next to Mrs. Ros in my collection of kitsch is the work of the Scottish poet William McGonagall. This genius was born in 1830, but did not find his vocation until 1877. Poor and inadequate poets pullulate in every tongue, but (as the *Times Literary Supplement* observes) McGonagall 'is the only truly memorable bad poet in our language.' In his command of platitude and his disregard of melody, he was the true heir of William Wordsworth as a descriptive poet.

In one way his talents, or at least his aspirations, exceeded those of Wordsworth. He was at his best in describing events he had never witnessed, such as train disasters, shipwrecks, and sanguinary battles, and in picturing magnificent scenery he had never beheld except with the eye of the imagination. Here is his unforgettable Arctic landscape:

*Greenland's icy mountains are fascinating and grand,
And wondrously created by the Almighty's command;
And the works of the Almighty there's few can understand:
Who knows but it might be a part of Fairyland?*

*Because there are churches of ice, and houses glittering like glass,
And for scenic grandeur there's nothing can it surpass,
Besides there's monuments and spires, also ruins,
Which serve for a safe retreat from the wild bruins.*

*The icy mountains they're higher than a brig's topmast,
And the stranger in amazement stands aghast
As he beholds the water flowing off the melted ice
Adown the mountain sides, that he cries out, Oh! how nice!*

McGonagall also had a strong dramatic sense. He loved to tell of agonizing adventures, more drastic perhaps but not less moving than that related in Wordsworth's 'Vaudracour and Julia.' The happy ending of one of his 'Gothic' ballads is surely unforgettable:

*So thus ends the story of Hanchen, a heroine brave,
That tried hard her master's gold to save,
And for her bravery she got married to the miller's eldest son,
And Hanchen on her marriage night cried Heaven's will be done.*

These scanty selections do not do justice to McGonagall's ingenuity as a rhymester. His sound effects show unusual talent. Most poets would be baffled by the problem of producing rhymes for the proper names *General Graham* and *Osman Digna*, but McGonagall gets them into a single stanza, with dazzling effect:

*Ye sons of Great Britain, I think no shame
To write in praise of brave General Graham!
Whose name will be handed down to posterity without any stigma,
Because, at the battle of El-Tab, he defeated Osman Digna.*

One of McGonagall's most intense personal experiences was his visit to New York. Financially, it was not a success. In one of his vivid autobiographical sketches, he says, 'I tried occasionally to get an engagement from theatrical proprietors and music-hall proprietors, but alas! 'twas all in vain, for they all told me they didn't encourage rivalry.' However, he was deeply impressed by the architecture of Manhattan. In eloquent verses he expressed what many others have felt, although without adequate words to voice their emotion:

*Oh! Mighty City of New York, you are wonderful to behold,
Your buildings are magnificent, the truth be it told;
They were the only thing that seemed to arrest my eye,
Because many of them are thirteen stories high.*

*And the tops of the houses are all flat,
And in the warm weather the people gather to chat;
Besides on the house-tops they dry their clothes,
And also many people all night on the house-tops repose.*

Yet McGonagall felt himself a stranger in the United States. And here again his close kinship with Wordsworth appears. The Poet Laureate, in a powerful sonnet written at Calais, once reproached the English Channel for delaying his return by one of those too frequent storms in which (reckless tyrant!) it will indulge itself:

*Why cast ye back upon the Gallic shore,
Ye furious waves! a patriotic Son
Of England?*

In the same vein McGonagall sings with rapture of his return to his 'ain countree':

*And with regard to New York, and the sights I did see,
 One street in Dundee is more worth to me,
 And, believe me, the morning I sailed from New York,
 For bonnie Dundee—my heart it felt as light as a cork.*

Indeed, New York is a challenging subject for ambitious poets. Here, from the same shelf, is a delicious poem on the same theme, by Ezra Pound:

*My City, my beloved,
 Thou art a maid with no breasts
 Thou art slender as a silver reed.
 Listen to me, attend me!
 And I will breathe into thee a soul,
 And thou shalt live for ever.*

The essence of this kind of trash is incongruity. The kitsch writer is always sincere. He really means to say something important. He feels he has a lofty spiritual message to bring to an unawakened world, or else he has had a powerful experience which he must communicate to the public. But either his message turns out to be a majestic platitude, or else he chooses the wrong form in which to convey it—or, most delightful of all, there is a fundamental discrepancy between the writer and his subject, as when Ezra Pound, born in Idaho, addresses the largest city in the world as a maid with no breasts, and enjoins it to achieve inspiration and immortality by listening to him. This is like climbing Mount Everest in order to carve a head of Mickey Mouse in the east face.

Bad love poetry, bad religious poetry, bad mystical prose, bad novels both autobiographical and historical—one can form a superb collection of kitsch simply by reading with a lively and awakened eye. College songs bristle with it. The works of Father Divine are full of it—all the more delightful because in him it is usually incomprehensible. One of the Indian mystics, Sri Ramakrishna, charmed connoisseurs by describing the Indian scriptures (in a phrase which almost sets itself to kitsch-music) as

fried in the butter of knowledge and steeped in the honey of love.

Bad funeral poetry is a rich mine of the stuff. Here, for example, is the opening of a jolly little lament, 'The Funeral' by Stephen Spender, apparently written during his pink period:

*Death is another milestone on their way.
 With laughter on their lips and with winds blowing round them
 They record simply
 How this one excelled all others in making driving belts.*

Observe the change from humanism to communism. Spender simply took Browning's 'Grammarian's Funeral,' threw away the humor and the marching rhythm, and substituted wind and the Stakhanovist speed-up. Such also is a delicious couplet from Archibald MacLeish's elegy on the late Harry Crosby:

*He walks with Ernest in the streets in Saragossa
 They are drunk their mouths are hard they say qué cosa.*

From an earlier romantic period, here is a splendid specimen. Coleridge attempted to express the profound truth that men and animals are neighbors in a hard world; but he made the fundamental mistake of putting it into a monologue address to a donkey:

*Poor Ass! Thy master should have learnt to show
 Pity—best taught by fellowship of Woe!
 Innocent foal! thou poor despised forlorn!
 I hail thee brother . . .*

Once you get the taste for this kind of thing it is possible to find pleasure in hundreds of experiences which you might otherwise have thought either anesthetic or tedious: bad translations, abstract painting, grand opera . . . Dr. Johnson, with his strong sense of humor, had a fancy for kitsch, and used to repeat a poem in celebration of the marriage of the Duke of Leeds, composed by 'an inferiour domestick . . . in such homely rhimes as he could make':

*When the Duke of Leeds shall married be
 To a fine young lady of high quality,
 How happy will that gentlewoman be
 In his Grace of Leed's good company.*

*She shall have all that's fine and fair,
 And the best of silk and sattin shall wear;
 And ride in a coach to take the air,
 And have a house in St. James's Square.*

Folk poetry is full of such jewels. Here is the epitaph on an old gentleman from Vermont who died in a sawmill accident:

*How shocking to the human mind
The log did him to powder grind.
God did command his soul away
His summings we must all obey.*

Kitsch is well known in drama, although (except for motion pictures) it does not usually last long. One palmary instance was a play extolling the virtues of the Boy Scout movement, called *Young England*. It ran for a matter of years during the 1930's, to audiences almost wholly composed of kitsch-fanciers, who eventually came to know the text quite as well as the unfortunate actors. I can still remember the opening of one magnificent episode. Scene: a woodland glade. Enter the hero, a Scoutmaster, riding a bicycle, and followed by the youthful members of his troop. They pile bicycles in silence. Then the Scoutmaster raises his finger, and says (accompanied fortissimo by most of the members of the audience):

Fresh water must be our first consideration!

In the decorative arts kitsch flourishes, and is particularly widespread in sculpture. One of my favorite pieces of bad art is a statue in Rockefeller Center, New York. It is supposed to represent Atlas, the Titan condemned to carry the sky on his shoulders. That is an ideal of somber, massive tragedy: greatness and suffering combined as in Hercules or Prometheus. But this version displays Atlas as a powerful moron, with a tiny little head, rather like the pan-fried young men who appear in the health magazines. Instead of supporting the heavens, he is lifting a spherical metal balloon: it is transparent, and quite empty; yet he is balancing insecurely on one foot like a furniture mover walking upstairs with a beach ball; and he is scowling like a mad baboon. If he ever gets the thing up, he will drop it; or else heave it onto a Fifth Avenue bus. It is a supremely ridiculous statue, and delights me every time I see it.

Perhaps you think this is a depraved taste. But really it is an extension of experience. At one end, Homer. At the other, Amanda McKittrick Ros. At one end, *Hamlet*. At the other, McGonagall, who is best praised in his own inimitable words:

*The poetry is moral and sublime
 And in my opinion nothing could be more fine.
 True genius there does shine so bright
 Like unto the stars of night.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe "kitsch" to someone who has not read this essay?
2. With what sort of tone or attitude does Highet approach kitsch? Can you find some specific examples of words he uses to achieve this effect?
3. Highet investigates kitsch in literature and decorative arts, such as figurines and sculpture. Using his definition, how could you apply the term to housing, furniture, clothing, automobiles, office buildings, and so on? For instance, look up a picture of a 1958 Oldsmobile or, better, find one on the street or in a junkyard. Does this seem to be genuine kitsch to you?
4. Why do you think kitsch remains so popular? Do you think the income level, social status, or educational level of its audience has anything to do with its popularity?

2

MOVIES

The Film Generation: Celebration and Concern

Stanley Kauffmann

Stanley Kauffmann is one of America's most respected film critics. In addition to writing several volumes of film criticism and a regular column in The New Republic, he has published several novels and has served as drama critic for The New York Times. In this essay he discusses the new film audience, a "Film Generation" that regards the movie as a serious art form.

Some of the following remarks were included, in differing forms, in talks delivered recently at several universities, colleges, and seminars. In one of the audiences were a distinguished poet and a critic of the graphic arts. Afterward, the critic came up to me and said, "You destroyed us. You wiped out our professions. You rendered my friend and me obsolete." I said that I neither believed nor intended that. Then he said wryly, stroking his chin, "On the other hand, if I were twenty years younger, I know I'd go into films."

His dismal reaction had been prompted by my assertion that film is the art for which there is the greatest spontaneous appetite in America at present, and by my reasons for thinking so. I must be clear that this is not to say that it is the art practiced at the highest level in this country; the film public depends more on imports today than does any other art public. But observation and experience, and the experience of others, make me believe that this uniquely responsive audience exists.

Or, in another phrase, there exists a Film Generation: the first generation that has matured in a culture in which the film has been of accepted serious relevance, however that seriousness is defined. Before 1935 films were proportionately more popular than they

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are now, but for the huge majority of film-goers they represented a regular weekly or semiweekly bath of escapism. Such an escapist audience still exists in large number, but another audience, most of them born since 1935, exists along with it. This group, this Film Generation, is certainly not exclusively grim, but it is essentially serious. Even its appreciations of sheer entertainment films reflect an over-all serious view.

There are a number of reasons, old and new, intrinsic and extrinsic, why this generation has come into being. Here are some of the older, intrinsic reasons.

1. In an age imbued with technological interest, the film art flowers out of technology. Excepting architecture, film is the one art that can capitalize directly and extensively on this century's luxuriance in applied science. Graphic artists have used mechanical and electronic elements, poets and painters have used computers, composers use electronic tapes. These are matters of choice. The film-maker has no choice: he must use complicated electronic and mechanical equipment. This fact helps to create a strong sense of junction with his society, of membership in the present. American artists have often been ashamed of—sometimes have dreaded—a feeling of difference from the busy “real” American world around them. For the film-maker the very instruments of his art provide communion with the spirit of his age. I think that the audience shares his feeling of union, sometimes consciously (especially when stereophonic sound, special optical effects, or color processes are used). The scientific skills employed are thus in themselves a link between the artist and the audience, and are a further link between them all and the unseen, unheard but apprehended society bustling outside the film theater.

There is a pleasant paradoxical corollary. In an era that is much concerned with the survival of the human being as such, in an increasingly mechanized age, here a complicated technology is used to celebrate the human being.

2. The world of surfaces and physical details has again become material for art. Just as the naturalistic novel seems to be sputtering to a halt, overdescribed down to the last vest button, the film gives some of its virtues new artistic life. A novelist who employs the slow steam-roller apparatus of intense naturalism these days is asking for an extra vote of confidence from the reader, because the method and effects are so familiar that the reader can anticipate by pages. Even when there is the interest of an unusual setting, the reader is conscious that different nouns have been

slipped into a worn pattern. The "new" French novel of Robbe-Grillet, Duras, Sarraute attempts to counteract this condition by intensifying it, using surfaces as the last realities, the only dependable objective correlatives. Sometimes, for some readers, this works. But both the old and the latter-day naturalisms must strain in order to connect. Rolf Hochhuth, the author of *The Deputy*, has said:

When I recently saw Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence*, I left that Hamburg movie house with the question, "What is there left for the novelist today?" Think of what Bergman can do with a single shot of his camera, up a street, down a corridor, into a woman's armpit. Of all he can say with this without saying a word.

Despite Hochhuth's understandable thrill-despair, there is plenty left for the novelist to say, even of armpits, but the essence of his remark rightly strips from fiction the primary function of creating material reality. The film has not only taken over this function but exalted it: it manages to make poetry out of doorknobs, breakfasts, furniture. Trivial details, of which everyone's universe is made, can once again be transmuted into metaphor, contributing to imaginative act.

A complementary, powerful fact is that this principle operates whether the film-maker is concerned with it or not. In any film except those with fantastic settings, whether the director's aim is naturalistic or romantic or symbolic or anything else, the streets and stairways and cigarette lighters are present, the girl's room is at least as real as the girl—often it bolsters her defective reality. Emphasized or not, invited or not, the physical world through the intensifications of photography never stops insisting on its presence and relevance.

This new life of surfaces gives a discrete verity to many mediocre films and gives great vitality to a film by a good artist. Consciously or not, this vitality reassures the audience, tangentially certifying and commenting on its habitat. Indeed, out of this phenomenon, it can be argued that the film discovered pop art years ago, digested this minor achievement, then continued on its way.

3. The film form seems particularly apt for the treatment of many of the pressing questions of our time: inner states of tension or of doubt or apathy—even (as we shall see) doubts about art itself. The film can externalize some physical matters that, for example, the theater cannot easily deal with; and it can relate them

to physical environment in a manner that the theater cannot contain nor the novel quite duplicate. The film can dramatize post-Freudian man, and his habitat—and the relation between the two. One does not need to believe in the death of the theater or the novel—as I do not—in order to see these special graces in the film.

4. Film is the only art besides music that is available to the whole world at once, exactly as it was first made. With subtitles, it is the only art involving language that can be enjoyed in a language of which one is ignorant. (I except opera, where the language rarely needs to be understood precisely.)

The point is not the spreading of information or amity, as in USIA or UNESCO films, useful though they may be. The point is emotional relationship and debt. If one has been moved by, for instance, Japanese actors in Japanese settings, in actions of Japanese life that have resonated against one's own experience, there is a connection with Japan that is deeper than the benefits of propaganda or travelogue. No one who has been moved by *Ikiru* can think of Japan and the Japanese exactly as he thought before.

Obviously similar experience—emotional and spiritual—is available through other arts, but rarely with the imperial ease of the film. As against foreign literature, foreign films have an advantage besides accessibility in the original language. The Japanese novelist invites us to recreate the scene in imagination. The Japanese film-maker provides the scene for us, with a vividness that our minds cannot equal in a foreign setting. Thus our responses can begin at a more advanced point and can more easily (although not more strongly) be stimulated and heightened.

This universality and this relative simultaneity of artistic experience have made us all members of a much larger empathetic community than has been immediately possible before in history.

5. Film has one great benefit by accident: its youth, which means not only vigor but the reach of possibility. The novel, still very much alive, is conscious of having to remain alive. One of its chief handicaps is its history; the novelist is burdened with the achievements of the past. This is also true of poetry. It flourishes certainly; as with fiction, the state of poetry is far better than is often assumed. But poetry, too, is conscious of a struggle for pertinent survival. In painting and sculpture, the desperation is readily apparent; the new fashion in each new season makes it clear. But the film is an infant, only begun. It has already accomplished miracles. Consider that it was only fifty years from Edison's camera to *Citizen Kane*, which is rather as if Stravinsky had written *Petrouchka* fifty years after Guido d'Arezzo developed musical no-

tation. Nevertheless the film continent has only just been discovered, the boundaries are not remotely in sight. It is this freshness that gives the young generation—what I have called the Film Generation—not only the excitement of its potential but a strong proprietary feeling. The film belongs to them.

These, I think, are some of the reasons for the growth of that new film audience. But they raise a question. As noted, these reasons have been valid to some degree for a long time, yet it is only in about the last twenty years that the Film Generation has emerged. Why didn't this happen sooner? Why have these reasons begun to be strongly operative only since the Second World War?

In that period other elements have risen to galvanize them. Some of these later elements come from outside the film world: the spurt in college education; political and social abrasions and changes; moral, ethical, religious dissolutions and resolutions. All these have made this generation more impatient and more hungry. But, since the Second War, there have also been some important developments within the film world itself.* These developments have been in content, not in form. Three elements are especially evident: increased sexuality, an increase in national flavor, and an increased stress on the individual. The latter two are linked.

As for the first, sex has been important currency in the theater since *The Agamemnon*, and with the first films came the first film idols. In fact there are scenes in many silent films that would have censor trouble today. But apart from sexual display or the sex appeal of any actor or actress, there is now—in many foreign films and some American ones—a sexual attitude that can be respected: an attitude closer to the realities of sexual life than the mythology that is preached by clergy of every faith, by mass media, by parents. This relative sexual freedom, long established in fiction and the theater, has been slower to arrive in films because of their wider availability to all ages and mentalities, and the consequent

* These do not include linguistic developments. Nothing has changed the language of film as, for example, electronics has changed music or abstract expressionism has altered the vision of painting. There have been many technical film developments—wide screens, stereophonic sound, color refinements—but so far they have largely been peripheral to the art itself. They, and the improved hand-held camera and recorder, may affect the basic language of film in future; they have not yet markedly done so. This fact can be taken as an implied strength. Experiments in artistic technique are usually a sign that a boundary has been reached with old techniques. In film there is no hint of exhaustion in the techniques that were known to Griffith and Eisenstein forty years ago.

brooding of censors. Now, in a more liberal time, this freedom makes films even more pertinent to this generation. The mythology that still passes for sexual morality is prescriptive, these films are descriptive; but there is more to their merit than verisimilitude. Not by nudity nor bedroom calisthenics nor frank language but by fidelity to the complexities of sexual behavior, these films provide more than recognition. By accepting and exploring complexities, they provide confidence in the fundamental beauty of those complexities, in the desirability of being human, even with all the trouble it involves.

The second element, national flavor, has been described by the English critic Penelope Houston in *The Contemporary Cinema* (1963):

However partial or distorted an image one gets of a society through its cinema, it is still possible to discern the national face behind the screen. It is difficult to conceive of a neo-realist idealism [in Italy] without the jubilant preface of the liberation of Rome; or to look at Britain's films of the past few years without reference to our redbrick radicalism; or to ignore the effect of the political climate on a French cinema which declares its awareness of strain in the very insistence with which it puts private before public life and creation for creation's sake before either.

It would be easy to add a similar sentence for almost every major film-producing country. Japanese films are concerned with contemporary unrest, directly and indirectly. Many of their costume pictures about samurai swordsmen are set in the 1860s when the feudal system was crumbling and immense social metamorphosis was taking place. The Soviet film has deepened in lethargy as revolutionary fervor wore off, as Stalinist despotism made it nervous, as some subsequent economic and scientific successes made it smug. It has become, with a few exceptions, either war glory or the ideologic equivalent of the petty bourgeois confection. As for America, the poor boy and rich girl story (or rich boy and poor girl) which was the staple of the popular film before the Second World War has disappeared. Money as romance, the Gatsby dream, has receded, not because everyone is now rich but because the middle-class image has replaced both the poor image and the rich image. What American would now relish the ancient compliment "poor but honest"? And what is the difference *in appearance*

between the clerk's car and the boss's? The much-mooted ascendancy of the middle class has reached the point where it is strong enough to control cultural forms, to magnify its own image in art.

With this ascendancy we have seen the emergence of a new romantic hero, posed against this bourgeois background, since all such heroes must contrast with their societies. The new romantic is the liberated prole, with a motorcycle or a Texas Cadillac, seeking his life by assaulting convention and morality, rather than by striving for success in accepted modes, either with money or with women. This hero scoffs at ideals of excellence and aspiration at the same time that he wants to dominate. There are signs that this hero may have run his course, but in the last twenty years or so he was pre-eminent.

A lesser companion of his still continues: the Frank Sinatra-Dean Martin figure, the smart, cool operator just inside the law, a philanderer righteously resentful of any claims on him by women. His casual *persona* derives in part from the night-club microphone, which was first a necessity, then became a prop, then a source of power and ease for those who had little power and could achieve nothing but ease. The invisible hand-held microphone accompanies the crooner-as-hero wherever he goes. His oblique, slithering solipsism seems likely to persist after the Brando figure, more directly descended from the proletarian rebel and Byronic individualist, has passed. Mere "coolness" persists; purposeful rebellion fades.

All the national colors described above apply both to popular and serious films. If we concentrate on serious film—film made primarily as personal expression, not as contractual job or money-spinner—then we often find, besides intensified national color, an intensified introspection. This is the third of our elements: a concern with the exploration of the individual as a universe. It is not a novelty in films. No more introspective films have ever been made than Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) or Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* (1926). But merely to mention such names as Bergman, Antonioni, Fellini, Ozu, Torre Nilsson, Olmi, Truffaut is to see that, for many outstanding directors, there has lately been more reliance on inner conflict than on classic confrontation of antagonists. These men and others, including some Americans, have been extending the film into the vast areas of innermost privacy, even of the unconscious, that have been the province of the novel and of metaphysical poetry. Saul Bellow has complained that the modern novelist doesn't tell us what a human being *is* today. Bellow is a notable exception to his own complaint; but whether we agree or

not, we can see that many contemporary film-makers have tried to answer that question, with a more consistent application than ever before in the history of the art.

These two elements—national color and the exploration of the individual—are obviously inseparable. Society and the man affect each other, even if it is in the man's withdrawal. These elements are further linked in a curious contradictory motion against our time. In an age when internationalism is promulgated as a solution to political difficulties, national colors have become more evident in films. In an age when social philosophers have begun to question the durability of individualism—which is, after all, a fairly recent concept in history and almost exclusive to the West—the film is tending to cherish the individual. Does this indicate a time lag between the film and the advances of political and social philosophy? On the contrary, I believe it indicates a perverse penetration to truth. The truth of art sometimes runs counter to what seems politically and intellectually desirable; that is always a risk of art. I think the film is showing us that nationalism, in the purely cultural sense, is becoming more necessary to us as jet plane and Telstar threaten to make us one world. I think that just at the time when technological and power structures challenge individualism, our own minds and souls have become more interesting to us. Up to now, technology has outraced self-discovery. Only now—in this postreligious, self-dependent age—are we beginning to appreciate how rich and dangerous each one of us is.

These elements have led, directly and by implication, to the phenomenon we are examining; the historical moment for the rise of the Film Generation, a surge of somewhat nostalgic revolution; a reluctance to lose what seems to be disappearing, accompanied by an impulse to disaffection, an insistence on an amorphous cosmos. (“Stay loose.” “Swing.”) Doubtless that nostalgia is sentimental, an unwillingness to be banned from an Eden of individualism that in fact never existed. But much of the revolution is clearheaded; not so much an attempt to halt change as to influence it; a natural and valuable impulse to scratch on the chromium fronts of the advancing tanks of factory-society “Kilroy was here.”

The divided attitude toward social change leads to another, crucial polarity. This generation has an ambivalent view of cultural tradition. On the one hand there is a great desire for such tradition, admitted or not. Everyone wants to know that he came from somewhere; it's less lonely. But this desire is often accompanied by a mirror attitude that looks on the past as failure and betrayal. It is of course a familiar indictment, the young accusing the old

of having made a mess, but now the accusation is more stringent and more general because of the acceleration of change and the diminutions of choice.

This ambivalence toward tradition—this polarity that both wants and rejects it—has created a hunger for art as assurance of origins together with a preference for art forms that are relatively free of the past. Outstanding among these is film. Even though it has been on hand for sixty-five years or so, the film seems much more of the present and future than other forms. It has its roots—of content and method—in older arts: drama, literature, dance, painting; yet it is very much less entailed by the past than these arts. It satisfies this generation's ambivalent need in tradition.

So far, this inquiry has been almost all celebration; now a concern must be raised. So far, we have discussed certain phenomena as cultural dynamics and social facts: now a word must be said in value judgment of the revolutionary standards involved. Not all the films that the Film Generation venerates seem worth its energy and devotion. It is not my purpose to lay down an artistic credo: I could always think of too many exceptions. Taste is a matter of instances, not precepts. One forms an idea of another's taste—or of one's own—from the perspective of many instances of judgment and preference, and even then, general deductions must be drawn delicately. But, drawing them as delicately as I am able, I am left with a concern to posit against the foregoing celebration.

There are enthusiasms of this Film Generation that I do not share, there are many enthusiasms of mine that they seem not to share. For the most part this is nobody's fault and probably nobody's virtue. But there is one enthusiasm in particular that has taken many members of this generation—not all, but a large proportion—that seems potentially deleterious and therefore to need discussion.

On college campuses around the country, in some film societies and small theaters (there are at least three in New York at this writing), much is being made of certain experimental films. The passion for experiment, as such, is eternal and necessary, but out of disgust with much commercial and fake-serious fare, there is a strong tendency to value experiment for its own sake, to regard it as a value instead of a means to value. And since, at this period in social and political affairs, a passion for these films has been taken to have other significances as well, the phenomenon is especially important.

The films to which I refer are often called underground films.

In America a large proportion of them come from a group centered in New York but not confined there, variously called New American Films or the Film-maker's Cooperative. It is an association of dedicated film-makers and dedicated apostles. (The apostles carry the word widely. Two minutes after I met Federico Fellini in Rome, he asked me whether I had seen Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*.) The group also has a circle of apostolic critics.

Predictably, this group considers itself the element of poetry in an otherwise prosaic film situation in this country and the world. Also predictably, its works are difficult to describe because it is not a school like neorealism or surrealism. It includes these and many more styles. It welcomes anyone who uses film as a form of personal expression. The most lucid general statement about this group that I know was written by Ken Kelman (*The Nation*, May 11, 1964). He divides their works into three main categories. First, "outright social criticism and protest" (Dan Drasin's *Sunday*, Stan Vanderbeek's *Skullduggery*). Second, "films which suggest, mainly through anarchic fantasy, the possibilities of the human spirit in its socially uncorrupted state" (Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and *Normal Love*). The third group "creates, out of a need to fill our rationalistic void, those actual inner worlds which fall within the realm of myth" (Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, Stan Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night* and *Window Water Baby Moving*).

Kelman's article, like others on the subject, is a ringing statement written with inner consistency and a fire that outstrips mere sincerity. The difficulty is that, when one sees these films (I have seen all those cited and numerous others), one finds small consonance between the descriptions and the works. Not to belabor individual films, one can say that most of them represent the attitudes and intents that Kelman describes but that their acceptance as accomplishment reflects a deliberate disconnection from cultural and social history. For me, most of the "new" techniques are dated, most of the social criticism is facile or vacuous, the mythic content undernourishing, the general quality of inspiration tenuous, strained, trite. Much of the work seems made for a young audience that insists on having its *own* films, at any critical or cultural price.

One of the grave liabilities in the situation is that writing like Kelman's and the attitudes it promotes tend to encourage the symbiotic state that exists today in the graphic arts. There is not much direct relation between film and audience, nothing so simple as the audience coming to the theater and being affected, or not, by what it sees. The audience exists jointly with these films in a highly

verbalized critical environment; its preformed attitudes are eager dramatizations of credos and exegeses. Much of modern painting—op, pop, collage, latter-day abstraction—seems to have its life almost as much in what is written about it as on canvas. Indeed many of the paintings seem to have been made to evoke aesthetic disquisition, to exist verbally and in viewers' attitudes. The underground film has entered this territory—of art as "position"—a position sustained as much by the polemic-conscious audience as by the material on the screen. It has long been an indictment of Broadway and Hollywood hits that the audience is preconditioned, whipped into line by newspaper raves. Here is very much the same situation at a higher intellectual altitude.

Another grave liability is the pressure brought to bear by the underground movement for disconnection from cultural history. Generally, as has been noted, the Film Generation has at least an ambivalent attitude toward tradition: this underground movement pushes—by implication and otherwise—for complete rejection of the standards that have been continually evolved through some centuries of Western art. They are not to be evolved further, they are to be discarded. It is easy to chuckle patronizingly at this belief as one more instance of the perennial artistic rebellion of the young, but current social upheavals give it a momentum that takes it out of the sphere of mere youthful high spirits—or low spirits. And the morning or the year or the decade after the excitements of rebellion have passed, it may be discovered that a valuable continuum in culture has been seriously injured—to the detriment of the very aims for which the action was taken.

I do not argue against change, including radical change. I do argue against nihilism as a necessary first step for progress. Besides, this film nihilism contains a bitter contradiction. It is often a manifestation in art of discontents elsewhere, of anger at older generations' betrayal of certain ideals. But the best art of the past—in all fields—is expression of those ideals, often despite society's apathy toward them. In discarding that inheritance of art, the rebels discard much of the best work that the human race has done for the very ideals that galvanize this new rebellion.

There is a parallel between this devotion to the underground film in many of the Film Generation and an element in the "new left," the new political radicalism. Some of radical youth are engaged in genuinely creative action: antimilitarism, antidiscrimination, support of various economic programs. But many of them equate radicalism with personal gesture and style—revolt consummated by bizarre hair and dress, unconventional sexual behav-

ior, flirtations with drugs. One who is aware of the valid basis for disaffection can still regret the introversions and futilities of these gestures. Likewise, one hopeful for the invigoration of the American film can doubt the pertinence of comparable gestures in this field: the exaltation of meaninglessness in film as a statement of meaninglessness in the world: the praise of juvenile irreverence—perennial in art—as a new formulation of myth; the approval of a social criticism that is devoid of intellectual foundation and political belief.

I dwell on the partiality to these experimental films not to counterbalance the happy fact of the Film Generation's existence but precisely because of its existence. Art has never been well created for long independently of an audience; in fact, history shows that audience response feeds great eras of art (painting in Renaissance Italy, the drama in Elizabethan England and neoclassic France, the sudden, ravenous world-wide appetite for silent-film comedy).

Speaking in the large, I believe that the Film Generation has the power to evoke the film that it wants, even though that generation is a minority and despite the harsh conditions of production and exhibition around the world. *All* films will not alter, nor should they, but if the dynamics of cultural history still obtains, an insistent group of art takers can—sooner or later, one way or another—have an effect on art makers. The effect is circular. The audience obviously cannot do it alone; there have to be talented artists. But talent is a relative constant in the human race; it is sparked by response and, even at its best, can be dampened by neglect. (Think of Herman Melville's twenty years in the Customs House.)

Thus, by a logical progression, we can see that the Film Generation has extraordinary powers. If it is true (as I have claimed) that film is the most pertinent art at present; if it is true that the young generation is closer to the film than to other arts; if it is also true that audience appetite can evoke art; then, it follows that the Film Generation has the opportunity to help bring forth the best and most relevant art of our age. And it is the possible impediment to this opportunity that makes a devotion to culturally baseless, essentially sterile films seem wasteful.

I am aware that the above puts an almost ludicrously large burden on this Film Generation. In effect, it is almost to ask them to solve the problems of cultural transition, to define what culture will become. The problem is not to be solved in any one locus, even when the locus—film and its audience—has come into being quite naturally. It is never to be solved; it is only to be confronted

continually, particularly in an age that is *not* an age, that is a rapid series of continually shifting points. But the size of the conclusion does not diminish the opportunity.

There is not much question among the thoughtful that we live in a time of the most profound cultural change, when the very purposes of art, as well as its content, are being transformed. The New American Cinema is one manifestation of that upheaval. In my view, most of its films that I have seen are of minuscule importance, but the implication in most of them is important: the implication that what's past is quite dead. The art of the future may be divorced from present concepts of humanism; it may find its pertinences in modes that, to most eyes, now look cold or abstract or even antihuman. But they will have been made by men who would not be what they are, whatever that may be, without the precedents of culture; and if that new art, whatever it may be, is to be held to its highest standards, the best of the past needs to be brought forward with us. The real *use* of our inheritance in the contemporary situation would throw a good deal of illumination on much of the new that is now adulated. The Kelmans tell us that an Antonioni is only seemingly free, that he is trapped by attempting to renovate the past. But, to take Antonioni as an example, it is precisely the effort to alter in an altered cosmos without returning Western culture to Year One that may keep a cultural future possible; may sustain us as we travel from a terrain that once was fruitful to one that has not yet been sighted. We don't want to starve en route.

As an important part of this process—this rescue operation, if you like—the Film Generation can demand a new film from the serious film-maker that is more than a gesture of denial. Such a generation, joined with the past and therefore truly equipped to outgrow it, may eventually get in its films what the Kelmans have prematurely claimed: a new social cohesion, a new fertile and reassuring mythos. If these come, they will manifest their presence, not so much by the blown prose of rhapsodists as by an irony: middle-of-the-road art will imitate the new film. That film will certainly not be ignored, as the majority now ignore underground efforts. When the imitation begins, then authentically progressive artists and audiences will know that they have thus far succeeded, and will know it is again time to move forward.

So the Film Generation, flaws and all, represents both a circumstance and an opportunity. On the whole it is, I believe, the most cheering circumstance in contemporary American art. That generation can be a vital force, or it can twiddle its strength and

chances away in irrelevant artistic nihilism, in engorged social petulance. One does not ask them to "save" film forever. In the long run, the history of the film will be the same as that of all arts: a few peaks, some plateaus, many chasms; but the present chance—a rare one—could save much time in the development of this young medium. The foreseeable future is all that, reasonably, we can have hopes or anxieties about in art. The Film Generation can help to make the foreseeable future of film interesting and important. Let us see.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Kauffmann attests to the existence of "a Film Generation: the first generation that has matured in a culture in which the film has been of accepted serious relevance." In this judgment he obviously differs with Baldwin and Rosten, who consider the popular arts—with few exceptions—escapist and trivial. What evidence does Kauffmann advance to support his claim? What do you think of his arguments?*
2. *According to Kauffmann, "The film form seems particularly apt for the treatment of many of the pressing questions of our time: inner states of tension or of doubt or apathy—even . . . doubts about art itself." How would Baldwin or Tynan describe "the pressing questions of our time"? What do you think of Kauffmann's formulation of our contemporary problems?*
3. *Do you think foreign films "have made us all members of a much larger empathetic community"? How do you think the average Hollywood movie is received in the more "underdeveloped" countries?*
4. *Kauffmann isolates two important qualities of the contemporary film: national color and the exploration of the individual. Discuss these two elements in one or two films you have seen recently.*
5. *Kauffmann speaks of "a young audience that insists on having its own films." Discuss how Hollywood has been catering to this demand in the past few years.*
6. *Describe Kauffmann's "concern" for the Film Generation. Do you agree with his observations and proposals?*

The Film Experience

Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein

Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein lecture on film at Queens College in New York. Their short book The Film Experience is an addition to the expanding esthetic of the film. The first chapter of that book, reprinted below, is a brief survey of the development of film styles and critical theories.

Since moviegoers do not have to be told what a movie is, critics seem presumptuous when they write about cinema as art. When they lay stress on cinematic details and employ technical terms, finding analogies between film and painting or literature, moviegoers find critics pretentious as well. The film is so clearly a part of one's growing up that one naturally looks down on those who make movies an experience comparable to listening to Beethoven, looking at Picasso, or reading Milton. The film is a Saturday afternoon entertainment during which James Cagney shoves grapefruit into Mae Clarke's "kisser," Godzilla flies, Steve Reeves as Hercules breaks his chains, and Rory Calhoun gets out of a tight spot. On TV, movies are bedtime stories for adults in which problems, hard in life to get into and impossible in life to solve, absorb the interest of those who like hard problems and easy solutions. Why the fuss about cinema as art?

Even when classicists, historians, philosophers, professors of fine arts, and other intellectuals—people who ought to know better—praise films, their tributes are for the film "subculture." To them, the most appealing feature of the movies is naïveté and spontaneity, which they fear will come to harm if films are subjected to the discipline of other arts and sciences. In their view, the moviegoer should not spoil his fun by applying aesthetic judgment. Rather he should let himself go, and seek total immersion.

Yet there is another notion of film "culture," which has been

growing stronger of late. Although the majority of people think of cinema as mere entertainment—"escapism"—the fact that film has always been a legitimate art form has not gone unnoticed, or even unpublicized. *Time* magazine, for example, has spoken of the necessity for the modern intellectual to become "cineliterate." Elia Kazan has announced on television that for intellectual and artistic stimulation, *he* goes not to the theater but to the movies. Even the earliest uses of moving pictures were not to entertain, but to put reality in a new light for the sake of better perceiving it. As early as 1871, theoreticians were concerned with discovering through cinematography the operation of things invisible to the human eye. Through their work, how a bird flies and a horse gallops became "magically" clear. They did not themselves regard what they were doing as art, for it was all in the name of scientific research; but it was a short time after those earliest endeavors that film pioneers recognized the art potential in film making. By 1915 such a formidable poet as Vachel Lindsay could see in movies a way of bringing to life that which is necessarily static in painting and sculpture. During the twenties and thirties, Sergei Eisenstein was developing a *poetics* of the film, pointing out that not only does film delight and teach, as do the other arts, but that it also has its own particular "form" and "sense."

How potent film expression can be was soon recognized by those who could use it and by those who feared it. Lenin and Hitler relied enormously on films to carry the propaganda of Bolshevism and Nazism to their own people and around the world. In so doing, they inadvertently advanced film art. Eisenstein's genius found its first impetus under Lenin's commissions. Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, covering the 1936 Olympic Games, advertised "the superiority of the German race" and the principle of "strength through joy" in a poetic documentary. John Grierson's *Night Mail* (1936),* conceived to demonstrate the excellence of the British Postal Service, became a visual celebration of transportation with the help of a text by W. H. Auden.

When moving pictures were first shown to the public, they were an immediate success, which is not surprising, for they appealed directly to a fundamental human thirst—a thirst for the exhibition and imitation of people and things. No doubt a part of the movies' early popularity was the novelty of the thing, this

* Dates are based on public premières, except when the official opening was long delayed because of censorship, or, as for underground films, because of the lack of commercial distribution. In such cases the date of completion, when known, is given.

great, flickering toy. But rather than waning, the appeal of the "toy" became world-wide. Those first films of the nineties—films of trains pulling into stations or of sea waves crashing on rocks, and the first "shocker," Edison's *The Kiss* (1896)—astounded the audiences of the nickelodeons by their power to capture and reproduce over and over again a moment of stark reality. Those people had themselves seen trains pulling into stations, waves crashing against rocks, and people actually kissing, but somehow the moving pictures made these things different and more exciting, mysteriously so, especially when one considers how much of the "actual" events was not shown. There was no color,* the activity was silent, and even the movement was jerky and unnatural. The film was spotted and grainy, and in place of that ever-searching quality of the human eye, the camera eye was but a framed, fixed stare. To all intents and purposes, these audiences should have had a better time going to train stations themselves to watch the trains come in—and that wouldn't have cost a nickel. Yet excitement over the enlarging horizons of photographic realism was universal. In France, for example, the Lumière brothers in the 1900's set up their cameras to capture the passing scene on the streets of Paris, while in America the Edison Company was sending cameramen out to film Niagara Falls. What held the early film audiences and brought them back for more was the delight of seeing reality reproduced and at the same time transformed—the familiar made strange.

A refinement of this kind of pleasure has been the public's fascination with "true-to-life" re-enactments. The movies suddenly made it possible to see people and events of note for oneself, as they actually lived or happened. Thus the growth of the newsreel. As early as 1898 the first of the new breed of newsreel cameramen were in Cuba shooting Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders, making TR one of the first of a line of politicians whose images have been caught and enhanced by films.

From shots of simple happenings and from those early—sometimes staged—newsreels developed the true art form of the documentary. Under John Grierson, Pare Lorentz, and Robert Flaherty, the filming of the real took on the impact of brilliant drama. In their hands, the familiar and unfamiliar elements of life itself became the raw materials of artistic (and political, social, and economic) statements. Since then, Louis de Rochemont and other directors have used documentary techniques in fiction films,

* [Some of the earliest films were in color—hand-tinted.—EDITOR]

and a brilliant new concept of the documentary has developed in the style of *cinéma vérité*.

Since most of the film footage produced these days is for commercial, educational, and scientific use, "research films" in their purest form are very much with us. Moreover, they are greatly similar in purpose to the very first moving pictures. Instead of the mechanics of flight, the subject may be the workings of a missile or space capsule. Rather than shoot the galloping of a horse, such film makers may shoot through an electron microscope to record the functions of the tiniest organisms. At their best they fulfill Siegfried Kracauer's ideal of using film to "redeem physical reality."

Even in frankly fictionalized movie stories the viewer expects authenticity, and so film makers must keep on hand whole libraries of "stock" footage of places, processes, and events, shots which are quite similar to those early nickelodeon renderings of the real world on film. Thus films about newspapers can show rolling presses; stories involving travel can draw upon shots of ships, airplanes, famous cities, or quaint out-of-the-way places. The soaring airplane that often breaks into a human drama is likely to come from the studio library, as is the moving traffic seen through the back window in a taxi scene. Such footage can be projected by back projection to serve as a background for the actors in the studio. Other library stock shots may be used for authenticity, as in the use of newsreel combat film in war stories. In such ways as these do seemingly unworkable materials such as locales, processes, or simple actions become workable into larger artistic wholes.

To achieve particular effects and integrate them into the total film, the film editor groups, cuts, conjoins, and superimposes various research shots; in short, handles them as if they were plastic material. A film maker does not simply present raw reality; he uses what he has photographed to make a point. Newsreel footage, for example, can be cut up and even mixed with still photographs so that the intercutting causes a point of view to emerge. Bruce Conner accomplished just that in *Report* (1965) by juxtaposing newsreel footage of the house in which Lincoln died with shots of the Kennedy motorcade moving through Dallas toward the book depository. By joining these two research elements, Conner created a kind of simile and established a theme. Documentarists always engage in such manipulation, but Conner here creates a new kind of documentary by means of rapid cutting

and cross-cutting, nonsynchronous sound, disrupted time order, repeated segments of action, and reversed motion. The assassination of President Kennedy is, to be sure, "reported," through authentic footage of the motorcade and a tape of the radio coverage of those confused events. However, Conner entirely reshapes this material to bring out its essence. Violent cutting emphasizes the violence of the homicide itself; repeating the sight of the President in the automobile just before the shooting drives home its dreadful inevitability; and reversing the motion of the car as it is seen from the rear, so that it appears several times to back into the camera, panders to our futile desire to pull the President back from his fate. By intercutting these specially handled scenes with such shots as those of Lincoln's house and of President Kennedy's wedding, Conner seems to add irrelevant documentary data, but actually adds meaning and poignancy. After all, is not historiography itself the recording of facts into a meaningful context or pattern?

A "pure" rendering of objective reality is actually impossible. Shaping always occurs. The Lumières' shots of Paris seem to be raw, untampered-with material. But even here the cameraman has selected the placement of his camera, has adjusted the light values and distorted or changed the focal length. Imaginative shaping of various kinds has always been part and parcel of film making. Early film artists were quick to find ways of arranging scenes and to invent photographic trickery that could compete with—and even surpass—those found in "live" vaudeville and magic shows. In France, Georges Méliès, and in America, Edwin Porter, presented "spectacle films," dazzling in their ingenuity, toward which the audience was expected to maintain a "willing suspension of disbelief." It was quite within the range of their ambition to make films with inanimate objects as actors (the seemingly self-propelled furniture in *The Automatic Moving Company*, France, 1910) and even to show "a trip to the moon"—a subject perennially challenging to moviemakers. If we can visualize Méliès hauling a huge papier-mâché moon up a ramp toward the camera as he made his *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902, we can get an idea of the fervor and imagination with which creators of film spectacles go about their work.

While the research film presumes to present undistorted reality, the spectacle purports to invent reality. Yet just as the research film cannot present unaltered truth, so the spectacle usually involves research elements: objects, events, or locales

which the audience delights in seeing because they can be verified as "real." It is reported that when Erich von Stroheim made *Foolish Wives* (1922),

he had installed a complete electrical wiring system for each room of a dummy hotel that appeared briefly in the film. In another picture he ordered \$10,000 worth of special medals to be struck off for officers in the army of a mythical kingdom, had the royal crest embroidered on his players' underclothes, held up a costly scene for hours until the smoke from a single chimney was rising to his satisfaction. Such details, he argued, may not have added to the physical reality of his pictures, but they did enhance the feeling, the atmosphere that he was trying to create.¹

Publicity men know the value of these research units in making a film attractive. They know that people want to see "real" things. De Mille used to boast that his movie decor was real or was copied precisely from the baths of Caracalla; and James Agee noted that "in *Wilson* they copied the cracks on the paintings in the White House."² Hollywood especially has always been capable of exploiting a paradox which, as we have seen, movie audiences always relish: fascination with a perfect illusion of reality, and an added titillation in knowing that what they are seeing is, after all, only an illusion created for the sake of spectacle.

Film makers intrigue moviegoers not only with the starkness or richness of visual details of experience, but also by the "real" scenes they can evoke without actually photographing them. A noise of splashing water while the camera focuses on two characters sitting on a rock can evoke the image of a nearby waterfall. Or the actual photographing of one object or locale can suggest the presence of another, if the director "composes" his frame with the same care exercised by a painter. By arranging lines, colors, and planes, a painter may draw the eye to an object in the foreground or send it scampering along a winding road into the misty horizon of the background, thus suggesting a world beyond the viewer's ken and expanding the confines of the canvas. The film maker has a similar means by which he can evoke a

¹ Arthur Knight, *The Liveliest Art* (New York: The New American Library, 1957), pp. 152-53.

² James Agee, *Agee on Film: Reviews and Comments* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 112.

much larger scene than he actually shows. When, in *Ashes* (1965), Wajda allows the black smoke from burning houses to burst beyond the confines of the frame, his already grandiose tableau (reminiscent of Antigone burying her dead brother) is expanded even further. This kind of movement is most effective when the total composition avoids a sense of centrality, that is, when no key figure or object is placed in the center of the frame. In Roberto Rossellini's *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* (1950), the dispersing of the monks in all directions in the film's last sequence implies the existence beyond the range of the camera of a Catholic world which the monks will spiritually reunify by their preaching.

Besides the never-to-be-seen reality that is provided by having objects move off-camera, or off-frame, film makers can induce a sense of an about-to-be-discovered reality. For this purpose they move the camera left or right (the pan shot) or up and down (the tilt shot) or place it on tracks to follow and catch up with a moving actor or object. By panning slowly, the camera makes things gradually swim into the moviegoer's field of vision. In a mystery or suspense story, the camera panning over a semidarkened room and alighting on unexpected objects stimulates fearful conjectures about the next object it will discover. A subtler method of implying, rather than photographing, realistic details involves editing filmstrips. A famous example occurs in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), in which the deftness of the cutting makes the woman who is murdered while showering appear to be nude when in fact she is never actually shown to be so—not even subliminally.

Actually, the film artist has all time and space at his disposal, as we have seen. If he wishes to root his camera to one spot, he can still turn it a full 360 degrees to show the entire horizon. Nor need he root the camera at all. He may move it along the terrain from spot to spot. Nor need he even anchor it in time. All places, all times are available to his "canvas."

A film always transforms, surpasses, or recreates reality while it is recording it. Film is a medium and, because a medium expresses by means of its own qualities and colorations and has its own strengths and defects, it inevitably transforms what it attempts to represent. Cinema presumes a certain trust in the world as it is. Yet contrary to the old saw, the camera *does* "lie": it moves unexpectedly; it reduces dimensionality; it changes the natural size of an object or places it into an artificial context of juxtaposed or superimposed shots; it heightens a form by painting it with an unreal luminescence or beclouding it with an unreal darkness. Far from being impassive, the camera must—if it is to main-

tain our interest—maintain a fluidity of space and time, which is often lacking in “reality.” These devices and effects may be “lies,” but they are some of the ways of art, and the means to improved perception.

Why is it that an argument so basic—and so obvious—explaining film as art has to be made? How is it that critics—those respected as such and those of self-generating reputations—have so often been blind to artistry in film when they grant it in other media? It is important to confront these questions, because film criticism itself has not only done much to foster quality in the movies, but has also done much to reduce it. In fact, few media are handled by a critical corps so fragmented and so much in basic conflict as is the cinema.

We begin with film history. Cinema was the first mass-entertainment art form to be invented in modern times. Literature, music, painting, sculpture, the dance, and the theater all had long, venerable traditions behind them when the first nickelodeons were in their heyday. Photography was also an invented art, of course, but it achieved nowhere near the popularity as an entertainment medium that its offspring, the moving pictures, amassed. The cinema was invented not by an artist, but by technicians. Completely mechanical, and astonishing in its effects, it had about it from the beginning an aura of being a wonder toy, and it focused on trivia. Even when it entered the world of art—capturing, for example, theatrical productions on film—it could offer only a poor, silent, flawed impression of the real thing. Furthermore, it was heavily shaped by its audience, which was the great mass public. In a short time, the movies became for the masses the staple of entertainment, and moviemakers quickly adjusted their productions to the common denominator of proletarian and middle-class tastes. And this, of course, meant that the movies quickly became big business, owned and operated not by artists or artistically minded entrepreneurs, but by businessmen—many of whom came to the new industry from completely different business backgrounds and whose interest was in giving the public only what it wanted.

That a film, for instance, such as *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) was a primitive but still noteworthy work of art, whose integrity should have been respected, did not occur to S. Lubin, who remade the film—virtually scene for scene and shot for shot—as a product to steal and sell. That *his* product still turned out inferior to Edwin Porter’s original indicates the special quality a true artist can give to his work. Thus, while film makers—the budding

directors, cameramen, and a few good actors—were making great strides in developing an art of film, and while some critics were coming to recognize this, those who owned the movies established a foundation of cheapness, commonness, and triviality.

Even as films were developing as an art, the movies had become a social institution and an industry, to be frowned upon by the world of art criticism. The theater might have its critics in the press, but the movies had gossip columnists. And these, of course, made no demands for quality film performances, but fed an insatiable public curiosity about the lives and follies of the “stars.” The movies became a world with a culture unto itself. This world had its temples in the great movie palaces and its more modest chapels in the small, often slightly shabby neighborhood houses. It had its rituals—the “movie nights” that became family habits, and, of course, the Saturday afternoon movies for the kids. It had its hierarchy of gods and goddesses, from the great superstars to the ever-recurring and comfortably familiar character actors. Its mythology was gossip, sex scandals, and stories of meteoric rises to fame and fortune from humble beginnings. There were public crises over morals, there was the constant lure of Hollywood for the young, there were exotic stars from overseas, there were popcorn and bingo nights. There was, above all, the development of the most effective public relations and image-building apparatus ever seen. In the face of this pervasive movie culture, film art as such—at least as far as the public was concerned—remained remote and esoteric, and, naturally, in the face of this situation, the quality of film criticism suffered.

It still suffers, in part because film criticism seems specially vulnerable to cultural fads. And as a result, the simple truth that film is art—good or bad, as the case may be—is all too often denied or perverted. This can be seen in some of our “schools” of film criticism.

Pauline Kael has written that after seeing an art film, she wants to go out to a movie. We must suppose the art film was trash and we can only hope the movie was true art. Delight is after all a function of true art. For Miss Kael the art film means “artiness,” and “artiness” may mean camera rhetoric for its own sake. There are film enthusiasts who take special pleasure in noting artful camera angles, curious cross-cuts, or other technically brilliant devices that make a film’s rhetoric exciting. But is that enough? James Card, in assessing the work of William F. Adler, especially Adler’s *The Second Coming* (1915), makes a necessary point:

Adler, by means which have defied all expert analysis or explanation, improvised some mysterious device which enabled his camera to follow action, to truck, dolly and zoom with sophisticated facility that seems often quite out of reach of many present-day studios so lavishly equipped with tracks, trucks, cranes, and lenses of variable focal length. The camera movement in *The Second Coming* makes ridiculous the measurement of moving camera shots in *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* for Adler makes camera mobility a primary technique rather than an exceptional device. The entire film is predominantly filled with full-screen close-ups. The picture is, of course, in its total effect, artless and quite devoid of content which could be considered of lasting interest.³

As Card suggests, camera technique, however brilliant, does not make a great movie. If artiness in a film irritates Miss Kael, we share her irritation.

Critics may also admire the setting, the splendid costumes, the excitement of physical combat, the style or personality of an actor, the musical score, or other facets of the film—for what pleasure these things create for them. But praising a movie solely for its bright colors or thrilling music or the jutting, dimpled chin of one of its actors is a form of self-indulgence. The object of any part of a good film or any good work of art is to contribute to the whole, and so such an appreciation really violates the point of a good film. It puts the viewer in the place of the object of his viewing.

Some critics commit the “historical fallacy” by equating old with classic. When Walker Allen said that he preferred silent films to talkies on grounds of “the less dialogue the better,” he was letting nostalgia get in the way of his perception. To be a “classic” a film must carry its justification in every part—in fact in every shot—and it must transcend the conventions of its day.

While some critics limit their sights by nostalgia and anti-quarianism, others are entrapped by an idolatry of stars or directors, fascinated by personal mystiques and private lives. Recently a more sophisticated group of critics has been coaxing journalism away from this cult of personality to a concern for the way directors reveal their personal style in their films. Evolved

³ James Card, “George Eastman House Photography” in “Our Resources for Scholarship,” *Film Quarterly*, XVI (Winter, 1962-63), p. 40.

primarily among French critics at the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, this approach assumes that every good movie in a director's canon gains its value and impact solely from the single-minded plan or style which he imposes on actors and technicians in accordance with his "vision." The notion of a collection of dominant creative personalities hovering over, pervading, and unifying the total production of quality films has given rise to the phrase "*la politique des auteurs*." Consciously taking into account the whole historical and critical formation of cinema, especially in the work of "strong" American directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and John Ford, the *Cahiers* critics were able to illustrate this kind of authorial control by themselves becoming directors of New Wave (Nouvelle Vague) films. These directors, as did some earlier directors, listed their names as if they were, in fact, "authors": *Les Cousins* (1959) was *un film de* Claude Chabrol, as *David Copperfield* is a novel by Charles Dickens.

Cahiers critics have sought to establish credit for discovering particular technical devices. They praise Ernst Lubitsch for the jump-cut, Joseph von Sternberg for baroque adornment, and Alfred Hitchcock for visual rhythms. When they find no author evident in the film product, then, by implication, the movie is bad, often in spite of consistently excellent work by particular contributors. Thus Andrew Sarris, in judging a film such as Sidney Franklin's *The Good Earth* (1937), follows the *Cahiers* cataloguing system but makes his own judgments. He condemns the film as a totality because it fails to reflect an *auteur's* policy, but he still praises the stars and the gimmicks that attracted the audience.⁴ Pauline Kael, whose criticism is closely geared to her own personal response to a film, attacks the *auteur* theory on the grounds that its emphasis on one standard above all—the presence of the director's plan embodied throughout—leads *auteur* critics to praise bad films. Her view is sound—to a point, that point being the value that ambitious failure has always had in art, especially when the "failure" can be connected with an author's, a painter's, a composer's, or a director's total body of work.

Miss Kael's main criterion of value is perhaps just as arbitrary: the making of a significant social statement. In spite of the objections of such "humanistic" critics, the *auteur* theory remains exciting because it encourages the discovery and appreciation of genius—full-blown or developing. It uncovers the living artistic

⁴ Andrew Sarris, "The American Director's Issue," *Film Culture*, No. 28 (Spring, 1963), p. 58.

traditions that run through films and suggests the many possibilities of a personal directorial style. Finally, it focuses our attention on "pure" cinema, the film experience for its own sake as something to be judged, not for its cultural (political, social) contribution to society, but as quality of work within a medium. In short, what goes for Brueghel and Balzac and Britten ought to go for Antonioni, Kurosawa, and Ford.

The humanistic critics would argue that no film, and no contemporary work of art, whatever the age or the medium, can exist separately, and that this is especially so for that mass medium, the movies. Expression is propaganda: that fact is primary; the intensity of the propaganda—a film by Eisenstein as opposed, let us say, to a film by Lubitsch—is only a contributing factor. Thus Pauline Kael could like *L'Avventura* (1960), as socially and thematically moving, because it moved *her*, but rejected *La Notte* (1961) and *L'Eclisse* (1962), which completed Antonioni's trilogy, because they lacked the impact of the first. Naturally she has no sympathy for shoddy production, bad acting, or bad stories—she is a perceptive critic. But what marks a critic is not what he rejects so much as what he applauds—and why.

A third prominent school of film criticism pursues toughness of mind and sharpness of experience. These critics oppose the intellectualism of the *auteur* and humanist critics. The experience of film, so says Manny Farber, the chief exponent of this school, must be essential and total; judgmental criteria are only the results of word play. For the tough-guy critics, like Farber, the nickelodeon atmosphere, which survived into the 1930's in seamy little theaters like those lined up along New York's Forty-second Street, and which can still be found in all major cities, provides the proper milieu. The art house itself is, to them, anticinema, and the chief enemy to understanding film is pretension, be it present in the story, in the actor's gestures, or in directorial "artiness." To these critics it follows that films of "moral uplift," like those of Stanley Kramer, performers who "overact," like Bette Davis, and even, perhaps, a figure such as Orson Welles who "overdirected" *Citizen Kane* (1941), are fair game for condemnation. For Harold Clurman, the chief image of the movies of the thirties is "a punch in the jaw." Whether in physical action or pointed speech, the chief virtue of film lies in direct communication.

The very history of film has encouraged the evolution of these theories. The *auteur* theory stems from the fact that ever since the first directors decided where to place their cameras for greatest effect, the director has acted as an *auteur*, setting up policies of

filming, acting, and even narration. He may work in conjunction with other artists and technicians and may even defer to their judgment; but the final decisions, the final policy are his, and this has been true from Porter, Méliès, and Griffith through Fellini, Resnais, and Kramer. The crux is, what value judgments should this fact of history and artistic organization call forth?

The humanistic bias stems from the nature of our age itself, and from the emphasis that socially involved artists have placed upon the mass media as ways of influencing our way of life for the better. In the twentieth century—as in the nineteenth—all art forms have been used for their ability to move their audiences to action or belief. Picasso's *Guernica*, Brecht's *The Jewish Woman* and *Man Is Man*, John Latouche and Earl Robinson's *Ballad for Americans*, Émile Zola's *Germinal*, the unremembered radio plays of Norman Corwin, these are but a smattering from other art forms that have had as their intent the dissemination of socially significant themes. Before the vogue of television, no medium was more widespread in intense following than the movies. Robert Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest* spoke its powerful message to many thousands as a play on Broadway (1934), but as a movie (1936) it touched millions. Not only do the great social issues of our day call for constant treatment, but it has also seemed natural that the heaviest responsibility for doing this should have been placed on the film. Some of the greatest films ever made have been intended as propaganda, but other great films have been thematically *dégage* or simply wrongheaded in their themes. The humanistic critic must also recognize criteria having nothing to do with thematic significance.

The old nostalgia never burns down, it merely shifts its focus. The tough-minded criticism of Farber, Clurman, and others of their position is at heart nostalgia and a misreading of cinema as an institution and an art form. Farber and Clurman are right when they maintain that for many millions the essential film experience is a simple, direct, and unpretentious thing. The Indian biting the dust, the sock in the jaw (anybody's jaw), the pie in the face (in the case of Cagney, read "grapefruit"), the bullet in the gut, the bomb in the building have jolted audiences all over the world, as have sharp, direct dialogue and simple, naïve stories. Producers and those who work for them have amassed fortunes by turning out films which, for all their length, color, wideness of screen, stereophonicity of sound, and thousands of cast, retain the essential spirit of the nickelodeon. The twenties and thirties had a special and often exciting aura. Even to critics too young to have

known that storied time, the thirties—those years in which so many stars “were born”—may have a romantic attraction. The special glamour of Hollywood on one side and the gloom of the neighborhood movie house on the other offer colorations too tantalizing to be ignored. But is this a value of film or a value of personal psychology? And, considering the universe of films that has been made, can we truly say that that is all there is to film?

Film is rich enough as an art to allow all three theories to co-exist. Just as the aesthetics of literature traditionally invites variety and controversy regarding its methods and aims, so do theories of film. What is crucial is that we avoid oversimplifying the film experience. To be alert to the full richness of concept and technique that makes a good film is to elevate the cinema to its rightful place in our culture. To know how films are made, to know how the film maker moves us, entices us, jolts us, and brings us to tears, not only with sentiments but with a host of means to project sheer beauty before us, is to make the seeing of a film much more of an adventure and, if the film is truly good, a triumph. To like what one likes is to make a valid judgment about art; but to seek to know *why* one likes art that is well wrought is to open oneself to a broader, richer world of sensitivity and perception.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Comment on the old saying, “The camera never lies.” Cite some examples to illustrate your point of view.
2. On the basis of this selection, how would you defend the film as an art form?
3. The authors list several positions taken by film critics; what are they? What do you look for in a movie? Write a critique of a film from one of these critical viewpoints.
4. Huss and Silverstein refer to the *auteur* theory of film criticism. In literature it is common to speak of Hawthorne’s themes, Hemingway’s style, or Faulkner’s stream-of-consciousness technique. Discuss the works of a film-maker or director in terms of his consistency of theme, style, or structure.
5. Can you point out any difficulties in the logic of the *auteur* theory?
6. Huss and Silverstein note that critic Pauline Kael’s main criterion of value is that a film make a significant social statement. What do you think of this criterion? Discuss some movies whose main purpose seems to be the statement of a social or political doctrine.

7. *As the authors point out, one of the most basic elements of the style of a director, cameraman, or particular movie is the way space and time are manipulated. In some films the camera is quite static, and the movie is built up through the use of cutting (joining together short pieces of film). In other films the camera moves around, and little emphasis is placed on cutting. Analyze a film from this standpoint of the use of movement in time and space.*

Economics of the New Movie, in Dollars and Sense, by a Producer of Same

Ingo Preminger

*Ingo Preminger is a Hollywood producer whose most celebrated credit is M*A*S*H. In this article he discusses current practices and problems in film production and distribution.*

The right idea at the right time has always proved invincible. Thus the new era of motion-picture production began when in 1951 Arthur Krim moved into an old and not so glamorous office building at 729 Seventh Avenue in New York City as president of United Artists. Krim was the right man with the right set of ideas at the right time. His talents encompassed the brain of a big-time lawyer, the gambling instincts of a businessman and the sense of showmanship without which no man can compete with the moguls of Hollywood. His ideas were largely dictated by the harsh reality of United Artists' financial statements which at that moment totaled up into one important bottom line: very little cash. His inventive mind turned this condition into a virtue by enabling stars, directors and producers to get ownership participation and profit percentages instead of cash. Magically, at that very moment, the Hollywood establishment, the so-called majors, MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, Warner Brothers, Columbia, Paramount and Universal International, in a program of misguided economy, decided to discontinue their policy of keeping actors and directors under long-term exclusive contracts. Their mistake provided Krim with the all-important, perfectly timed opportunity of hiring on the open market stars like Clark Gable, Jane Russell, Tyrone Power, Gary Cooper and directors of the caliber of Billy Wilder, Willy Wyler and George Stevens. The Hollywood establishment

was caught napping when United Artists gave these godlings of the silver screen something they had never tasted before—a piece of the action—the feeling of ownership and a sense of adventure. Artists who had lived their sheltered existences behind their Bel-Air walls, while their business managers had taken care of every worldly transaction from hiring a maid to investing in real estate, were suddenly exposed to the appeal of becoming bosses, entrepreneurs and powerful forces in the business. Their appetites were whetted by the *fata morgana* of enormous profits and favorable loopholes in the laws governing personal income taxes and capital gains. The fact is that many of these high expectations remained unfulfilled, but no matter how unprofitable each single film proved to be, the general result was a flow of product that provided United Artists with much-needed merchandise. As the major motion-picture companies turned over production to outside talent, producers, directors and stars became co-owners and partners in the profits.

In this connection, a new look at the term “profits” is appropriate. The concept of profits as the difference between incoming and outgoing moneys has to be understood in the new context where one of the partners in the profits also receives a fee for his efforts as a distributor. The distributor enjoys the privilege of deducting and collecting his fee off the top for his own account, before any funds are used toward repayment of expenses, including the cost of the making of the picture. The felicitous position of the distributor is responsible for the production of films that promise huge grosses and distribution fees, but offer very little chance of ever showing a profit. High costs of negatives of the film and the costs of distribution just keep eating up all the money coming in from the play dates, with the result that the artist rarely collects any profits, while his partner the distributor receives huge distribution fees. It came as no surprise when percentages of grosses rather than profits started to appear in production-distribution agreements, thereby exposing the emptiness of a word that had served its purpose successfully when the game first started.

The rest of the distributors soon followed the example set by United Artists and, ironically, in a few years the bargaining position of stars, directors, and producers became strong enough to demand not only ownership, control and participation in grosses and profits, but also an ever-increasing amount of guaranteed cash. Directors like Mike Nichols and stars like Richard Burton have received a guaranteed million dollars per picture, a marked increase from the years when MGM voluntarily gave up its ex-

clusive hold on its players in order to avoid the burden of a weekly salary.

The process of turning more and more controls over to the independent producer led to the order of today which, with minor exceptions, makes all the major studios not the producers of films, but the financiers of the so-called "independent package."

A "package" consists of one or more of the following elements: the first is generally a story in some form—it may be a produced or unproduced stage play, a published or unpublished novel, a story written for the film medium varying from a few words to hundreds of pages, a biography, a song title, an idea, or even the rights to remake an old film. Package ingredients can also consist of one or more actors, a producer, a director, a screenwriter, a composer, a cameraman or other elements which can emerge in a business of ever-changing fashion and trends.

A current example of the birth of a new kind of package element is the advent of pornography as an important and much-sought-after box-office attraction. Coincidentally the new production code or rating is serving as a means to publicize a film's pornographic character under the guise of protecting the public. It has become quite clear since the introduction of the code that its warning against the low moral standard of a particular motion picture has turned out to provide the blessing of free advertisement to attract the prurient interests of the paying moviegoer.

Before the new production code, a picture either did or did not receive the Seal, expressing the approval by the Code and Rating Administration of the Motion Picture Association of America. This administration, also named the Valenti office after its presiding member, is appointed and salaried by the major distributors, and represents a tribunal of self-censorship, as if self-administered censorship were more desirable. The excuse advanced for this hypocritical posture is that it helps ward off outside censorship; a highly specious argument in the light of the many court decisions declaring that all censorship prior to the release of a film is unconstitutional.

The new code, under the jurisdiction of the same administration, has created a situation where the classifications G ("All ages admitted. General audiences") and GP ("All ages admitted. Parental guidance suggested") are regarded as box-office poison. The R classification denotes "Restricted. Under seventeen requires accompanying parent or guardian," while an X rating stands for "No one under seventeen admitted" because of sex, violence, crime or profanity. The letters R and X on a theatre marquee and

in a newspaper ad are precisely what attract people, given their healthy appetite for hard-core pornography. Thus the new code has become a powerful force on the side of the dirty picture.

The packager or the man behind the package is generally the producer, but very often stars, writers, directors and/or their agents assume the initiative and wheel and deal, each on his own behalf.

Two questions come to mind: why does the distributor not do the packaging himself, and how does the distributor decide which package is to be financed?

As a fair generalization I would suggest that the answer to the first question lies in a disinclination to assume leadership and responsibility; in short, in the hedonistic inertia of people whose major interest in life is to hold on to a steady and comfortable job. There are, of course, special circumstances and reasons, but analysis of these would carry us beyond the framework of this piece.

The answer to the second question may seem deceptively simple. One quick look at the package should tell the story and determine the decision of the distributor: more elements of proven box-office attraction will make the package more promising in terms of its box-office potential. In 1970, for instance, Paul Newman should justify a larger investment than Rock Hudson, and Arthur Penn as the proposed director should fetch more enthusiasm from investors than Richard Fleischer. A best-selling novel like *Marjorie Morningstar* by its own often overrated strength will create acceptance for its owner-packager over and above a relatively unknown and underrated literary work such as *Goodbye, Columbus*. And then, as a matter of course, two or three good elements should be more bankable than one; conversely, two or more mediocre ingredients may make up for the lack of one outstanding one. The bankable star, the actor who suffices as the only package element, owes his position to his popularity with audiences as a box-office magnet. No distributor will turn down a Steve McQueen picture, although turkeys like *The Thomas Crown Affair* have not fulfilled the promise of the star to sell tickets.

The bankable literary property, like a hit play or a best-selling novel, offers the nervous investor the assurance of box-office appeal with movie audiences because of the fame, direct popularity and wide appeal of the work. But again, the harsh reality of many disappointments like *Death of a Salesman*, *By Love Possessed*, and *In Cold Blood* proves there is no such thing

as a guaranteed transfer of success from one medium to another.

However, most of the difficulties of judging packages arise through factors that just cannot be precisely and objectively determined. The estimated cost of the film is the first item that comes under scrutiny. The same package elements that will make a two-million-dollar film attractive will fail to support a film estimated to run into a negative cost of four million dollars. The distributor will have to be expert at appraising the accuracy of cost estimates not only in the light of the material but also of the individuals involved. There are slow directors and fast directors and they will film the same story at vast differences in cost; there are stars who are notorious for causing delays in production, and there is Frank Sinatra who will not repeat a scene, galloping through his pictures and earning dubious glory as the "one-take actor." Some producers are known as well-organized professionals who bring films in on schedule and within budget while others are muddled, incompetent, or, to be generous, tired.

And then there are the cases when the acceptance of a package by distributors can be a mere formality. These are the deals involving, as package ingredients, moviemakers of unquestionable and unanimously recognized excellence. A select group of producers and directors demand and obtain absolute control beginning with the selection of the subject matter, through the final cut of the film. They make the decisions concerning all phases of production, including casting, hiring of crews, construction of sets, selections of locations. Their announcement that they plan to make a picture brings all the distributors running to bid for the privilege of supplying the necessary and often undetermined amount of financing. These are the men one can borrow money on, the bankable moviemakers. These are the most powerful men in the American movie business. They, more than anyone else, with their almost uncontrolled power and influence, bear the responsibility for the shape of films to come and the future of the motion picture as an art form. They have the means to realize their creative dreams without the need for compromise in order to pacify some banker's objections. They have, or are supposed to have, the magic rapport with world audiences and the ability to execute their visions on film.

Strangely, these men are virtually unknown to the millions of moviegoers. With the exception of Alfred Hitchcock, our most prominent directors and producers do not enjoy the fame and notoriety of their stars, a poor testimonial indeed to the effectiveness of the costly press-agentry subscribed to by so many creative

contributors behind the camera. A classic example was the late Jerry Wald, who made his own personal public relations his life's work.

To truly appreciate the fortunate position of the bankable moviemaker, consider the woes that befall the run-of-the-mill producer trying to get his projects financed, produced and released.

Our average Hollywood producer-on-the-make must first find a story and tie it up with an option for a limited time. This in itself imposes an ulcer-making deadline, beyond which he loses not only his option but his entire investment of money and time.

The next step will take him on a search for actors and director to make the deal more attractive. But people of importance—and these are the ones that our producer-on-the-make is after—are not easily contacted. Their agents have built an almost impenetrable wall around them. Even the attempt to contact the artist directly is punishable by the eternal scorn of the agent. This, by the way, often turns out to be a blessing in disguise: the agent, once he is an openly declared opponent to a project, cannot hurt it as effectively as he normally would under the guise of benevolence and friendship. But whatever approach the producer chooses, he will soon find out that his phone calls are frequently ignored, and the most common reply is simply that the artist is unavailable for several years. If any of his prospects finally agrees to examine his project, our producer will learn the great eternal verity in the motion-picture business: Nobody Reads.

His difficulties are further multiplied and exacerbated by the natural and charming custom of the industry to avoid the truth even when it costs nothing. This creates an emotional climate of paralyzing uncertainty, and with nobody having honesty or guts enough to give our friend a definite "no" he will soon despair of ever tying all the strings around his package.

But some independent producers succeed in wrapping up the package and proceed to the next step: submission to the financier.

Backers come in all shapes and sizes. There are those who watch themselves operate, being mainly interested in making an impression, and those, the hard-nosed, greedy money machines, who have learned certain solid ground rules on which they base all decisions. Those in the first group, which would include a Joe Levine and a Bob Evans, see themselves as the Ziegfelds and the Thalbergs of today. They are more concerned with looking glamorous in making a deal than with creating every chance for

a good picture. The second group would include a Leo Jaffe and a David Picker who operate strictly by the record.

And with it all, more often than not, the least reasonable methods are the ones rewarded by spectacular success. The production of *A Lion in Winter*, for instance, came about fortuitously when Peter O'Toole, committed to do the title role in *The Ski Bum*, preferred to play a roistering King of England, and Miss Hepburn was available.

We now find our man, package in hand, staring across the vast reaches of a neo-Mexican desk at the Hollywood representative of a national television network.

You thought we were talking about movies. We are. All three of the national television networks have now entered the business of theatrical motion pictures. The reason for their decision to produce yet another wasteland may be a desire to become primary owners of motion pictures for television release in the face of ever-increasing prices quoted by the old-time movie people or else simply the legitimate wish to expand into a related, potentially profitable and more glamorous field not subject to the dictates of Madison Avenue. Anyway, with the old-timers short of cash and long on unreleased product, it seemed like a good idea to tackle one of the well-heeled newcomers.

In the weeks leading to the appointment with the network representative, our candidate will have endured many humiliations from a battery of secretaries attempting to make him divulge more of the exact nature of his calls. Would he not like to speak to an underling first, or send over his project for examination and meet afterward if the matter has any merit?

Too wise and experienced to fall for these traps, our man finally has his day with the top man—who, like all top men in the business, has to check with somebody else—and gets his chance to present his project.

Again, a quick “no” would be merciful. But the inflated euphemisms from the man behind the big desk usually culminate in the dramatic imperative, “Let me have your script,” followed by, “I will read it over the weekend.”

Unfortunately, the weekend, with all its demands of society, friends, and family, hardly leaves the network executive enough time to peruse his scripts that are in production and which he must get to know somehow.

Thus the script sooner or later is handed to a *reader*, whose job it is to condense the contents of literary work into so-called synopses.

The reader's report and a synopsis are placed on several desks throughout the distributor's office. Every reader worth his meager salary knows that top executives, as they go up the ladder of success and influence, become less and less able to read more than two paragraphs. The destructive synopsis routine serves only to make the refusal of a package seem more reasonable without ever mentioning the truth, which is simply the low grade of the bankable elements. The key question is the killer: "Who is in it?" If Barbra Streisand had accepted the script, the distributor would have found out about its contents at the invitational World Premiere long after gambling his stockholders' money on it. In a business built largely on hunches and intuition, one looks in vain for a reasonable explanation for the old-fashioned reliance on star names to sell tickets at the box office. This is in the face of the overwhelming commercial success of the starless *The Graduate* and such flops as *Doctor Dolittle* with Rex Harrison.

After his first defeat, a producer can take his package to other money sources and perhaps, against all odds, conclude an arrangement for the distribution and production of his project. During the interview with the top executive the deal is concluded with a handshake. However, only the basic points are discussed. An experienced packager knows that this summit meeting with its veneer of urbane sincerity, fair play and goodwill constitutes his last chance to nail down important contractual details in his favor, and, if at all possible, he will obtain a memo committing these vital points to paper as promptly as possible. In the weeks following the summit meeting, the legal department of the distributor and a "negotiator," mainly a former lawyer in charge of contracts, will try to renegotiate—"reneg" as the pros aptly call it—every advantage granted by the distributor. At this later stage the masks of fair play and integrity are dropped and the law of the jungle openly prevails. Our producer's bargaining position has deteriorated after his press agent has rashly wired the announcement of the deal to all the trade papers. The negotiator is aware of this and will push the hapless victim around to the extent that he dares, short of inviting a lawsuit.

Surely, you think, the foregoing must be exaggerated. The fact is that the whole truth is even grimmer.

Why then would anybody in his right mind endure the ordeal of independent production? For the same reasons that men become involved in other areas of American commerce and industry—only more so. Much more so. Here, success can arrive with the speed and the disproportionate impact of a jackpot.

Glamour, recognition, V.I.P. treatment by airlines and restaurants, access to beautiful women, power to hire and fire, and all the other goodies offered by the Bitch are constantly waved before the twitching noses of ambitious men. The examples of so many rather undistinguished people who made it big are constantly encouraging the newcomer; no credentials are necessary, fabulous careers by high-school dropouts are the rule.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Do erotic movies really undermine the morals of our country's youth, as so many people say? Do you think that young people are attracted by X ratings and hard-core pornography? Does age make any difference in these matters?*
- 2. Preminger, as a producer, naturally considers a successful movie to be one that reaps huge profits. Have you seen "successful" films that you thought were artistic failures? Have you seen any movies that were not great financial successes that you thought were good works of art?*
- 3. Outline a film idea that you think would be a sure financial success. Include plot summary or story source, location, actors, director, and so on. Explain why you think your plan would be financially sound.*
- 4. Do you think that commercial considerations limit the quality and artistry of the films we see? If so, how?*

Puritanism Revisited: An Analysis of the Contemporary Screen-Image Western

Peter Homans

Peter Homans is a professor of psychology and theology at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. In this essay he describes the characteristics and underlying themes of movie and television westerns, concluding that they have recently become more popular than ever because they reflect the attitudes and ideals of puritanism.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of popular culture is the rapidity with which new forms are initiated and older, more familiar ones revitalized. While narrative forms of popular culture, such as the detective story, the romance, and the soap opera, have generally been less subject to sudden losses or gains in popularity, the western has within the last few years undergone a very abrupt change in this respect. Formerly associated with a dwindling audience of adolescents, who were trading in their hats and six-guns for space helmets and disintegrators, the western has quite suddenly engaged an enormous number of people, very few of whom could be called adolescent.

This new and far-reaching popularity is easily established. Whereas before, the western story was told from four to six in the afternoon, on Saturday mornings, in comic books and in some pulp fiction, now it is to be seen during the choicest television viewing hours, in a steady stream of motion pictures, and in every drug store pulp rack. At present, on television alone, more than thirty western stories are told weekly, with an estimated budget of sixty

FROM *Studies in Public Communication*, No. 3 (Chicago: Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, Summer 1961). Copyright © 1961 by the University of Chicago. Reprinted by permission.

million dollars. Four of the five top nighttime shows are westerns, and of the top twenty shows, eleven are westerns. In addition to this, it is estimated that women now compose one-third of the western's heretofore male audience.

Such evidence invariably leads to attempts to explain the phenomenon. Here there has been little restraint in trying to analyse the unique status which the western has gained. Some have suggested that it is the modern story version of the Oedipal classic; others find it a parallel of the medieval legends of courtly love and adventure; while those enamoured of psychiatric theory see it as a form of wish-fulfillment, an "escape" from the realities of life into an over-simplified world of good and evil.

Such theories, I suppose, could be described at greater length—but not much. They not only betray a mindless, off-the-top-of-the-head superficiality; they also suffer from a deeper fault characteristic of so many of the opinions handed down today about popular culture—a two-fold reductionism which tends to rob the story of its concrete uniqueness.

This two-fold reductionism first appears as the failure to attend fully and with care the historical roots of any form. For example, to say that the western is a re-telling of chivalric tales is partly true. There is some similarity between the quest of the knight and the quest of the western hero—they both seek to destroy an evil being by force. However, the tales of chivalry grew out of medieval culture, and any effort to account for them must consider their relationship to their culture. Similarly, the western must be seen in relation to its culture—eastern American life at the turn of the century. To relate the two forms without first considering their historical contexts is what may be called historical reductionism.

The second form of reductionism is the failure of most theories to attend the unique details of the story which set it apart from prior forms. This can also be seen in the idea of chivalric tales retold. Holders of this theory notice that both heroes are engaged in a quest, the destruction of evil, and that they both earn some kind of special status in the eyes of the communities they have served. But what is not noticed is that the modern tale betrays an intense preoccupation with asceticism and colorlessness, while the medieval one dwells upon color, sensuousness, and luxury; or, that the medieval hero exemplifies tact, manners, elaborate ceremony and custom, while his modern counterpart seeks to avoid these. Again, the western rules out women; the older story would not be a story of chivalry did not women play an important part. The refusal to attend with care specific and possibly inconsequen-

tial details is a form of reductionism which may be called textual reductionism.

Both types of reductionism rob a particular form of possible uniqueness and independence. They force it to be merely a dependent function of some prior form, whatever that form may be. Together, they have become the two main errors which have obscured analysis of many present-day forms of popular culture.

However, these two foci are more than pitfalls to be avoided. The textual and historical aspects of any popular art form are the very points which should be scrutinized most carefully and elaborately. If these points are properly attended, they will yield the greatest insight into the meaning and significance of the story.

Textual Analysis

Any effort to analyse a particular form of popular culture must begin with the problem of text. Each of us, in thinking and talking about the western, has in mind an overall understanding of it—an ordered vision of character, event, and detail shaped by all the hundreds of different versions which he has seen. Therefore, one must first set forth and defend precisely what it is he thinks the western is, before indicating what it means. Indeed, disagreements as to meaning can often be traced to disagreements as to text.

But we cannot simply lump together everything that has ever happened in every western, fearful of omitting something important. Nor can we refuse to include anything which does not appear in each and every version. For there are westerns which omit details which all critics would agree are characteristic of the story, just as there are others which include details which all would agree are of no consequence. The task consists in selecting, from the endless number of westerns we have all seen, a basic construct of narrative, character, and detail which will set forth clearly the datum for subsequent analysis. This critic's basic construct can be set forth as follows:

Background

The western takes place in a stark, desolate, abandoned land. The desert, as a place deprived of vitality and life as we know it, is indispensable. The story would not be credible were it set in an equatorial jungle, a fertile lowland, or an arctic tundra. As the classical versions have told us again and again, the hero emerges from the desert, bearing its marks, and returns to it. Already we

are instructed that our story deals with a form of existence deprived of color and vitality.

This desert effect is contradicted by the presence of a town. Jerry-built, slapped-together buildings, with falsefronts lined awkwardly along a road which is forever thick with dust or mud, tell us that the builders themselves did not expect them to endure. And of these few buildings, only three stand out as recognizable and important—the saloon, the bank, and the marshal's office (hero's dwelling). Recent westerns have added stores, court houses, homes, and even churches. But for the classical versions such contrived togetherness has never really been necessary.

The saloon is by far the most important building in the western. First of all, it is the only place in the entire story where people can be seen together time after time. It thereby performs the function of a meeting-house, social center, church, etc. More important, however, is its function as locus for the climax of the story, the gun-fight. Even in today's more fashionable westerns, which prefer main street at high noon, the gun-fight often begins in the saloon, and takes place just outside it.

The bank, we note, is a hastily constructed, fragile affair. Poorly guarded (if at all), it is an easy mark, there for the taking. Its only protection consists of a snivelling, timid clerk, with a mustache and a green eyeshade, who is only too glad to hand over the loot. Has there ever been a western in which a robber wondered whether he could pull off his robbery? There is a great deal of apprehension as to whether he will elude the inevitable posse, but never as to the simple act of robbery. The bank is surprisingly unprotected.

The marshal's office appears less regularly. Most noticeable here is the absence of any evidence of domesticity. We rarely see a bed, a place for clothes, or any indication that a person actually makes his home here. There is no mirror, an omission which has always intrigued me. The overall atmosphere is that of austerity, to be contrasted sharply with the rich carpeting, impressive desk, curtains, pictures, and liquor supply of the saloon owner or evil gambler. Such asceticism is not due to the hero's lack of funds or low salary; rather, because of his living habits, there is no need of anything else. Indeed, we are led to suspect that such austerity is in some way related to our hero's virtue.

The town as a whole has no business or industry. People have money, but we rarely see them make it. And we are not concerned as to how they got their money—unless they stole it. This town and its citizens lead a derivative, dependent existence, serving activities

which originate and will continue outside the town. It is expendable, and will disappear as soon as the activities it serves no longer exist.

Home life, like economic life, is conspicuous by its absence. There simply are no homes, families, domestic animals, or children. The closest thing to a home is a hotel, and this is rarely separated from the saloon. Recent westerns have included homes, along with cozy vignettes of hearth, wife, kitchen, etc. Such innovations do little more than indicate how harassed script writers have become, for these scenes do not contribute to the basic action and imagery of the story. Classically, home life in the western simply isn't.

Supporting People

As in any good form of popular culture, the number of important people is small. Such people I prefer to call "types". A type is an important figure recurring again and again, whose basic actions and patterns of relationship are relatively enduring from one version of the story to another. The particular vocation, clothing, mannerisms, personal plans, names, are all conventions—concessions to plausibility—which seemingly identify as new someone we know we've seen before. Such conventions I would like to call "role". When we refer to a particular person in a story with the preface "the"—e.g., "the" hero, or "the" good girl—we have penetrated beyond the role and identified a type.

One of the most interesting types is the "derelict-professional". He is one who was originally trained in one of the traditional eastern professions (Law, Medicine, Letters, Ministry), but who has, since his arrival in the west, become corrupted by such activities as drink, gambling, sex, or violence. Most celebrated is Doc Holliday, who trained in the east as a dentist, then came west to practice medicine whenever he was sober enough to do so. The derelict-professional sometimes appears as a judge or lawyer; sometimes as an ex-writer; in other instances he is a gun-toting preacher. The point is the same: the traditional resources of society (healer, teacher, shepherd, counselor) cannot exist in an uncorrupted state under the pressures of western life.¹

¹Such TV versions as *Frontier Doctor* (Medicine), *Jefferson Drum* (Letters) and *Black Saddle* (Law) do not contradict this thesis, although they set forth professional men from the east who are hardly derelict. Close attention, however, reveals a "past" of questionable nature which these men are trying to conceal, but which is always being threatened by exposure. Such figures might best be called "covert" derelict-professionals.

Somewhat similar is the "non-violent easterner". He often appears as a well-dressed business man, or as a very recent graduate of Harvard, although the roles, as always, vary. Constantly forced to defend himself, he is simply not up to it. Indeed, he is usually thrashed shortly upon his arrival in town. Sometimes this is so humiliating that he tries to become a westerner. It never works. He is either humiliated even more, or killed. Another role for this type is the pastor (a recent addition) who, when the chips are down, has only a prayer to offer. The east, we soon note, is incapable of action when action is most needed.

The "good girl" is another supportive type. Pale and without appetites, she too is from the east. Classically represented as the new schoolmarm, she also appears as the daughter of a local rancher, someone en route to a more distant point, or the wife of a cattleman. She has her eye on the hero. While any dealings between them come about as the result of her initiative, she is rarely flirtatious or coy. She does not allow any feminine allure to speak for itself—surely one reason why she ends up doing most of the talking. The good girl fails to understand why men have to drink, gamble, punch and shoot each other, and she spends a good deal of time making this point to the hero. Usually she has some kind of protection—brother, father, fiancé, or relative—which makes it possible for her not to work. She is never independent, out in the world, with no attachments.

The "bad girl" is alone in the world, unattached, and works for her living, usually in the saloon as a waitress or dancer. She too has her eye on the hero, attracting him in a way her counterpart does not. She is often flirtatious and coy, but rarely takes the initiative in their meetings. She doesn't try to make him put away his guns and settle down. She is friendly with other men, and, like her counterpart, is unhappily stalemated in her relation to the hero.

The "attendant" is another type. The most enduring and easily recognizable role for this type is the bartender, although the snivelling bank clerk is a close second. The attendant observes the action, provides the instruments of it, but never becomes centrally involved with it. Like a child following adults from room to room, he remains passive, deferring again and again to the principals, performing the important function of appearing unimportant.

One final type, of which there are many—"the boys", those bearded, grimy people who are always "just there", drinking and gambling in the saloon, without any apparent interest in anyone or anything, except their cards, whiskey, and the occasional song-

stress. Their function is that of an audience. No hero ever shot it out with his adversary without these people watching. Isolated conflicts between hero and adversary are always postponed—sometimes at considerable inconvenience to both—until the “boys” have had a chance to gather. The “boys” are passive functions of the action, important primarily for their presence.

Principals and Action

The action of the screen-image western takes place in three phases: the opening, the action, and closing phases; or, everything before the fight, the fight, and everything after the fight.

The opening phase first of all introduces us to the story's setting, to the supporting types (through their roles) and principals. In doing so, however, it not only supplies us with information, but also provides the very important illusion that we are to see for the first time something which we know, in the back of our heads, we have seen many times before. It is important to believe that we are not idiots, watching the same story night after night.

Secondly, the opening phase prepares us for the action by delineating the hero. He is, first of all, a transcendent figure, originating beyond the town. Classically, he rides into town from nowhere; even if he is the marshal, his identity is in some way dissociated from the people he must save. We know nothing of any past activities, relationships, future plans, or ambitions. Indeed, the hero is himself often quite ambiguous about these. There are no friends, relatives, family, mistresses—not even a dog or cat—with the exception of the horse, and this too is a strangely formal relationship.

His appearance further supports this image. In the pre-action phase the hero sets forth a contrived indolence, barely distinguishable from sloth. Lax to the point of laziness, there appears to be nothing directional or purposeful about him. Take that hat, for instance: it sits exactly where it was placed—no effort has been made to align it. His horse is tied to whatever happens to protrude from the ground—and remains tied, although little more than a lazy nod would free it. Clothes and gunbelt also betray the absence of any effort towards arrangement and order. With feet propped up on the hitching rail, frame balanced on a chair or stool tilted back on its two rear legs, hat pushed slightly over the eyes, hands clasped over the buckle of his gunbelt, the hero is a study in contrived indolence.

I have used the word “contrived” to indicate another quality—

that of discipline and control—which remains latent, being obscured by apparent laxity. His indolence is merely superficial, and serves to protect and undergird the deeper elements of control which will appear in the action phase. Now he has time on his hands; but he knows his time is coming, and so do we.

The hero's coupling of laxity and control is seen in those recurrent primary images which are ordinarily referred to simply as "typical scenes". With women there is no desire or attraction. He appears somewhat bored with the whole business, as if it were in the line of duty. He never blushes, or betrays any enthusiasm; he never rages or raves over a woman. His monosyllabic stammer and brevity of speech clearly indicate an intended indifference. In the drinking scenes we are likely to see him equipped with the traditional shot-glass and bottle. The latter becomes his personal property, and therefore he is never questioned as to how many drinks he has taken. We rarely see him pay for more than one. While drinking he usually stares gloomily at the floor, or at all the other gloomy people who are staring gloomily at each other. He gulps his drink, rarely enjoys it, and is impatient to be off, on his way, hurrying to a place we are never told about. In the gambling scenes his poker face is to cards what his gloomy stare was to drink—a mask serving to veil any inner feelings of greed, enthusiasm, fear, or apprehension. We note, however, that he always wins, or else refuses to play. Similarly, he is utterly unimpressed and indifferent to money, regardless of its quantity or source, although the unguarded bank is always just around the corner.

The action phase opens with the threat of evil, and extends up to its destruction at the hands of the hero. Although evil is most often referred to as the "villain" or "bad guy" or "heavy", I prefer the terms "evil one" or "adversary".

Of the many hundreds of seemingly different versions, each is unshaven, darkly clothed, and from the west. Little is known about him. We are not told of his origins, his relationships, habits, or customs. Like the hero, he is from beyond the town, rather than identified with the interests, problems, and resources which characterize it. All details of his personal life are withheld. We can only be sure that the evil one unhesitatingly involves himself in the following activities: gambling, drink, the accumulation of money, lust and violence. They are his vocation; with respect to these, he is a professional man. It should be noted, however, that he is inclined to cheat at cards, get drunk, lust after women who do not return the compliment, rob banks, and finally, to shooting people he does not care for, especially heroes.

The impact of this evil one on the town is electric, as though a switch had been thrown, suddenly animating it with vitality, purpose, and direction. Indeed, it is evil, rather than good, which actually gives meaning to the lives of these people—his presence elicits commitment to a cause. The townsfolk now share a new identity: they are “those who are threatened by the evil one”. Unified by a common threat, the town loses its desolate, aimless quality. It becomes busy. Some hasten to protect others; some to protect themselves; some run for help; some comment fearfully. Nevertheless, they all know (as do we) that they are of themselves ultimately powerless to meet this evil. What is required is the hero—a transcendent power originating from beyond the town.

Notice what has happened to this power. Gone are the indolence, laxity, and lack of intention. Now he is infused with vitality, direction, and seriousness. Before, the most trivial item might have caught his attention; now, every prior loyalty and concern are thoroughly excluded—he drops everything—in order that he may confront with passion and single-mindedness this ultimate threat. Once this radical shift has been accomplished, the hero (and audience) are ready for the final conflict—the central part of the action phase, the climax of the story.

While the fight can take many forms (fist-fight, fight with knives, whips, etc.—even a scowling match in which the hero successfully glares down the evil one), the classical and most popular form is the encounter with six-guns. It is a built-up and drawn-out affair, always allowing enough time for an audience to gather. The two men must adhere to an elaborate and well-defined casuistry as to who draws first, when it is proper to draw, when it is not, etc. The climax also reflects much of the craft of gunplay, of which both hero and evil one are the skilled artisans (cross-draw versus side-draw, fanning versus thumbing, whether two guns are really better than one, etc.). While these issues are certainly not the main concern of the action, the prominence given them by the story as a whole tends to prolong the climax.

Although the hero's presence usually makes the fight possible—i.e., he insists on obstructing the evil one in some way—it is the latter who invariably attacks first. Were the hero ever to draw first, the story would no longer be a western. Regardless of the issues involved, or of the moral responsibility for what is to follow, the hero's final, victorious shot is always provoked by the evil one. With the destruction of the evil one, the action phase is completed.

In the closing phase the town and its hero return to their pre-action ways. The electric quality of alarm and the sense of purpose

and direction recede. People come out of hiding to acclaim their hero and enjoy his victory. He too returns to his pre-action mode of indolence and laxity. At such a moment he is likely to become immediately absorbed in some unimportant detail (like blowing the smoke from his gun), indicating for all to see that he has survived the crisis and is once again his old self.

One more event must take place, however, before the story can conclude. The hero must renounce any further involvement with the town which his victory may have suggested. In some way the town offers him the opportunity to identify with it, to settle down. Traditionally, this means marrying the schoolmarm and settling down. The hero always refuses. He cannot identify himself with the situation he has saved. He forfeits any opportunity to renounce his "beyond the town" origin and destiny. When this forfeiture has been made clear, when both savior and saved realize that it cannot be abrogated, then the story is over.

Analysis

The western is, as most people by this time are willing to acknowledge, a popular myth. And by myth I mean three things. First of all, it is a story whose basic patterns of character, plot, and detail are repeated again and again, and can be so recognized. Secondly, the story embodies and sets forth certain meanings about what is good and bad, right and wrong—meanings regarded as important by those who view and participate in the myth. And thirdly, some of these meanings are veiled by the story,² so that one can affirm them without overtly acknowledging them. Some part of the story (or all of it, perhaps) serves to conceal something from the participant—i.e., there is an unacknowledged aspect to the story. There is, therefore, an embarrassing question which never occurs to those in the sway of the myth—the posing of which is precisely the critic's most important task.

The meanings which the western sets forth center upon the problem of good and evil. Evil, according to the myth, is the failure to resist temptation. It is loss of control. Goodness lies in the power and willingness to resist temptation. It is the ability to remain in the presence of temptation and yet remain in control of

²This point is drawn from DeRougemont's analysis of the myth of Tristan and Isolde. See Denis DeRougemont, *Love in the Western World*, New York: Pantheon Press, 1956.

one's desire. Five activities make up the well-known content of temptation: drinking, gambling, money, sex, and violence.

Whenever any one of these activities appears it should be seen as a self-contained temptation episode.³ Such an episode first of all presents an object of temptation which can be indulged, should the hero so choose; and secondly, it sets forth the hero in such a way that he can indulge the temptation in a preliminary way without becoming absorbed in it—i.e., without losing control. And, of course, it sets forth the evil one in precisely the opposite way.

In the drinking scenes the hero possesses not one drink, but a whole bottle—i.e., he has at his disposal the opportunity for unlimited indulgence and its consequent loss of self-control. Gambling is a situation over which one has rather limited control—you can lose; but the hero does not lose. He wins, thereby remaining in control (cheating simply signifies the failure to acknowledge loss of control). Wealth is not seized although it is available to him through the unguarded bank; and both good and bad girl seek out the hero in their various ways, but to no avail—he remains a hero. However, each temptation is presented in its peculiar way in order to set forth hero and evil one in their respective functions.

The temptation to do violence is more problematic, so much more so that the climax is given over to its solution. Furthermore, in the climax we find the key to the meaning of the myth as a whole—i.e., it can tell us why each type appears as he does, why the temptation episodes have their unique shape, and why certain fundamental images recur as they do.

We perceive in the evil one a terrible power, one which cannot be overcome by the ordinary resources of the town. However, he has acquired this power at great price: he has forfeited that very control and resistance which sustains and makes the hero what he is. The evil one represents, therefore, not temptation, so much as "temptation-unhesitatingly-given-into". He is the embodiment of the failure to resist temptation; he is the failure of denial. This is the real meaning of evil in the myth of the western, and it is this which makes the evil one truly evil. Because of this he threatens the hero's resistance (and that of the townsfolk, as well, although indirectly): each taunt and baiting gesture is a lure to the forei-

³ I am not suggesting that every western has all of these temptations, or that they appear in any given order. The subject of analysis is the representative version—not any particular version or set of versions. Thus any particular western might deal with any one, or a number of such temptations.

ture of control. This temptation the hero cannot handle with the usual methods of restraint, control, and the refusal to become absorbed; and it leads to a temptation which the hero cannot afford to resist: the temptation to destroy temptation.

The evil one's dark appearance is related to this threat. It tells us two things. First, that to lose control and forfeit resistance is (according to the story) a kind of living death, for black signifies death. In terms of the moral instruction of the story, and speaking metaphorically, we know that the evil one has "lost his life". But his black appearance also tells us that, speaking quite literally, this man will die—because of what he is, he must and will be executed. We are therefore both instructed and reassured.

The embarrassing question can now be posed: why must the hero wait to be attacked, why must he refrain from drawing first? Why does he not take his opponent from behind, while he is carousing, or while he is asleep? Anyone in the power of the myth would reply that the gunfight takes place the way it does because this is the way westerns are; it's natural; this is the way it's always done—or, in the language of the myth itself, it was self-defense. But if one moves beyond the grasp of the myth, if one is no longer loyal to its rules and values, the gunfight is never inevitable. The circumstances which force the hero into this situation are contrived in order to make the violent destruction of the evil one appear just and virtuous. These circumstances have their origin in the inner, veiled need to which the story is addressed. This process, whereby desire is at once indulged and veiled I call the "inner dynamic". It is the key to the western, explaining not only the climax of the story, but everything else uniquely characteristic of it. What is required is that temptation be indulged while providing the appearance of having been resisted.

Each of the minor temptation episodes—the typical scenes setting forth hero and evil one as each encounters drink, cards, money, and sex—takes its unique shape from this need. Each is a climax-less western in itself, a play within a play in which temptation is faced and defeated, not by violent destruction, as in the climax, but by inner, willed control. Or, reversing the relationship, we may say that in the gunfight we have writ large something which takes place again and again throughout the story. It is precisely for this reason that no western has or needs to have all these episodes. Therefore westerns can and do depart radically from the composite picture described earlier. We are so familiar with each kind of temptation, and each so re-enforces the others that ex-

traordinary deletions and variations can occur without our losing touch with the central meanings.

The inner dynamic affects the supporting types as well. The derelict-professional is derelict, and the non-violent easterner is weak, precisely because they have failed to resist temptation in the manner characteristic of the hero. Their moderate, controlled indulgence of the various temptations does not conform to the total resistance of the hero. Consequently they must be portrayed as derelict, weak and deficient men, contrasting unfavorably with the hero's virtue. In this sense they have more in common with the evil one.

Because these two types both originate in the east, they have something in common with the good girl. We note that everything eastern in the western is considered weak, emotional, and feminine (family life, intellectual life, domestic life, professional life). Only by becoming western-ized can the east be redeemed. The western, therefore, is more a myth about the east than it is about the west: it is a secret and bitter parody of eastern ways. This is all the more interesting, since it was originally written in the east, by easterners, for eastern reading. It really has very little to do with the west.

Woman is split in the western to correspond to the splitting of man into hero and evil one. Primarily, however, the double feminine image permits the hero some gratification of desire while making a stalemate ultimately necessary. To get the good girl, the story instructs us, our hero would have to become like those despicable easterners; to get the bad girl, he would have to emulate the evil one. In such a dilemma a ride into the sunset is not such a bad solution after all.

The attendant sets forth the inner dynamic by being infinitely close to the action (temptations) while never becoming at all involved in it. It is his task to provide the instruments of temptation (drink, money, cards, guns) while never indulging them himself. He is at once closer to temptation than any other type, and yet more removed than any other type.

The boys function to facilitate the action without becoming involved in it. Without them hero and adversary might find other ways to settle their differences. The boys serve to remind them of their obligations to each other and the story as a whole, thereby structuring the myth more firmly. While they are around nothing less than the traditional gunfight will do. On the other hand, because they never participate in the action, but only coerce and re-

enforce it, they are thoroughly resistant to this temptation as well.

In summary, then: the western is a myth in which evil appears as a series of temptations to be resisted by the hero—most of which he succeeds in avoiding through inner control. When faced with the embodiment of these temptations, his mode of control changes, and he destroys the threat. But the story is so structured that the responsibility for this act falls upon the adversary, permitting the hero to destroy while appearing to save. Types and details, as well as narrative, take their shape from this inner dynamic, which must therefore be understood as the basic organizing and interpretive principle for the myth as a whole.

Cultural Implications

The western, I believe, bears a significant relationship—both dynamic and historical—to a cultural force which, for lack of a better word, I would call “puritanism”. Here I simply refer to a particular normative image of man’s inner life in which it is the proper task of the will to rule, control, and contain the spontaneous, vital aspects of life. For the puritan there is little interpenetration between will and feeling, will and imagination. The will dominates rather than participates in the feelings and imagination.

Whenever vitality becomes too pressing, and the dominion of the will becomes threatened, the self must find some other mode of control. In such a situation the puritan will seek, usually unknowingly, any situation which will permit him to express vitality while at the same time appearing to control and resist it. The western provides just this opportunity, for, as we have seen, the entire myth is shaped by the inner dynamic of apparent control and veiled expression. Indeed, in the gunfight (and to a lesser extent in the minor temptation episodes) the hero’s heightened gravity and dedicated exclusion of all other loyalties presents a study in puritan virtue, while the evil one presents nothing more nor less than the old New England protestant devil—strangely costumed, to be sure—the traditional tempter whose horrid lures never allow the good puritan a moment’s peace. In the gunfight there is deliverance and redemption. Here is the real meaning of the western: a puritan morality tale in which the savior-hero redeems the community from the temptations of the devil.

The western is also related to puritanism through its strong self-critical element—i.e., it attacks, usually through parody, many aspects of traditional civilized life. Self-criticism, however, does

not come easily to the puritan. Like vitality, it functions through imagination; and it too is in the service of the will. Therefore, if such criticism is to appear at all, it too must be veiled. The western assists in this difficult problem, for the story is well-removed from his own locale, both geographically and psychically. Because it is always a story taking place "out there", and "a long time ago", self-criticism can appear without being directly recognized as such.

It is tempting to inquire how far certain historical forms of puritanism, such as mass religious revivals, may have actually produced the western. Was it only a coincidence that the same period of 1905-1920, which saw the early emergence of the western myth, also witnessed the nationwide popularity of a Billy Sunday and an Aimee Semple McPherson? Their gospel was a radical triumph of will over feeling and vitality, through which the believer could rely wholly upon his increasingly omnipotent will for the requisite controls. And here too was the familiar inventory of vices, with its characteristic emphasis upon gambling and drinking.

Recently there has been an even more remarkable religious revival. Beginning in the early 1950's, it reached its point of greatest intensity in 1955. Here the gentle willfulness of the Graham gospel, and the more subtle (but equally hortatory) "save-yourself" of the Peale contingent permitted many respectable people to go to church and become interested in religion, without actually knowing why. However, like its earlier counterpart, this was not so much a religious movement as it was a renewed attack of the will upon the life of feeling and vitality.

That a re-appearance of the western should take place precisely at this point is certainly suggestive. For the upsurge in its popularity did occur just five years ago, beginning in the same year that the religious revival reached its height. Perhaps the present western revival has been more extensive and pervasive because the recent religious revival was equally so.

Presently, however, the religious revival has subsided, but the western remains almost as popular as ever. This could mean one of two things. On the one hand, the many changes which the western is presently undergoing—in its narrative, its types, and in its recurrent, primary images—could indicate that the religious recession has permitted the myth to be altered radically, such that it is on the way to becoming something entirely different. On the other hand, should such changes remain responsible to and be contained by the classical version, it could be that our puritanism is simply being expressed through non-religious sources: most notably through the social sciences (indeed, in the sociologist's and

psychologist's denunciation of the violence, historical inaccuracies, etc. in the western, do we not hear echoes of the puritan hero himself?).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. What are some characteristics of puritanism? How is the western hero a puritan?*
- 2. This article was written in 1961, before the appearance of frankly erotic themes in films. Do you think westerns made in the past few years have reflected this new approach to sex? If so, how has this changed the image of the western hero?*
- 3. Apply Homans' "cast of characters" to a movie or TV western you have seen recently.*
- 4. In what sense does the western represent American history?*
- 5. What are some of the qualities of myth? Explain how the western reflects these qualities.*

The Gangster as Tragic Hero

Robert Warshow

Robert Warshow's book The Immediate Experience, from which this brief essay on the gangster film is taken, is one of the seminal critical studies of popular culture. Warshow died in 1955, too early to see his great interest in the popular arts vindicated.

America, as a social and political organization, is committed to a cheerful view of life. It could not be otherwise. The sense of tragedy is a luxury of aristocratic societies, where the fate of the individual is not conceived of as having a direct and legitimate political importance, being determined by a fixed and supra-political—that is, non-controversial—moral order or fate. Modern equalitarian societies, however, whether democratic or authoritarian in their political forms, always base themselves on the claim that they are making life happier; the avowed function of the modern state, at least in its ultimate terms, is not only to regulate social relations, but also to determine the quality and the possibilities of human life in general. Happiness thus becomes the chief political issue—in a sense, the only political issue—and for that reason it can never be treated as an issue at all. If an American or a Russian is unhappy, it implies a certain reprobation of his society, and therefore, by a logic of which we can all recognize the necessity, it becomes an obligation of citizenship to be cheerful; if the authorities find it necessary, the citizen may even be compelled to make a public display of his cheerfulness on important occasions, just as he may be conscripted into the army in time of war.

Naturally, this civic responsibility rests most strongly upon the organs of mass culture. The individual citizen may still be permitted his private unhappiness so long as it does not take on political significance, the extent of this tolerance being determined

by how large an area of private life the society can accommodate. But every production of mass culture is a public act and must conform with accepted notions of the public good. Nobody seriously questions the principle that it is the function of mass culture to maintain public morale, and certainly nobody in the mass audience objects to having his morale maintained.* At a time when the normal condition of the citizen is a state of anxiety, euphoria spreads over our culture like the broad smile of an idiot. In terms of attitudes towards life, there is very little difference between a "happy" movie like *Good News*, which ignores death and suffering, and a "sad" movie like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, which uses death and suffering as incidents in the service of a higher optimism.

But, whatever its effectiveness as a source of consolation and a means of pressure for maintaining "positive" social attitudes, this optimism is fundamentally satisfying to no one, not even to those who would be most disoriented without its support. Even within the area of mass culture, there always exists a current of opposition, seeking to express by whatever means are available to it that sense of desperation and inevitable failure which optimism itself helps to create. Most often, this opposition is confined to rudimentary or semiliterate forms: in mob politics and journalism, for example, or in certain kinds of religious enthusiasm. When it does enter the field of art, it is likely to be disguised or attenuated: in an unspecific form of expression like jazz, in the basically harmless nihilism of the Marx Brothers, in the continually reasserted strain of hopelessness that often seems to be the real meaning of the soap opera. The gangster film is remarkable in that it fills the need for disguise (though not sufficiently to avoid arousing uneasiness) without requiring any serious distortion. From its beginnings, it has been a consistent and astonishingly complete presentation of the modern sense of tragedy.†

* In her testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Mrs. Leila Rogers said that the movie *None but the Lonely Heart* was un-American because it was gloomy. Like so much else that was said during the unhappy investigation of Hollywood, this statement was at once stupid and illuminating. One knew immediately what Mrs. Rogers was talking about; she had simply been insensitive enough to carry her philistinism to its conclusion.

† Efforts have been made from time to time to bring the gangster film into line with the prevailing optimism and social constructiveness of our culture; *Kiss of Death* is a recent example. These efforts are usually unsuccessful; the reasons for their lack of success are interesting in themselves, but I shall not be able to discuss them here.

In its initial character, the gangster film is simply one example of the movies' constant tendency to create fixed dramatic patterns that can be repeated indefinitely with a reasonable expectation of profit. One gangster film follows another as one musical or one Western follows another. But this rigidity is not necessarily opposed to the requirements of art. There have been very successful types of art in the past which developed such specific and detailed conventions as almost to make individual examples of the type interchangeable. This is true, for example, of Elizabethan revenge tragedy and Restoration comedy.

For such a type to be successful means that its conventions have imposed themselves upon the general consciousness and become the accepted vehicles of a particular set of attitudes and a particular aesthetic effect. One goes to any individual example of the type with very definite expectations, and originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it. Moreover, the relationship between the conventions which go to make up such a type and the real experience of its audience or the real facts of whatever situation it pretends to describe is of only secondary importance and does not determine its aesthetic force. It is only in an ultimate sense that the type appeals to its audience's experience of reality; much more immediately, it appeals to previous experience of the type itself: it creates its own field of reference.

Thus the importance of the gangster film, and the nature and intensity of its emotional and aesthetic impact, cannot be measured in terms of the place of the gangster himself or the importance of the problem of crime in American life. Those European moviegoers who think there is a gangster on every corner in New York are certainly deceived, but defenders of the "positive" side of American culture are equally deceived if they think it relevant to point out that most Americans have never seen a gangster. What matters is that the experience of the gangster as an *experience of art* is universal to Americans. There is almost nothing we understand better or react to more readily or with quicker intelligence. The Western film, though it seems never to diminish in popularity, is for most of us no more than the folklore of the past, familiar and understandable only because it has been repeated so often. The gangster film comes much closer. In ways that we do not easily or willingly define, the gangster speaks for us, expressing that part of the American psyche which rejects the qualities and the demands of modern life, which rejects "Americanism" itself.

The gangster is the man of the city, with the city's language

and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring, carrying his life in his hands like a placard, like a club. For everyone else, there is at least the theoretical possibility of another world—in that happier American culture which the gangster denies, the city does not really exist; it is only a more crowded and more brightly lit country—but for the gangster there is only the city; he must inhabit it in order to personify it: not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world. And the gangster—though there are real gangsters—is also, and primarily, a creature of the imagination. The real city, one might say, produces only criminals; the imaginary city produces the gangster: he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become.

Thrown into the crowd without background or advantages, with only those ambiguous skills which the rest of us—the real people of the real city—can only pretend to have, the gangster is required to make his way, to make his life and impose it on others. Usually, when we come upon him, he has already made his choice or the choice has already been made for him, it doesn't matter which: we are not permitted to ask whether at some point he could have chosen to be something else than what he is.

The gangster's activity is actually a form of rational enterprise, involving fairly definite goals and various techniques for achieving them. But this rationality is usually no more than a vague background; we know, perhaps, that the gangster sells liquor or that he operates a numbers racket; often we are not given even that much information. So his activity becomes a kind of pure criminality: he hurts people. Certainly our response to the gangster film is most consistently and most universally a response to sadism; we gain the double satisfaction of participating vicariously in the gangster's sadism and then seeing it turned against the gangster himself.

But on another level the quality of irrational brutality and the quality of rational enterprise become one. Since we do not see the rational and routine aspects of the gangster's behavior, the practice of brutality—the quality of unmixed criminality—becomes the totality of his career. At the same time, we are always conscious that the whole meaning of this career is a drive for success: the typical gangster film presents a steady upward progress followed by a very precipitate fall. Thus brutality itself becomes at once the means to success and the content of success—a success that is defined in its most general terms, not as accomplishment or specific gain, but simply as the unlimited possibility of aggression.

(In the same way, film presentations of businessmen tend to make it appear that they achieve their success by talking on the telephone and holding conferences and that success *is* talking on the telephone and holding conferences.)

From this point of view, the initial contact between the film and its audience is an agreed conception of human life: that man is a being with the possibilities of success or failure. This principle, too, belongs to the city; one must emerge from the crowd or else one is nothing. On that basis the necessity of the action is established, and it progresses by inalterable paths to the point where the gangster lies dead and the principle has been modified: there is really only one possibility—failure. The final meaning of the city is anonymity and death.

In the opening scene of *Scarface*, we are shown a successful man; we know he is successful because he has just given a party of opulent proportions and because he is called Big Louie. Through some monstrous lack of caution, he permits himself to be alone for a few moments. We understand from this immediately that he is about to be killed. No convention of the gangster film is more strongly established than this: it is dangerous to be alone. And yet the very conditions of success make it impossible not to be alone, for success is always the establishment of an *individual* pre-eminence that must be imposed on others, in whom it automatically arouses hatred; the successful man is an outlaw. The gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual, to draw himself out of the crowd, and he always dies *because* he is an individual; the final bullet thrusts him back, makes him, after all, a failure. "Mother of God," says the dying Little Caesar, "is this the end of Rico?"—speaking of himself thus in the third person because what has been brought low is not the undifferentiated *man*, but the individual with a name, the gangster, the success; even to himself he is a creature of the imagination. (T. S. Eliot has pointed out that a number of Shakespeare's tragic heroes have this trick of looking at themselves dramatically; their true identity, the thing that is destroyed when they die, is something outside themselves—not a man, but a style of life, a kind of meaning.)

At bottom, the gangster is doomed because he is under the obligation to succeed, not because the means he employs are unlawful. In the deeper layers of the modern consciousness, *all* means are unlawful, every attempt to succeed is an act of aggression, leaving one alone and guilty and defenseless among enemies: one is *punished* for success. This is our intolerable dilemma: that failure is a kind of death and success is evil and dangerous, is—

ultimately—impossible. The effect of the gangster film is to embody this dilemma in the person of the gangster and resolve it by his death. The dilemma is resolved because it is *his* death, not ours. We are safe; for the moment, we can acquiesce in our failure, we can choose to fail.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think that recent movies you have seen bear out Warshow's ironic statement that "it is the function of mass culture to maintain public morale" and to "conform with accepted notions of the public good"? Examine one or more American films to support your answer.
2. Warshow claims that the gangster film has been "a consistent and astonishingly complete presentation of the modern sense of tragedy." What is tragedy? How are gangster films tragic?
3. Do you agree that "our response to the gangster film is most consistently and most universally a response to sadism"? Does Warshow's statement have reference to the increasing amounts of violence in films? Do you enjoy violence on the screen? Why or why not?
4. Why are the gangsters so often more attractive than the "good" characters? (Bonnie and Clyde and many of James Cagney's gangster movies are examples of this.)
5. Warshow maintains that for the gangster "the whole meaning of his career is a drive for success." How does this relate to the much-discussed "American Dream"?
6. Warshow's remarks are based largely on the classic gangster movies of the 1930's and 1940's. How would they apply to more recent films?

Comedy's Greatest Era

James Agee

James Agee, one of this country's greatest film critics, was also a screen-writer and a Pulitzer Prize novelist. During most of the 1940's, he was film critic for both Time and The Nation. "Comedy's Greatest Era" originally appeared as the cover story for Life on September 3, 1949.

In the language of screen comedians four of the main grades of laugh are the titter, the yowl, the bellylaugh and the boffo. The titter is just a titter. The yowl is a runaway titter. Anyone who has ever had the pleasure knows all about a bellylaugh. The boffo is the laugh that kills. An ideally good gag, perfectly constructed and played, would bring the victim up this ladder of laughs by cruelly controlled degrees to the top rung, and would then proceed to wobble, shake, wave and brandish the ladder until he groaned for mercy. Then, after the shortest possible time out for recuperation, he would feel the first wicked tickling of the comedian's whip once more and start up a new ladder.

The reader can get a fair enough idea of the current state of screen comedy by asking himself how long it has been since he has had that treatment. The best of comedies these days hand out plenty of titters and once in a while it is possible to achieve a yowl without overstraining. Even those who have never seen anything better must occasionally have the feeling, as they watch the current run or, rather, trickle of screen comedy, that they are having to make a little cause for laughter go an awfully long way. And anyone who has watched screen comedy over the past ten or fifteen years is bound to realize that it has quietly but steadily deteriorated. As for those happy atavists who remember silent comedy in its heyday and the bellylaughs and boffos that went

with it, they have something close to an absolute standard by which to measure the deterioration.

When a modern comedian gets hit on the head, for example, the most he is apt to do is look sleepy. When a silent comedian got hit on the head he seldom let it go so flatly. He realized a broad license, and a ruthless discipline within that license. It was his business to be as funny as possible physically, without the help or hindrance of words. So he gave us a figure of speech, or rather of vision, for loss of consciousness. In other words he gave us a poem, a kind of poem, moreover, that everybody understands. The least he might do was to straighten up stiff as a plank and fall over backward with such skill that his whole length seemed to slap the floor at the same instant. Or he might make a cadenza of it—look vague, smile like an angel, roll up his eyes, lace his fingers, thrust his hands palms downward as far as they would go, hunch his shoulders, rise on tiptoe, prance ecstatically in narrowing circles until, with tallow knees, he sank down the vortex of his dizziness to the floor, and there signified nirvana by kicking his heels twice, like a swimming frog.

Startled by a cop, this same comedian might grab his hatbrim with both hands and yank it down over his ears, jump high in the air, come to earth in a split violent enough to telescope his spine, spring thence into a coattail-flattening sprint and dwindle at rocket speed to the size of a gnat along the grand, forlorn perspective of some lazy back boulevard.

Those are fine clichés from the language of silent comedy in its infancy. The man who could handle them properly combined several of the more difficult accomplishments of the acrobat, the dancer, the clown and the mime. Some very gifted comedians, unforgettably Ben Turpin, had an immense vocabulary of these clichés and were in part so lovable because they were deep conservative classicists and never tried to break away from them. The still more gifted men, of course, simplified and invented, finding out new and much deeper uses for the idiom. They learned to show emotion through it, and comic psychology, more eloquently than most language has ever managed to, and they discovered beauties of comic motion which are hopelessly beyond reach of words.

It is hard to find a theater these days where a comedy is playing; in the days of the silents it was equally hard to find a theater which was not showing one. The laughs today are pitifully few, far between, shallow, quiet and short. They almost never build, as they used to, into something combining the jabbering fre-

quency of a machine gun with the delirious momentum of a roller coaster. Saddest of all, there are few comedians now below middle age and there are none who seem to learn much from picture, to picture, or to try anything new.

To put it unkindly, the only thing wrong with screen comedy today is that it takes place on a screen which talks. Because it talks, the only comedians who ever mastered the screen cannot work, for they cannot combine their comic style with talk. Because there is a screen, talking comedians are trapped into a continual exhibition of their inadequacy as screen comedians on a surface as big as the side of a barn.

At the moment, as for many years past, the chances to see silent comedy are rare. There is a smattering of it on television—too often treated as something quaintly archaic, to be laughed at, not with. Some two hundred comedies—long and short—can be rented for home projection. And a lucky minority has access to the comedies in the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art, which is still incomplete but which is probably the best in the world. In the near future, however, something of this lost art will return to regular theaters. A thick straw in the wind is the big business now being done by a series of revivals of W. C. Fields's memorable movies, a kind of comedy more akin to the old silent variety than anything which is being made today. . . .

Awaiting [the revival of the silent comedians,] we will discuss here what has gone wrong with screen comedy and what, if anything, can be done about it. But mainly we will try to suggest what it was like in its glory in the years from 1912 to 1930, as practiced by the employees of Mack Sennett, the father of American screen comedy, and by the four most eminent masters: Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, the late Harry Langdon and Buster Keaton.

Mack Sennett made two kinds of comedy: parody laced with slapstick, and plain slapstick. The parodies were the unceremonious burial of a century of hamming, including the new hamming in serious movies, and nobody who has missed Ben Turpin in *A Small Town Idol*, or kidding Erich von Stroheim in *Three Foolish Weeks* or as *The Shiek of Araby*, can imagine how rough parody can get and still remain subtle and roaringly funny. The plain slapstick, at its best, was even better: a profusion of hearty young women in disconcerting bathing suits, frisking around with a gaggle of insanely incompetent policemen and of equally certifiable male civilians sporting museum-piece mustaches. All these people zipped and caromed about the pristine world of the screen

as jazzily as a convention of water bugs. Words can hardly suggest how energetically they collided and bounced apart, meeting in full gallop around the corner of a house; how hard and how often they fell on their backsides; or with what fantastically adroit clumsiness they got themselves fouled up in folding ladders, garden hoses, tethered animals and each other's headlong cross-purposes. The gestures were ferociously emphatic; not a line or motion of the body was wasted or inarticulate. The reader may remember how splendidly upright wandlike old Ben Turpin could stand for a Renunciation Scene, with his lampshade mustache twittering and his sparrowy chest stuck out and his head flung back like Paderewski assaulting a climax and the long babyish black hair trying to look lionlike, while his Adam's apple, an orange in a Christmas stocking, pumped with noble emotion. Or huge Mack Swain, who looked like a hairy mushroom, rolling his eyes in a manner patented by French Romantics and gasping in some dubious ecstasy. Or Louise Fazenda, the perennial farmer's daughter and the perfect low-comedy housemaid, primping her spit curl; and how her hair tightened a good-looking face into the incarnation of rampant gullibility. Or snouty James Finlayson, gleefully foreclosing a mortgage, with his look of eternally tasting a spoiled pickle. Or Chester Conklin, a myopic and inebriated little walrus stumbling around in outsized pants. Or Fatty Arbuckle, with his cold eye and his loose, serene smile, his silky manipulation of his bulk and his satanic marksmanship with pies (he was ambidextrous and could simultaneously blind two people in opposite directions).

The intimate tastes and secret hopes of these poor ineligible dunces were ruthlessly exposed whenever a hot stove, an electric fan or a bulldog took a dislike to their outer garments: agonizingly elaborate drawers, worked up on some lonely evening out of some Godforsaken lace curtain; or men's underpants with big round black spots on them. The Sennett sets—delirious wallpaper, megalomaniacally scrolled iron beds, Grand Rapids *in extremis*—outdid even the underwear. It was their business, after all, to kid the squalid braggadocio which infested the domestic interiors of the period, and that was almost beyond parody. These comedies told their stories to the unaided eye, and by every means possible they screamed to it. That is one reason for the India-ink silhouettes of the cops, and for convicts and prison bars and their shadows in hard sunlight, and for barefooted husbands, in tigerish pajamas, reacting like dervishes to stepped-on tacks.

The early silent comedians never strove for or consciously thought of anything which could be called artistic "form," but they achieved it. For Sennett's rival, Hal Roach, Leo McCarey once devoted almost the whole of a Laurel and Hardy two-reeler to pie-throwing. The first pies were thrown thoughtfully, almost philosophically. Then innocent bystanders began to get caught into the vortex. At full pitch it was Armageddon. But everything was calculated so nicely that until late in the picture, when havoc took over, every pie made its special kind of point and piled on its special kind of laugh.

Sennett's comedies were just a shade faster and fizzier than life. According to legend (and according to Sennett) he discovered the sped tempo proper to screen comedy when a green cameraman, trying to save money, cranked too slow.* Realizing the tremendous drumlike power of mere motion to exhilarate, he gave inanimate objects a mischievous life of their own, broke every law of nature the tricked camera would serve him for and made the screen dance like a witches' Sabbath. The thing one is surest of all to remember is how toward the end of nearly every Sennett comedy, a chase (usually called the "rally") built up such a majestic trajectory of pure anarchic motion that bathing girls, cops, comics, dogs, cats, babies, automobiles, locomotives, innocent bystanders, sometimes what seemed like a whole city, an entire civilization, were hauled along head over heels in the wake of that energy like dry leaves following an express train.

"Nice" people, who shunned all movies in the early days, condemned the Sennett comedies as vulgar and naive. But millions of less pretentious people loved their sincerity and sweetness, their wild-animal innocence and glorious vitality. They could not put these feelings into words, but they flocked to the silents. The reader who gets back deep enough into that world will probably even remember the theater: the barefaced honky-tonk and the waltzes by Waldteufel, slammed out on a mechanical piano; the searing redolence of peanuts and demirep perfumery, tobacco and feet and sweat; the laughter of unrespectable people having a hell of a fine time, laughter as violent and steady and deafening as standing under a waterfall.

Sennett wheedled his first financing out of a couple of ex-

* Silent comedy was shot at 12 to 16 frames per second and was speeded up by being shown at 16 frames per second, the usual rate of theater projectors at that time. Theater projectors today run at 24, which makes modern film taken at the same speed seem smooth and natural. But it makes silent movies fast and jerky.

bookies to whom he was already in debt. He took his comics out of music halls, burlesque, vaudeville, circuses and limbo, and through them he tapped in on that great pipeline of horsing and miming which runs back unbroken through the fairs of the Middle Ages at least to ancient Greece. He added all that he himself had learned about the large and spurious gesture, the late decadence of the Grand Manner, as a stage-struck boy in East Berlin, Connecticut and as a frustrated opera singer and actor. The only thing he claims to have invented is the pie in the face, and he insists, "Anyone who tells you he has discovered something new is a fool or a liar or both."

The silent-comedy studio was about the best training school the movies had ever known, and the Sennett studio was about as free and easy and as fecund of talent as they came. All the major comedians we will mention worked there, at least briefly. So did some of the major stars of the twenties and since—notably Gloria Swanson, Phyllis Haver, Wallace Beery, Marie Dressler and Carole Lombard. Directors Frank Capra, Leo McCarey and George Stevens also got their start in silent comedy; much that remains most flexible, spontaneous and visually alive in sound movies can be traced, through them and others, to this silent apprenticeship. Everybody did pretty much as he pleased on the Sennett lot, and everybody's ideas were welcome. Sennett posted no rules, and the only thing he strictly forbade was liquor. A Sennett story conference was a most informal affair. During the early years, at least, only the most important scenario might be jotted on the back of an envelope. Mainly Sennett's men thrashed out a few primary ideas and carried them in their heads, sure the better stuff would turn up while they were shooting, in the heat of physical action. This put quite a load on the prop man; he had to have the most improbable apparatus on hand—bombs, trick telephones, what not—to implement whatever idea might suddenly turn up. All kinds of things did—and were recklessly used. Once a low-comedy auto got out of control and killed the cameraman, but he was not visible in the shot, which was thrilling and undamaged; the audience never knew the difference.

Sennett used to hire a "wild man" to sit in on his gag conferences, whose whole job was to think up "wildies." Usually he was an all but brainless, speechless man, scarcely able to communicate his idea; but he had a totally uninhibited imagination. He might say nothing for an hour; then he'd mutter "You take . . ." and all the relatively rational others would shut up and wait. "You take this cloud . . ." he would get out, sketching

vague shapes in the air. Often he could get no further; but thanks to some kind of thought-transference, saner men would take this cloud and make something of it. The wild man seems in fact to have functioned as the group's subconscious mind, the source of all creative energy. His ideas were so weird and amorphous that Sennett can no longer remember a one of them, or even how it turned out after rational processing. But a fair equivalent might be one of the best comic sequences in a Laurel and Hardy picture. It is simple enough—simple and real, in fact, as a nightmare. Laurel and Hardy are trying to move a piano across a narrow suspension bridge. The bridge is slung over a sickening chasm, between a couple of Alps. Midway they meet a gorilla.

Had he done nothing else, Sennett would be remembered for giving a start to three of the four comedians who now began to apply their sharp individual talents to this newborn language. The one whom he did not train (he was on the lot briefly but Sennett barely remembers seeing him around) wore glasses, smiled a great deal and looked like the sort of eager young man who might have quit divinity school to hustle brushes. That was Harold Lloyd. The others were grotesque and poetic in their screen characters in degrees which appear to be impossible when the magic of silence is broken. One, who never smiled, carried a face as still and sad as a daguerreotype through some of the most preposterously ingenious and visually satisfying physical comedy ever invented. That was Buster Keaton. One looked like an elderly baby and, at times, a baby dope fiend; he could do more with less than any other comedian. That was Harry Langdon. One looked like Charlie Chaplin, and he was the first man to give the silent language a soul.

When Charlie Chaplin started to work for Sennett he had chiefly to reckon with Ford Sterling, the reigning comedian. Their first picture together amounted to a duel before the assembled professionals. Sterling, by no means untalented, was a big man with a florid Teutonic style which, under this special pressure, he turned on full blast. Chaplin defeated him within a few minutes with a wink of the mustache, a hitch of the trousers, a quirk of the little finger.

With *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, in 1914, he became a major star. Soon after, he left Sennett when Sennett refused to start a landslide among the other comedians by meeting the raise Chaplin demanded. Sennett is understandably wry about it in retrospect, but he still says, "I was right at the time." Of Chaplin he says simply, "Oh well, he's just the greatest artist that ever

lived." None of Chaplin's former rivals rate him much lower than that; they speak of him no more jealously than they might of God. We will try here only to suggest the essence of his supremacy. Of all comedians he worked most deeply and most shrewdly within a realization of what a human being is, and is up against. The Tramp is as centrally representative of humanity, as many-sided and as mysterious, as Hamlet, and it seems unlikely that any dancer or actor can ever have excelled him in eloquence, variety or poignancy of motion. As for pure motion, even if he had never gone on to make his magnificent feature-length comedies, Chaplin would have made his period in movies a great one single-handed even if he had made nothing except *The Cure*, or *One A.M.* In the latter, barring one immobile taxi driver, Chaplin plays alone, as a drunk trying to get upstairs and into bed. It is a sort of inspired elaboration on a soft-shoe dance, involving an angry stuffed wildcat, small rugs on slippery floors, a Lazy Susan table, exquisite footwork on a flight of stairs, a contretemps with a huge ferocious pendulum and the funniest and most perverse Murphy bed in movie history—and, always made physically lucid, the delicately weird mental processes of a man ethereally sozzled.

Before Chaplin came to pictures people were content with a couple of gags per comedy; he got some kind of laugh every second. The minute he began to work he set standards—and continually forced them higher. Anyone who saw Chaplin eating a boiled shoe like brook trout in *The Gold Rush*, or embarrassed by a swallowed whistle in *City Lights*, has seen perfection. Most of the time, however, Chaplin got his laughter less from the gags, or from milking them in any ordinary sense, than through his genius for what may be called *inflection*—the perfect, changeful shading of his physical and emotional attitudes toward the gag. Funny as his bout with the Murphy bed is, the glances of awe, expostulation and helpless, almost whimpering desire for vengeance which he darts at this infernal machine are even better.

A painful and frequent error among tyros is breaking the comic line with a too-big laugh, then a letdown; or with a laugh which is out of key or irrelevant. The masters could ornament the main line beautifully; they never addled it. In *A Night Out* Chaplin, passed out, is hauled along the sidewalk by the scruff of his coat by staggering Ben Turpin. His toes trail; he is as supine as a sled. Turpin himself is so drunk he can hardly drag him. Chaplin comes quietly to, realizes how well he is being served by his struggling pal, and with a royally delicate gesture plucks and savors a flower.

The finest pantomime, the deepest emotion, the richest and most poignant poetry were in Chaplin's work. He could probably pantomime Bryce's *The American Commonwealth* without ever blurring a syllable and make it paralyzingly funny into the bargain. At the end of *City Lights* the blind girl who has regained her sight, thanks to the Tramp, sees him for the first time. She has imagined and anticipated him as princely, to say the least; and it has never seriously occurred to him that he is inadequate. She recognizes who he must be by his shy, confident, shining joy as he comes silently toward her. And he recognizes himself, for the first time, through the terrible changes in her face. The camera just exchanges a few quiet close-ups of the emotions which shift and intensify in each face. It is enough to shrivel the heart to see, and it is the greatest piece of acting and the highest moment in movies.

Harold Lloyd worked only a little while with Sennett. During most of his career he acted for another major comedy producer, Hal Roach. He tried at first to offset Chaplin's influence and establish his own individuality by playing Chaplin's exact opposite, a character named Lonesome Luke who wore clothes much too small for him and whose gestures were likewise as un-Chaplinesque as possible. But he soon realized that an opposite in itself was a kind of slavishness. He discovered his own comic identity when he saw a movie about a fighting parson: a hero who wore glasses. He began to think about those glasses day and night. He decided on horn rims because they were youthful, ultra-visible on the screen and on the verge of becoming fashionable (he was to make them so). Around these large lensless horn rims he began to develop a new character, nothing grotesque or eccentric, but a fresh, believable young man who could fit into a wide variety of stories.

Lloyd depended more on story and situation than any of the other major comedians (he kept the best stable of gagmen in Hollywood, at one time hiring six); but unlike most "story" comedians he was also a very funny man from inside. He had, as he has written, "an unusually large comic vocabulary." More particularly he had an expertly expressive body and even more expressive teeth, and out of his thesaurus of smiles he could at a moment's notice blend prissiness, breeziness and asininity, and still remain tremendously likable. His movies were more extroverted and closer to ordinary life than any others of the best comedies: the vicissitudes of a New York taxi driver; the unaccepted college boy who, by desperate courage and inspired in-

eptitude, wins the Big Game. He was especially good at putting a very timid, spoiled or brassy young fellow through devastating embarrassments. He went through one of his most uproarious Gethsemanes as a shy country youth courting the nicest girl in town in *Grandma's Boy*. He arrived dressed "strictly up to date for the Spring of 1862," as a subtitle observed, and found that the ancient colored butler wore a similar flowered waistcoat and moldering cutaway. He got one wandering, nervous forefinger dreadfully stuck in a fancy little vase. The girl began cheerfully to try to identify that queer smell which dilated from him; Grandpa's best suit was rife with mothballs. A tenacious litter of kittens feasted off the goose grease on his home-shined shoes.

Lloyd was even better at the comedy of thrills. In *Safety Last*, as a rank amateur, he is forced to substitute for a human fly and to climb a medium-sized skyscraper. Dozens of awful things happen to him. He gets fouled up in a tennis set. Popcorn falls on him from a window above, and the local pigeons treat him like a cross between a lunch wagon and St. Francis of Assisi. A mouse runs up his britches-leg, and the crowd below salutes his desperate dance on the window ledge with wild applause of the daredevil. A good deal of this full-length picture hangs thus by its eyelashes along the face of a building. Each new floor is like a new stanza in a poem; and the higher and more horrifying it gets, the funnier it gets.

In this movie Lloyd demonstrates beautifully his ability to do more than merely milk a gag, but to top it. (In an old, simple example of topping, an incredible number of tall men get, one by one, out of a small closed auto. After as many have clambered out as the joke will bear, one more steps out: a midget. That tops the gag. Then the auto collapses. That tops the topper.) In *Safety Last* Lloyd is driven out to the dirty end of a flagpole by a furious dog; the pole breaks and he falls, just managing to grab the minute hand of a huge clock. His weight promptly pulls the hand down from IX to VI. That would be more than enough for any ordinary comedian, but there is further logic in the situation. Now, hideously, the whole clockface pulls loose and slants from its trembling springs above the street. Getting out of difficulty with the clock, he makes still further use of the instrument by getting one foot caught in one of these obstinate springs.

A proper delaying of the ultrapredictable can of course be just as funny as a properly timed explosion of the unexpected. As Lloyd approaches the end of his horrible hegira up the side of the building in *Safety Last*, it becomes clear to the audience,

but not to him, that if he raises his head another couple of inches he is going to get murderously conked by one of the four arms of a revolving wind gauge. He delays the evil moment almost interminably, with one distraction and another, and every delay is a suspense-tightening laugh; he also gets his foot nicely entangled in a rope, so that when he does get hit, the payoff of one gag sends him careening head downward through the abyss into another. Lloyd was outstanding even among the master craftsmen at setting up a gag clearly, culminating and getting out of it deftly, and linking it smoothly to the next. Harsh experience also taught him a deep and fundamental rule: never try to get "above" the audience.

Lloyd tried it in *The Freshman*. He was to wear an unfinished, basted-together tuxedo to a college party, and it would gradually fall apart as he danced. Lloyd decided to skip the pants, a low-comedy cliché, and lose just the coat. His gagmen warned him. A preview proved how right they were. Lloyd had to re-shoot the whole expensive sequence, build it around defective pants and climax it with the inevitable. It was one of the funniest things he ever did.

When Lloyd was still a very young man he lost about half his right hand (and nearly lost his sight) when a comedy bomb exploded prematurely. But in spite of his artificially built-out hand he continued to do his own dirty work, like all of the best comedians. The side of the building he climbed in *Safety Last* did not overhang the street, as it appears to. But the nearest landing place was a roof three floors below him, as he approached the top, and he did everything, of course, the hard way, that is, the comic way, keeping his bottom stuck well out, his shoulders hunched, his hands and feet skidding over perdition.

If great comedy must involve something beyond laughter, Lloyd was not a great comedian. If plain laughter is any criterion—and it is a healthy counterbalance to the other—few people have equaled him, and nobody has ever beaten him.

Chaplin and Keaton and Lloyd were all more like each other, in one important way, than Harry Langdon was like any of them. Whatever else the others might be doing, they all used more or less elaborate physical comedy; Langdon showed how little of that one might use and still be a great silent-screen comedian. In his screen character he symbolized something as deeply and centrally human, though by no means as rangily so, as the Tramp. There was, of course, an immense difference in inventiveness and range of virtuosity. It seemed as if Chaplin could

do literally anything, on any instrument in the orchestra. Langdon had one queerly toned, unique little reed. But out of it he could get incredible melodies.

Like Chaplin, Langdon wore a coat which buttoned on his wishbone and swung out wide below, but the effect was very different: he seemed like an outsized baby who had begun to outgrow his clothes. The crown of his hat was rounded and the brim was turned up all around, like a little boy's hat, and he looked as if he wore diapers under his pants. His walk was that of a child which has just gotten sure on its feet, and his body and hands fitted that age. His face was kept pale to show off, with the simplicity of a nursery-school drawing, the bright, ignorant, gentle eyes and the little twirling mouth. He had big moon cheeks, with dimples, and a Napoleonic forelock of mousy hair; the round, docile head seemed large in ratio to the cream-puff body. Twitchings of his face were signals of tiny discomforts too slowly registered by a tinier brain; quick, squirty little smiles showed his almost prehuman pleasures, his incurably premature truthfulness. He was a virtuoso of hesitations and of delicately indecisive motions, and he was particularly fine in a high wind, rounding a corner with a kind of skittering toddle, both hands nursing his hatbrim.

He was as remarkable a master as Chaplin of subtle emotional and mental process and operated much more at leisure. He once got a good three hundred feet of continuously bigger laughs out of rubbing his chest, in a crowded vehicle, with Limburger cheese, under the misapprehension that it was a cold salve. In another long scene, watching a brazen showgirl change her clothes, he sat motionless, back to the camera, and registered the whole lexicon of lost innocence, shock, disapproval and disgust, with the back of his neck. His scenes with women were nearly always something special. Once a lady spy did everything in her power (under the Hays Office) to seduce him. Harry was polite, willing, even flirtatious in his little way. The only trouble was that he couldn't imagine what in the world she was leering and pawing at him for, and that he was terribly ticklish. The Mata Hari wound up foaming at the mouth.

There was also a sinister flicker of depravity about the Langdon character, all the more disturbing because babies are pre-moral. He had an instinct for bringing his actual adulthood and figurative babyishness into frictions as crawley as a fingernail on a slate blackboard, and he wandered into areas of strangeness which were beyond the other comedians. In a nightmare in one

movie he was forced to fight a large, muscular young man; the girl Harry loved was the prize. The young man was a good boxer; Harry could scarcely lift his gloves. The contest took place in a fiercely lighted prize ring, in a prodigious pitch-dark arena. The only spectator was the girl, and she was rooting against Harry. As the fight went on, her eyes glittered ever more brightly with blood lust and, with glittering teeth, she tore her big straw hat to shreds.

Langdon came to Sennett from a vaudeville act in which he had fought a losing battle with a recalcitrant automobile. The minute Frank Capra saw him he begged Sennett to let him work with him. Langdon was almost as childlike as the character he played. He had only a vague idea of his story or even of each scene as he played it; each time he went before the camera Capra would brief him on the general situation and then, as this finest of intuitive improvisers once tried to explain his work, "I'd go into my routine." The whole tragedy of the coming of dialogue, as far as these comedians were concerned—and one reason for the increasing rigidity of comedy ever since—can be epitomized in the mere thought of Harry Langdon confronted with a script.

Langdon's magic was in his innocence, and Capra took beautiful care not to meddle with it. The key to the proper use of Langdon, Capra always knew, was "the principle of the brick." "If there was a rule for writing Langdon material," he explains, "it was this: his only ally was God. Langdon might be saved by the brick falling on the cop, but it was *verboden* that he in any way motivate the brick's fall." Langdon became quickly and fantastically popular with three pictures, *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp*, *The Strong Man* and *Long Pants*; from then on he went downhill even faster. "The trouble was," Capra says, "that high-brow critics came around to explain his art to him. Also he developed an interest in dames. It was a pretty high life for such a little fellow." Langdon made two more pictures with high-brow writers, one of which (*Three's a Crowd*) had some wonderful passages in it, including the prize-ring nightmare; then First National canceled his contract. He was reduced to mediocre roles and two-reelers which were more rehashes of his old gags; this time around they no longer seemed funny. "He never did really understand what hit him," says Capra. "He died broke [in 1944]. And he died of a broken heart. He was the most tragic figure I ever came across in show business."

Buster Keaton started work at the age of three and one-half with his parents in one of the roughest acts in vaudeville ("The

Three Keatons"); Harry Houdini gave the child the name Buster in admiration for a fall he took down a flight of stairs. In his first movies Keaton teamed with Fatty Arbuckle under Sennett. He went on to become one of Metro's biggest stars and earners; a Keaton feature cost about \$200,000 to make and reliably grossed \$2,000,000. Very early in his movie career friends asked him why he never smiled on the screen. He didn't realize he didn't. He had got the dead-pan habit in variety; on the screen he had merely been so hard at work it had never occurred to him there was anything to smile about. Now he tried it just once and never again. He was by his whole style and nature so much the most deeply "silent" of the silent comedians that even a smile was as deafeningly out of key as a yell. In a way his pictures are like a transcendent juggling act in which it seems that the whole universe is in exquisite flying motion and the one point of repose is the juggler's effortless, uninterested face.

Keaton's face ranked almost with Lincoln's as an early American archetype; it was haunting, handsome, almost beautiful, yet it was irreducibly funny; he improved matters by topping it off with a deadly horizontal hat, as flat and thin as a phonograph record. One can never forget Keaton wearing it, standing erect at the prow as his little boat is being launched. The boat goes grandly down the skids and, just as grandly, straight on to the bottom. Keaton never budes. The last you see of him, the water lifts the hat off the stoic head and it floats away.

No other comedian could do as much with the dead pan. He used this great, sad, motionless face to suggest various related things: a one-track mind near the track's end of pure insanity; mulish imperturbability under the wildest of circumstances; how dead a human being can get and still be alive; an awe-inspiring sort of patience and power to endure, proper to granite but uncanny in flesh and blood. Everything that he was and did bore out this rigid face and played laughs against it. When he moved his eyes, it was like seeing them move in a statue. His short-legged body was all sudden, machinelike angles, governed by a daft aplomb. When he swept a semaphorelike arm to point, you could almost hear the electrical impulse in the signal block. When he ran from a cop, his transitions from accelerating walk to easy jogtrot to brisk canter to headlong gallop to flogged-piston sprint—always floating, above this frenzy, the untroubled, untouchable face—were as distinct and as soberly in order as an automatic gearshift.

Keaton was a wonderfully resourceful inventor of mechanistic gags (he still spends much of his time fooling with Erector sets); as he ran afoul of locomotives, steamships, prefabricated and over-electrified houses, he put himself through some of the hardest and cleverest punishment ever designed for laughs. In *Sherlock Jr.*, boiling along on the handlebars of a motorcycle quite unaware that he has lost his driver, Keaton whips through city traffic, breaks up a tug-of-war, gets a shovelful of dirt in the face from each of a long line of Rockette-timed ditch-diggers, approaches a log at high speed which is hinged open by dynamite precisely soon enough to let him through and, hitting an obstruction, leaves the handlebars like an arrow leaving a bow, whams through the window of a shack in which the heroine is about to be violated, and hits the heavy feet-first, knocking him through the opposite wall. The whole sequence is as clean in motion as the trajectory of a bullet.

Much of the charm and edge of Keaton's comedy, however, lay in the subtle leverages of expression he could work against his nominal dead pan. Trapped in the side-wheel of a ferryboat, saving himself from drowning only by walking, then desperately running, inside the accelerating wheel like a squirrel in a cage, his only real concern was, obviously, to keep his hat on. Confronted by Love, he was not as dead-pan as he was cracked up to be, either; there was an odd, abrupt motion of his head which suggested a horse nipping after a sugar lump.

Keaton worked strictly for laughs, but his work came from so far inside a curious and original spirit that he achieved a great deal besides, especially in his feature-length comedies. (For plain hard laughter his nineteen short comedies . . . were even better.) He was the only major comedian who kept sentiment almost entirely out of his work, and he brought pure physical comedy to its greatest heights. Beneath his lack of emotion he was also unconsistently sardonic; deep below that, giving a disturbing tension and grandeur to the foolishness, for those who sensed it, there was in his comedy a freezing whisper not of pathos but of melancholia. With the humor, the craftsmanship and the action there was often, besides, a fine, still and sometimes dreamlike beauty. Much of his Civil War picture *The General* is within hailing distance of Mathew Brady. And there is a ghostly, unforgettable moment in *The Navigator* when, on a deserted, softly rolling ship, all the pale doors along a deck swing open as one behind Keaton and, as one, slam shut, in a hair-raising illusion of noise.

Perhaps because "dry" comedy is so much more rare and odd than "dry" wit, there are people who never much cared for Keaton. Those who do cannot care mildly.

As soon as the screen began to talk, silent comedy was pretty well finished. The hardy and prolific Mack Sennett made the transfer; he was the first man to put Bing Crosby and W. C. Fields on the screen. But he was essentially a silent-picture man, and by the time the Academy awarded him a special Oscar for his "lasting contribution to the comedy technique of the screen" (in 1938), he was no longer active. As for the comedians we have spoken of in particular, they were as badly off as fine dancers suddenly required to appear in plays.

Harold Lloyd, whose work was most nearly realistic, naturally coped least unhappily with the added realism of speech; he made several talking comedies. But good as the best were, they were not so good as his silent work, and by the late thirties he quit acting. . . .

Up to the middle thirties Buster Keaton made several feature-length pictures (with such players as Jimmy Durante, Wallace Beery and Robert Montgomery); he also made a couple of dozen talking shorts. Now and again he managed to get loose into motion, without having to talk, and for a moment or so the screen would start singing again. But his dark, dead voice, though it was in keeping with the visual character, tore his intensely silent style to bits and destroyed the illusion within which he worked. . . .

The only man who really survived the flood was Chaplin, the only one who was rich, proud and popular enough to afford to stay silent. He brought out two of his greatest nontalking comedies, *City Lights* and *Modern Times*, in the middle of an avalanche of talk, spoke gibberish and, in the closing moments, plain English in *The Great Dictator*, and at last made an all-talking picture, *Monsieur Verdoux*, creating for that purpose an entirely new character who might properly talk a blue streak. *Verdoux* is the greatest of talking comedies though so cold and savage that it had to find its public in grimly experienced Europe.

Good comedy, and some that was better than good, outlived silence, but there has been less and less of it. The talkies brought one great comedian, the late, majestically lethargic W. C. Fields, who could not possibly have worked as well in silence; he was the toughest and the most warmly human of all screen comedians, and *It's a Gift* and *The Bank Dick*, fiendishly funny and incisive white-collar comedies, rank high among the best comedies (and best movies) ever made. Laurel and Hardy, the only comedians

who managed to preserve much of the large, low style of silence and who began to explore the comedy of sound, have made nothing since 1945. Walt Disney, at his best an inspired comic inventor and teller of fairy stories, lost his stride during the war and has since regained it only at moments. Preston Sturges has made brilliant, satirical comedies, but his pictures are smart, nervous comedy-dramas merely italicized with slapstick. The Marx Brothers were side-splitters but they made their best comedies years ago. Jimmy Durante is mainly a nightclub genius; Abbot and Costello are semiskilled laborers, at best; Bob Hope is a good radio comedian with a pleasing presence, but not much more, on the screen.

There is no hope that screen comedy will get much better than it is without new, gifted young comedians who really belong in movies, and without freedom for their experiments. For everyone who may appear we have one last, invidious comparison to offer as a guidepost.

One of the most popular recent comedies is Bob Hope's *The Paleface*. We take no pleasure in blackening *The Paleface*; we single it out, rather, because it is as good as we've got. Anything that is said of it here could be said, with interest, of other comedies of our time. Most of the laughs in *The Paleface* are verbal. Bob Hope is very adroit with his lines and now and then, when the words don't get in the way, he makes a good beginning as a visual comedian. But only the beginning, never the middle or the end. He is funny, for instance, reacting to a shot of violent whiskey. But he does not know how to get still funnier (*i.e.*, how to build and milk) or how to be funniest last (*i.e.*, how to top or cap his gag). The camera has to fade out on the same old face he started with.

One sequence is promisingly set up for visual comedy. In it, Hope and a lethal local boy stalk each other all over a cow town through streets which have been emptied in fear of their duel. The gag here is that through accident and stupidity they keep just failing to find each other. Some of it is quite funny. But the fun slackens between laughs like a weak clothesline, and by all the logic of humor (which is ruthlessly logical) the biggest laugh should come at the moment, and through the way, they finally spot each other. The sequence is so weakly thought out that at that crucial moment the camera can't afford to watch them; it switches to Jane Russell.

Now we turn to a masterpiece. In *The Navigator* Buster Keaton works with practically the same gag as Hope's duel. Adrift on a ship which he believes is otherwise empty, he drops

a lighted cigarette. A girl finds it. She calls out and he hears her; each then tries to find the other. First each walks purposefully down the long, vacant starboard deck, the girl, then Keaton, turning the corner just in time not to see each other. Next time around each of them is trotting briskly, very much in earnest; going at the same pace, they miss each other just the same. Next time around each of them is going like a bat out of hell. Again they miss. Then the camera withdraws to a point of vantage at the stern, leans its chin in its hand and just watches the whole intricate superstructure of the ship as the protagonists stroll, steal and scuttle from level to level, up, down and sidewise, always managing to miss each other by hair's-breadths, in an enchantingly neat and elaborate piece of timing. There are no subsidiary gags to get laughs in this sequence and there is little loud laughter; merely a quiet and steadily increasing kind of delight. When Keaton has got all he can out of this fine modification of the movie chase he invents a fine device to bring the two together: the girl, thoroughly winded, sits down for a breather, indoors, on a plank which workmen have left across sawhorses. Keaton pauses on an upper deck, equally winded and puzzled. What follows happens in a couple of seconds at most: air suction whips his silk topper backward down a ventilator; grabbing frantically for it, he backs against the lip of the ventilator, jackknifes and falls in backward. Instantly the camera cuts back to the girl. A topper falls through the ceiling and lands tidily, right side up, on the plank beside her. Before she can look more than startled, its owner follows, head between his knees, crushes the topper, breaks the plank with the point of his spine and proceeds to the floor. The breaking of the plank smacks Boy and Girl together.

It is only fair to remember that the silent comedians would have as hard a time playing a talking scene as Hope has playing his visual ones, and that writing and directing are as accountable for the failure as Hope himself. But not even the humblest journeymen of the silent years would have let themselves off so easily. Like the masters, they knew, and sweated to obey, the laws of their craft.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. What does Agee see as the essence of film comedy?*
- 2. When did you last see a comedy that made you laugh? What sorts of things do you consider funny?*

3. Agee obviously has a preference for silent comedy. Have you seen any classic silent comedies? If so, do you agree with Agee's enthusiastic praise of these films, or do you find his remarks clouded with nostalgia? Is it possible for ideas of humor to change?

4. From Agee's descriptions and from any of these silent comedies you have seen, how would you say the subject matter of comedies today differs from that of the silent era? With what kinds of subject matter do most of today's comedies deal?

5. Agee distinguishes between a visual comedian and a verbal comedian. Name one or two of today's comedians of each type and comment on their technique.

6. Why does Agee consider the silent period of American film "comedy's greatest era"?

The Road Beyond Neorealism: An Interview with Federico Fellini

Gideon Bachmann

Federico Fellini is the flamboyant Italian director whose films, from the simple, neorealist La Strada through the more complex La Dolce Vita and 8½ to the baroque Fellini Satyricon, have been acclaimed the world over.

BACHMANN: I do not want to talk to you about one or another specific film, but rather more generally—about your attitudes toward film-making, your reasons for making certain films, and your philosophical and sociological approach to what you use as film material. For example, many critics have said that there is a deep symbolism in your work, that there are recurring motifs in all your films. Like the image of the piazza at night with a fountain, of the seashore, and others. Is there a conscious intention on your part in repeating these images?

FELLINI: It is not intentional. In choosing a location, I do not choose it for its symbolic content. Things happen. If they happen well, they convey my meaning. Concerning the specific examples you mention, I'd like to say that all my films to date are concerned with people looking for themselves. Night and the loneliness of empty streets, as shown in the shots of piazzas you mention, is perhaps the best atmosphere in which I see these people. Also, it is quite possible that the associations which make me choose these locations are based on autobiographical experiences, for I cannot remove myself from the content of my

films. Possibly what is in my mind when I shoot these scenes is the memory of my first impression of Rome—when I had left my home town of Rimini and was in Rome alone. I was sixteen: I had no job, no idea of what I wanted to do. Often I was out of work, often I didn't have the money to stay in a hotel or eat properly. Or I would work at night. In any case, it is quite possible that the image of the town at night, empty and lonely, has remained in my soul from those days.

BACHMANN: Did you intend to go into films when you first came to Rome?

FELLINI: No, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. Still, my coming to Rome did have something to do with films: I had seen so many American films in which newspapermen were glamorous figures—I don't remember the titles, that was twenty-five years ago—but I was so impressed with the lives of newspapermen, that I decided to become one too. I liked the coats they wore and the way they wore their hats on the back of their heads. Unfortunately, the job I found was very different from my dream—I became a cub reporter who was sent by the editor to hospitals and to the police to get the obvious news. Later I began to write for the radio—sketches, mostly. After that I was tempted by the stage; and I toured Italy with a small traveling musical show. That period was one of the richest in my life, and I still draw on many of my experiences from those days.

BACHMANN: Certainly touring musical shows are one of the recurring motifs in your films. By the way, how did you finally begin working in films?

FELLINI: First, I was a rewrite man—I used to add gags to the scripts of dull comedies. My first original screenplay was called *Avanti c'è posto*, and it was the story of a bus conductor. Freely translated the title would be "Please Move to the Rear." It was directed by Bonnard, who had taken to directing pictures when his fame as a matinee idol had faded. That was 1940. After that, I wrote many scripts. Too many. All were produced. They were comedies, mostly, in a pathetic vein. After the war, I met Rossellini, and for him I worked on *Open City* and *Paisan*. That's when I began to understand—or at least to suspect—that one could express deep things too in films. So I continued for two or three years writing scripts for the postwar Italian directors. After that, though, I became . . . I don't want to say disappointed, but when one really loves films, one cannot stop at the written page. I decided to direct. My first film was called *Luci del varietà* (Footlights).

BACHMANN: You directed this yourself?

FELLINI: Yes, I wrote and directed it. It was the story of the small troupe with whom I had spent a year on the road.

BACHMANN: When did you write and appear in *The Miracle*?

FELLINI: When I worked for Rossellini. Before I began to direct.

BACHMANN: Your serious film career, then, began during the period of the flowering of Italian neorealism. The relation between your films and "classical" neorealism has been much debated by the critics. Do you feel that your work in any way derives from, or was influenced by the neorealist directors with whom you have worked, like de Sica, Rossellini, Lattuada, etc.?

FELLINI: Well, I was one of the first to write scripts for neorealist films. I think all my work is definitely in the neorealist style, even if in Italy today some people don't think so. But this is a long story. For me, neorealism is a way of seeing reality without prejudice, without the interference of conventions—just parking yourself in front of reality without any preconceived ideas.

BACHMANN: You don't mean simply to put the camera in front of "life" and photograph what's there?

FELLINI: No, it's a question of having the feeling for reality. Naturally, there is always the need for an interpretation. What has happened in Italy is that after the war everything for us was completely new. Italy was in ruins; you could say everything you felt by just looking around. Later, the leftist press capitalized on this inadvertent one-sidedness by saying that the only valid thing to do in films is to show what happens around you. But this has no value from an artistic point of view, because always the important thing is to know *who* sees the reality. Then it becomes a question of the power to condense, to show the essence of things. After all, why are the films we make so much better than newsreels?

BACHMANN: Though, of course, even newsreels are already one step removed from reality, through the selectivity of the cameraman who took them.

FELLINI: Right. . . . But why should people go to the movies, if films show reality only through a very cold, objective eye? It would be much better just to walk around in the street. For me, neorealism means looking at reality with an honest eye—but any kind of reality: not just social reality, but also spiritual reality, metaphysical reality, anything man has inside him.

BACHMANN: You mean anything that has reality for the director?

FELLINI: Yes.

BACHMANN: Then the completed film is really *two* steps removed from nature: first the personal *view* of it by the director, and then his *interpretation* of that personal view.

FELLINI: Yes, yes. For me, neorealism is not a question of *what* you show—its real spirit is in *how* you show it. It's just a way of looking around, without convention or prejudice. Certain people still think neorealism is fit to show only certain kinds of reality; and they insist that this is social reality. But in this way, it becomes mere propaganda. It is a program; to show only certain aspects of life. People have written that I am a traitor to the cause of neorealism, that I am too much of an individualist, too much of an individual. My own personal conviction, however, is that the films I have done so far are in the same style as the first neorealist films, simply telling the story of people. And always, in telling the story of some people, I try to show some truth.

BACHMANN: Is there any underlying philosophy in your films? I mean besides the depiction of what is truth for you.

FELLINI: Well, I could tell you what for me is one of the most pressing problems, one which provides part of the theme for all my films. It's the terrible difficulty people have in talking to each other—the old problem of communication, the desperate anguish to be *with*, the desire to have a real, authentic relationship with another person. You'll find this in *I Vitelloni*, in *La Strada*, in *Il Bidone*, and also in *Notti di Cabiria*. It may be that I'll change, but for now I'm completely absorbed in this problem—maybe because I have not yet solved it in my private life.

BACHMANN: Do you feel that the reason for this difficulty in interpersonal communication is that we have created a kind of society which makes it hard for people to have true relationships?

FELLINI: It is the fault of society only because society is made up of men. I believe that everyone has to find truth by himself. It is completely useless to prepare a statement for a crowd, or make a film with a message for everyone. I don't believe in talking to a crowd. Because what is a crowd? It is a collection of many individuals, each with his own reality. That is also the reason why my pictures never end. They never have a simple solution. I think it is immoral (in the true sense of the word) to tell a story that has a conclusion. Because you cut out your audience the moment you present a solution on the screen. Because there are no "solutions" in their lives. I think it is more moral—and more important—to show, let's say, the story of one man. Then everyone, with his own sensibility and on the basis

of his own inner development, can try to find his own solution.

BACHMANN: You mean to say that by "ending" a problem, the filmmaker takes away from the audience the feeling that what they are seeing is the truth?

FELLINI: Yes, or even worse. For when you show a true problem and then resolve it, the spectator is beguiled into feeling that the problems in his own life, too, will solve themselves, and he can stop working on them for himself. By giving happy endings to films, you goad your audience into going on living in a trite, bland manner, because they are now sure that sometime, somewhere, something happy is going to happen to them, too, and without their having to do anything about it. Conversely, by not serving them the happy ending on a platter, you can make them think; you can remove some of that smug security. Then they'll *have* to find their own answers.

BACHMANN: This would seem to indicate that you're not just making pictures to make pictures, but because there are certain things you want to say.

FELLINI: Well, I don't start that way. What usually starts me on a film idea is that something happens to me which I think has some bearing on other people's experiences. And the feeling is usually the same: to try, first of all, to tell something about myself; and in doing so, to try to find a salvation, to try to find a road toward some meaning, some truth, something that will be important to others, too. And when, as often happens, people who have seen my films come to visit me—not to discuss my films, but to talk to me about their personal problems—I feel I have achieved something. It is always a great satisfaction for me. Of course, I can't help them clarify their problems, but it means the picture has done some good.

BACHMANN: When you say you don't start that way, do you mean to say that the real "message" of your films develops out of the material?

FELLINI: Well, a picture is a mixture of things. It changes. That is one of the reasons why making films is such a wonderful thing.

BACHMANN: Could you tell me about the process in your film work? A kind of step-by-step description of your work on any given film?

FELLINI: First, I have to be moved by a feeling. I have to be interested in one character or one problem. Once I have that, I don't really need a very well-written story or a very detailed script. I need to begin without knowing that everything is in perfect

order; otherwise I lose all the fun of it. If I knew everything from the start, I would no longer be interested in doing it. So that when I begin a picture, I am not yet sure of the location or the actors. Because for me, to make a picture is like leaving for a trip. And the most interesting part of a trip is what you discover on the way. I am very open to suggestions when I start a film. I am not rigid about what I do. I like the people with me on the film to share this new adventure. Certainly, I do remember that I am shooting, sometimes.

When the picture is finished, I would, if possible, like not to see it. I often say to my producer, joking: "Let's not cut this one; let's make a new one instead." But I cut all my own films. Cutting is one of the most emotional aspects of film-making. It is the most exciting thing to see the picture begin to breathe; it is like seeing your child grow up. The rhythm is not yet well identified, the sequence not established. But I never reshoot. I believe that a good picture has to have defects. It has to have mistakes in it, like life, like people. I don't believe that beauty, in the sense of perfection, exists—except maybe for the angels. A beautiful woman is attractive only if she is not perfect. The most important thing is to see to it that the picture is alive. This is the most rewarding moment in making films: when the picture begins to live. And I never go back to look at what I have already done—I edit the whole film right through. When it's finished, and I go into the projection room to see it for the first time, I like to be alone. I can express exactly what happens. I look at the picture; the picture looks at me. A lot of things happen. Some ideas are born; some die. Later I begin to "clean" the picture. In Italy we do not use the sound we shoot on location, but redo the whole track in the studio. But the first answer print still has the location sound on it. Once that is removed, something happens again. The answer print still has the flavor of the adventure of making the film—a train that passed, a baby that cried, a window that opened. I remember the people who were with me on location. I remember the trip. I would like to retain these memories. Once they put the clean, new track on it, it's like a father seeing his little girl wear lipstick for the first time. You have to get to know this new creature that is emerging; you have to try to like it. Then when you add the music, again something is added and something is lost. Every time you see it again, there is some new feeling. When it is completely finished, you have lost the objective point of view. Then, when others see it, I react personally—I feel they have no right to say anything about *my* picture. But

I listen carefully, nevertheless—I am trying to find out whether for them the picture is alive.

BACHMANN: Do you feel that in all the films you have made you have always remained faithful to what you were trying to say when you started the picture?

FELLINI: Yes, I do.

BACHMANN: Do you feel there is a relation between your work and that of the current crop of Italian writers, like, for example, Carlo Levi and Ennio Flaiano?

FELLINI: Yes, I think this core of neorealism in films has influenced all the arts.

BACHMANN: Have you, yourself, done any writing except scripts?

FELLINI: No. Just some short stories when I worked for newspapers. But not since I've worked in films. It's a different medium. A writer can do everything by himself—but he needs discipline. He has to get up at seven in the morning, and be alone in a room with a white sheet of paper. I am too much of a *vitellone* to do that. I think I have chosen the best medium of expression for myself. I love the very precious combination of work and of living-together that film-making offers. I approach film-making in a very personal way. That's why I consider myself a neorealist. Any research that a man does about himself, about his relationships with others and with the mystery of life, is a spiritual and—in the true sense—religious search. I suppose that is the extent of my formal philosophy. I make movies in the same way that I talk to people—whether it's a friend, a girl, a priest, or anyone: to seek some clarification. That is what neorealism means to me, in the original, pure sense. A search into oneself, and into others. In any direction, any direction where there is life. All the formal philosophy you could possibly apply to my work is that there is no formal philosophy. In film-making, as in living, you must take the experiences that life presents, those which apply to yourself and to others. Except that in film-making only the absolute truth will work. In life I may be a swindler or a crook, but that wouldn't work in a film. A man's film is like a naked man—nothing can be hidden. I must be truthful in my films.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This interview provides an insight into the mind of one of the most acclaimed film directors in the world. He talks very much as an auteur,

or author, of his films. If you have seen any of Fellini's films, see whether you can relate his statements here to his actual productions.

2. From this interview, what would you say is Fellini's foremost motive for making films?

3. What does Fellini mean when he says, "I think it is immoral (in the true sense of the word) to tell a story that has a conclusion"? How does this approach compare with the approaches taken by other directors?

4. How have American film endings changed in the past few years, as compared to the movies of the 1940's and 1950's?

5. Fellini came to prominence with the neorealist movement in Italy after World War II. From his remarks, formulate a description of what Fellini means by neorealism.

Bergman Discusses Film-Making

Ingmar Bergman

Ingmar Bergman, the eminent Swedish writer-director, could be considered the most philosophical film-maker in the history of motion pictures. All his films, such as The Seventh Seal, The Silence, and Shame, probe the relations of men to one another and to a deity who may or may not exist.

During the shooting of *The Virgin Spring*, we were up in the northern province of Dalarna in May and it was early in the morning, about half past seven. The landscape there is rugged, and our company was working by a little lake in the forest. It was very cold, about 30 degrees, and from time to time a few snowflakes fell through the gray, rain-dimmed sky. The company was dressed in a strange variety of clothing—raincoats, oil slickers, Icelandic sweaters, leather jackets, old blankets, coachmen's coats, medieval robes. Our men had laid some ninety feet of rusty, buckling rail over the difficult terrain, to dolly the camera on. We were all helping with the equipment—actors, electricians, make-up men, script girl, sound crew—mainly to keep warm. Suddenly someone shouted and pointed toward the sky. Then we saw a crane floating high above the fir trees, and then another, and then several cranes, floating majestically in a circle above us. We all dropped what we were doing and ran to the top of a nearby hill to see the cranes better. We stood there for a long time, until they turned westward and disappeared over the forest. And suddenly I thought: this is what it means to make a movie in Sweden. This is what can happen, this is how we work together with our old equipment and little money, and this is how we can suddenly

drop everything for the love of four cranes floating above the tree tops.

My association with film goes back to the world of childhood.

My grandmother had a very large old apartment in Uppsala. I used to sit under the dining-room table there, "listening" to the sunshine which came in through the gigantic windows. The cathedral bells went ding-dong, and the sunlight moved about and "sounded" in a special way. One day, when winter was giving way to spring and I was five years old, a piano was being played in the next apartment. It played waltzes, nothing but waltzes. On the wall hung a large picture of Venice. As the sunlight moved across the picture the water in the canal began to flow, the pigeons flew up from the square, people talked and gesticulated. Bells sounded, not those of Uppsala Cathedral but from the picture itself. And the piano music also came from that remarkable picture of Venice.

A child who is born and brought up in a vicarage acquires an early familiarity with life and death behind the scenes. Father performed funerals, marriages, baptisms, gave advice and prepared sermons. The devil was an early acquaintance, and in the child's mind there was a need to personify him. This is where my magic lantern came in. It consisted of a small metal box with a carbide lamp—I can still remember the smell of the hot metal—and colored glass slides: Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, and all the others. And the Wolf was the Devil, without horns but with a tail and a gaping red mouth, strangely real yet incomprehensible, a picture of wickedness and temptation on the flowered wall of the nursery.

When I was ten years old I received my first, rattling film projector, with its chimney and lamp. I found it both mystifying and fascinating. The first film I had was nine feet long and brown in color. It showed a girl lying asleep in a meadow, who woke up and stretched out her arms, then disappeared to the right. That was all there was to it. The film was a great success and was projected every night until it broke and could not be mended any more.

This little rickety machine was my first conjuring set. And even today I remind myself with childish excitement that I am really a conjurer, since cinematography is based on deception of the human eye. I have worked it out that if I see a film which

has a running time of one hour, I sit through twenty-seven minutes of complete darkness—the blankness between frames. When I show a film I am guilty of deceit. I use an apparatus which is constructed to take advantage of a certain human weakness, an apparatus with which I can sway my audience in a highly emotional manner—make them laugh, scream with fright, smile, believe in fairy stories, become indignant, feel shocked, charmed, deeply moved or perhaps yawn with boredom. Thus I am either an impostor or, when the audience is willing to be taken in, a conjurer. I perform conjuring tricks with apparatus so expensive and so wonderful that any entertainer in history would have given anything to have it.

A film for me begins with something very vague—a chance remark or a bit of conversation, a hazy but agreeable event unrelated to any particular situation. It can be a few bars of music, a shaft of light across the street. Sometimes in my work at the theater I have envisioned actors made up for yet unplayed roles.

These are split-second impressions that disappear as quickly as they come, yet leave behind a mood—like pleasant dreams. It is a mental state, not an actual story, but one abounding in fertile associations and images. Most of all, it is a brightly colored thread sticking out of the dark sack of the unconscious. If I begin to wind up this thread, and do it carefully, a complete film will emerge.

This primitive nucleus strives to achieve definite form, moving in a way that may be lazy and half asleep at first. Its stirring is accompanied by vibrations and rhythms which are very special and unique to each film. The picture sequences then assume a pattern in accordance with these rhythms, obeying laws born out of and conditioned by my original stimulus.

If that embryonic substance seems to have enough strength to be made into a film, I decide to materialize it. Then comes something very complicated and difficult: the transformation of rhythms, moods, atmosphere, tensions, sequences, tones and scents into words and sentences, into an understandable screenplay.

This is an almost impossible task.

The only thing that can be satisfactorily transferred from that original complex of rhythms and moods is the dialogue, and even dialogue is a sensitive substance which may offer resistance. Written dialogue is like a musical score, almost incomprehensible to the average person. Its interpretation demands a technical

knack plus a certain kind of imagination and feeling—qualities which are so often lacking, even among actors. One can write dialogue, but how it should be delivered, its rhythm and tempo, what is to take place between lines—all this must be omitted for practical reasons. Such a detailed script would be unreadable. I try to squeeze instructions as to location, characterization and atmosphere into my screenplays in understandable terms, but the success of this depends on my writing ability and the perceptiveness of the reader, which are not always predictable.

Now we come to essentials, by which I mean montage, rhythm and the relation of one picture to another—the vital third dimension without which the film is merely a dead product from a factory. Here I cannot clearly give a key, as in a musical score, nor a specific idea of the tempo which determines the relationship of the elements involved. It is quite impossible for me to indicate the way in which the film “breathes” and pulsates.

I have often wished for a kind of notation which would enable me to put on paper all the shades and tones of my vision, to record distinctly the inner structure of a film. For when I stand in the artistically devastating atmosphere of the studio, my hands and head full of all the trivial and irritating details that go with motion-picture production, it often takes a tremendous effort to remember how I originally saw and thought out this or that sequence, or what was the relation between the scene of four weeks ago and that of today. If I could express myself clearly, in explicit symbols, then this problem would be almost eliminated and I could work with absolute confidence that whenever I liked I could prove the relationship between the part and the whole and put my finger on the rhythm, the continuity of the film.

Thus the script is a very imperfect *technical* basis for a film. And there is another important point in this connection which I should like to mention. Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict. This probably has something to do with the receptive process of the mind. The written word is read and assimilated by a conscious act of the will in alliance with the intellect; little by little it affects the imagination and the emotions. The process is different with a motion picture. When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect, we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly on our feelings.

Music works in the same fashion; I would say that there is no art form that has so much in common with film as music.

Both affect our emotions directly, not via the intellect. And film is mainly rhythm; it is inhalation and exhalation in continuous sequence. Ever since childhood, music has been my great source of recreation and stimulation, and I often experience a film or play musically.

It is mainly because of this difference between film and literature that we should avoid making films out of books. The irrational dimension of a literary work, the germ of its existence, is often untranslatable into visual terms—and it, in turn, destroys the special, irrational dimension of the film. If, despite this, we wish to translate something literary into film terms, we must make an infinite number of complicated adjustments which often bear little or no fruit in proportion to the effort expended.

I myself have never had any ambition to be an author. I do not want to write novels, short stories, essays, biographies, or even plays for the theater. I only want to make films—films about conditions, tensions, pictures, rhythms and characters which are in one way or another important to me. The motion picture, with its complicated process of birth, is my method of saying what I want to my fellow men. I am a film-maker, not an author.

Thus the writing of the script is a difficult period but a useful one, for it compels me to prove logically the validity of my ideas. In doing this, I am caught in a conflict—a conflict between my need to transmit a complicated situation through visual images, and my desire for absolute clarity. I do not intend my work to be solely for the benefit of myself or the few, but for the entertainment of the general public. The wishes of the public are imperative. But sometimes I risk following my own impulse, and it has been shown that the public can respond with surprising sensitivity to the most unconventional line of development.

When shooting begins, the most important thing is that those who work with me feel a definite contact, that all of us somehow cancel out our conflicts through working together. We must pull in one direction for the sake of the work at hand. Sometimes this leads to dispute, but the more definite and clear the “marching orders,” the easier it is to reach the goal which has been set. This is the basis for my conduct as director, and perhaps the explanation of much of the nonsense that has been written about me.

While I cannot let myself be concerned with what people think and say about me personally, I believe that reviewers and critics have every right to interpret my films as they like. I refuse

to interpret my work to others, and I cannot tell the critic what to think; each person has the right to understand a film as he sees it. Either he is attracted or repelled. A film is made to create reaction. If the audience does not react one way or another, it is an indifferent work and worthless.

I do not mean by this that I believe in being "different" at any price. A lot has been said about the value of originality, and I find this foolish. Either you are original or you are not. It is completely natural for artists to take from and give to each other, to borrow from and experience one another. In my own life, my great literary experience was Strindberg. There are works of his which can still make my hair stand on end—*The People of Hemsö*, for example. And it is my dream to produce *Dream Play* some day. Olof Molander's production of it in 1934 was for me a fundamental dramatic experience.

On a personal level, there are many people who have meant a great deal to me. My father and mother were certainly of vital importance, not only in themselves but because they created a world for me to revolt against. In my family there was an atmosphere of hearty wholesomeness which I, a sensitive young plant, scorned and rebelled against. But that strict middle-class home gave me a wall to pound on, something to sharpen myself against. At the same time they taught me a number of values—efficiency, punctuality, a sense of financial responsibility—which may be "bourgeois" but are nevertheless important to the artist. They are part of the process of setting oneself severe standards. Today as a film-maker I am conscientious, hard-working and extremely careful; my films involve good craftsmanship, and my pride is the pride of a good craftsman.

Among the people who have meant something in my professional development is Torsten Hammaren of Gothenburg. I went there from Hälsingborg, where I had been head of the municipal theater for two years. I had no conception of what theater was; Hammaren taught me during the four years I stayed in Gothenburg. Then, when I made my first attempts at film, Alf Sjöberg—who directed *Torment*—taught me a great deal. And there was Lorens Marmstedt, who really taught me film-making from scratch after my first unsuccessful movie. Among other things I learned from Marmstedt is the one unbreakable rule: you must look at your own work very coldly and clearly; you must be a devil to yourself in the screening room when watching the day's rushes. Then there is Herbert Grevenius, one of the few who believed

in me as a writer. I had trouble with script-writing, and was reaching out more and more to the drama, to dialogue, as a means of expression. He gave me great encouragement.

Finally, there is Carl Anders Dymling, my producer. He is crazy enough to place more faith in the sense of responsibility of a creative artist than in calculations of profit and loss. I am thus able to work with an integrity that has become the very air I breathe, and one of the main reasons I do not want to work outside of Sweden. The moment I lose this freedom I will cease to be a film-maker, because I have no skill in the art of compromise. My only significance in the world of film lies in the freedom of my creativity.

Today, the ambitious film-maker is obliged to walk a tight-rope without a net. He may be a conjurer, but no one conjures the producer, the bank director or the theater owners when the public refuses to go see a film and lay down the money by which producer, bank director, theater owner and conjurer can live. The conjurer may then be deprived of his magic wand; I would like to be able to measure the amount of talent, initiative and creative ability which has been destroyed by the film industry in its ruthlessly efficient sausage machine. What was play to me once has now become a struggle. Failure, criticism, public indifference all hurt more today than yesterday. The brutality of the industry is undisguised—yet that can be an advantage.

So much for people and the film business. I have been asked, as a clergyman's son, about the role of religion in my thinking and film-making. To me, religious problems are continuously alive. I never cease to concern myself with them; it goes on every hour of every day. Yet this does not take place on the emotional level, but on an intellectual one. Religious emotion, religious sentimentality, is something I got rid of long ago—I hope. The religious problem is an intellectual one to me: the relationship of my mind to my intuition. The result of this conflict is usually some kind of tower of Babel.

Philosophically, there is a book which was a tremendous experience for me: Eiono Kaila's *Psychology of the Personality*. His thesis that man lives strictly according to his needs—negative and positive—was shattering to me, but terribly true. And I built on this ground.

People ask what are my intentions with my films—my aims. It is a difficult and dangerous question, and I usually give an

evasive answer: I try to tell the truth about the human condition, the truth as I see it. This answer seems to satisfy everyone, but it is not quite correct. I prefer to describe what I *would like* my aims to be.

There is an old story of how the cathedral of Chartres was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Then thousands of people came from all points of the compass, like a giant procession of ants, and together they began to rebuild the cathedral on its old site. They worked until the building was completed—master builders, artists, laborers, clowns, noblemen, priests, burghers. But they all remained anonymous, and no one knows to this day who built the cathedral of Chartres.

Regardless of my own beliefs and my own doubts, which are unimportant in this connection, it is my opinion that art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship. It severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself. In former days the artist remained unknown and his work was to the glory of God. He lived and died without being more or less important than other artisans; “eternal values,” “immortality” and “masterpiece” were terms not applicable in his case. The ability to create was a gift. In such a world flourished invulnerable assurance and natural humility.

Today the individual has become the highest form and the greatest bane of artistic creation. The smallest wound or pain of the ego is examined under a microscope as if it were of eternal importance. The artist considers his isolation, his subjectivity, his individualism almost holy. Thus we finally gather in one large pen, where we stand and bleat about our loneliness without listening to each other and without realizing that we are smothering each other to death. The individualists stare into each other’s eyes and yet deny the existence of each other. We walk in circles, so limited by our own anxieties that we can no longer distinguish between true and false, between the gangster’s whim and the purest ideal.

Thus if I am asked what I would like the general purpose of my films to be, I would reply that I want to be one of the artists in the cathedral on the great plain, I want to make a dragon’s head, an angel, a devil—or perhaps a saint—out of stone. It does not matter which; it is the sense of satisfaction that counts. Regardless of whether I believe or not, whether I am a Christian or not, I would play my part in the collective building of the cathedral.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Are Bergman's remarks about film-making in Sweden directed against the Hollywood system, which controls so much of the world's film activity? What differences does he see between the Hollywood industry and its Swedish counterpart?*
- 2. What does Bergman mean when he says that he is a conjurer? How does this compare with Fellini's remarks about neorealism? How can a movie be considered a "deception of the human eye"?*
- 3. How does the process of the development of a film as described by Fellini and Bergman differ from the practice of adapting films from novels, which is especially common in the United States? What are the advantages and disadvantages of adapting novels to the screen?*
- 4. Bergman says that "film has nothing to do with literature." What does he mean by this? Do you agree?*
- 5. Bergman attacks the idea of the arts as mere vehicles for self-expression. Explain his position, referring to one or two of his films for illustration, if possible.*

Where Are We— The Underground?

Jonas Mekas

Jonas Mekas is a member of the New York underground film movement. One of his best-known films is The Brig. In the following address to the Philadelphia College of Art, he described the motives and aims of the underground film-maker.

When I was asked to accept the highest award of the Philadelphia College of Art, I hesitated for a moment. I said to myself, Who am I? Really, I haven't done much in my life. Everything I want to do, all my dreams, are still in the future. Then I thought again. What the College is really doing by awarding this honor to me, is directing people's attention to the avant-garde arts. This award doesn't, really, go to me; it goes to the new cinema—to all those avant-garde artists who are trying to bring some beauty into a world full of sadness and horror.

What are we really doing? Where are we—the Underground? What's the meaning of it all? I will try to answer, or to indicate, some of the meanings connected with our work—meanings that are closely connected with all of us.

There was a time, when I was sixteen or seventeen, when I was idealistic and believed that the world would change in my own lifetime. I read about all the suffering of man, wars, and misery that took place in the past centuries. And I somehow believed that in my own lifetime all this would change. I had faith in the progress of man, in the goodness of man. And then came the war, and I went through horrors more unbelievable than anything I had read in the books, and it all happened right before my eyes—before my eyes the heads of children were smashed with bayonets. And

FROM an address to the Philadelphia College of Art, as reprinted in *The New American Cinema*, edited by Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1967), pp. 17-22. Reprinted by permission of the author.

this was done by my generation. And it's still being done today, in Vietnam, by my generation. It's done all over the world, by my generation. Everything that I believed in shook to the foundations—all my idealism, and my faith in the goodness of man and progress of man; all was shattered. Somehow, I managed to keep myself together. But, really, I wasn't one piece any longer; I was one thousand painful pieces.

It's really from this, and because of this, that I did what I did. I felt I had to start from the very beginning. I had no faith, no hope left. I had to collect myself again, bit by bit. And I wasn't surprised when, upon my arrival in New York, I found others who felt as I felt. There were poets, and filmmakers, and painters—people who were also walking like one thousand painful pieces. And we felt that there was nothing to lose any more. There was almost nothing worth keeping from our civilized inheritance. Let's clean ourselves out, we felt. Let's clean out everything that is dragging us down—the whole bag of horrors and lies and egos. The Beat Generation was the outgrowth, the result of this desperation; the mystical researches came out of this desperation. No price was too high, we felt, to pay for this cleaning job, no embarrassment too big to take. Let them laugh at us and our shabby appearances; let them spit into our beards. Even if we had nothing—some of us still have nothing to put into the cleared place—we couldn't remain as we were. We had to clean out not only the present but, through the drug experience or through meditation, to go back by several generations, to eliminate our egos, our bad faith, our mistrust, our sense of competition, of personal profit—so that if there was anything beautiful and pure, it would find a clear place and would settle in us and would begin to grow. It was a painful search, and it still is. We are still in the beginning of this search and growth, and many minds get broken to pieces. We are going through a dramatic end of the Christian Era and the birth of what we begin to call the Aquarian Age, and there are violent happenings taking place in man's spirit and they aren't always in our control. But it's a little bit easier because there are today many of us in various places of the country, of the world; we keep meeting each other, and we recognize each other; we know we are the traveling pioneers of the new age. We are the transitional generations. My generation, your generation, we have been marked by the sign of travel. We kept going and searching (we still do) in constant movement, from one side of the continent to another, between San Francisco and New York, between India and Mexico, and through all the inner journeys of the psychedelics and

yoga systems, and macrobiotics. No generation since Columbus has traveled more than the current two generations of America. Yes, other generations have also traveled, but they always traveled as conquerors, to conquer the others, to teach them their own way of life. Our parents are still traveling through Vietnam as conquerors; they travel, yes—but how useless and unreal all their journeys and their conquerings seem to us today! For we are traveling, collecting the broken bits and pieces of knowledge, of love, of hope, of old ages; not the wisdom of our parents, nor our mothers' wisdom, but that wisdom which is as old as the earth, as the planets, as man himself—the mystical, the eternal—collecting, gathering ourselves bit by bit, having nothing to offer to others but taking gladly whatever is invested with love and warmth and wisdom, no matter how little that may be.

In cinema, this search is manifested through abandoning of all the existing professional, commercial values, rules, subjects, techniques, pretensions. We said: We don't know what man is; we don't know what cinema is. Let us, therefore, be completely open. Let us go in any direction. Let us be completely open and listening, ready to move to any direction upon the slightest call, almost like one who is too tired and too weary, whose senses are like a musical string, almost with no power of our own, blown and played by the mystical winds of the incoming Age, waiting for a slightest motion or call or sign—let's go in any direction to break out of the net that is dragging us down. Our mothers' wisdom! Don't get tied down to any of the establishments; they will go down and they will drag us down. The sun, that is our direction. The beauty, that is our direction—not money, not success, not comfort, not security, not even our own happiness, but the happiness of all of us together.

We used to march with posters protesting this and protesting that. Today, we realize that to improve the world, the others, first we have to improve ourselves; that only through the beauty of our own selves can we beautify the others. Our work, therefore, our most important work at this stage is ourselves. Our protest and our critique of the existing order of life can be only through the expansion of our own being. We are the measure of all things. And the beauty of our creation, of our art, is proportional to the beauty of ourselves, of our souls.

You may be wondering, sometimes, why we keep making little movies, underground movies, why we are talking about Home Movies, and you hope, sometimes, that all this will change soon. Wait, you say, until they begin making big movies. But we say,

No, there is a misunderstanding here. We *are* making real movies. What we are doing comes from the deeper needs of man's soul. Man has wasted himself outside himself; man has disappeared in his projections. We want to bring him down, into his small room, to bring him home. We want to remind him that there is such a thing as home, where he can be, once in a while, alone and with himself and with a few that he loves close to him, and be with himself and his soul—that's the meaning of the home movie, the private visions of our movies. We want to surround this earth with our home movies. Our movies come from our hearts—our little movies, not the Hollywood movies. Our movies are like extensions of our own pulse, of our heartbeat, of our eyes, our fingertips; they are so personal, so unambitious in their movement, in their use of light, their imagery. We want to surround this earth with our film frames and warm it up—until it begins to move. We could continue expressing our own surroundings, being mirrors of the dirty cities, the black dailiness. But we have done that job already. There is pain in the arts of the last few decades. The whole period of so-called modern art is nothing but the pain of our ending civilization, the last decades of the Christian Era. Now we are looking, we are being pulled by a desire for something joyful deep within us, deep in the stars, and we want to bring it down to earth so that it will change our cities, our faces, our movements, our voices, our souls—we want an art of light. You'll see more and more of luminous colors and heavenly sounds coming through our art. The brush strokes will be charged with a different energy, not to express our egos, not to promote ourselves "as artists" (that is gone, all that is gone and gone), but to bring down the whispers of heaven to serve as strings, as instruments of ethereal winds, with our own personalities almost disappearing. I see it all over the country, and humble, unknown artists keep coming from various and distant countries, passing the town like monks stopping on their way somewhere, showing glimpses brought down from heaven. There is a renaissance, a spiritual renaissance coming upon us, and it's through artists that this new age is bringing to us its first voices and visions; it's through their intuition that the eternity communicates with us, bringing a new knowledge, new feelings. Let us then be very open to our art, to this new art, and to our work as artists. This isn't time for lowering ourselves, but for being ready to sing the most beautiful note.

I was talking in the beginning about my own disillusionment after the war. Today, for the first time in a long time, I suddenly again begin to see the broken pieces of myself coming together. I

am listening, very openly, with all my senses, with my eyes and ears open, and I begin to hear and see a new man emerging. After fifteen years of disillusionment, slowly, during the last few months, I have gained again the belief and trust in man, and the knowledge that this is the generation that is building the bridge from horror to light. You, me—we are the one thousand painful pieces that are beginning to come together in one beautiful note. As if a completely new race of man were emerging on earth. Do you know what the rock 'n' roll group called *The Byrds* do with their money? They are making huge signs and putting them all along the road-sides of California, and the signs say one word: Love. But our parents would say: This is crazy, you should put your money into the bank. That's the difference. That's what I mean. That's where we stand in 1966 and midsummer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Mekas observes that the basic premise of the underground movement was that "there was almost nothing worth keeping from our civilized inheritance." Many centuries of civilization, he asserts, have produced World War II and Vietnam; therefore this civilization must be discarded. Do you think his reasoning is valid?
2. Mekas's article amounts to a credo for the underground movement. How do you feel about this credo?
3. How does Mekas's idea of what a film should be compare with Preminger's views? With Kauffmann's?
4. Mekas's credo seems based on the younger generation's ability to change what it sees as the older generation's mistakes. Do you think the younger generation will turn out to be more peaceful, loving, honest, tolerant, and socially concerned than the previous generation? Why or why not?
5. From Mekas's article, how would you define the term "underground films"?
6. If you have seen any underground films, how do you feel they live up to Mekas's credo? Kauffmann, you will remember, claimed that the theory was much more interesting than the movies themselves.

3

TELEVISION AND RADIO

Television: The Timid Giant

Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan is a professor at the University of Toronto whose theories of communication have had a profound effect on popular and critical conceptions of the mass media. His ideas on the nature of television form the basis of his theories about the changes we are undergoing as we make the transition from a mechanical to an electric culture. In this selection from his book Understanding Media, McLuhan sets forth his view of television as a "cool"—that is, audience-involving—medium.

The mode of the TV image has nothing in common with film or photo, except that it offers also a nonverbal *gestalt* or posture of forms. With TV, the viewer is the screen. He is bombarded with light impulses that James Joyce called the "Charge of the Light Brigade" that imbues his "soulskin with subconscious inklings." The TV image is visually low in data. The TV image is not a *still* shot. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger. The resulting plastic contour appears by light *through*, not light *on*, and the image so formed has the quality of sculpture and icon, rather than of picture. The TV image offers some three million dots per second to the receiver. From these he accepts only a few dozen each instant, from which to make an image.

The film image offers many more millions of data per second, and the viewer does not have to make the same drastic reduction of items to form his impression. He tends instead to accept the full image as a package deal. In contrast, the viewer of the TV mosaic, with technical control of the image, unconsciously reconfigures the dots into an abstract work of art on the pattern of a Seurat or

Rouault. If anybody were to ask whether all this would change if technology stepped up the character of the TV image to movie data level, one could only counter by inquiring, "Could we alter a cartoon by adding details of perspective and light and shade?" The answer is "Yes," only it would then no longer be a cartoon. Nor would "improved" TV be television. The TV image is *now* a mosaic mesh of light and dark spots which a movie shot never is, even when the quality of the movie image is very poor.

As in any other mosaic, the third dimension is alien to TV, but it can be superimposed. In TV the illusion of the third dimension is provided slightly by the stage sets in the studio; but the TV image itself is a flat two-dimensional mosaic. Most of the three-dimensional illusion is a carry-over of habitual viewing of film and photo. For the TV camera does not have a built-in angle of vision like the movie camera. Eastman Kodak now has a two-dimensional camera that can match the flat effects of the TV camera. Yet it is hard for literate people, with their habit of fixed points of view and three-dimensional vision, to understand the properties of two-dimensional vision. If it had been easy for them, they would have had no difficulties with abstract art, General Motors would not have made a mess of motorcar design, and the picture magazine would not be having difficulties now with the relationship between features and ads. The TV image requires each instant that we "close" the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile, because tactility is the interplay of the senses, rather than the isolated contact of skin and object.

To contrast it with the film shot, many directors refer to the TV image as one of "low definition," in the sense that it offers little detail and a low degree of information, much like the cartoon. A TV close-up provides only as much information as a small section of a long-shot on the movie screen. For lack of observing so central an aspect of the TV image, the critics of program "content" have talked nonsense about "TV violence." The spokesmen of censorious views are typical semiliterate book-oriented individuals who have no competence in the grammars of newspaper, or radio, or of film, but who look askew and askance at all non-book media. The simplest question about any psychic aspect, even of the book medium, throws these people into a panic of uncertainty. Vehemence of projection of a single isolated attitude they mistake for moral vigilance. Once these censors became aware that in all cases "the medium is the message" or the basic source of effects, they would turn to suppression of media as such, instead of seek-

ing "content" control. Their current assumption that content or programming is the factor that influences outlook and action is derived from the book medium, with its sharp cleavage between form and content.

Is it not strange that TV should have been as revolutionary a medium in America in the 1950s as radio in Europe in the 1930s? Radio, the medium that resuscitated the tribal and kinship webs of the European mind in the 1920s and 1930s, had no such effect in England or America. There, the erosion of tribal bonds by means of literacy and its industrial extensions had gone so far that our radio did not achieve any notable tribal reactions. Yet ten years of TV have Europeanized even the United States, as witness its changed feelings for space and personal relations. There is new sensitivity to the dance, plastic arts, and architecture, as well as the demand for the small car, the paperback, sculptural hairdos and molded dress effects—to say nothing of a new concern for complex effects in cuisine and in the use of wines. Notwithstanding, it would be misleading to say that TV will retribalize England and America. The action of radio on the world of resonant speech and memory was hysterical. But TV has certainly made England and America vulnerable to radio where previously they had immunity to a great degree. For good or ill, the TV image has exerted a unifying synesthetic force on the sense-life of these intensely literate populations, such as they have lacked for centuries. It is wise to withhold all value judgments when studying these media matters, since their effects are not capable of being isolated.

Synesthesia, or unified sense and imaginative life, had long seemed an unattainable dream to Western poets, painters, and artists in general. They had looked with sorrow and dismay on the fragmented and impoverished imaginative life of Western literate man in the eighteenth century and later. Such was the message of Blake and Pater, Yeats and D. H. Lawrence, and a host of other great figures. They were not prepared to have their dreams realized in everyday life by the esthetic action of radio and television. Yet these massive extensions of our central nervous systems have enveloped Western man in a daily session of synesthesia. The Western way of life attained centuries since by the rigorous separation and specialization of the senses, with the visual sense atop the hierarchy, is not able to withstand the radio and TV waves that wash about the great visual structure of abstract Individual Man. Those who, from political motives, would now add their force to the anti-individual action of our electric technology

are puny subliminal automatons aping the patterns of the prevailing electric pressures. A century ago they would, with equal somnambulism, have faced in the opposite direction. German Romantic poets and philosophers had been chanting in tribal chorus for a return to the dark unconscious for over a century before radio and Hitler made such a return difficult to avoid. What is to be thought of people who wish such a return to preliterate ways, when they have no inkling of how the civilized visual way was ever substituted for tribal auditory magic?

At this hour, when Americans are discovering new passions for skin-diving and the wraparound space of small cars, thanks to the indomitable tactile promptings of the TV image, the same image is inspiring many English people with race feelings of tribal exclusiveness. Whereas highly literate Westerners have always idealized the condition of integration of races, it has been their literate culture that made impossible real uniformity among races. Literate man naturally dreams of visual solutions to the problems of human differences. At the end of the nineteenth century, this kind of dream suggested similar dress and education for both men and women. The failure of the sex-integration programs has provided the theme of much of the literature and psychoanalysis of the twentieth century. Race integration, undertaken on the basis of visual uniformity, is an extension of the same cultural strategy of literate man, for whom differences always seem to need eradication, both in sex and in race, and in space and in time. Electronic man, by becoming ever more deeply involved in the actualities of the human condition, cannot accept the literate cultural strategy. The Negro will reject a plan of visual uniformity as definitely as women did earlier, and for the same reasons. Women found that they had been robbed of their distinctive roles and turned into fragmented citizens in "a man's world." The entire approach to these problems in terms of uniformity and social homogenization is a final pressure of the mechanical and industrial technology. Without moralizing, it can be said that the electric age, by involving all men deeply in one another, will come to reject such mechanical solutions. It is more difficult to provide uniqueness and diversity than it is to impose the uniform patterns of mass education; but it is such uniqueness and diversity that can be fostered under electric conditions as never before.

Temporarily, all preliterate groups in the world have begun to feel the explosive and aggressive energies that are released by the onset of the new literacy and mechanization. These explosions

come just at a time when the new electric technology combines to make us share them on a global scale.

The effect of TV, as the most recent and spectacular electric extension of our central nervous system, is hard to grasp for various reasons. Since it has affected the totality of our lives, personal and social and political, it would be quite unrealistic to attempt a "systematic" or visual presentation of such influence. Instead, it is more feasible to "present" TV as a complex *gestalt* of data gathered almost at random. . . .

The TV producer will point out that speech on television must not have the careful precision necessary in the theater. The TV actor does not have to project either his voice or himself. Likewise, TV acting is so extremely intimate, because of the peculiar involvement of the viewer with the completion or "closing" of the TV image, that the actor must achieve a great degree of spontaneous casualness that would be irrelevant in movies and lost on stage. For the audience participates in the inner life of the TV actor as fully as in the outer life of the movie star. Technically, TV tends to be a close-up medium. The close-up that in the movie is used for shock is, on TV, a quite casual thing. And whereas a glossy photo the size of the TV screen would show a dozen faces in adequate detail, a dozen faces on the TV screen are only a blur.

The peculiar character of the TV image in its relation to the actor causes such familiar reactions as our not being able to recognize in real life a person whom we see every week on TV. . . . Newscasters and actors alike report the frequency with which they are approached by people who feel they've met them before. Joanne Woodward in an interview was asked what was the difference between being a movie star and a TV actress. She replied: "When I was in the movies I heard people say, 'There goes Joanne Woodward.' Now they say, 'There goes somebody I think I know.'"

The owner of a Hollywood hotel in an area where many movie and TV actors reside reported that tourists had switched their allegiance to TV stars. Moreover, most TV stars are men, that is, "cool characters," while most movie stars are women, since they can be presented as "hot" characters. Men and women movie stars alike, along with the entire star system, have tended to dwindle into a more moderate status since TV. The movie is a hot, high-definition medium. Perhaps the most interesting observation of the hotel proprietor was that the tourists wanted to

see Perry Mason and Wyatt Earp. They did not want to see Raymond Burr and Hugh O'Brian. The old movie-fan tourists had wanted to see their favorites as they were in *real* life, not as they were in their film roles. The fans of the cool TV medium want to see their star in *role*, whereas the movie fans want the *real thing*.

A similar reversal of attitudes occurred with the printed book. There was little interest in the private lives of authors under manuscript or scribal culture. Today the comic strip is close to the pre-print woodcut and manuscript form of expression. Walt Kelly's *Pogo* looks very much indeed like a gothic page. Yet in spite of great public interest in the comic-strip form, there is as little curiosity about the private lives of these artists as about the lives of popular-song writers. With print, the private life became of the utmost concern to readers. Print is a hot medium. It projects the author at the public as the movie did. The manuscript is a cool medium that does not project the author, so much as involve the reader. So with TV. The viewer is involved and participant. The *role* of the TV star, in this way, seems more fascinating than his private life. It is thus that the student of media, like the psychiatrist, gets more data from his informants than they themselves have perceived. Everybody experiences far more than he understands. Yet it is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behavior, especially in collective matters of media and technology, where the individual is almost inevitably unaware of their effect upon him.

Some may find it paradoxical that a cool medium like TV should be so much more compressed and condensed than a hot medium like film. But it is well known that a half minute of television is equal to three minutes of stage or vaudeville. The same is true of manuscript in contrast to print. The "cool" manuscript tended toward compressed forms of statement, aphoristic and allegorical. The "hot" print medium expanded expression in the direction of simplification and the "spelling-out" of meanings. Print speeded up and "exploded" the compressed script into simpler fragments.

A cool medium, whether the spoken word or the manuscript or TV, leaves much more for the listener or user to do than a hot medium. If the medium is of high definition, participation is low. If the medium is of low intensity, the participation is high. Perhaps this is why lovers mumble so.

Because the low definition of TV insures a high degree of audience involvement, the most effective programs are those that present situations which consist of some process to be completed.

Thus, to use TV to teach poetry would permit the teacher to concentrate on the poetic process of actual *making*, as it pertained to a particular poem. The book form is quite unsuited to this type of involved presentation. The same salience of process of do-it-yourself-ness and depth involvement in the TV image extends to the art of the TV actor. Under TV conditions, he must be alert to improvise and to embellish every phrase and verbal resonance with details of gesture and posture, sustaining that intimacy with the viewer which is not possible on the massive movie screen or on the stage.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the degree to which this image has disposed America to European modes of sense and sensibility. America is now Europeanizing as furiously as Europe is Americanizing. Europe, during the Second War, developed much of the industrial technology needed for its first mass consumer phase. It was, on the other hand, the First War that had readied America for the same consumer "take-off." It took the electronic *implosion* to dissolve the nationalist diversity of a splintered Europe, and to do for it what the industrial *explosion* had done for America. The industrial explosion that accompanies the fragmenting expansion of literacy and industry was able to exert little unifying effect in the European world with its numerous tongues and cultures. The Napoleonic thrust had utilized the combined force of the new literacy and early industrialism. But Napoleon had had a less homogenized set of materials to work with than even the Russians have today. The homogenizing power of the literate process had gone further in America by 1800 than anywhere in Europe. From the first, America took to heart the print technology for its educational, industrial, and political life; and it was rewarded by an unprecedented pool of standardized workers and consumers, such as no culture had ever had before. That our cultural historians have been oblivious of the homogenizing power of typography, and of the irresistible strength of homogenized populations, is no credit to them. Political scientists have been quite unaware of the effects of media anywhere at any time, simply because nobody has been willing to study the personal and social effects of media apart from their "content."

America long ago achieved its Common Market by mechanical and literate homogenization of social organization. Europe is now getting a unity under the electric auspices of compression and interrelation. Just how much homogenization via literacy is needed

to make an effective producer-consumer group in the postmechanical age, in the age of automation, nobody has ever asked. For it has never been fully recognized that the role of literacy in shaping an industrial economy is basic and archetypal. Literacy is indispensable for habits of uniformity at all times and places. Above all, it is needed for the workability of price systems and markets. This factor has been ignored exactly as TV is now being ignored, for TV fosters many preferences that are quite at variance with literate uniformity and repeatability. It has sent Americans questing for every sort of oddment and quaintness in objects from out of their storied past. Many Americans will now spare no pains or expense to get to taste some new wine or food. The uniform and repeatable now must yield to the uniquely askew, a fact that is increasingly the despair and confusion of our entire standardized economy.

The power of the TV mosaic to transform American innocence into depth sophistication, independently of "content," is not mysterious if looked at directly. This mosaic TV image had already been adumbrated in the popular press that grew up with the telegraph. The commercial use of the telegraph began in 1844 in America, and earlier in England. The electric principle and its implications received much attention in Shelley's poetry. Artistic rule-of-thumb usually anticipates the science and technology in these matters by a full generation or more. The meaning of the telegraph mosaic in its *journalistic* manifestations was not lost to the mind of Edgar Allan Poe. He used it to establish two startlingly new inventions, the symbolist poem and the detective story. Both of these forms require do-it-yourself participation on the part of the reader. By offering an incomplete image or process, Poe *involved* his readers in the creative process in a way that Baudelaire, Valéry, T. S. Eliot, and many others have admired and followed. Poe had grasped at once the electric dynamic as one of public participation in creativity. Nevertheless, even today the homogenized consumer complains when asked to participate in creating or completing an abstract poem or painting or structure of any kind. Yet Poe knew even then that participation in depth followed at once from the telegraph mosaic. The more lineal and literal-minded of the literary brahmmins "just couldn't see it." They still can't see it. They prefer not to participate in the creative process. They have accommodated themselves to the completed package, in prose and verse and in the plastic arts. It is these people who **must** confront, in every classroom in the land, students who have

accommodated themselves to the tactile and nonpictorial modes of symbolist and mythic structures, thanks to the TV image.

Life magazine for August 10, 1962, had a feature on how "Too Many Subteens Grow Up Too Soon and Too Fast." There was no observation of the fact that similar speed of growth and precociousness have always been the normal in tribal cultures and in nonliterate societies. England and America fostered the institution of prolonged adolescence by the negation of the tactile participation that is sex. In this, there was no conscious strategy, but rather a general acceptance of the consequences of prime stress on the printed word and visual values as a means of organizing personal and social life. This stress led to triumphs of industrial production and political conformity that were their own sufficient warrant.

Respectability, or the ability to sustain visual inspection of one's life, became dominant. No European country allowed print such precedence. Visually, Europe has always been shoddy in American eyes. American women, on the other hand, who have never been equaled in any culture for visual turnout, have always seemed abstract, mechanical dolls to Europeans. Tactility is a supreme value in European life. For that reason, on the Continent there is no adolescence, but only the leap from childhood to adult ways. Such is now the American state since TV, and this state of evasion of adolescence will continue. The introspective life of long, long thoughts and distant goals, to be pursued in lines of Siberian railroad kind, cannot coexist with the mosaic form of the TV image that commands immediate participation in *depth* and admits of no delays. The mandates of that image are so various yet so consistent that even to mention them is to describe the revolution of the past decade.

Just where to begin to examine the transformation of American attitudes since TV is a most arbitrary affair, as can be seen in a change so great as the abrupt decline of baseball. The removal of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles was a portent in itself. Baseball moved West in an attempt to retain an audience after TV struck. The characteristic mode of the baseball game is that it features one-thing-at-a-time. It is a lineal, expansive game which, like golf, is perfectly adapted to the outlook of an individualist and inner-directed society. Timing and waiting are of the essence, with the entire field in suspense waiting upon the performance of a single player. By contrast, football, basketball, and ice hockey are games in which many events occur simultaneously, with the

entire team involved at the same time. With the advent of TV, such isolation of the individual performance as occurs in baseball became unacceptable. Interest in baseball declined, and its stars, quite as much as movie stars, found that fame had some very cramping dimensions. Baseball had been, like the movies, a hot medium featuring individual virtuosity and stellar performers. The real ball fan is a store of statistical information about previous explosions of batters and pitchers in numerous games. Nothing could indicate more clearly the peculiar satisfaction provided by a game that belonged to the industrial metropolis of ceaselessly exploding populations, stocks and bonds, and production and sales records. Baseball belonged to the age of the first onset of the hot press and the movie medium. It will always remain a symbol of the era of the hot mommas, jazz babies, of sheiks and shebas, of vamps and gold-diggers and the fast buck. Baseball, in a word, is a hot game that got cooled off in the new TV climate, as did most of the hot politicians and hot issues of the earlier decade.

There is no cooler medium or hotter issue at present than the small car. It is like a badly wired woofer in a hi-fi circuit that produces a tremendous flutter in the bottom. The small European car, like the European paperback and the European belle, for that matter, was no visual package job. Visually, the entire batch of European cars are so poor an affair that it is obvious their makers never thought of them as something to look at. They are something to put on, like pants or a pullover. Theirs is the kind of space sought by the skin-diver, the water-skier, and the dinghy sailor. In an immediate tactile sense, this new space is akin to that to which the picture-window fad had catered. In terms of "view," the picture window never made any sense. In terms of an attempt to discover a new dimension in the out-of-doors by pretending to be a goldfish, the picture window does make sense. So do the frantic efforts to roughen up the indoor walls and textures as if they were the outside of the house. Exactly the same impulse sends the indoor spaces and furniture out into the patios in an attempt to experience the outside as inside. The TV viewer is in just that role at all times. He is submarine. He is bombarded by atoms that reveal the outside as inside in an endless adventure amidst blurred images and mysterious contours.

However, the American car has been fashioned in accordance with the *visual* mandates of the typographic and the movie images. The American car was an enclosed space, not a tactile space. And an enclosed space . . . is one in which all spatial qualities have been reduced to visual terms. So in the American car, as the

French observed decades ago, "one is not on the road, one is in the car." By contrast, the European car aims to drag you along the road and to provide a great deal of vibration for the bottom. Brigitte Bardot got into the news when it was discovered that she liked to drive barefoot in order to get the maximal vibration. Even English cars, weak on visual appearance as they are, have been guilty of advertising that "at sixty miles an hour all you can hear is the ticking of the clock." That would be a very poor ad, indeed, for a TV generation that has to be *with* everything and has to *dig* things in order to get at them. So avid is the TV viewer for rich tactile effects that he could be counted on to revert to skis. The wheel, so far as he is concerned, lacks the requisite abrasiveness.

Clothes in this first TV decade repeat the same story as vehicles. The revolution was heralded by bobby-soxers who dumped the whole cargo of visual effects for a set of tactile ones so extreme as to create a dead level of flat-footed deadpanism. Part of the cool dimension of TV is the cool, deadpan mug that came in with the teenager. Adolescence, in the age of hot media, of radio and movie, and of the ancient book, had been a time of fresh, eager, and expressive countenances. No elder statesman or senior executive of the 1940s would have ventured to wear so dead and sculptural a pan as the child of the TV age. The dances that came in with TV were to match—all the way to the Twist, which is merely a form of very unanimated dialogue, the gestures and grimaces of which indicate involvement in depth, but "nothing to say."

Clothing and styling in the past decade have gone so tactile and sculptural that they present a sort of exaggerated evidence of the new qualities of the TV mosaic. The TV extension of our nerves in hirsute pattern possesses the power to evoke a flood of related imagery in clothing, hairdo, walk, and gesture.

All this adds up to the compressional implosion—the return to nonspecialized forms of clothes and spaces, the seeking of multi-uses for rooms and things and objects, in a single word—the iconic. In music and poetry and painting, the tactile implosion means the insistence on qualities that are close to casual speech. Thus Schönberg and Stravinsky and Carl Orff and Bartok, far from being advanced seekers of esoteric effects, seem now to have brought music very close to the condition of ordinary human speech. It is this colloquial rhythm that once seemed so unmelodious about their work. Anyone who listens to the medieval works of Perotinus or Dufay will find them very close to Stravinsky and Bartok. The

great explosion of the Renaissance that split musical instruments off from song and speech and gave them specialist functions is now being played backward in our age of electronic implosion.

One of the most vivid examples of the tactile quality of the TV image occurs in medical experience. In closed-circuit instruction in surgery, medical students from the first reported a strange effect—that they seemed not to be watching an operation, but performing it. They felt that they were holding the scalpel. Thus the TV image, in fostering a passion for depth involvement in every aspect of experience, creates an obsession with bodily welfare. The sudden emergence of the TV medico and the hospital ward as a program to rival the western is perfectly natural. It would be possible to list a dozen untried kinds of programs that would prove immediately popular for the same reasons. Tom Dooley and his epic of Medicare for the backward society was a natural outgrowth of the first TV decade.

Now that we have considered the subliminal force of the TV image in a redundant scattering of samples, the question would seem to arise: "What possible *immunity* can there be from the subliminal operation of a new medium like television?" People have long supposed that bulldog opacity, backed by firm disapproval, is adequate enough protection against any new experience. It is the theme of this book that not even the most lucid understanding of the peculiar force of a medium can head off the ordinary "closure" of the senses that causes us to conform to the pattern of experience presented. The utmost purity of mind is no defense against bacteria, though the confreres of Louis Pasteur tossed him out of the medical profession for his base allegations about the invisible operation of bacteria. To resist TV, therefore, one must acquire the antidote of related media like print.

It is an especially touchy area that presents itself with the question: "What has been the effect of TV on our political life?" Here, at least, great traditions of critical awareness and vigilance testify to the safeguards we have posted against the dastardly uses of power.

When Theodore White's *The Making of the President: 1960* is opened at the section on "The Television Debates," the TV student will experience dismay. White offers statistics on the number of sets in American homes and the number of hours of daily use of these sets, but not one clue as to the nature of the TV image or its effects on candidates or viewers. White considers the "content" of the debates and the deportment of the debaters, but it never occurs to him to ask why TV would inevitably be a disaster

for a sharp intense image like Nixon's, and a boon for the blurry, shaggy texture of Kennedy.

At the end of the debates, Philip Deane of the London *Observer* explained my idea of the coming TV impact on the election to the *Toronto Globe and Mail* under the headline of "The Sheriff and the Lawyer," October 15, 1960. It was that TV would prove so entirely in Kennedy's favor that he would win the election. Without TV, Nixon had it made. Deane, toward the end of his article, wrote:

Now the press has tended to say that Mr. Nixon has been gaining in the last two debates and that he was bad in the first. Professor McLuhan thinks that Mr. Nixon has been sounding progressively more definite; regardless of the value of the Vice-President's views and principles, he has been defending them with too much flourish for the TV medium. Mr. Kennedy's rather sharp responses have been a mistake, but he still presents an image closer to the TV hero, Professor McLuhan says—something like the shy young Sheriff—while Mr. Nixon with his very dark eyes that tend to stare, with his slicker circumlocution, has resembled more the railway lawyer who signs leases that are not in the interests of the folks in the little town.

In fact, by counterattacking and by claiming for himself, as he does in the TV debates, the same goals as the Democrats have, Mr. Nixon may be helping his opponent by blurring the Kennedy image, by confusing what exactly it is that Mr. Kennedy wants to change.

Mr. Kennedy is thus not handicapped by clear-cut issues; he is visually a less well-defined image, and appears more nonchalant. He seems less anxious to sell himself than does Mr. Nixon. So far, then, Professor McLuhan gives Mr. Kennedy the lead without underestimating Mr. Nixon's formidable appeal to the vast conservative forces of the United States.

Another way of explaining the acceptable, as opposed to the unacceptable, TV personality is to say that anybody whose *appearance* strongly declares his role and status in life is wrong for TV. Anybody who looks as if he might be a teacher, a doctor, a businessman, or any of a dozen other things all at the same time is right for TV. When the person presented *looks* classifiable, as Nixon did, the TV viewer has nothing to fill in. He feels uncom-

fortable with his TV image. He says uneasily, "There's something about the guy that isn't right." The viewer feels exactly the same about an exceedingly pretty girl on TV, or about any of the intense "high definition" images and messages from the sponsors. . . . Likewise, precisely the formula that recommends anybody for a movie role disqualifies the same person for TV acceptance. For the hot movie medium needs people who look very definitely a *type* of some kind. The cool TV medium cannot abide the typical because it leaves the viewer frustrated of his job of "closure" or completion of image. . . .

How about Educational Television? When the three-year-old sits watching the President's press conference with Dad and Granddad, that illustrates the serious educational role of TV. If we ask what is the relation of TV to the learning process, the answer is surely that the TV image, by its stress on participation, dialogue, and depth, has brought to America new demand for crash-programming in education. Whether there ever will be TV in every classroom is a small matter. The revolution has already taken place at home. TV has changed our sense-lives and our mental processes. It has created a taste for all experience *in depth* that affects language teaching as much as car styles. Since TV, nobody is happy with a mere book knowledge of French or English poetry. The unanimous cry now is, "Let's *talk* French," and "Let the bard be *heard*." And oddly enough, with the demand for depth, goes the demand for crash-programming. Not only deeper, but further, into all knowledge has become the normal popular demand since TV. Perhaps enough has been said about the nature of the TV image to explain why this should be. How could it possibly pervade our lives any more than it does? Mere classroom use could not extend its influence. Of course, in the classroom its role compels a reshuffling of subjects, and approaches to subjects. Merely to put the present classroom on TV would be like putting movies on TV. The result would be a hybrid that is neither. The right approach is to ask, "What can TV do that the classroom cannot do for French, or for physics?" The answer is: "TV can illustrate the interplay of process and the growth of forms of all kinds as nothing else can."

The other side of the story concerns the fact that, in the visually organized educational and social world, the TV child is an underprivileged cripple. An oblique indication of this startling reversal has been given by William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. On the one hand, it is very flattering for hordes of docile children to be told that, once out of the sight of their governesses, the

seething savage passions within them would boil over and sweep away pram and playpen, alike. On the other hand, Mr. Golding's little pastoral parable does have some meaning in terms of the psychic changes in the TV child. This matter is so important for any future strategy of culture or politics that it demands a headline prominence, and capsulated summary:

Why the TV Child Cannot See Ahead

The plunge into depth experience via the TV image can only be explained in terms of the differences between visual and mosaic space. Ability to discriminate between these radically different forms is quite rare in our Western world. It has been pointed out that, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is not king. He is taken to be an hallucinated lunatic. In a highly visual culture, it is as difficult to communicate the nonvisual properties of spatial forms as to explain visuality to the blind. In *The ABC of Relativity* Bertrand Russell began by explaining that there is nothing difficult about Einstein's ideas, but that they do call for total reorganization of our imaginative lives. It is precisely this imaginative reorganization that has occurred via the TV image.

The ordinary inability to discriminate between the photographic and the TV image is not merely a crippling factor in the learning process today; it is symptomatic of an age-old failure in Western culture. The literate man, accustomed to an environment in which the visual sense is extended everywhere as a principle of organization, sometimes supposes that the mosaic world of primitive art, or even the world of Byzantine art, represents a mere difference in degree, a sort of failure to bring their visual portrayals up to the level of full visual effectiveness. Nothing could be further from the truth. This, in fact, is a misconception that has impaired understanding between East and West for many centuries. Today it impairs relations between colored and white societies.

Most technology produces an amplification that is quite explicit in its separation of the senses. Radio is an extension of the aural, high-fidelity photography of the visual. But TV is, above all, an extension of the sense of touch, which involves maximal interplay of all the senses. For Western man, however, the all-embracing extension had occurred by means of phonetic writing, which is a technology for extending the sense of sight. All non-phonetic forms of writing are, by contrast, artistic modes that retain much variety of sensuous orchestration. Phonetic writing, alone, has the power of separating and fragmenting the senses and of sloughing

off the semantic complexities. The TV image reverses this literate process of analytic fragmentation of sensory life.

The visual stress on continuity, uniformity, and connectedness, as it derives from literacy, confronts us with the great technological means of implementing continuity and lineality by fragmented repetition. The ancient world found this means in the brick, whether for wall or road. The repetitive, uniform brick, indispensable agent of road and wall, of cities and empires, is an extension, via letters, of the visual sense. *The brick wall is not a mosaic form*, and neither is the mosaic form a visual structure. The mosaic can be *seen* as dancing can, but is not *structured* visually; nor is it an extension of the visual power. For the mosaic is not uniform, continuous, or repetitive. It is discontinuous, skew, and nonlineal, like the tactual TV image. To the sense of touch, all things are sudden, counter, original, spare, strange. The "Pied Beauty" of G. M. Hopkins is a catalogue of the notes of the sense of touch. The poem is a manifesto of the nonvisual, and like Cézanne or Seurat or Rouault it provides an indispensable approach to understanding TV. The nonvisual mosaic structures of modern art, like those of modern physics and electric-information patterns, permit little detachment. The mosaic form of the TV image demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being, as does the sense of touch. Literacy, in contrast, had, by extending the visual power to the uniform organization of time and space, psychically and socially, conferred the power of detachment and noninvolvement.

The visual sense when extended by phonetic literacy fosters the analytic habit of perceiving the single facet in the life of forms. The visual power enables us to isolate the single incident in time and space, as in representational art. In visual representation of a person or an object, a single phase or moment or aspect is separated from the multitude of known and felt phases, moments and aspects of the person or object. By contrast, iconographic art uses the eye as we use our hand in seeking to create an inclusive image, made up of many moments, phases, and aspects of the person or thing. Thus the iconic mode is not visual representation, nor the specialization of visual stress as defined by viewing from a single position. The tactual mode of perceiving is sudden but not specialist. It is total, synesthetic, involving all the senses. Pervaded by the mosaic TV image, the TV child encounters the world in a spirit antithetic to literacy.

The TV image, that is to say, even more than the icon, is

an extension of the sense of touch. Where it encounters a literate culture, it necessarily thickens the sense-mix, transforming fragmented and specialist extensions into a seamless web of experience. Such transformation is, of course, a "disaster" for a literate, specialist culture. It blurs many cherished attitudes and procedures. It dims the efficacy of the basic pedagogic techniques, and the relevance of the curriculum. If for no other reason, it would be well to understand the dynamic life of these forms as they intrude upon us and upon one another. TV makes for myopia.

The young people who have experienced a decade of TV have naturally imbibed an urge toward involvement in depth that makes all the remote visualized goals of usual culture seem not only unreal but irrelevant, and not only irrelevant but anemic. It is the total involvement in all-inclusive *nowness* that occurs in young lives via TV's mosaic image. This change of attitude has nothing to do with programming in any way, and would be the same if the programs consisted entirely of the highest cultural content. The change in attitude by means of relating themselves to the mosaic TV image would occur in any event. It is, of course, our job not only to understand this change but to exploit it for its pedagogical richness. The TV child expects involvement and doesn't want a specialist *job* in the future. He does want a *role* and a deep commitment to his society. Unbridled and misunderstood, this richly human need can manifest itself in the distorted forms portrayed in *West Side Story*.

The TV child cannot see ahead because he wants involvement, and he cannot accept a fragmentary and merely visualized goal or destiny in learning or in life.

Murder by Television

Jack Ruby shot Lee Oswald while tightly surrounded by guards who were paralyzed by television cameras. The fascinating and involving power of television scarcely needed this additional proof of its peculiar operation upon human perceptions. The Kennedy assassination gave people an immediate sense of the television power to create depth involvement, on the one hand, and a numbing effect as deep as grief, itself, on the other hand. Most people were amazed at the depth of meaning which the event communicated to them. Many more were surprised by the coolness and calm of the mass reaction. The same event, handled by press or radio (in the absence of television), would have provided

a totally different experience. The national "lid" would have "blown off." Excitement would have been enormously greater and depth participation in a common awareness very much less.

As explained earlier, Kennedy was an excellent TV image. He had used the medium with the same effectiveness that Roosevelt had learned to achieve by radio. With TV, Kennedy found it natural to involve the nation in the office of the Presidency, both as an operation and as an image. TV reaches out for the corporate attributes of office. Potentially, it can transform the Presidency into a monarchic dynasty. A merely elective Presidency scarcely affords the depth of dedication and commitment demanded by the TV form. Even teachers on TV seem to be endowed by the student audiences with a charismatic or mystic character that much exceeds the feelings developed in the classroom or lecture hall. In the course of many studies of audience reactions to TV teaching, there recurs this puzzling fact. The viewers feel that the teacher has a dimension almost of sacredness. This feeling does not have its basis in concepts or ideas, but seems to creep in uninvited and unexplained. It baffles both the students and the analysts of their reactions. Surely, there could be no more telling touch to tip us off to the character of TV. This is not so much a visual as a tactual-auditory medium that involves all of our senses in depth interplay. For people long accustomed to the merely visual experience of the typographic and photographic varieties, it would seem to be the *synesthesia*, or tactual depth of TV experience, that dislocates them from their usual attitudes of passivity and detachment.

The banal and ritual remark of the conventionally literate, that TV presents an experience for passive viewers, is wide of the mark. TV is above all a medium that demands a creatively participant response. The guards who failed to protect Lee Oswald were not passive. They were so involved by the mere sight of the TV cameras that they lost their sense of their merely practical and specialist task.

Perhaps it was the Kennedy funeral that most strongly impressed the audience with the power of TV to invest an occasion with the character of corporate participation. No national event except in sports has ever had such coverage or such an audience. It revealed the unrivaled power of TV to achieve the involvement of the audience in a complex *process*. The funeral as a corporate process caused even the image of sport to pale and dwindle into puny proportions. The Kennedy funeral, in short, manifested the power of TV to involve an entire population in a ritual process.

By comparison, press, movie, and even radio are mere packaging devices for consumers.

Most of all, the Kennedy event provides an opportunity for noting a paradoxical feature of the "cool" TV medium. It involves us in moving depth, but it does not excite, agitate or arouse. Presumably, this is a feature of all depth experience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. A number of critics disagree with McLuhan's position that perception in television is achieved by forming an image from only a few dozen dots out of some three million offered each second. What evidence does McLuhan offer to support his thesis?

2. What does McLuhan mean when he calls television a "cool" medium?

3. One of McLuhan's basic theses in all his books is that the media, independent of any considerations of content, shape our perceptions, values, and way of life. In this selection he contrasts the effects of the medium of print with the medium of television. Explain what McLuhan sees as the basic differences in the effect on culture of print and of television.

4. McLuhan predicted the black rejection of visual uniformity that came to the fore several years after he wrote *Understanding Media*. He attributes this phenomenon to television's influence on our culture. Following McLuhan's argument, explain why this would be so.

5. Select a few of your favorite television personalities and discuss whether McLuhan would consider them true TV types.

6. Speaking of John Kennedy's assassination, McLuhan remarks that the "coolness and calm of the mass reaction" was largely due to extensive television coverage. If McLuhan is right, would maximum TV coverage of riots and disorders during troubled times serve as a calming influence? What do you think of the practice of showing riots on television?

7. Joe McGinniss' *The Selling of the President 1968* gives an inside story of the "packaging" of Richard Nixon by his promotional staff. According to McGinniss, McLuhan's ideas about the nature of TV were particularly influential in the Nixon camp, and he predicts that future campaigns will be won or lost on the basis of how well the candidate is packaged for television. Do you think this is true? If so, is it harmful to the democratic process? In the current crop of political hopefuls, which do you think would win the TV race?

8. *Vice President Spiro Agnew's attacks on the television medium stirred up a nationwide controversy. In an article for TV Guide, Agnew wrote:*

It is relevant to ask how much of the time television has to amuse, entertain and divert the child; how much it has to plant within him the seeds of knowledge, a desire to learn and an enthusiasm for the schooling he is about to undertake. And what is it doing with this time?

Agnew went on to speak of "the failure of children in their first years of school" and attributed a great part of the blame to television's failure. McLuhan, on the other hand, faults the schools for neglecting to cope with the TV child. Discuss which view you feel is more accurate.

Our Leaders Do Not Understand Television

Margaret Mead

In this article Margaret Mead, an eminent anthropologist, maintains that the print-oriented pre-World War II generation does not experience television in the same way as the younger generation, and therefore cannot appreciate the enormous power and responsibility of TV.

For all its widespread use, TV is still a new medium, its possibilities more guessed at than known. The world of the press, the critics of the stage, the politicians competing for office, the reformer pleading for change and the frightened conservative timidly and angrily trying to prevent it, all come from a generation who knew no TV in their childhood. They were brought up on the big picture magazines and the radio, where an unseen voice could so easily beguile and deceive. And most of this generation, from earliest childhood, depended upon reading to give them their picture of the world, on words arranged sequentially on paper, words that evoked images which they had no immediate means of correcting. Most of them have sat, as children and as adults, reading in cozy living rooms with members of their families around them, each immersed in different printed material—newspapers, magazines, textbooks, novels.

Thus, however magnificent they may consider an Apollo voyage or the televising of Churchill's funeral, TV is actually no more a part of their world than the satellites that—among other wonders—make international simultaneous viewing possible. Instead of watching an event like a Presidential news conference—at an “inconvenient” hour because it is the hour it really happens—they postpone finding out what the President said until they read it in the next day's newspaper, their traditional source of

news. Time and again I have asked those high up in the councils of the Nation or the world what has happened—to a space flight, an international sports event, a crucial election taking place 12 hours and half a world away—only to be told, “I don’t know; I haven’t seen a paper yet.” They know that all this will be televised, but television is not yet a part of their feel of the way the world is.

The generation gap that is dominating almost every home and campus—as well as the deliberations of the advocates of law and order, and the advocates of instant peace and instant justice—can be attributed more to TV, I believe, than to any other of the circumstances that have brought about this globe-encircling confrontation between pre-World War II and post-World War II generations.

There are, of course, a whole series of other circumstances, all attributable to our science-based technology:

The bomb and the new need to prevent war because of the danger of the total annihilation of all mankind;

The speed with which people can, and do, travel all over the world;

The population explosion and the resulting changing attitudes toward parenthood, sex and the place of women;

Automation of industry and the expendability of masses of unskilled workers;

Pollution of the environment due to tremendously increased use of modern technology by a bursting population;

Space exploration and man’s changing view of himself and his universe;

And the computer, which has arrived just in time to make the information explosion bearable.

The older generations have had to get used to these circumstances and they still think of stars rather than satellites in the sky. The younger generation has never known a world without satellites. The means has not yet been developed to communicate what the old know (but don’t fully realize that they know) to the young (who do not know that it is important to know anything that went before).

Television can do a great deal to bridge this gap, if television’s role in shaping contemporary culture and in creating the generation gap is fully understood. Neither of these has been adequately explored.

If we examine briefly what television has done, we can say that it has brought actuality into the home, so that much that

goes on in the world is as real as the events once witnessed by children in the village square—where deaths and births, quarrels and reconciliations, the extravagances of the well-to-do, and the miseries of the poor and unfortunate were all heard and seen. Ten thousand years ago, when the most advanced peoples began building great cities, it became possible to hide much of what went on, in one caste or class or part of the city, from other groups in the city, or at least to shield the young or the gently bred or women from some of the roughnesses of life. When printing was invented, it became less possible to shield people from alien and competing ideas, yet the books themselves filtered reality before it reached the minds of the young. And books reached their minds, not their eyes. The literate had to learn somehow to construct images, strange and inaccurate as they were, to correspond to the words they read, like *oasis*, *glacier*, *unicorn*, *Sahara*, *Cathay*. The great bulk of people remained nonliterate city dwellers cut off from the literate world, or peasants, now reduced in stature by the existence of higher degrees of civilization, cut off from everything except what happened in their limited little universes.

Today, with a flick of the dial, children can obtain first-hand views of the interior of the homes of the great, of religious ceremonies never seen close-up by worshipping multitudes, of a statesman with a cold, or a poet blinking with the sun in his eyes, or a famous musician having a temper tantrum. Through the medium of the television screen, children experience vividly homes that they, whether well-off or poor and dispossessed, would never have entered. Myth after myth, fondly believed and firmly propagated by parents and teachers, is shattered as they watch. And other things that sounded like myths come alive. It is one thing to read about the high regard that cows are held in in India; it is quite another to see a whole row of cattle well fed among emaciated and starving people.

The sights and shocks for which the few privileged travelers went around the world are now brought into every home, regardless of the ability of the adults to explain what is happening on the screen.

And today, the whole world can participate simultaneously in events about which it is impossible to lie: an announced space flight; an inauguration; success or failure in such enterprises; failures of nerve; bad temper or irritability in the great; failures in technical planning; the killing of an assassin. All come on the screen as they would appear to the eye of a close participant. It is this presentation of actuality, this impossibility of editing

certain kinds of preannounced events, that has given the young a view of the world very different from that of their elders, whose thinking is still dominated by carefully edited views of reality, arranged for them by filmmakers and writers. Until TV, each country could be told that its own troops fought only in self defense against brutish and fiendish enemies. Now, at every dinner table in the United States, some of the actualities of the Vietnam war have been brought to the American people. For the first time since the Civil War—on our own ground—the inevitable cruelties of war on both sides have been brought home to them. It was once possible to believe that all Africans were savages, but not after a TV presentation of highly educated African leaders arguing persuasively in impeccable English before a world audience. Before TV, events could still be arranged to implement provincial myopic class- or race-bound views of the real world.

On television, actuality can also be distorted; the contrived, the diplomatically falsified is always endangered by a newscast. So when, in a carefully prearranged press interview, the members of a prominent delegation indignantly deny that they have been going to night clubs, their credibility is called in question by a newscast that had shown them in a night club the day before. Indeed, so sharp is the light that actuality throws on edited versions of life, that simple or low-grade attempts to manipulate the background of a telecast (as in President Nixon's famous "Checkers" speech—where the books didn't look right, and the dog seemed dragged in—or Sen. Edward Kennedy's over-carefully prepared speech to his Massachusetts constituents) fail. Conscious manipulation of the news has become more difficult.

But there remains the unconscious, naive and unplanned manipulation, which preserves the appearance of sincerity. While newscasts of events as they happen are educating the young people of the world to look actuality in the face, subtle forms of distortion are, at the same time, spreading unreal and dangerous expectations. Take, for example, a TV ad that has been carefully constructed to appeal to the average housewife, to persuade her to buy an economical detergent or new breakfast food. The actors are a mother and a small, dirty-faced youngster. Casually, as part of the setting, and not in connection with the product being advertised, an expensive electric toothbrush or a costly new type of electric stove is seen. A message nobody planned to send goes into a million homes. The thing to have is an electric toothbrush; other people who look like us, who buy detergents or breakfast foods at the supermarket, have electric toothbrushes or infrared,

radar-range broilers. Why don't we? Thus, the demand that every home should share the comforts and amenities of the wealthiest homes spreads, and the sense of privation increases. So we have a younger generation, and an increasingly discontented group of the disadvantaged, demanding what all other people are *seen* to have, now.

So around the world, because of these casual, accidental, apparent sidelights, plus the actual insights into the way food is wasted and resources squandered, people are losing any sense of the cause-and-effect relationships between working, saving, and enjoying the rewards of work. Our young people do not see why all of the reforms they advocate cannot in fact be accomplished immediately.

The ads—which have been getting so much giddier and more fascinating this last year or so that some people advocate turning off the set *between* ads—accomplish an excellent purpose in teaching the young when a message is consciously propagandistic and self-interested and when it is not. But, at the same time, the subtle background messages of affluence are dangerous.

Furthermore, putting movies on TV accomplishes several contradictory things: old movies do give some sense of history, and a great deal of sensitivity to style, but new movies, Hollywood style, in which the murderer does in fact look just like Daddy, confuse youngsters. Better devices are needed for discriminating between fact and fiction, between unintended devastating actuality like the scene when Senator Kennedy was assassinated, and deliberate falsifications, as we saw in a recent show in which the proceedings of a "clean-cut" rightist group were intercut with lurid and non-representative scenes from one of the big music festivals. Today's children need to learn—as surely as yesterday's children learned to recognize the voice that went with an ad—whether they are watching something that really happened or is just happening, or is a fictional representation of what might happen or never did or could happen. Tomorrow's children will have parents who understand this need; today's young people did not.

A momentous decision has just been made in India to introduce television by satellite, and so to give millions of villagers, now isolated without roads or telephones, immediate entry into the modern world. It has been estimated that this move has advanced the possibilities of communicating the news, new techniques, new ways of life, 30 years ahead of the time needed by traditional transmission. With the telecasts to be received on village sets will come a leap of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years in intro-

ducing to the farmers of poor-yield crops such innovations as miracle rice and miracle wheat.

Old and young will watch, and learn, with eyes vastly different from their contemporaries in our part of the world. The elders will not have learned the new sequentially, as the older generations have in the United States, Europe and Japan; they will receive it just as their young do—all at once. If the form of the telecasts recognizes this, the generations, instead of being alienated, can be brought closer together.

TV, used by many agencies and organizations in many centers for many purposes, has a great future. If it is overcontrolled and has too little chance to be responsive to the needs of our diverse civilizations, the combination of credible actuality and incredible fiction and contrivance could lead to its being cynically rejected. We suffer now because so many of the literate old have copped out, taken no responsibility for TV, its organization or its programs. We could suffer far more if the sophisticated young, instead of being influenced by TV as they now are to dress in costume and “lay their bodies on the line,” come to accuse TV of being interested only in easily commercialized violence, for example.

What we do with and through and by TV is a vital, perhaps the *most* vital, component in our highly dangerous, rapidly changing world. Our previous concern with the dangers of an irresponsible press pales before the urgency of establishing a better understanding of TV's power, and the need for new styles of responsibility.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Several articles in this section, including this one, imply that people who did not grow up with television experience this medium differently from those who did. Do you think there is any validity in this contention? How do you perceive television differently from your parents?*
- 2. What evidence does Mead offer to support her view that the older generation is more dependent on printed sources than on television for their information? Can you think of any other evidence?*
- 3. Mead first suggests that the generation gap can be attributed primarily to television, and then she says that television can do a great deal to bridge this gap. Discuss both of these proposals.*
- 4. Mead speaks of the marvelous doors of the actual world which have been opened by television for even the poorest citizen. Other*

critics have claimed that such beneficial use of TV is a rarity amidst trivia and banality. Consult your local television guide and see how much of this "presentation of actuality" there is in relation to "the mishmash of commercial programming that neither entertains nor enlightens." (Vice President Spiro Agnew in TV Guide, May 16, 1970).

5. Mead, like McLuhan, speaks of TV as it is, not as it perhaps should be. Which effects of television on children does she concentrate on?

6. Mead sees a connection between television commercials and the growing tendency for people to want things accomplished immediately. Explore this connection.

7. Vice President Agnew presented this challenge to the television industry (in TV Guide, May 16, 1970):

You have our children almost from the time they are able to sit in front of the TV set. Help us to make them good citizens. And while you're doing that, let's enlist a few more adults in a national effort to improve ourselves and our environment. Your power to do this is unprecedented in America's history.

Do you think Mead would see these as valid goals for television, or do you think this would be proof for the title of her article? If making good citizens were a goal of television, how would programing change?

A Psychiatrist Looks at Television and Violence

Ner Littner

Psychiatrist Ner Littner is Director of the Extension Division and Child Therapy Training Program of the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis. In this essay he examines the effects on viewers of the various kinds of violence portrayed on television and concludes that violence on TV is not a cause but a reflection of the increased violence in American society.

A great deal has been written and said about the harmful psychological effects of television viewing upon the viewer. Some of it is based on clinical studies of the viewers. Much of it is rhetoric aimed at promoting various personal prejudices of the speaker or writer.

I myself have made no clinical studies of the psychological effects of watching TV. What I am about to say is based entirely on my own observations. Some of my remarks undoubtedly will reflect subjective prejudices that I will try to couch in scientific language. Other remarks will agree or disagree with some of the completed research studies. Still others will be based on what I hope are valid observations of my friends and patients.

The literature on the psychological effects of TV can be used to prove anything you want it to. You can find confirmatory evidence for any personal bias that you wish to promote. This means, in effect, that at this point in time, we really have no clear-cut, persuasive, scientific research studies to guide us, so that we end up reading through the literature with the same point of view with which we started.

This absence of scientifically valid studies in the field does

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not trace to a lack of motivation, but rather to the difficulties involved in trying to do research that is meaningful.

Let me mention just a few of the problems involved in trying to measure the specific psychological effects of TV upon the viewer, *e.g.*, *the psychological impact of violence*.

1. *How do you factor out the specific variable you are trying to measure?* What is your definition of violence? How do you compare the unreality of the violence in many of the children's shows against the realistic portrayal of a savage beating? How does humor affect the impact? What if the violence is justified? *etc.*, *etc.*

2. *Where do you get a control group to compare and contrast with the group exposed to the violence viewing?*

3. *How do you measure the full effects of the TV viewing upon the viewer?* A human being is a psychosomatic entity. His behavior is only one aspect of his functioning. He also has a body that is subject to physical changes, and a mind that shows changes in such areas as thoughts, emotions, and intelligence. To measure only the *behavior* of a person, after he has been exposed to certain TV scenes, may result in one missing most of the possible effects of the viewing.

4. *How can you follow the viewer for the length of time necessary to get full and complete results?*

Most of the research on violence tries to *measure the immediate behavior* of people who have been exposed to violent scenes. On the one hand, there is no follow up to see what the long-term effect may be. Many of the traumatic influences on children, for example, may not show their harmful effects for many years: there may be a sort of buried, land-mine result. Comparable is the adult who may not show a psychosis until late in adult life, even though it is a result of severe mishandling in early childhood—the psychotic process lying quietly under cover for many years.

On the other hand, some experimental subjects may show an immediate reaction to a scene of violence, as though they are being made more violent by their watching, but there has been little follow up of these subjects. Conceivably, it results from something prior to the scene. Conceivably, also, the impact is only temporary and there is no carry-over into real life. In still another possibility, repeated exposure to violence may change one's threshold of reaction so that after a while he shows little reaction to scenes of violence.

However, I object to the research on violence mainly because it has not gone on for a long enough period of time. *Valid psychological studies require longitudinal studies that cover three generations.* To tease out the true psychological effects of a single variable, one must follow the effects of that variable across three generations. For example, to understand the effects of a specific childrearing practice, such as toilet training, one must study three generations. First, one psychologically studies the parents who are carrying out the specific toilet-training technique. Then, one studies the child who has been toilet trained in that way, following him and his development as he goes into adulthood. Finally, one studies how *he* toilet trains his own children and how they develop in turn.

There is nothing short term about accurate psychological research. No matter how many research studies we may launch today on the impact of TV violence, we will not know the end results for many years. When William H. Stewart, Surgeon-General, announced the one-year, million-dollar investigation of the impact of TV violence on children, he said his panel of experts would review existing studies and recommend long-range research. One cannot expect definitive results for many years.

5. How do you accurately determine what is cause and what is effect?

An extreme version of this problem is offered by such a well-known authority as Dr. Frederic Wertham, a psychiatrist who has written extensively on the subject of TV and violence. In a 1962 article, he said that "we are confronted in the mass media with a display to children of brutality, sadism and violence such as the world has never before seen. At the same time there is such a rise of violence among our youth that no peace corps abroad can make up for the violence corps at home." While agreeing with Dr. Wertham about the accuracy of both parts of his premise (the increase in exposure to violence and the increase in violence among youth), I think that he is making a serious mistake in logic when he implies that one is the *cause* of the other. One must not overlook the alternative possibility: that *both* are symptoms of something else.

The Violence of Television

Many prominent people believe that the violence shown on television has either an immediate or a potential harmful psychological effect on its viewers. Thus, Max Born, the noted atomic

physicist who was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1954, has commented on "the dark shadow over everything," specifically the methods of mass destruction and the corruptive influence of mass media, especially television. These are strong words.

Dr. Wertham, whom I have already mentioned, has written extensively on what he considers to be the long-range sleeper effects: callousness, loss of sympathy, becoming accustomed to brutality, and falsely linking sex with violence. (He does not even overlook the problem of the child who suffers from lack of sleep because he watches the late-late show.) Dr. Wertham has some rather strong feelings on the subject of TV and violence. I imagine that you will hear much more about them as the Surgeon-General's investigation picks up speed. Here is a typical quote from his comments about the harmful effects of television and the mass media:

There is a tendency to stereotype emotions at the expense of the emotional spontaneity of the individual. The relentless commercialism and the surfeit of brutality, violence, and sadism has made a profound impression on susceptible young people. The result is a distortion of natural attitudes in the direction of cynicism, greed, hostility, callousness, and insensitivity. . . . Greed and sadism are perpetuated where they exist, and aroused where they do not. . . . Harmful mass media influences are a contribution factor in many young people's troubles.

These are but two of the voices in the recently increasing crescendo of attacks on television violence. It almost seems as though everyone is rushing to get in on the act. The assassinations of President Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy have apparently triggered the recent harsh criticisms of television for the violent content of many of its entertainment programs and even of its news reporting.

The TV networks and independent producers, for the most part, seem to be running scared. As though in tacit and silent agreement with their critics, apparently they are gently shelving some new shows likely to cause embarrassing questions about violence. Even some of the Saturday morning superhero and monster cartoons are supposedly on their way out.

Senator John O. Pastore (*D.*, Rhode Island), Chairman of the Senate Communications Subcommittee, is now implying that the nation's morale is being undermined by excessive displays of violence in television. Even the Surgeon-General is quoted as

telling Congress on March 12 that children, under certain conditions, become more aggressive after viewing acts of television aggression, and that a steady diet of televised violence may act as a social sanction to violent behavior and may increase indifference to violence in real-life situations.

To top it all off, two of the major television networks have accepted a proposal for pre-screening censorship of television shows. They have agreed to allow a broadcasting industry representative to preview television entertainment programs for good taste—this, of course, in addition to the normal government censorship or regulation through the licensing power of the Federal Communications Commission, which is already entrusted with the authority to see that the networks and stations operate in the public interest.

I can summarize my own views of the effects of television violence as follows:

1. I believe that the vast amount of violence on television is *basically a reflection of the violent interests of the viewers*; it is a symptom, not a cause; it graphically portrays the violence in our souls. I doubt that it is a serious cause of much of it.

2. I do not believe that television violence, when *honestly portrayed*, engenders violence in viewers of any age who were not violent already; and I do not believe that it raises violent impulses to an uncontrollable pitch in those who are already violent. (I will discuss later what I mean by “honest” television.)

3. I do think, however, that for some who are already violently disposed, TV violence may provide a model, a *modus operandi*, when they choose to discharge their violent urges. However, a book, a newspaper, or a radio program may provide a violent person with the same type of detailed plan for the expression of his violence.

4. As far as *dishonest* television violence is concerned, I do think that exposure to repeated doses may possibly interfere, to a degree unmeasurable at present, with the normal development of impulse control in normal or disturbed children; but I do not think that “dishonest” television violence has any marked pathological impact on the average adult.

5. Instead of wasting their efforts on such red herrings as censorship, violence, sex, or nudity, I think that both the viewing public and the television industry would be far better off if the television industry would devote its considerable talents and energies to creating conditions that would make it possible to develop and screen television shows specializing in such qualities as ex-

cellence, artistic value, creativity, originality, honesty, and integrity. If *these* were the hallmark of our television shows, we would not have to worry about possible censorship of their violence, sex, or nudity.

Let me now outline the thinking that undergirds these five points.

As an introduction, I would like to remind you of the law of the land as repeatedly spelled out by the U. S. Supreme Court on the subject of censorship and particularly as it applies to motion pictures. Television is presumably covered by the same constitutional guarantees as freedom of speech and of the press with regard to censorship. Movies, however, have not fared as well.

Since 1907, Chicago has had an ordinance providing for police-department censorship of movies *before* their release. Although the ordinance has frequently been changed and often challenged, it still is in force today.

The U. S. Supreme Court has frequently reaffirmed its position that all forms of communication can be censored on only one ground, namely *obscenity*: is the communication obscene or not? *There are no Supreme Court rulings that accept violence as grounds for censorship.*

The Supreme Court has also stated that only the effects of the communication on the *average adult* must be considered and that one cannot ban something because it may be harmful to children or to those adults emotionally disturbed. In the 1964 Jacobellis case concerning the picture, *The Lovers*, the Supreme Court quoted Judge Learned Hand who said, as far back as 1913:

I scarcely think that [man] would forbid all which might corrupt the most corruptible, or that society is prepared to accept for its own limitations those which may perhaps be necessary to the weakest of its members. . . . To put thought in leash to the *average conscience* of the time is perhaps tolerable, but to fetter it by the necessities of the lowest and least capable seems a fatal policy. . . .

Let us now shift from the legal hat to the psychiatric hat, still focusing our remarks on movies. What is the potential harmful impact of *movie* violence on the viewer?

If we consider the origins of violent feelings in a given person, we recognize that *anger and the wish to be violent are a reaction to feelings either of frustration or of fear.* When a child is frustrated or afraid, he becomes angry and wants to hurt vio-

lently the person or object frustrating or frightening him. As life is full of frustrating and frightening situations, part of the task of the growing child is to learn how to control and redirect his feelings of anger and violence. The *adolescent* has a particularly difficult time controlling and redirecting these feelings because (1) his size make it possible for him to express them, which frightens him and his environment, and (2) adolescence normally is a time of rebellion and defiance of adults and of authority. The age period from 15 to 20 is a particularly vulnerable and turbulent period in this respect. Usually, by about 21 years of age, adolescent turmoil subsides and normal adult controls over angry and violent feelings become established: the young adult is now socialized.

When a *normal adult* is exposed to scenes of violence, his own violent impulses tend to be stirred up by a process of contagion. This stirring up, in turn, brings his inner controls against violent behavior into action, thus re-establishing his emotional equilibrium.

There are various possibilities as to what can then happen:

1. If the violence to which the adult is exposed is *little or moderate*, he may enjoy it and gain a vicarious, secondhand satisfaction from viewing it, like the audience at a bullfight or a boxing match or a game of lacrosse.

2. If the movie has *one scene of great violence* and it is effectively presented so that it stirs up the destructive, violent impulses of the average adult, he may not enjoy it at all. Instead, the surge of violence within him will frighten him and he will display all the manifestations of fear—a fast pulse and fast breathing, nausea, pallor, diarrhea, etc.

As far as the long-term impact of violent movies is concerned, I think that we must distinguish between the effects on the normal adult and those on the normal child.

I do not believe that the average, normal adult requires any external protection against violent movies.

I believe that the average adult is perfectly capable of protecting himself against any possible psychological damage that may result from seeing one or more violent movies. My reasons for this position are as follows:

1. At any given moment, approximately 90 per cent of all adults are functioning within normal emotional limits. Therefore, in line with the Supreme Court philosophy of establishing minimal standards, which are based on the effect of the communication

on the "average" adult, we should consider for our purposes that the *average* adult is one who is "normal" emotionally.

2. By the usual definition of normalcy, the adult who is normal emotionally has both the capacity and the ability to protect himself from being harmed by a motion picture that is potentially dangerous to him.

The normal adult already has developed mental resources adequate enough to enable him to use one or more of the following safety valves: he can *ignore* the potentially dangerous violence; he can *reject it* by leaving the movie theatre; or he can *drain off in a safe manner* any potentially harmful tensions aroused by the film.

The normal adult provides his own built-in protection against the potentially dangerous aspects of a film, no matter how violent or depraved it may attempt to be or is.

However, I do not believe that the *average child* is in such a protected position.

Although the U. S. Supreme Court has not authorized any film classification system based on age, it has hinted that it might consider favorably film censorship for children. Also in the 1964 *Jacobellis* case, the Supreme Court had this to say:

We recognize the legitimate and indeed exigent interests of states and localities throughout the nation in preventing the dissemination of material deemed harmful to children. But that interest does not justify a total suppression of such material, the effect of which would be to 'reduce the adult population . . . to reading only what is fit for children.' State and local authorities might well consider whether their objections in this area would be better served by laws aimed specifically at preventing distribution of objectionable material to children, rather than at totally prohibiting its dissemination.

I have long advocated movie censorship for children and adolescents, particularly as it concerns violence. My reasons for this advocacy are as follows:

1. A child, by definition, is an immature organism. Even a normal child is not expected to have the wisdom, the judgment, or the maturity of the adult. He is entitled to be protected from situations that may harm him, even though—because of his immaturity, his normal wish to be one of the group, or his normal

state of adolescent rebelliousness—he may be attracted, and expose himself, to a potentially dangerous situation. The child is entitled to be protected even from himself.

2. This principle, accepted by all psychiatrists, is also given legal sanction in certain situations. A 15-year old may wish to drive a car, a 17-year old may wish to marry without a parent's consent, an 18-year old may wish to drink alcohol—but the law attempts to protect him in such special circumstances against the potentially dangerous consequences of his own (and sometimes even his parents') wishes.

3. In contrast to other forms of communication, such as books or magazines, films may have a devastating impact upon children and adolescents. This is because:

a. A well-executed movie may be startlingly realistic, both because of its lifelike nature and because it tends to engage many of the viewer's senses.

b. In addition, a film potentially has a great capacity for capturing and focusing the viewer's attention on specific scenes.

c. Books and magazines can be put aside if they are disturbing, thus diluting their potentially traumatic effect. It is difficult to do so with a movie.

d. Although a child, like an adult, also is able to protect himself from dangerous material by leaving the movie theater, he is less likely to do so because of his immaturity, his fear of being considered "chicken" by his friends, and for economic reasons.

e. Books usually are read in the light, while a movie is viewed in the dark. Darkness tends to rob the child of one of his bases for self-security and self-control. The child may thus be more afraid in the dark, while fears associated with the dark and with nighttime may be more easily aroused.

f. Although the film viewer is usually one of a group physically, psychologically he may be peculiarly alone, cut off and isolated from the person in the next seat both by his own imagination as well as by the darkness.

I have been detailing the reasons for my belief that motion pictures, unlike any other form of communication, should be subject to censorship for their violence, but only as far as children and adolescents are concerned. I make a distinction, however, between violent movies shown in a movie theater and perhaps the same violent movie shown on television.

From a psychological point of view, there are certain miti-

gating factors in television viewing that may greatly decrease the traumatic impact of the violence. These include the following:

1. TV viewing is usually with the light on. This absence of darkness provides security and relieves fear for the frightened child.

2. The child, when viewing TV, frequently is not alone; his parents, his family, or his friends may be present. This greatly increases his resistance to the impact of the violence.

3. There are opportunities for better control of what the child sees. The television stations usually make some attempt to show material that is not suitable for children at times that are not convenient for children. Also, the child's parents have greater opportunities for controlling what the child sees on a television screen than what he sees on a movie screen.

4. The inevitable commercials have a mental health value as useful tension-breaking devices. Thus the child has frequent, forced rest periods as far as the build-up of violence-provoked tensions are concerned.

5. The child can also come and go far more readily when watching a TV program than in a movie theater. This also helps him escape from excessively tense situations.

6. Although a child can eat a great deal in the modern movie theater, the opportunities for breaking tension through eating are much greater at home with a television program.

As I do not believe that the average adult can be harmed by the violence in movies, I certainly do not think that television movies will have any greater traumatic effect. As far as television viewing by children and adolescents is concerned, I do believe that there are possible dangers, particularly from viewing programs that are dishonest and lack integrity.

In order to explain what I mean by this, let me discuss for a moment the whole subject of violence on television. There has been until recently an increasing trend to violence on television. I think that this is due to a variety of reasons:

1. We are, and always have been a violent nation. We live in an age of violence. Therefore, to a large degree the violence on television accurately reflects the violence of our times.

2. We are increasingly freer in our acceptance of freedom of expression. The public and the courts are showing greater tolerance of, and are more liberal towards, what can be shown. In a similar way we are far more relaxed about displays of sex and

morality. Therefore, more violence is being shown as part of this relaxation of censorship.

3. For some program directors and moviemakers, the showing of violence is a cheap way of producing something that may make money. Instead of relying on art, talent, or creativity, reliance is placed on violence for the sake of violence, of shock for the sake of shock. The shock effect of the violence is being used to sell the movie or the program.

4. Because the portrayal of obscenity is against the law, this sets a limit on the amount of sex that can be safely sneaked in. The portrayal of violence is not against the law and therefore can be used to the extent that audiences will accept it.

These are four reasons (there probably are many more) for the great use of violence on television programs. This is not to say that the showing of violence on television is necessarily bad. Actually, it can have decidedly positive effects on the viewing public, and particularly children. These *positive effects* include the following:

1. An appropriate display of violence tends to present the world as it really is, rather than as we wistfully wish it would be. It is unrealistic to leave it out when it is part of the scene. Therefore, when shown in appropriate amounts it can be of *educational* value.

2. It can also be of *mental health* value, if appropriately done. Like watching a bullfight or boxing match, it can help discharge indirectly various violent feelings of the viewer. This tends to keep the viewer's violent feelings from boiling over in more dangerous ways. Therefore, in appropriate amounts it can provide a safe catharsis.

On the other hand, the *negative effects* of viewing television include the following:

1. The child or adolescent has not yet settled on his typical behavior patterns for functioning. If exposed to a repetitive display of *violence as a television-approved method for solving problems*, the child may be encouraged in that direction, particularly if he already comes from a family setting where violence also is the way of settling difficulties. Therefore, there may be an encouragement towards immature methods of problem solving. When, in an attempt to show that crime does not pay, there is violent retribution, its main effect is still to teach violence as the way to solve problems.

2. The individual, whether child or adult, who already uses violent behavior as a solution, may find worked out for him on

television a detailed *modus operandi*. Therefore, the violent viewer may use the detail of the television programs as a way of expressing his violence. Television does not cause juvenile delinquency, but it can contribute techniques for a child already delinquent.

3. If excessive doses of violence are presented on television, it may have sufficient of a shock effect to prevent it being used for catharsis. There is a limit to show how much viewing of violence can be used for a safe discharge.

The impact of repeated exposure to excessive violence depends on at least three factors: (a) the age of the viewer; (b) the maturity of the viewer; and (c) the way in which the violence is presented and packaged.

a. *The age of the viewer.* As I have already mentioned, the mature adult will be offended and disgusted by excessive or inappropriate displays of violence. Therefore he can ignore it or turn it off. The *normal adolescent (or the immature adult)* is in a different situation. The excessive display of violence may cause a sympathetic resonance of inner violent feelings in the adolescent to a degree that he cannot handle it. There is no socially acceptable way of discharging excessive violent feelings. Therefore the adolescent may have his normal attempts to come to peace with his violent and rebellious feeling jeopardized. The normal adolescent, unlike the normal adult, will also tend to be attracted to the violence rather than repelled. The *normal pre-adolescent child* may also be disturbed by excessive and inappropriate displays of violence. However, he probably will be less upset than the adolescent because he is not as concerned, as is the adolescent, with problems of violent rebellion against authority.

b. *The maturity of the viewer.* The more emotionally disturbed the viewer is, the more likely it is that he will have difficulty in managing stirred-up violent feelings.

Let us consider an extreme situation where an adolescent, immediately after seeing a TV program in which a juvenile delinquent violently rapes a girl, leaves the TV set and violently rapes the first girl he meets. For such a sequence of events to have occurred, one would have to say that the adolescent probably was seriously disturbed emotionally *before* he saw the TV program. It is highly unlikely that any program, no matter how violent, could have such an effect on a normal adolescent.

One also could not say that it was the viewing of the TV

program that "caused" the adolescent to rape the girl. One could only say that the program had two effects. Its first was to *trigger* a previously-existing emotional disorder. The traumatic effect of the program was but one of the many etiological factors which, coming together, resulted in the adolescent's violent action. The second effect would be to provide the disturbed adolescent with a *blueprint* for discharging his violent tensions. These violent tensions, of course, would probably have originated in violent problems within his own family, completely predating his ever seeing the TV program.

Violent television does not make children aggressive; rather, *the aggressive child turns to violent TV*. And, for that matter, TV does not make a child passive; rather, it is the passive child who chooses the TV.

c. *The way in which the violence is presented and packaged.*

I. The television violence will be least traumatic if it is completely appropriate and realistic to the story in which it is contained.

II. The television violence will be most traumatic if it is presented dishonestly, if it is being used to sell the program, if it is contrived and inappropriate, if it is unrealistically focused on, if it is presented out of context—in other words, if it is violence for the sake of violence and if the television show is deliberately using violence and brutality to attract and hold a larger audience.

The reason why *dishonest* television violence can be traumatic to the normal child or adolescent is because he feels exploited and used. *He senses he is being taken advantage of*. This tends to reactivate any conflictual feelings he may have about being exploited by his own parents. These reactivated feelings add an additional traumatic impact. In addition, the inappropriateness of the violence makes it harder for the child to deal with it mentally.

There are other packaging factors that help determine the degree of traumatic impact for the normal child or adolescent:

I. The degree of unreality of the characters and the violence may be a modifying factor. Thus cartoon stories, because they are so unrealistic, so caricatured, so bizzare, probably have little traumatic impact. Similarly, western stories, which are usually viewed by the child as being truly make-believe, also probably have little traumatic impact. On the other hand, the closer the

violent action approximates the real thing, and the more vividly and accurately it is portrayed, the greater is the potential harmful effect on children.

II. Humor is also a modifying influence in that it tends to take the edge off the violent impact.

As you will note, I have suggested that a constant diet of violence, when viewed in a movie theater, may have a harmful effect on the normal child or adolescent. When it is viewed on a television program, I think that the harmful effect on children is limited to those TV programs that are exploitive of the violence and the viewer, programs that lack integrity or are dishonest.

Although a constant viewing diet of dishonest, violent television programs may be harmful to children and particularly to adolescents, it is important that we keep this question in perspective. The viewing of violent TV programs is only one part of a child's life and of the influences upon him. As Jimmy Walker once said, no girl was ever ruined by a book—or, one might add, by a television set. What we do and think at any given moment is the culmination of our entire life history up to that point. When a person commits a crime, he is responding not only to the situation of the moment but to all the events of his entire life and particularly to those of his childhood. When he commits a crime he is responding to all the traumatic experiences he has suffered from the day he was born.

The warm, secure home and satisfactory peer-group relationships provide a highly effective antidote to much of the potential harm that might come from television viewing by children. We know that the roots of all mental illness are anchored solidly in the unhappy experiences of childhood. The vulnerabilities within the adult that cause him to collapse quickly under the vicissitudes of modern living usually were created when he was a child. It is very unlikely that the child who is emotionally healthy will become mentally ill as an adult, or will suffer unduly from being exposed to TV violence.

It has been demonstrated repeatedly that the nature of a child's mothering or fathering in the first five years or so of his life is absolutely crucial. For most children, the adequacy of their care by their parents in these first five years is far more important than all their future television viewing. From the age of six or so, the healthy care or the traumatic pressures on the child—although still quite important—seem to have a decreasing effect in terms of helping him to become either mature or emotionally disturbed. By and large, by the age of six, the major roots of the

child's personality and the major props and foundations for his emotional health have all been laid.

This is not to say that experiences and stresses after the age of six may not be of great meaning to the child. Basically, they assist the child in developing along the lines laid down earlier in his life. Good living experiences after the age of six may minimize somewhat the traumatic effects of poor handling prior to the age of six. Usually though, such relatively late corrective experiences have to be fairly intense to outweigh the stunning impact of earlier harmful experiences. Similarly, poor living experiences after the age of six also may retard the child's development of emotional maturity. However, if the child received adequate early care, it will take very hard knocks indeed to tear down his emotional maturity. Of course any child, no matter how healthy he is, may suffer an emotional disorder at any time if the stress and pressure upon him at that point is great enough.

When seen in this greater context, we must recognize that, no matter how harmful television violence may be for children, its traumatic impact is relatively minor compared to possible harmful handling by their parents. Television violence may bore one to death but I doubt if exposure to it will cause anyone to kill someone else.

Years before television, Dorothy L. Sayers wrote, "Death seems to provide the minds of the Anglo-Saxon race with a greater fund of innocent amusement than any other single subject . . . the tale must be about dead bodies or very wicked people, probably both, before the tired businessman can feel really happy."

The violent action story will be with us until the public's taste changes, and there are no indications that a change is around the corner.

To listen to some of the critics of television, one gets the notion that everything would be just fine if only television violence were avoided or censored. Television does not create the desire for violence nor the social nor individual conditions that create it. It only caters to it, to an existing appetite that cannot be legislated or censored away. Violence is appealing to all of us because we all have unacceptable wishes to hurt and be hurt. For the most part, the normal person controls and holds in the direct expression of these wishes, and instead satisfies them indirectly and safely through such a medium as television.

When one observes all the fuss that is being made over television violence, one wonders about the enormously exaggerated

statements and accusations. When one considers that our public welfare policies, for example, are doing more damage to the children on welfare than all the television programs put together, yet there is little outcry about the harmful effects of public welfare on children—it begins to make one wonder.

It is my own opinion that we are constantly looking for scapegoats to avoid facing the necessity of dealing with the many complex problems that beset us. We are always looking for an easy answer to what really are enormously complicated difficulties.

There is no such thing as a single simple cause for all cases of violence nor a single simple solution to them. Similarly, a blanket approach to children suffering from a specific symptom is almost useless unless it takes into account the uniqueness of each child.

For example, consider the delinquent child. The notion that every delinquent child has been over-protected and spoiled by his parents and really only requires firmness and punishment is as fallacious as the idea that every delinquent child is emotionally disturbed and requires an extensive psychoanalysis. One might as well prescribe morphine for everyone with a headache. Such a single-track policy would result in many brain tumors being missed and many people over-medicated.

We must help our communities resist the temptation of the single, simple, easy "solution." It takes many years and many hurts to turn a healthy normal baby into a frightened criminal. There is no pat answer to the problem of juvenile delinquency. Eliminating violence from television shows is not only contrary to all our knowledge but just does not work. There are as many different causes of juvenile delinquency as there are of headaches or indigestion. To expect to find, or attempt to apply, a single formula for all children who get into trouble only delays a constructive approach to a problem that already is almost out of control. Television violence is our newest scapegoat, the newest attempt to divert our attention from the basic causes of community violence.

I think that the two television networks that agreed to pre-screen censorship have been sucked in by the pressures upon them. In effect, they have confessed to non-existent sins and have helped to drag another red herring across the road to true solutions. The sooner we get off the kick of falsely blaming American violence on American television, the sooner we will start grappling with the true causes of our national violence.

When I read in the papers about the actions of the two television networks, I was most tempted to write them the following letter:

To the two television networks who are willing to have censorship:

I am writing to correct certain misapprehensions you seem to have about the impact of your television shows upon your viewers. I would certainly agree that your programs may be quite entertaining, or even quite dull. They may be most educational, or even the opposite. Their taste may be excellent, or even low. But there is one thing you and your programs are not—they are *not* magical.

You may be the twelfth wonder of the world. You undoubtedly are powerful and wealthy. But as far as your ability to affect the mental health of a developing child is concerned, you are just not in the same league with a mother and father in their ability to help or harm a child's mind and emotions. Don't be so megalomaniac. You're really not as omnipotent as you seem to think you are.

Don't be a patsy and get sucked in by those forces in this country that, however unwitting, are constantly looking for instant scapegoats and simplistic answers to what are really highly complex issues. Certainly, through your great potential for education, you can be of great help in our war on mental illness. But mental health is not primarily your thing. Why don't you stick to your thing, and let my colleagues and me worry about the mental health of the developing child.

Yours for greater creativity, artistic values, and imaginative, experimental originality in your programming—

I haven't yet decided how to sign this letter.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Littner says he believes that "the vast amount of violence on television is basically a reflection of the violent interests of the viewers; it is a symptom, not a cause." Give reasons why you think America is or is not a violent country.*

2. *It is interesting to note that two of the most prominent American contributions to film and television are the western and the gangster-*

detective-crime story, and these two genres are this country's most popular exports. Does this suggest that the thirst for violence is not specifically American? Discuss.

3. *Do you think people basically like to see violence in television programs and movies? Why or why not?*

4. *What is Littner's distinction between "honest" and "dishonest" violence? Give some examples from movies or television programs you have seen.*

5. *When the movie Nevada Smith was screened on prime-time television recently, one particularly violent scene was considerably shortened; it involved the brutal horsewhipping of one of the men who had butchered Nevada's mother and father. If you had been in charge, would you have cut the scene or left it alone? Why?*

6. *Littner claims that "television violence is our newest scapegoat, the newest attempt to divert our attention from the basic causes of community violence." Do you agree with this view? If so, what causes could you suggest for the juvenile delinquency and acts of violence that are so much a part of our times? If you disagree with Littner's analysis, point out why you think he is mistaken.*

7. *In matters of censorship, what age would you consider constitutes "adulthood"? Why?*

8. *Discuss Littner's remark that "TV does not make a child passive; rather, it is the passive child who chooses the TV."*

9. *The following article appeared in the New York Times (August 11, 1971):*

WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 (UPI)—The Federal Aviation Administration in a recent letter asked 500 television stations in 150 cities to refrain from showing "The Doomsday Flight," a film it believes has prompted a surge in telephoned bomb threats to airlines.

"Our great concern is that the film may have a highly emotional impact on some unstable individual and stimulate him to imitate the fictional situation in the movie," John H. Shaffer, F.A.A. administrator, said in a letter to the stations that have been offered the film by distributors.

"The Doomsday Flight," written by Rod Serling and originally broadcast on network television in 1966, depicts a bomb-hoax plot to extort money from an airline. A telephone caller says a plane is carrying a bomb set to detonate when the airliner

drops below a certain altitude, and demands a ransom in return for telling where the bomb is planted.

The film was shown in Canada on July 26. On Aug. 3, in an incident that followed "The Doomsday Flight" script, a British Overseas Airways Corporation Boeing 747 carrying 379 persons from Montreal to London was diverted to Denver, when a caller said a bomb would explode if the plane dropped below 5,000 feet.

The jetliner landed at Denver's Stapleton International Airport, which is 5,339 feet above sea level, but no bomb was found. The caller had demanded \$250,000 in ransom.

Mr. Shaffer said "the number of anonymously telephoned bomb threats received by the local airline rises significantly" each time the film is shown.

Qantas Air Lines paid a \$500,000 extortion demand last May in a similar situation involving one of its planes, but a bomb was never found. Mr. Serling said at the time he was sorry he ever used the idea for a film.

The government has no power to order a ban on the film's showing, but Mr. Shaffer said in the letter dated June 30 that "you would be making the highest possible contribution to the safety of the more than 160 million passengers" who fly airlines in the United States annually if the movie is not shown.

An F.A.A. spokesman said only 20 stations had replied that they would not show the film, which was made for television by Universal Pictures and is distributed by the Music Corporation of America. But, he said, "to our knowledge the film has not been shown in the United States since the letter was sent, and we have been led to believe that the distributor will remove it from film packages sold to stations."

How do you think this correlates with Littner's statements about the effects of television on violence? If you were a TV station manager, would you show the film? Discuss.

Des Moines Speech on Television News Bias

Spiro T. Agnew

In the following address, delivered to the Mid-West Regional Republican Committee at Des Moines, Iowa, on November 13, 1969, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew accuses the three major television networks of bias and distortion in their coverage of news.

Tonight I want to discuss the importance of the television news medium to the American people. No nation depends more on the intelligent judgment of its citizens. No medium has a more profound influence over public opinion. Nowhere in our system are there fewer checks on vast power. So, nowhere should there be more conscientious responsibility exercised than by the news media. The question is, Are we demanding enough of our television news presentations? And are the men of this medium demanding enough of themselves?

Monday night a week ago, President Nixon delivered the most important address of his Administration, one of the most important of our decade. His subject was Vietnam. His hope was to rally the American people to see the conflict through to a lasting and just peace in the Pacific. For 32 minutes, he reasoned with a nation that has suffered almost a third of a million casualties in the longest war in its history.

When the President completed his address—an address, incidentally, that he spent weeks in the preparation of—his words and policies were subjected to instant analysis and querulous criticism. The audience of 70 million Americans gathered to hear the President of the United States was inherited by a small band of network commentators and self-appointed analysts, the majority

of whom expressed in one way or another their hostility to what he had to say.

It was obvious that their minds were made up in advance. Those who recall the fumbling and groping that followed President Johnson's dramatic disclosure of his intention not to seek another term have seen these men in a genuine state of nonpreparedness. This was not it.

One commentator twice contradicted the President's statement about the exchange of correspondence with Ho Chi Minh. Another challenged the President's abilities as a politician. A third asserted that the President was following a Pentagon line. Others, by the expression on their faces, the tone of their questions and the sarcasm of their responses, made clear their sharp disapproval.

To guarantee in advance that the President's plea for national unity would be challenged, one network trotted out Averell Harriman for the occasion. Throughout the President's message, he waited in the wings. When the President concluded, Mr. Harriman recited perfectly. He attacked the Thieu Government as unrepresentative; he criticized the President's speech for various deficiencies; he twice issued a call to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to debate Vietnam once again; he stated his belief that the Vietcong or North Vietnamese did not really want a military takeover of South Vietnam; and he told a little anecdote about a "very, very responsible" fellow he had met in the North Vietnamese delegation.

All in all, Mr. Harriman offered a broad range of gratuitous advice challenging and contradicting the policies outlined by the President of the United States. Where the President had issued a call for unity, Mr. Harriman was encouraging the country not to listen to him.

A word about Mr. Harriman. For 10 months he was America's chief negotiator at the Paris peace talks—a period in which the United States swapped some of the greatest military concessions in the history of warfare for an enemy agreement on the shape of the bargaining table. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Mr. Harriman seems to be under some heavy compulsion to justify his failure to anyone who will listen. And the networks have shown themselves willing to give him all the air time he desires.

Now every American has a right to disagree with the President of the United States and to express publicly that disagreement. But the President of the United States has a right to communicate directly with the people who elected him, and the people of this country have the right to make up their own minds and

form their own opinions about a Presidential address without having a President's words and thoughts characterized through the prejudices of hostile critics before they can even be digested.

When Winston Churchill rallied public opinion to stay the course against Hitler's Germany, he didn't have to contend with a gaggle of commentators raising doubts about whether he was reading public opinion right, or whether Britain had the stamina to see the war through.

When President Kennedy rallied the nation in the Cuban missile crisis, his address to the people was not chewed over by a roundtable of critics who disparaged the course of action he'd asked America to follow.

The purpose of my remarks tonight is to focus your attention on this little group of men who not only enjoy a right of instant rebuttal to every Presidential address, but, more importantly, wield a free hand in selecting, presenting and interpreting the great issues in our nation.

First, let's define that power. At least 40 million Americans every night, it's estimated, watch the network news. Seven million of them view A.B.C., the remainder being divided between N.B.C. and C.B.S.

According to Harris polls and other studies, for millions of Americans the networks are the sole source of national and world news. In Will Roger's observation, what you knew was what you read in the newspaper. Today for growing millions of Americans, it's what they see and hear on their television sets.

Now how is this network news determined? A small group of men, numbering perhaps no more than a dozen anchormen, commentators and executive producers, settle upon the 20 minutes or so of film and commentary that's to reach the public. This selection is made from the 90 to 180 minutes that may be available. Their powers of choice are broad.

They decide what 40 to 50 million Americans will learn of the day's events in the nation and in the world.

We cannot measure this power and influence by the traditional democratic standards, for these men can create national issues overnight.

They can make or break by their coverage and commentary a moratorium on the war.

They can elevate men from obscurity to national prominence within a week. They can reward some politicians with national exposure and ignore others.

For millions of Americans the network reporter who covers

a continuing issue—like the ABM or civil rights—becomes, in effect, the presiding judge in a national trial by jury.

It must be recognized that the networks have made important contributions to the national knowledge—for news, documentaries and specials. They have often used their power constructively and creatively to awaken the public conscience to critical problems. The networks made hunger and black lung disease national issues overnight. The TV networks have done what no other medium could have done in terms of dramatizing the horrors of war. The networks have tackled our most difficult social problems with a directness and an immediacy that's the gift of their medium. They focus the nation's attention on its environmental abuses—on pollution in the Great Lakes and the threatened ecology of the Everglades.

But it was also the networks that elevated Stokely Carmichael and George Lincoln Rockwell from obscurity to national prominence.

Nor is their power confined to the substantive. A raised eyebrow, an inflection of the voice, a caustic remark dropped in the middle of a broadcast can raise doubts in a million minds about the veracity of a public official or the wisdom of a Government policy.

One Federal Communications Commissioner considers the powers of the networks equal to that of local, state and Federal Governments all combined. Certainly it represents a concentration of power over American public opinion unknown in history.

Now what do Americans know of the men who wield this power? Of the men who produce and direct the network news, the nation knows practically nothing. Of the commentators, most Americans know little other than that they reflect an urbane and assured presence seemingly well-informed on every important matter.

We do know that to a man these commentators and producers live and work in the geographical and intellectual confines of Washington, D.C., or New York City, the latter of which James Reston terms the most unrepresentative community in the entire United States.

Both communities bask in their own provincialism, their own parochialism.

We can deduce that these men read the same newspapers. They draw their political and social views from the same sources. Worse, they talk constantly to one another, thereby providing artificial reinforcement to their shared viewpoints.

Do they allow their biases to influence the selection and presentation of the news? David Brinkley states objectivity is impossible to normal human behavior. Rather, he says, we should strive for fairness.

Another anchorman on a network news show contends, and I quote: "You can't expunge all your private convictions just because you sit in a seat like this and a camera starts to stare at you. I think your program has to reflect what your basic feelings are. I'll plead guilty to that."

Less than a week before the 1968 election, this same commentator charged that President Nixon's campaign commitments were no more durable than campaign balloons. He claimed that, were it not for the fear of hostile reaction, Richard Nixon would be giving in to, and I quote him exactly, "his natural instinct to smash the enemy with a club or go after him with a meat axe."

Had this slander been made by one political candidate about another, it would have been dismissed by most commentators as a partisan attack. But this attack emanated from the privileged sanctuary of a network studio and therefore had the apparent dignity of an objective statement.

The American people would rightly not tolerate this concentration of power in Government.

Is it not fair and relevant to question its concentration in the hands of a tiny, enclosed fraternity of privileged men elected by no one and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by Government?

The views of the majority of this fraternity do not—and I repeat, not—represent the views of America.

That is why such a great gulf existed between how the nation received the President's address and how the networks reviewed it.

Not only did the country receive the President's address more warmly than the networks, but so also did the Congress of the United States.

Yesterday, the President was notified that 300 individual Congressmen and 50 Senators of both parties had endorsed his efforts for peace.

As with other American institutions, perhaps it is time that the networks were made more responsive to the views of the nation and more responsible to the people they serve.

Now I want to make myself perfectly clear. I'm not asking for Government censorship or any other kind of censorship. I'm asking whether a form of censorship already exists when the news

that 40 million Americans receive each night is determined by a handful of men responsible only to their corporate employers and is filtered through a handful of commentators who admit to their own set of biases.

The questions I'm raising here tonight should have been raised by others long ago. They should have been raised by those Americans who have traditionally considered the preservation of freedom of speech and freedom of the press their special provinces of responsibility.

They should have been raised by those Americans who share the view of the late Justice Learned Hand that right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues than through any kind of authoritative selection.

Advocates for the networks have claimed a First Amendment right to the same unlimited freedoms held by the great newspapers of America.

But the situations are not identical. Where *The New York Times* reaches 800,000 people, N.B.C. reaches 20 times that number on its evening news. [The average weekday circulation of *The Times* in October was 1,012,367; the average Sunday circulation was 1,523,558.] Nor can the tremendous impact of seeing television film and hearing commentary be compared with reading the printed page.

A decade ago, before the network news acquired such dominance over public opinion, Walter Lippmann spoke to the issue. He said there's an essential and radical difference between television and printing. The three or four competing television stations control virtually all that can be received over the air by ordinary television sets. But besides the mass circulation dailies, there are weeklies, monthlies, out-of-town newspapers and books. If a man doesn't like his newspaper, he can read another from out of town or wait for a weekly news magazine. It's not ideal, but it's infinitely better than the situation in television.

There if a man doesn't like what the networks are showing, all he can do is turn them off and listen to a phonograph. Networks, he stated, which are few in number, have a virtual monopoly of a whole medium of communication.

The newspapers of mass circulation have no monopoly of the medium of print.

Now a virtual monopoly of a whole medium of communication is not something that democratic people should blindly ignore. And we are not going to cut off our television sets and listen to

the phonograph just because the airways belong to the networks. They don't. They belong to the people.

As Justice Byron White wrote in his landmark opinion six months ago, it's the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount.

Now it's argued that this power presents no danger in the hands of those who have used it responsibly. But, as to whether or not the networks have abused the power they enjoy, let us call as our first witness former Vice President Humphrey and the city of Chicago. According to Theodore White, television's intercutting of the film from the streets of Chicago with the current proceedings on the floor of the convention created the most striking and false political picture of 1968—the nomination of a man for the American Presidency by the brutality and violence of merciless police.

If we are to believe a recent report of the House of Representatives Commerce Committee, then television's presentation of the violence in the streets worked an injustice on the reputation of the Chicago police. According to the committee findings, one network in particular presented, and I quote, "a one-sided picture which in large measure exonerates the demonstrators and protesters. Film of provocations of police that was available never saw the light of day while the film of a police response which the protesters provoked was shown to millions.

Another network showed virtually the same scene of violence from three separate angles without making clear it was the same scene. And, while the full report is reticent in drawing conclusions, it is not a document to inspire confidence in the fairness of the network news.

Our knowledge of the impact of network news on the national mind is far from complete, but some early returns are available. Again, we have enough information to raise serious questions about its effect on a democratic society. Several years ago Fred Friendly, one of the pioneers of network news, wrote that its missing ingredients were conviction, controversy and a point of view. The networks have compensated with a vengeance.

And in the networks' endless pursuit of controversy, we should ask: What is the end value—to enlighten or to profit? What is the end result—to inform or to confuse? How does the ongoing exploration for more action, more excitement, more drama serve our national search for internal peace and stability?

Gresham's Law seems to be operating in the network news.

Bad news drives out good news. The irrational is more controversial than the rational. Concurrence can no longer compete with dissent.

One minute of Eldridge Cleaver is worth 10 minutes of Roy Wilkins. The labor crisis settled at the negotiating table is nothing compared to the confrontation that results in a strike—or better yet, violence along the picket lines.

Normality has become the nemesis of the network news. Now the upshot of all this controversy is that a narrow and distorted picture of America often emerges from the televised news.

A single, dramatic piece of the mosaic becomes in the minds of millions the entire picture. And the American who relies upon television for his news might conclude that the majority of American students are embittered radicals. That the majority of black Americans feel no regard for their country. That violence and lawlessness are the rule rather than the exception on the American campus.

We know that none of these conclusions is true.

Perhaps the place to start looking for a credibility gap is not in the offices of the Government in Washington but in the studios of the networks in New York.

Television may have destroyed the old stereotypes, but has it not created new ones in their places?

What has this passionate pursuit of controversy done to the politics of progress through local compromise essential to the functioning of a democratic society?

The members of Congress or the Senate who follow their principles and philosophy quietly in the spirit of compromise are unknown to many Americans, while the loudest and most extreme dissenters on every issue are known to every man in the street.

How many marches and demonstrations would we have if the marchers did not know that the ever-faithful TV cameras would be there to record their antics for the next news show?

We've heard demands that Senators and Congressmen and judges make known all their financial connections so that the public will know who and what influences their decisions and their votes. Strong arguments can be made for that view.

But when a single commentator or producer, night after night, determines for millions of people how much of each side of a great issue they are going to see and hear, should he not first disclose his personal views on the issue as well?

In this search for excitement and controversy, has more than

equal time gone to the minority of Americans who specialize in attacking the United States—its institutions and its citizens?

Tonight I've raised questions. I've made no attempt to suggest the answers. The answers must come from the media men. They are challenged to turn their critical powers on themselves, to direct their energy, their talent and their conviction toward improving the quality and objectivity of news presentation.

They are challenged to structure their own civic ethics to relate their great freedom with the great responsibilities they hold.

And the people of America are challenged, too, challenged to press for responsible news presentations. The people can let the networks know that they want their news straight and objective. The people can register their complaints on bias through mail to the networks and phone calls to local stations. This is one case where the people must defend themselves; where the citizen, not the Government, must be the reformer; where the consumer can be the most effective crusader.

By way of conclusion, let me say that every elected leader in the United States depends on these men of the media. Whether what I've said to you tonight will be heard and seen at all by the nation is not my decision, it's not your decision, it's their decision.

In tomorrow's edition of *The Des Moines Register*, you'll be able to read a news story detailing what I've said tonight. Editorial comment will be reserved for the editorial page, where it belongs.

Should not the same wall of separation exist between news and comment on the nation's networks?

Now, my friends, we'd never trust such power, as I've described, over public opinion in the hands of an elected Government. It's time we questioned it in the hands of a small and unelected elite.

The great networks have dominated America's airwaves for decades. The people are entitled to a full accounting of their stewardship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Do you agree with Agnew's assertion that the presence of TV cameras has a great deal to do with the creation of demonstrations and confrontations? Why or why not?*
- 2. Should the power and influence of the "small group of men" who program network news be curtailed, as Agnew suggests? If so, how? If not, why not?*

3. Are you among the millions of Americans who rely on television as a primary source of news? If you are, can you say that network news programs are objective? If you are not, from what sources do you obtain the news, and why do you depend on them rather than on television?

4. If you were the head of a television news organization, whose network was dependent on the federal government for its license to broadcast, what would your reaction have been to Agnew's address?

How Well Does TV Present the News

Herbert J. Gans

Herbert J. Gans, a noted writer on popular culture, is a professor of sociology and urban planning at MIT and is associated with the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies. This essay in defense of network newscasting was prompted by Vice President Spiro Agnew's attacks on the news media.

In the old days monarchs sometimes beheaded messengers who brought bad tidings—and today's rulers, though shorn of the divine right of kings, occasionally still feel the same urges. When the Nixon Administration sent Vice President Agnew forth in November [1969] to attack the TV networks for their bad tidings, he asked the citizenry to cut them down to size with letters and wires.

In his speech, the Vice President depicted network evening news programs as the network of a small band of conspirators who choose news and commentary in a way designed to sell the liberal ideology of the New York-Washington axis. That Agnew is not alone in this view is suggested by the many favorable responses to his speech—and also by the applause drawn by George Wallace when he made the same charge in 1968.

However, network newsmen do not function the way Agnew said they do. I have been studying the networks as well as news magazines for the past several years, and insofar as there is bias in their product it stems, I find, far less from their own prejudices than from the nature of modern journalism. While for the most part my subject in this article will be network news, some of my observations also apply to the news magazines, and probably to the national press in general.

The network newsmen's task is not an easy one. Although millions of events take place in the world every day, only a few can be reported in the 22½ minutes available for news in the half-hour evening news program. But since events can only become news if someone is there to cover them, the newsmen must first *anticipate* which events might be newsworthy, and then decide which they can cover with the always limited number of reporters and cameramen. (What events become news therefore depends in part on the size and locations of the news-gathering bureaus.)

Thus, millions of events are reduced to a few dozen filmed and so-called "tell" news stories every day. These are reviewed on a given network by the news program's executive producer and about three producers and news editors; by about 4:00 in the afternoon, the executive producer selects the 20 or so stories that will be shown and told that night.

The final selection process accordingly involves only one man, rather than "the no more than a dozen anchormen, commentators and executive producers" Vice President Agnew described as being in on the decision—and most anchormen and commentators do not participate regularly in it. However, the executive producer's choices are based on the judgments of his assistants, and these in turn rest on prior anticipation and selection by assignment editors who send crews out on a story, and by the crews themselves, who compete with each other to produce film that will get on the air, and so affect how a story is covered. So do the film editors who cut the film into a story—and all these participants in the process are constantly checking the wire services and other news media to see what *they* have selected. In reality, then, many hundreds of people take part in deciding what will be shown every evening.

Since their decisions must often be made in split-second time, newsmen use a number of easily and quickly applied criteria to determine what events will be broadcast as news, principally (1) media considerations, (2) professional judgments, (3) professional and personal values and (4) audience reaction.

Media considerations are perhaps most important. Since the print and electronic news media are competing against one another for audiences, each medium favors stories which it can or thinks it can do best. Thus, TV newsmen look particularly for events which can be filmed, while news magazine men prefer those that can be described dramatically, and picture magazine men look for stories best told through still pictures. This rule is by no means

ironclad; TV will not ignore important stories that do not lend themselves to filming. The heavy use of film on TV news shows is, however, also based on the assumption that the audience prefers film to a talking anchorman. (If the audience preferred getting all its news from Cronkite or Huntley and Brinkley, there would be no film, and the networks would happily save the expense of sending three- or four-man crews all over the globe.)

The professional judgments of newsmen on what to report and how to report it are a close second in importance. These are based on assessments of a story's importance, topicality, interest and dramatic quality.

On a national news show, stories are considered important if they are significant to the nation, by which is meant the Federal Government, or many people around the country. Important stories include almost all the public activities of the President (and Presidential candidates), major decisions by the Congress and its committees, changes of policy by agencies of the Federal Government, sharp changes in the economy, policy or personnel changes at the top levels of major foreign nations—especially if these affect American foreign policy—and wars, major disasters and occasional crimes involving many or famous people or large sums of money.

In addition, there are always a number of continually important or "running" stories, and events relating to them are given frequent coverage. In recent years, the war in Vietnam, racial conflict, the youth rebellion and inflation have been running stories.

One of the most easily applied criteria for choosing stories is topicality. Important stories are always told as quickly as they happen, partly because the possibility of scooping the competition, a hark-back to the days when news traveled more slowly, still excites almost every newsman.

Stories with high-interest content need not be topical; they are TV's equivalent of the newspaper feature and they are gathered both for use in case there are not enough important stories, and to vary the pace of the show. Such stories are those which interest the newsman. They may provide a detailed look at one part of a running story, at a new educational experiment in the ghetto, or at a new weapon being used in Vietnam. They can be human-interest stories about the poignant experience of an ordinary person, or they may take a nostalgic look at an old ship that has been retired—newsmen have a soft spot in their hearts for old ships, trains, cars and planes. Or they may be bizarre—what newsmen call man-bites-dog stories.

But above all, TV news films must have dramatic quality. This means action, people doing something, preferably involving disagreement, conflict or adventure. Thus films of an anti-war demonstration are more likely to get on the air than an interview—"talking heads," in the TV newsman's jargon, are considered dull. A violent demonstration is rated more camera-worthy than a peaceful one, which is why TV will usually show whatever altercation takes place during a march, even if 99.9 per cent of the demonstrators did nothing more than walk. If the talking head belongs to the President, it will obviously be shown, but a more important statement by an underling is likely to be paraphrased by an anchorman in 20 or 25 seconds. Most of the decisions which the Vice President ascribed to the personal bias of the newsmen are actually based on the desire for exciting film.

In making their selection, newsmen also apply values, most of which are professional—and are thus shared by most of their colleagues—and a few of which are personal. Newsmen prefer stories that report people rather than social processes. Nothing pleases a newsman more than to be able to tell an important story in terms of an individual—for example, the pacification program in Vietnam as it affects a Vietnamese peasant. The people newsmen seem to like best are individualists struggling against superhuman odds, a Chichester who conquers the oceans, or the astronauts, and people who can triumph over Big Technology and Bureaucracy.

Some of the professional values are based on assumptions about how society works. For example, while most sociologists would argue that leaders arise out of and in response to group needs, most journalists assume that leaders emerge independently and can transform their groups—that things only get done through "leadership," and that progress results from the availability of skilled, well-intentioned leaders. One result of this is that journalists place great importance on rooting out incompetent and ill-intentioned leaders, and the exposé that catches an officeholder with his fingers in the public till is many a newsman's dream.

The newsman's professional values regulate how he reports events. He sees himself as a detached outsider who does not try to inject himself into his story and never states an explicit personal opinion. Even the TV commentators, such as Eric Sevareid and Howard K. Smith, view themselves as analysts and interpreters, providing background information and possible explanations for the usually descriptive stories broadcast by their colleagues, and

they offer personal opinions much less often than the Vice President suggested.

The newsman also attempts to be objective, and although he knows that his choice of stories and the way he covers them involve subjective considerations, he compensates by trying to be fair, especially on a controversial story. Fairness is achieved through balance, by giving both sides when reporting.

Newsmen's personal values are expressed mainly in choosing among interesting stories. One former TV executive producer, for example, was fond of features about children and nature. In recent years the anchormen have been given to expressing personal interests: for example, Cronkite's enthusiasm for the space program, Brinkley's for the showman tactics of the late Senator Dirksen and Huntley's and Smith's occasional editorializing in favor of the war in Vietnam.

Still, the impress of *explicit* personal values on news reports is far less important than Agnew charged, mainly because personal feelings are censored out by the professional emphasis on objectivity, but also because most newsmen do not have strong political inclinations or allegiances. They are not ideologists and their opinions change over time. A few years ago, I would guess, many newsmen favored the Vietnam war; today, the large majority are doves, although the percentage that favors unilateral withdrawal is probably no greater than it is among the citizens polled by Gallup or Harris.

Personal values do affect news presentation, however, but almost always unconsciously through the quick and intuitive choices of words and films picked to describe people and events. When newsmen describe the National Liberation Front as the Vietcong and then as the enemy, rebelling ghetto residents as rioters and mobs, draft resisters as draft dodgers; when they report democratic elections in South Vietnam and elsewhere but forget that candidates may have been nominated in a smoke-filled room; or when they smile with relief if the stock market goes up, they are making personal judgments.

Objectivity is nigh impossible here and, besides, the newsmen cannot be truly detached outsiders. Like most other professionals, they are a part of the middle-class culture that dominates America, accept most of the economic and social values of that culture, and often judge other societies by these values. Thus, they generally see what goes wrong in Socialist countries more easily than what goes right, are more aware of propaganda in

Russian pronouncements than American ones, consider protesters more militant than insistent lobbyists, and deem marijuana-smoking more of a social problem than alcohol consumption.

By and large, the newsmen's personal values are not much different from those reflected in the majority opinions expressed in the polls, and if an accurate assessment were made of loaded adjectives and raised eyebrows on TV news shows, their implications would probably be more conservative, politically, than assumed. After all, until this year, the cameras watching antiwar demonstrators always seemed to focus on the bearded ones and on Vietcong flag carriers (although mainly because they provided the most dramatic film footage), and I doubt that any anchorman has yet chosen favorable words to describe a militant black-power advocate.

Still, newsmen are on the whole more liberal than their total audience, but this is probably because professionals are generally more liberal than laymen. Most newsmen consider themselves to be political independents, and if one looks closely at their unconscious value judgments, they will be liberal on some issues, conservative on others, and even radical on a few. (Although some viewers think that one network news show is more liberal than another, this is not really true; even the several correspondents reporting from Vietnam for the same news program differ in their views about the war.) However, few radicals, conservatives or even doctrinaire liberals go into journalism, for people with firm ideologies find it difficult to practice journalistic objectivity and fairness.

Audience reaction is taken into account less in the selection of stories than in the way they are presented. Newsmen make sure that stories are told clearly, that difficult words are eschewed, that stories which might alarm people are told as calmly as possible, and that those which might raise false hopes are carefully hedged. (A report on a new development in cancer prevention will, for example, emphasize the experimental nature of the work.)

But when it comes to choosing stories, the newsmen believe firmly that if they like a story, the audience will like it, too, and they have no information about the audience to the contrary. Executive producers know the Nielsen ratings of their shows, but unless they are slipping, they pay little attention to them, and besides the ratings tell them nothing about what the audience is like or what it wants.

Moreover, TV newsmen do not want to know much about their audience, feeling that they are professionals who have a job

to do, that the audience does not know how to cover the news, and that even if it did, audience opinions taken into account would restrict the professional's freedom to do a professional job. For example, most newsmen know that the audience has relatively little interest in foreign news, but they persist in presenting it because they are convinced that the audience needs to know what is going on in the world.

Indirectly, however, the audience plays an infinitely greater role. Newsmen believe—and audience research tends to bear them out—that the audience, though massive, is not especially loyal or attentive and that it must constantly be attracted to the news show and the individual story. That is why TV newsmen rely on film more than on the anchorman, why they select the most dramatic film, why they leave room for interesting stories, and such. In the last analysis, this is why the riots, the war, the antiwar demonstrations, the opposition to the President and all of the political conflict that Agnew complained about being overplayed are covered so fully.

Newsmen need not consider audience reactions more than they do because the professional criteria which guide their journalistic decisions automatically make sure that a large audience will be attracted, and provided with a balanced viewpoint that alienates as few people as possible. The professional criteria thus fit in with the fact that newsmen are, after all, employed by profit-seeking businesses. Yet newsmen are also somewhat more than acquiescent servants of capitalism; few are happy about the commercials that interrupt the news, the little news they can provide in 22½ minutes, and about the small staffs and bureaus with which they must cover the world. Even so, the newsmen also want a large and attentive audience, and even in countries where government finances TV news, few producers deliberately choose an undramatic piece of film over a dramatic one, if they are free to choose.

One of the things that impressed me most when I began my study was how free American TV newsmen are to cover what they consider most important or interesting—and how little network management, sponsors and government officials interfere—or interfere effectively. Network management remains aloof—at least as long as the ratings do not slip precipitously. Executive producers, however, like magazine and newspaper editors, also know what stories will displease management: principally those detrimental to the firm's business interests. (This taboo rarely extends to parent companies, however, and N.B.C.'s coverage of

war and space activities is not influenced by R.C.A.'s role in defense production.)

Sponsors do not interfere because they have no prior knowledge of what goes on the air. This is not true of all news programs; full-length documentaries now often have to be pre-sold, giving the sponsor some control at least over the topic of the documentary. But the evening news (though not the entire network news operation) is highly profitable for both network and sponsors, at least at N.B.C. and C.B.S., and an unhappy sponsor can be replaced from a long waiting list. Of course, executive producers do not go out of their way to antagonize sponsors; if a story on the relationship between smoking and cancer is scheduled, a cigarette sponsor will be informed that he is free to take his commercial out for the evening, and, in any case, the cancer story will not be placed immediately before or after a cigarette commercial.*

Government tries to interfere far more often, and in several ways. One is by news management, forbidding the reporter access to information by stamping it secret, or by swamping him with official versions of the truth—a favorite method of the officers who put on the daily Saigon briefings known as the Five o'clock Follies. (Also, in Vietnam transportation may not be available for correspondents who want to film a battle that is being lost.)

Another method of Government interference is pressure, and both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson were known for their alacrity in calling network executives or newsmen to object to a story they had just seen on the evening news, and all Presidents use their press secretaries for this purpose, too. Network executives who receive such calls rarely pass them on to the offending newsmen, for they want to protect his independence. At other times they may make sure that the attempt to pressure becomes public knowledge, in which case it boomerangs—and this discourages Presidents and other officials from complaining too often.

Newsmen who receive calls from unhappy politicians generally shrug them off. They know that by the next week the politician will have realized that he needs the newsmen more than the newsmen needs him. Of course, repeated pressure may make newsmen more careful in choosing words, but it will also leave a residue of ill will.

Politicians will also try to win a reporter to their side by

* [This article was written before cigarette advertising was removed from television and radio in January 1971.—EDITOR]

wining and dining him, but the national newsman is much freer from political or commercial interference than his local colleague, who has less job security and prestige, and a less powerful employer as well. Sponsors can complain about the news coverage of a local station, and politicians can persuade friendly sponsors to do it for them, or send out building inspectors to find code violations in the studio. National networks and sponsors are not so easily bullied. But another reason why the national newsman has so much freedom is that he rarely abuses it; he is reined in by his high visibility, his professionalism and by the sometimes terrifying feeling of responsibility that comes with broadcasting to an audience in the tens of millions.

Consequently, censorship is usually limited to matters of "taste." Anchormen never swear, of course, and until recent years even profanity uttered by an excited participant in a filmed news event was excised. Today what cuts are made are mostly in Vietnam film. Because the evening news is on at the dinner hour when children are watching, the bloodier battle footage is censored. As a result, TV has not, despite all claims to the contrary, shown the real war; few films have shown men dying or being wounded, and, in fact, print journalism has been more explicit about the bloodshed. (There are other reasons than taste for sanitizing the battle coverage; for one thing, networks don't like to ask their personnel to risk death by getting into the midst of a battle and only rarely do the South Vietnamese torture their prisoners or GI's cut ears off dead Vietcong when cameramen are around.)

Whether public protest results in self-censorship is difficult to determine. Coverage of ghetto rioting has been scarcer since the networks were blamed for publicizing Detroit and Newark, but the riots have been less severe since then, and newsmen say they are no longer so newsworthy.

Still, the battle footage from Vietnam seems more war-weary these days, although even in earlier years the war was not always covered so enthusiastically as people now think. But there is really little need for explicit self-censorship, for most newsmen are not inclined, professionally or personally, to see events and news stories from a radical perspective, of the left or the right. (Thus, radicals who believe that if newsmen were only liberated from their network restraints they would tell the truth as radicals see it are only deceiving themselves.)

Despite all the emphasis on objectivity and fairness, however, the criteria by which newsmen choose the news have political consequences for what becomes news and how American society

is depicted. Displeased politicians and viewers find nothing easier than to attack that depiction as distortion, but because the newsmen do not purposely distort the news, and because one man's distortion is another man's truth, it is fairer to suggest that the news provides a *selective* picture of reality.

Consider the emphasis on topicality, for example, and how it affects the presentation of news. Topicality cuts reality into individual events and incidents and de-emphasizes the long-term processes of which these events are only a part. For example, because the Vietnam war has been covered in terms of daily battles and body counts, the nature and progress of the war was often lost from view until the Tet offensive in 1968. And although correspondents frequently ended their daily battle reports by warning that, in guerrilla warfare, the day's battle is not very significant, still they had to report a new battle the next evening.

The journalistic definition of what is important news also has a marked effect on the picture we get of society. A lot of attention is paid to governmental leaders and little to the less visible individuals and institutions that set the limits within which these leaders can act. For example, the President's actions and inactions with respect to inflation are depicted in much more detail than the economic institutions and policies, including the Government's, which have brought about inflation.

The prevailing definition of important news thus gives an inordinate amount of publicity to the President and other high Government officials—which they consider their due and take for granted—while more crucial activities by lesser known mortals may not be reported. Ordinary people appear in the news only when they commit major crimes; participate in strikes, riots and demonstrations; are victims of disaster—or happen to bite a dog. And since leaders tend to be of high income and advancing age, while newsworthy ordinary persons are often young or poor, the over-all picture of society that emerges is one of responsible or at least respectable activities by an aging élite and not so respectable or unusual activities on the part of young lower-income groups.

But the major effect on the picture of society comes from a combination of these three things: media considerations, the choice of interesting stories, and the stress on dramatic quality. What most news media do, therefore, is over-emphasize unusual events. As one TV executive producer put it, "All journalists assume that the Boy Scouts and the churches are operating normally; our job is to cover what goes awry."

As a result of all this, we get a lot of selective glimpses. Vietnam coverage has mainly emphasized the dramatic side of the war, with just an occasional glance at the politics of South Vietnam. These politics, in turn, have been depicted mainly as a conflict between anti-democratic generals and democratic civilians, while little attention has been paid to the larger political and economic structure. Although quasifeudal landlords still have an inordinate amount of control over the South Vietnamese Government and economy, their activities and such basic problems as land reform have not often been dealt with on the TV screen or anywhere else in the major news media. But land reform is hard to put on film, and is not a very exciting subject to Americans in any case.

In domestic reporting, politicians are shown disagreeing with each other, but the compromises and what they compromise about are filmed more rarely. The college students who appear in news reports are usually protesters, or antiprotest protesters and drug users, and the fact that differences still exist between management and labor becomes visible on the news front only when a strike is called and it becomes violent.

Even within the events that are covered, the scarcity of time and space allows the news media, particularly TV, to depict only the highlights, rather than a cross section of the action. What usually appears on film is only the most dramatic portion of a fire-fight, a riot or a demonstration. This may make the event look more alarming than it really is, and it may also leave out important aspects. For example, a group of radicals disrupted a medical convention in order to present their views but the film showed only the disruption and not the views they expressed. This happens frequently, irrespective of political position.

Newsmen's professional and personal values play a smaller role in shaping the media's picture of society. However, the journalistic theory that leaders are more important than followers sometimes results in too little information about the interest groups and larger constituencies leaders speak for even when they are national figures. And newsmen's personal beliefs enter in mostly to reinforce the middle-class values that pervade the news anyway.

The rules of objectivity and fairness have more impact on the image of society in the news. Objectivity can prevent the well-informed reporter from giving his conclusions about a topic he has investigated thoroughly; he can only report what various sides had to say. (Of course, reportorial analysis is also scarce

because few news media provide the time or money for the investigative work that would allow a reporter to come to conclusions.) As a result, a newsman who covers a speech that he knows to include some outright lies cannot, by the dictates of objectivity, tell what he knows; unless he can find a respected figure who will let himself be quoted to the effect that the speaker was lying, he must leave this task to the occasional commentator. But when the correction of lies is forced into the area of commentary, that correction is made to appear the commentator's personal opinion.

Even fairness in the press is not entirely fair to all sides. In a legislative controversy, the press believes it achieves balance by giving the Democratic and Republican views; no national news medium is likely to provide time for the S.D.S. and the John Birch Society to state their opinions. Perhaps more important, however, the press often only gives the view of the "other side" when it has a large or respectable constituency. For example, when antiwar demonstrations were in their infancy, many news media provided a platform for their opponents but saw little need to balance this with pro-demonstration rebuttals. Indeed, until a respectable Government figure, Senator Fulbright, came out against the Vietnam war, the national news media did not really consider the war a controversial issue requiring balanced treatment.

That the news, on TV and elsewhere, must present a selective picture of reality is inevitable, but the journalistic criteria now used for selecting news are not immutable and could be replaced. Despite their defects, however, they also have some virtues; for one thing, they have attracted a large audience and created interest in world events among a general public that only a generation ago knew almost nothing about them. Even the emphasis on dramatic conflict in the news may be desirable, for although the resulting picture of American society is overdrawn, anything else might attract even less public attention to the conflicts that grip our society. Moreover, agreement on better criteria is difficult to reach, because all have political consequences and will result in the selection of news that seem distorted to somebody.

Consequently, the best criteria are probably those which maximize the diversity of news, giving all points of view a chance to be seen and heard. In this spirit, I would propose the following four additions to the current news fare:

"Representative" journalism. We need more descriptive and analytic reporting about, for, and by the poor, the not-so-affluent

and other income classes; age, racial and ethnic groups; radicals and conservatives; and all groups whose activities and views are now covered only rarely, to inform them and to tell the rest of us what America and the world look like from their perspective.

"Unfair" and subjective analysis and commentary. However hard the newsmen try to be fair and objective, they cannot be fully detached observers. The only alternative is to have far more analysis and commentary, with commentators selected from all points on the political spectrum, age groups, income levels, etc., to interpret events and society from as many angles as possible. It would also be useful to hear regularly from foreign commentators who could tell us how America looks to the outsider and might puncture some of our more dangerous myths: for example, that we are a classless society, that we are less imperialistic than Russia or China, or that radicals and conservatives are usually ill-motivated and misled.

"Slice-of-life" journalism. In addition to what's going awry, the news ought also to present a cross section, in depth, of society's events and people. This type of news gathering would provide more information about the usual activities and problems of ordinary people and, at the same time, seek to unearth the social, economic and political processes that really shape our life—and altogether try to reveal more of the iceberg that is American society than just the tip that appears in the news today.

More news. We need a lot more news, particularly on TV, for even though it is no substitute for newspapers and magazines, it will have to be just that because it is the major source of national and international news for an increasingly larger majority of Americans all the time. More news means not only additional news broadcasts and longer ones but also more investigative reporting and analysis.

These four* additions (the likes of which many newsmen have been proposing for some time) would provide more accurate and complete news coverage. Unfortunately, however, they would also be very expensive. For example, if news reports were to be more analytic, reporters would have to spend more time on every story and would need to be specialists. But more specialization

* I would also propose a fifth addition: dramatic entertainment fare around topics and issues that appear in the news, similar to but more varied than the late lamented "East Side, West Side" and "The Defenders." For example, a TV series based on the idea of Upton Sinclair's Lanny Budd novels might attract more viewers to world events.

would require more journalists, for specialists cannot produce as much as the present generalist, who can cover an amazingly wide variety of subjects without prior knowledge of them.

Whether anyone would be willing to pay the higher costs of these types of news is open to question. Many people seem satisfied with the present news fare and it is entirely possible that only by overdramatizing reality can a large audience be attracted. Even so, people do not seem to be deeply involved in the news; audience studies show that only a minority of the 50 million reached by the network's evening news broadcasts watches every evening. National and international news is rarely of such direct relevance to people's daily lives that they cannot get along without it.

One may hope that more deeply realistic and representative journalism would arouse the interest of many persons now less attentive to the news, but most likely the only audience now willing to pay for more news is the highly educated group and it is already well supplied by various magazines, journals of opinion, educational TV and the few good newspapers. Where then, would the money come from? Certainly, existing TV stations and networks ought to devote a bigger portion of their profits from entertainment programming to the news, but viewers will have to exert considerable political pressure on the F.C.C. before it will stiffen the public-service requirements for broadcasters. And probably no one's news hunger is great enough to make pay-TV news financially feasible, or persuade Congress to establish TV-set license fees.

Therefore the approach of "last resort" is Government subsidy, at least until additions to the news fare can build an audience. Of course, this raises the danger of Government control—but so far, the Federal Government has had precious little success in controlling many activities it supports, including the print media which benefit from subsidized mailing rates. Still, one would have to find ways of making sure that Government support would not be denied to media, newsmen, and commentators who state unpopular ideas.

The subsidies should go not only to the networks (and other existing news media) but also to new journalistic enterprises, including nonprofit ones. For example, why not a subsidy to allow journalists in the black or poor population to obtain TV stations and news programs, perhaps on a syndicated basis, to tell it like it is from their perspective? In fact, a major purpose of the subsidy would be to stimulate competition, for a society of more than

200-million people should be able to have access to more than three network news organizations and weekly news magazines. Ultimately, greater fairness and depth in news coverage can be brought about only by more diversity in the news.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Gans says, "Most of the decisions which the Vice President ascribed to the personal bias of the newsmen are actually based on the desire for exciting film." Do you think excitement should be the determining factor for news coverage? Why do you think newsmen tend to show only "whatever altercation takes place during a march"?

2. In the case of campus disorders, peace marches, and the like, do you think this tendency for excitement has helped form a negative image of the young in the minds of the older generation? Is a balanced image of young people presented on TV?

3. From watching the evening or local news, do you agree with Gans that "the newsmen attempts to be objective" and that "fairness is achieved through balance, by giving both sides when reporting"? Discuss and give examples.

4. Do you think all news commentators should be objective, or do you think some should editorialize and give opinions? Discuss reasons for your answer.

5. In his book *Television and Society*, Harry J. Skornia observes:

In view of the fact that RCA, CBS, Westinghouse, General Electric, and scores of other broadcast firms receive from 10 to 40 per cent of their income from government contracts related to defense efforts, how wholeheartedly and sincerely can they be expected to press for genuine and lasting peace?

Gans, on the other hand, states that "N.B.C.'s coverage of war and space activities is not influenced by R.C.A.'s role in defense production." What evidence does Gans provide to back up this statement? What facts or opinions could you bring forth to back up either of these contradictory positions?

6. The previous question brings up the larger problem of the control of American broadcasting by industry and business, as opposed to governmental or "public interest" control like that of the BBC, the British public broadcasting system. Which system do you think is preferable? Why? Several European countries levy an annual tax on individual

radios and television sets. Would you favor paying such additional taxes to have the government help support more news on TV?

7. Does Gans refute the famous charge made by Vice President Agnew that the news media are controlled by a small group of the "Eastern liberal establishment"? Discuss.

8. In November 1970, Eric Sevareid reacted to a suggestion made by Vice President Agnew that television news commentators be publicly examined on their "underlying philosophy" by a government panel. Read and discuss Sevareid's remarks.

What really hurts is the thought that maybe nobody's been listening all this time. If, after some 30 years and thousands of broadcasts, hundreds of articles and a few books, one's general cast of mind, warts and all, remains a mystery, then we're licked and we fail to see how a few more minutes of examination by Government types would solve the supposed riddle.

Mr. Agnew wants to know where we stand. We stand—or rather sit—right here, in the full glare, at a disadvantage as against politicians. We can't cast one vote in committee, an opposite vote on the floor; can't say one thing in the North, an opposite thing in the South. We hold no tenure, four years or otherwise, and can be voted out with a twist of the dial.

We can't use invective and epithets, can't even dream of impugning the patriotism of leading citizens, can't reduce every complicated issue to yes or no, black or white, and would rather go to jail than do bodily injury to the English language. We can't come down on this side or that side of each disputed public issue because we're trying to explain far more than advocate and because some issues don't have two sides: some have three, four or half a dozen and in these matters we're damned if we know the right answer. This may be why most of us look a bit frazzled while Mr. Agnew looks so serene.

Nobody in this business expects for a moment that the full truth of anything will be contained in any one account or commentary, but that through free reporting and discussion, as Mr. Walter Lippmann put it, the truth will emerge. The central point about the free press is not that it be accurate, though it must try to be; not that it even be fair, though it must try to be that; but that it be free. And that means freedom from any and all attempts by the power of Government to coerce it or intimidate it or police it in any way.

What Do We Do About Television?

Nicholas Johnson

Nicholas Johnson is a commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission who has aroused controversy by openly criticizing the FCC's licensing practices. In this article he points out what private individuals and groups can do to improve television programming and to obtain media exposure for their viewpoints.

Television is more than just another great public resource—like air and water—ruined by private greed and public inattention. It is the greatest communications mechanism ever designed and operated by man. It pumps into the human brain an unending stream of information, opinion, moral values, and esthetic taste. It cannot be a neutral influence. Every minute of television programming—commercials, entertainment, news—teaches us something.

Most Americans tell pollsters that television constitutes their principal source of information. Many of our senior citizens are tied to their television sets for intellectual stimulation. And children now spend more time learning from television than from church and school combined. By the time they enter first grade they will have received more hours of instruction from television networks than they will later receive from college professors while earning a bachelor's degree. Whether they like it or not, the television networks are playing the roles of teacher, preacher, parent, public official, doctor, psychiatrist, family counselor, and friend for tens of millions of Americans each day of their lives.

TV programming can be creative, educational, uplifting, and refreshing without being tedious. But the current television product that drains away lifetimes of leisure energy is none of these.

It leaves its addicts waterlogged. Only rarely does it contribute anything meaningful to their lives. No wonder so many Americans express to me a deep-seated hostility toward television. Too many realize, perhaps unconsciously but certainly with utter disgust, that television is itself a drug, constantly offering the allure of a satisfying fulfillment for otherwise empty and meaningless lives that it seldom, if ever, delivers.

Well, what do we do about it? Here are a few suggestions:

STEP ONE: *Turn on.* I don't mean rush to your sets and turn the on-knob. What I do mean is that we had all better "turn on" to television—wake up to the fact that it is no longer intellectually smart to ignore it. Everything we do, or are, or worry about is affected by television. How and when issues are resolved in this country—the Indochina War, air pollution, race relations—depend as much as anything else on how (and whether) they're treated by the television networks in "entertainment" as well as news and public affairs programing.

Dr. S. I. Hayakawa has said that man is no more conscious of communication than a fish would be conscious of the waters of the sea. The analogy is apt. A tidal wave of television programing has covered our land during the past twenty years. The vast majority of Americans have begun to breathe through gills. Yet, we have scarcely noticed the change, let alone wondered what it is doing to us. A few examples may start us thinking.

The entire medical profession, as well as the federal government, had little impact upon cigarette consumption in this country until a single young man, John Banzhaf, convinced the Federal Communications Commission that its Fairness Doctrine required TV and radio stations to broadcast \$100-million worth of "anti-smoking commercials." Cigarette consumption has now declined for one of the few times in history.

What the American people think about government and politics in general—as well as a favorite candidate in particular—is almost exclusively influenced by television. The candidates and their advertising agencies, which invest 75 per cent or more of their campaign funds in broadcast time, believe this: to the tune of \$58-million in 1968.

There's been a lot of talk recently about malnutrition in America. Yet, people could let their television sets run for twenty-four hours a day and never discover that diets of starch and soda pop can be fatal.

If people lack rudimentary information about jobs, com-

munity services for the poor, alcoholism, and so forth, it is because occasional tidbits of information of this kind in soap operas, game shows, commercials, and prime-time series are either inaccurate or missing.

In short, whatever your job or interests may be, the odds are very good that you could multiply your effectiveness tremendously by "turning on" to the impact of television on your activities and on our society as a whole—an impact that exceeds that of any other existing institution.

STEP TWO: *Tune in.* There are people all over the country with something vitally important to say: the people who knew "cyclamates" were dangerous decades ago, the people who warned us against the Vietnam War in the early Sixties, the people who sounded the alarm against industrial pollution when the word "smog" hadn't been invented. Why didn't we hear their warnings over the broadcast media?

In part it is the media's fault, the product of "corporate censorship." But in large part it's the fault of the very people with something to say who never stopped to consider how they might best say it. They simply haven't "tuned in" to television.

Obviously, I'm not suggesting you run out and buy up the nearest network. What I am suggesting is that we stop thinking that television programing somehow materializes out of thin air, or that it's manufactured by hidden forces or anonymous men. It is not. There is a new generation coming along that is substantially less frightened by a 16mm camera than by a pencil. You may be a part of it. Even those of us who are not, however, had better tune in to television ourselves.

Here is an example of someone who *did*. Last summer, CBS aired an hour-long show on Japan, assisted in large part by former Ambassador Edwin Reischauer. No one, including Ambassador Reischauer and CBS, would claim the show perfectly packaged all that Americans want or need to know about our 100 million neighbors across the Pacific. But many who watched felt it was one of the finest bits of educational entertainment about Japan ever offered to the American people by a commercial network.

Ambassador Reischauer has spent his lifetime studying Japan, yet his was not an easy assignment. An hour is not very long for a man who is used to writing books and teaching forty-five-hour semester courses, and there were those who wanted to turn the show into an hour-long geisha party. He could have refused to do the show at all, or walked away from the project when it

seemed to be getting out of control. But he didn't. And as a result, the nation, the CBS network, and Mr. Reischauer all benefited. (And the show was honored by an Emmy award.)

There are other Ed Reischauers in this country: men who don't know much about "television," but who know more than anyone else about a subject that is important and potentially entertaining. If these men can team their knowledge with the professional television talent of others (and a network's financial commitment), they can make a television program happen. Not only ought they to accept such assignments when asked, I would urge them to come forward and volunteer their assistance to the networks and their local station managers (or to the local cable television system, many of which have been ordered by the FCC to begin local program origination by January 1971). Of course, these offers won't always, or even often, be accepted—for many reasons. But sooner or later the dialogue has to begin.

There are many ways you can contribute to a television program without knowing anything about lighting or electronics. Broadcasters in many large communities (especially those with universities) are cashing in on local expertise for quick background when an important news story breaks, occasional on-camera interviews, suggestions for news items or entire shows, participation as panel members or even hosts, writers for programs, citizen advisory committees, and so forth. Everyone benefits. The broadcaster puts out higher-quality programing, the community builds greater citizen involvement and identification, and the television audience profits.

Whoever you are, whatever you're doing, ask yourself this simple question: What do I know or what do I have to communicate that others need to know or might find interesting? If you're a Department of Health, Education and Welfare official charged with communicating vital information about malnutrition to the poor, you might be better off putting your information into the plot-line of a daytime television soap opera than spending a lifetime writing pamphlets. If you're a law enforcement officer and want to inform people how to secure their homes against illegal entry, you might do better by talking to the writers and producers of *Dragnet*, *I Spy*, or *Mission: Impossible* than by making slide presentations.

STEP THREE: Drop out. The next step is to throw away most of what you've learned about communication. Don't make the mistake of writing "TV essays"—sitting in front of a camera reading,

or saying, what might otherwise have been expressed in print. "Talking heads" make for poor television communication, as educational and commercial television professionals are discovering. Intellectuals and other thinking creative people first have to "drop out" of the traditional modes of communicating thoughts, and learn to swim through the new medium of television.

Marshall McLuhan has made much of this clear. If the print medium is linear, television is not. McLuhan's message is as simple as one in a Chinese fortune cookie: "One picture worth thousand words"—particularly when the picture is in color and motion, is accompanied by sound (words and music), and is not tied to an orderly time sequence.

Mason Williams, multitalented one-time writer for the Smothers Brothers, is one of the few to see this new dimension in communication. He describes one of his techniques as "verbal snapshots"—short bursts of thought, or poetry, or sound that penetrate the mind in an instant, then linger. Here are some that happen to be about television itself: "I am qualified to criticize television because I have two eyes and a mind, which is one more eye and one more mind than television has." "Television doesn't have a job; it just goofs off all day." "Television is doing to your mind what industry is doing to the land. Some people already think like New York City looks." No one "snapshot" gives the whole picture. But read in rapid succession, they leave a vivid and highly distinctive after-image.

Others have dropped out of the older communications techniques and have adapted to the new media. Those students who are seen on television—sitting in, protesting, assembling—are developing a new medium of communication: the demonstration. Denied traditional access to the network news shows and panel discussions, students in this country now communicate with the American people via loud, "newsworthy," media-attractive aggregations of sound and color and people. Demonstrations are happenings, and the news media—like moths to a flame—run to cover them. Yippie Abbie Hoffman sees this clearer than most:

So what the hell are we doing, you ask? We are dynamiting brain cells. We are putting people through changes. . . . We are theater in the streets: total and committed. We aim to involve people and use . . . any weapon (prop) we can find. All is relevant, only "the play's the thing." . . . The media is the message. Use it! No fund raising, no full-page ads in *The New York Times*, no press releases.

Just do your thing; the press eats it up. Media is free.
Make news.

Dr. Martin Luther King told us very much the same thing. "Lacking sufficient access to television, publications, and broad forums, Negroes have had to write their most persuasive essays with the blunt pen of marching ranks."

Mason Williams, Abbie Hoffman, Dr. Martin Luther King, and many others have set the stage for the new communicators, the new media experts. All dropped out of the traditional communications bag of speeches, round-table discussions, panels, symposia, and filmed essays. And they reached the people.

STEP FOUR: *Make the legal scene.* Shakespeare's Henry VI threatened: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." Good advice in the fifteenth century perhaps. But bad advice today. We need lawyers. And they can help you improve television.

Examples are legion. The United Church of Christ successfully fought *two* legal appeals to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, one establishing the right of local citizens groups to participate in FCC proceedings, and one revoking the license of WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi, for systematic segregationist practices. In Media, Pennsylvania, nineteen local organizations hired a Washington lawyer to protest radio station WXUR's alleged policy of broadcasting primarily right-wing political programming. In Los Angeles, a group of local businessmen challenged the license of KHJ-TV, and the FCC's hearing examiner awarded them the channel. There are dozens of other examples of the imaginative use of rusty old legal remedies to improve the contribution of television to our national life.

For all their drawbacks, lawyers understand what I call "the law of effective reform"; that is, to get reform from legal institutions (Congress, courts, agencies), one must assert, first, the factual basis for the grievance; second, the specific legal principle involved (Constitutional provision, statute, regulation, judicial or agency decision); and third, the precise remedy sought (legislation, fine, license revocation). Turn on a lawyer, and you'll turn on an awful lot of legal energy, talent, and skill. You will be astonished at just how much legal power you actually have over a seemingly intractable Establishment.

STEP FIVE: *Try do-it-yourself justice.* Find out what you can do without a lawyer. You ought to know, for example, that every

three years *all* the radio and television station licenses come up for renewal in your state. You ought to know when that date is. It is an "election day" of sorts, and you have a right and obligation to "vote." Not surprisingly, many individuals have never even been told there's an election.

Learn something about the grand design of communications in this country. For example, no one "owns" a radio or television station in the sense that you can own a home or the corner drug-store. It's more like leasing public land to graze sheep, or obtaining a contract to build a stretch of highway for the state. Congress has provided that the airways are public property. The user must be licensed, and, in the case of commercial broadcasters, that license term is for three years. There is no "right" to have the license renewed. It is renewed only if past performance, and promises of future performance, are found by the FCC to serve "the public interest." In making this finding, the views of local individuals and groups are, of course, given great weight. In extreme cases, license revocation or license renewal contest proceedings may be instituted by local groups.

You should understand the basic policy underlying the Communications Act of 1934, which set up the FCC and gave it its regulatory powers. "Spectrum space" (radio and television frequencies) in this country is limited. It must be shared by taxicabs, police cars, the Defense Department, and other business users. In many ways it would be more efficient to have a small number of extremely high-powered stations blanket the country, leaving the remaining spectrum space for other users. But Congress felt in 1934 that it was essential for the new technology of radio to serve needs, tastes, and interests at the local level—to provide community identification, cohesion, and outlets for local talent and expression. For this reason, roughly 95 per cent of the most valuable spectrum space has been handed out to some 7,500 radio and television stations in communities throughout the country. Unfortunately, the theory is not working. Most programing consists of nationally distributed records, movies, newswire copy, commercials, and network shows. Most stations broadcast very little in the way of locally oriented community service. It's up to you to make them change.

You have only to exercise your imagination to improve the programing service of your local station. Student groups, civic luncheon clubs, unions, PTAs, the League of Women Voters, and so forth are in an ideal position to accomplish change. They can contact national organizations, write for literature, and gen-

erally inform themselves of their broadcasting rights. Members can monitor what is now broadcast and draw up statements of programing standards, indicating what they would like to see with as much specificity as possible. They can set up Citizens Television Advisory Councils to issue reports on broadcaster's performance. They can send delegations to visit with local managers and owners. They can, when negotiation fails, take whatever legal steps are necessary with the FCC. They can complain to sponsors, networks, and local television stations when they find commercials excessively loud or obnoxious. If you think this is dreamy, pie-in-the-sky thinking, look what local groups have done during the past year.

Texarkana was given national attention last year when a large magazine reported that the city's population of rats was virtually taking over the city. Of lesser notoriety, but perhaps of greater long-run significance, was an agreement hammered out between a citizens group and KTAL-TV, the local television station. In January 1969, the Texarkana Junior Chamber of Commerce and twelve local unincorporated associations—with the assistance of the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ—filed complaints with the FCC, and alleged that KTAL-TV had failed to survey the needs of its community, had systematically refused to serve the tastes, needs, and desires of Texarkana's 26 per cent Negro population, and had maintained no color origination equipment in its Texarkana studio (although it had such equipment in the wealthier community of Shreveport, Louisiana). But they didn't stop there. Armed with the threat of a license renewal hearing, they went directly to the station's management and hammered out *an agreement* in which the station promised it would make a number of reforms, or forfeit its license. Among other provisions, KTAL-TV promised to recruit and train a staff broadly representative of all minority groups in the community; employ a minimum of two full-time Negro reporters; set up a toll-free telephone line for news and public service announcements and inquiries; present discussion programs of controversial issues, including both black and white participants; publicize the rights of the poor to obtain needed services; regularly televise announcements of the public's rights and periodically consult with all substantial groups in the community regarding their programing tastes and needs.

The seeds of citizen participation sown in Texarkana have since come to fruition elsewhere. Just recently five citizens groups negotiated agreements with twenty-two stations in Atlanta, Geor-

gia, and similar attempts have been made in Shreveport, Louisiana; Sandersville, Georgia; Mobile, Alabama; and Jackson, Mississippi.

In Washington, D.C., last summer a group of students under the supervision of the Institute for Policy Studies undertook a massive systematic review of the license applications of all television stations in the area of Washington, D.C., Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland. They used a number of "performance charts" by which they evaluated and ranked the stations in amounts of news broadcast, news employees hired, commercials, public service announcements, and other factors. The result was a book that may become a working model for the comparative evaluation of television stations' performances. (IPS, *Television Today: The End of Communication and the Death of Community*, \$10 from the Institute for Policy Studies, 1540 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C.) Citizens groups all over the country can easily follow their example.

I have felt for some time that it would be useful to have detailed reviews and periodic reports about the implications of specific television commercials and entertainment shows by groups of professional psychiatrists, child psychologists, educators, doctors, ministers, social scientists, and so forth. They could pick a show in the evening—any show—and discuss its esthetic quality, its accuracy, and its potential national impact upon moral values, constructive opinion, mental health, and so forth. It would be especially exciting if this critical analysis could be shown on television. Such professional comment would be bound to have *some* impact upon the networks' performance. (Last year's *Violence Commission Report* did.) It would be a high service indeed to our nation, with rewards as well for the professional groups and individuals involved—including the broadcasting industry. It is not without precedent. The BBC formerly aired a critique of evening shows following prime-time entertainment. It would be refreshing to have a television producer's sense of status and satisfaction depend more upon the enthusiasm of the critics and audience than upon the number of cans of "feminine deodorant spray" he can sell.

These examples are only the beginning. Television could become our most exciting medium if the creative people in this country would use a fraction of their talent to figure out ways of improving it.

STEP SIX: *Get high (with a little help from your friends).* Have you ever made a film, or produced a TV documentary, or written

Up for Renewal?

ALL LICENSES within a given state expire on the same date. Stations must file for license renewal with the FCC ninety days *prior* to the expiration date. Petitions to deny a station's license renewal application must be filed between ninety and thirty days *prior* to the expiration date. Forthcoming expiration dates* for stations located in the following states include:

- Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands: February 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Alabama and Georgia: April 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi: June 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana: August 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Ohio and Michigan: October 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Illinois and Wisconsin: December 1, 1970; 1973; 1976; and 1979.
- Iowa and Missouri: February 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Colorado: April 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska: June 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- Texas: August 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Idaho: October 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- California: December 1, 1971; 1974; 1977; and 1980.
- Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Guam, and Hawaii: February 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.
- Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont: April 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.
- New Jersey and New York: June 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.
- Delaware and Pennsylvania: August 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.
- Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and West Virginia: October 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.
- North Carolina and South Carolina: December 1, 1972; 1975; 1978; and 1981.

* Dates subject to change.

Where to Write

FOR FURTHER information regarding a specific network, agency, or group related to the broadcasting field, contact the following:

The Networks

American Broadcasting Company, Inc.
1330 Avenue of the Americas,
New York, N.Y. 10019

Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.

51 West 52nd Street,
New York N.Y. 10019

National Broadcasting Company

30 Rockefeller Plaza,
New York, N.Y. 10020

Mutual Broadcasting Company

135 West 50th Street,
New York, N.Y. 10019

Industry Associations

National Association of Broadcasters

1661 N Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20036

Television Information Office

745 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10022

Citizens Organizations

Action for Children's Television

33 Hancock Avenue,
Newton Centre, Mass. 02159

Action on Smoking and Health

2000 H Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20006

American Council for Better

Broadcasts with TACT
17 West Main,

Madison, Wis. 53703

Anti-Defamation League

1640 Rhode Island Avenue,
NW,

Washington, D.C. 20036

Citizens Communications Center

1816 Jefferson Place, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20036

Institute for American Democracy, Inc.

1330 Massachusetts Avenue,
NW,

Washington, D.C. 20005

Institute for Policy Studies

1520 New Hampshire Avenue,
NW,

Washington, D.C. 20036

National Association for Better Broadcasting

373 Northwestern Avenue,
Los Angeles, Calif. 90004

National Audience Board, Inc.

152 East End Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10028

National Citizens Committee

for Broadcasting

609 Fifth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10017

Office of Communication

United Church of Christ

289 Park Avenue South,
New York, N.Y. 10010

Television, Radio & Film Commission

The Methodist Church

475 Riverside Drive,
New York, N.Y. 10027

The Federal Government

Federal Communications Commission

1919 M Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20554

a radio script? That's a real high. But if you're like me, you'll need help—lots of it—from your friends. If you've got something to say, find someone who's expert in communication: high school or college film-makers, drama students, off-time TV reporters, or local CATV outlets with program origination equipment. Bring the thinkers in the community together with the media creators. CBS did it with Ed Reischauer and its one-hour special on Japan. You can do it, too. Get others interested in television. (A free pamphlet, "Clearing the Air," has just been published by Media Ithaca, Department of Sociology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14850. It explains how average citizens can obtain free air time over radio, television, and CATV.)

STEP SEVEN: *Expand your media mind.* Everyone can work for policies that increase the number of radio and television outlets, and provide individuals with access to existing outlets to express their talent or point of view. Those outlets are already numerous. There are now nearly ten times as many radio and television stations as there were thirty-five years ago. There are many more AM radio stations, including the "daytime only" stations. There is the new FM radio service. There is VHF television. And, since Congress passed the all-channel receiver law in 1962, UHF television (channels 14-83) has come alive. There are educational radio and television stations all over the country. There are "listener-supported" community radio stations (such as the Pacifica stations in New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and Berkeley). This increase in outlets has necessarily broadened the diversity of programing. However, since the system is virtually all "commercial" broadcasting, this diversity too often means simply that there are now five stations to play the "top forty" records in your city instead of two. In the past couple years, however, educational broadcasting has gained in strength with the Public Broadcasting Corporation (potentially America's answer to the BBC). Owners of groups of profitable television stations (such as Westinghouse and Metromedia) have begun syndicating more shows—some of which subsequently get picked up by the networks.

Cable television (CATV) offers a potentially unlimited number of channels. (The present over-the-air system is physically limited to from five to ten television stations even in the largest communities.) Twelve-channel cable systems are quite common, twenty-channel systems are being installed, and more channels will undoubtedly come in the future. Your telephone, for example,

is a "100-million-channel receiver" in that it can call, or be called by, any one of 100 million other instruments in this country.

Cable television offers greater diversity among commercial television programs—at the moment, mostly movies, sports, and reruns—but it can also offer another advantage: public access. The FCC has indicated that cable systems should be encouraged and perhaps ultimately required to offer channels for lease to any person willing to pay the going rate. In the *Red Lion* case last year, the Supreme Court upheld the FCC's fairness doctrine and, noting the monopolistic position most broadcasters hold, suggested that "free speech" rights belong principally to the audience and those who wish to use the station, not the station owner. This concept—which might raise administrative problems for single stations—is easily adaptable to cable television.

If someone wants to place a show on a single over-the-air broadcast station, some other (generally more profitable) program must be canceled. A cable system, by contrast, can theoretically carry an unlimited number of programs at the same time. We therefore have the opportunity to require cable systems to carry whatever programs are offered on a leased-channel basis (sustained either by advertising or by subscription fee). Time might even be made available free to organizations, young filmmakers, and others who could not afford the leasing fee and do not advertise or profit from their programming. Now is the time to guarantee such rights for your community. City councils all across the nation are in the process of drafting the terms for cable television franchises. If your community is at present considering a cable television ordinance, it is your opportunity to work for free and common-carrier "citizens' access" to the cables that will one day connect your home with the rest of the world.

Television is here to stay. It's the single most significant force in our society. It is now long past time that the professional and intellectual community—indeed, anyone who reads magazines and cares where this country is going—turn on to television.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In *Broadcasting and the Public*, Robert E. Summers and Harrison B. Summers claim that:

Most listeners . . . seem to be fairly well satisfied with the service that radio and television provide. In the 1964 Roper

study . . . when men and women were asked their opinions concerning television's performance, 62 per cent of the respondents believed that television stations were doing an "excellent" or "good" job as compared with 55 per cent who gave a similar rating to newspapers and only 47 per cent who had an equally good opinion of the activities of local governmental agencies.

This runs counter to Johnson's statement that many Americans have "a deep-seated hostility toward television." What is your opinion? Do you think 62 per cent of your peers are satisfied with TV?

2. This essay is written from the citizen-action point of view. What changes in TV programming or policies would you like to see effected? What problems in your region could television help to solve? Make suggestions for public-service broadcasting in your area.

3. How are your local radio and TV stations helping to serve the public interest? How are they negligent, and what can you do about it? Do you feel any are doing such a bad job that they should lose their license?

4. Much has been said about commercials on TV: that they are horrible and boring, that they are the most creative part of television, and so on. How do you view these advertisements? Do you find their absence on public television a plus or minus factor? Why?

5. Do you think religious groups should be issued broadcasting licenses to "own" radio and television stations? Why or why not?

Radio's Heroic Age

from *Newsweek Magazine*

With a hint of nostalgia for the adventure serials of radio, the following article sketches the powerful influence exerted by radio heroes on the imaginations of a generation of children.

ANNOUNCER: Having just uncovered the valuable uranium deposit, Jack Armstrong and fun-loving Billy Fairfield are rowing to Uncle Jim's yacht Spindrift that rides in the warm waters of the Sulu Sea.

BILLY: Jumpin'-jimony-gee-whiz, Jack.

JACK: Quiet, Billy, there's no time for that now. If we can get that uranium for our scientists at Hudson High, why, we'll learn how to use the atom. And we'll use it for the good of the whole world.

BILLY: I'll say!

Today, such dialogue seems merely camp. But for twenty years—in the 1930s and 1940s—it kept youngsters scrunched down beside a 4-foot laminated console radio. Not since has there been a world so totally in the possession of children. Their adventures listening to the great radio series were a private thing, untouched by adults, and their imaginations rode free—uncontained by the limitations of the television screen. "You had things your own way in Radioland," writes radio historian Jim Harmon in his new book, "The Great Radio Heroes."* "No one could tell you the monster was too gruesome, because you could make it as gruesome as you liked."

Much of Radioland's allure, says author Harmon, lay in the fact that many of the heroes were children. When arch-villain Ivan Shark used a ray machine to hypnotize a government em-

* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967.

ployee and extract top secrets, Captain Midnight jinxed him with the help of two Secret Squadron kids—Chuck and Joyce. And no one thought it odd that Jack Armstrong and Betty and Billy Fairfield could teach even Uncle Jim something when it came to fighting off giant gorillas and dealing with sorcerer Boo-Loo-La during a hunt for the ivory-rich Elephants' Graveyard.

Great Scott

Radio was a simple world of daydreams. Oh, to be invisible and have Lamont Cranston's chilling ability to "cloud men's minds." "Drop that branding iron, Mr. Darrow," echoed the sinister metallic voice. "Who was that?" asked the unstrung Darrow. "Hahahaaaah," came the spectral crescendo, "I am the Shadow." Or to have power far beyond that of mortal men. "Got to save the bridge," muttered Clark Kent, "and save Lois—not much time, good thing it's dark, no one can see Clark Kent change into SUPERMAN. Great Scott, the bridge is rocking like a pendulum . . ." Or to communicate with animals as did Sgt. Preston of the Yukon. Preston: "He's trying to tell me something. Yes, King—what is it boy?" Yukon King: "Grrrrrr, bowwow, rfff." Preston: "You saying you should go in my place? You're right, King!"

For the child, the mystique had many subtle ties. It might be the knowledge that the Green Hornet, alias Britt Reid, was the grandnephew of Texas Ranger John Reid, who was none other than the Lone Ranger. It could be the vague certainty that Tonto had more to him than the Lone Ranger, whom the faithful Indian companion found wounded in a massacre by the Butch Cavendish gang and nurtured back to health. Then, too, the old radio serials elicited literal involvement. By sending off a dime and box top to the magic address, listeners could sit in on code sessions of the Secret Squadron with their shiny Code-o-graphs, or take a tip from Tom Mix on how to find their way in the dark with his glowing signal arrowhead-compass-magnifying glass-siren-reduction lens.

Fair Play

Perhaps most memorable were the moral absolutes. The Lone Ranger never shot to kill. The Green Hornet used sleeping gas as his prime weapon. Jack Armstrong was apt to employ "the science of modern wrestling" to subdue an enemy. Fair play, justice, kindness, patriotism and honor ran through every script. "Billy," said Jack Armstrong one afternoon, "when I think of this country of

ours with millions of homes stretching from sea to sea and with everybody working and pulling together to have a nation where people can be free and do big, fine things—why, it makes me realize what a terribly important job we've got ahead."

Concludes author Harmon: "It was a time that will always seem a little better than it was."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. The Newsweek article suggests that the old radio programs of the 1930's and 1940's demanded more from the imagination than television does because the listener had to supply his own pictures. What do you think?*
- 2. This article is a brief sketch of a past social phenomenon. From the descriptions of the programs, would you say that American children have changed in the last thirty years? If so, how?*
- 3. It is said that if one saves anything long enough, it will come back into style. Old radio programs are stirring up interest across the country. What do you think accounts for this: nostalgia for a bygone era, the vogue of "camp," longing for absolutes in a relativistic time, American curiosity about the recent past?*

Radio: The Languishing Giant

Raymond Swing

The late Raymond Swing spent 27 years as a newspaperman and another 27 years as a broadcast journalist, most notably on the BBC program Commentary. The New Yorker once noted that during World War II, Swing's voice was the best-known American voice in the world after Franklin D. Roosevelt's. Here Swing considers what radio can do best and should be doing.

In this country, stock is being taken of electronic communications. This time it is without rapturous admiration for what they do so wondrously; the evaluation is registering in what respects these communications are failing. A revolution is being measured—a revolution that is not reaching its potential.

Radio and television in this country have grown up so far without social supervision. Radio matured first and reached its maximum value in World War II, when it helped make our nation, hitherto a collection of regions, into a unified whole. The war was deciding the survival of our way of life and through radio the whole country could learn about it as it developed, everyone doing so generally at the same time. It heard the story in diverse terms, but all of them sharpened the acute awareness of our national identity. We did not become less regional but we found ourselves, as regions can, to be a single community. We were not fully aware at the time that this was happening, and even now we hardly appreciate that it was happening and that radio was producing this result.

Then came television, which carried on the development of the community. But television, in growing up, smothered its social purposes in the surge for profits. This is what is now under exami-

nation. The social services of television and radio must be established and enlarged, which they cannot be while profit-making is the overriding consideration. That is the essence of the studies of the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Institute. Whether it is called educational, public, or cultural television, the meaning is the same. Commercial television cannot afford to stimulate and reflect community interests. Now some way is being sought to put the electronic revolution at the service of the community, to edify as well as entertain it.

Both the Ford and Carnegie studies focused on television, but that is not to say that TV has completely superseded radio. Presumably radio will be examined in due course. About as many American homes have radio as have television sets. The number of radio sets in the United States, in and out of homes, is in excess of 160,000,000, of which more than 50,000,000 are in cars. But radio no longer is building a national community as it did. It has been relegated to minor functions. Television surpasses it in glamor, excitement, and, indeed, in its occasional presentation of social problems. By now its national audience is tremendous, far greater for individual programs than radio ever mustered, a fact that turns out to be a hindrance to fulfilling its social duties, since social programs do not attract tremendous audiences. The hope is that cultural or public television can be independently financed, and that then it can perform its social functions far better than radio ever did. No doubt it can. The capabilities of the medium are almost limitless. But it would be a serious error to assume that television can do everything better than radio. If that were true, radio would not be languishing but dying, which it is not.

Take a quite minor example of radio's unique value, the blackout in the East two years ago [in November 1965]. During the darkness, transistor radios kept a considerable portion of the public informed of what was happening and what was not happening, and so prevented panic. This it would do in a time of real national calamity if electricity were cut off. Transistorized radio is making a major contribution in creating vast audiences throughout the world for short-wave broadcasts. Americans, not being listeners to short-wave broadcasts, have little idea of their importance. Already there are about 250,000,000 radio sets in use outside the American continent. Millions of them bring news and features to regions not served by newspapers. Millions of illiterates now receive world and local news, many of them with cheap transistor sets.

This is the prelude to the creation of a world community made up of regions in the same way the United States became a national

community. Indeed, it is the first time that the creation of a world community has become conceivable. It will take much more than short-wave radio to bring it about, more than radio plus television, which in time is sure to become universal. But the community cannot come into existence without them, and the impact of the electronic revolution should be measured in such terms. For many years radio will play a greater part than television in pulling the regions of the world together, and we need to utilize our own radio fully if we are to make our contribution to this growth.

Radio can do two things better than television. It can explain the news and it can produce superior music. Both of these functions require undistracted listening, the ear being the doorway to the mind. If the eye gets into the act, the mind's contribution is diluted. This is not true of news documentaries and opera. But news documentaries are not numerous enough to give the public a full and convincing study of what the news means. And opera is only one dish of the musical feast.

Television in its daily output makes little effort to explain the news. Even the vaunted half-hour programs of Huntley-Brinkley and Walter Cronkite do little more than verbalize headlines, with a taped feature now and then, all interspersed among the commercials. Even Eric Sevareid's daily essays, sober and suggestive though they are—and a credit to him and to television—cannot add greatly to the understanding of the news. They are not meant to, otherwise they would be given more time. Howard K. Smith, Charles Collingwood, Joseph C. Harsch, and Daniel Shore are among the experienced broadcasters who are quite capable of explaining the news. But a news commentary is a demanding challenge and cannot be done in gulps of two-and-a-half minutes. Television, in trying to create the illusion that it is conscientiously and ably reporting and interpreting the news, is guilty of one of the most glaring frauds of our time. The deceit is only partly due to the obsession with profits. It also results from a limitation of the medium. Just giving news interpretation more time will not completely solve the problem. When Elmer Davis had a quarter-hour on television, the sight of him reading his script became boring and the worth of his words was diminished. The five minutes he had on CBS radio were more effective and certainly more stimulating.

It should be obvious that the explanation of the news can be more competently done by radio. But radio today, having lost its monopoly, has also lost its stature. Twenty-five years ago there were dozens of commentators, each with his virtues and lack of them, each with a regular time and a faithful audience. Now only

one national commentator of excellence survives, Edward P. Morgan, and he is about to be whisked away for a two-year stint on public television. True, there are a number of so-called five-minute spots on national radio to which eminent broadcasters are assigned. Some of them speak at a regular time (generally inconvenient), so that listeners can acquire the habit of tuning them in. But the five minutes are really only three or two-and-a-half minutes of broadcasting and are invariably interrupted by incongruous commercials. Now and then a point in the news can be illuminated and this surely is better than nothing.

But these snippets are outrageously insufficient. If news is to be evaluated, the background from which it emanates must be explored. If national policy is to be adequately judged, the listener must know what the choices are before one of them is adopted. In theory at least, the listener should be familiar with the issues on which the public servant acts in his behalf. He cannot know them as well but he should know the gist of them. This ideal can only be approximated, and to do it fairly well is what gifted journalists strive to achieve. They must know the choices quite well, and must be able to simplify and translate them for the interested listener. That is one way to make self-government real, for it makes it possible to measure political leaders by their wisdom and dismiss them for the lack of it.

The American people today are not being given gifted explanation of the complexities of the world, which become more complex with stupefying swiftness. If radio had been grooming and selecting talented broadcasters, and giving them time and regularity, we should have known, for example, the full meaning of the choices in Vietnam at the time we were choosing a policy. With adequate news presentation we would not have had to watch on TV the Senate Foreign Relations Committee publicly floundering in its uncertainties. These broadcasts were like kindergarten classes for adults. The revolution in communications has made it possible for the thinking portion of the public to weigh the major policies which the President and the Congress have to work out and put into effect.

One reason why this has not come to pass is the failure of communications to keep pace with the swift changes here and abroad. We do know that the very survival of the human race depends on the mastery of nuclear energy by an intelligence equal to the ability that unleashed it. It also may depend on establishing controls of population growth. It is for statesmanship and communications to develop these abilities, and each is as vital as the

other. Men must understand the increasing complexities, and communications has to translate them into statements that the layman can follow. It was relatively easy to summon the words to explain the American Revolutionary War, the Civil War, or World Wars I and II. But the nuclear age added dimensions that the most erudite find obscure. The problems that now face governments must be solved by experts first of all, then by the politicians. The communicators must concurrently make them intelligible to the public. That is, the commentators have to be much, much better than they were twenty-five years ago. They have to know at least something about physics, economics, sociology, and international relations. They must be a different breed from scholars, for they must have the gift of tongues.

Here the natural field for operations is radio, not television. For one thing, it requires not only talented broadcasters but also listeners willing to think. And the size of thinking audiences is naturally relatively small. This, of course, is the main reason why television is shirking its job of keeping its public abreast of policies and events. It must have huge audiences. It assiduously measures the number of millions tuned in to a program and if there are too few the program is out. Radio, in World War II, did not charge advertisers tens of thousands of dollars per minute of network time. It could afford small audiences. The ratings of commentators were usually well below ten, that is, one-tenth of the sets operating at the time of the program. Most of them had ratings around six or below. But even a six rating, if it meant a dedicated audience and a thoughtful presentation, counted in the increase of public understanding. The size of thinking audiences is bound to be smaller than those in search of glamor and fun. This is a fact of life in the best of democracies. It is a fact that makes the explanation of the news unrewarding to television, so it is assigned to radio.

Unfortunately radio is not accepting the assignment. It has lost its authority and it is poorer than it used to be. And it has taken to aping television, competing with it as a news medium. Since television prospers on headline news, radio has become content with it. Since television interrupts the recital of news with commercials, radio breaks into its news reports with galling advertising. Radio is so crushed under the steam-roller of television's success that it has, for the present at least, lost a sense of its peculiar capabilities. This is due in part to radio, like television, being a commercial enterprise dependent on profits. So the redemption of radio for public service must lie in finding other revenue than advertising.

Both the Ford and Carnegie reports suggest other ways of raising money for public television. Public radio is as much entitled to the same consideration, and unless this is given, the American public will be deprived of one of the benefits which the electronic revolution has made available.

When it comes to music, the generalization holds that the countries which finance their orchestras and operas from licenses and other levies on listeners are culturally ahead of this country. We may broadcast a greater volume of radio music, but our radio does not support the musicians who produce it, and does not program its music with wisely exercised cultural authority. Some of our fine symphony orchestras are heard weekly on radio time provided by commercial sponsors. Our FM stations pour out floods of recorded music daily. It may appear as though radio were making its proper contribution to the national culture. But this is an illusion. We have in this country more competent young instrumentalists and singers than any other country in the world, the vast majority of them unable to lead a secure musical life. Only a few of our numerous orchestras pay respectable salaries the year round. Many young artists must go abroad to gain experience as professionals.

That is to say that radio, which has the largest musical audience, is not supporting music, only broadcasting it. A little support comes from sponsors, a greater part, such as it is, from foundations and funds raised locally. All told, it is not nearly enough to give livelihoods to our musicians. Foreign radio networks that employ their own musicians do more than simply broadcast music; they direct an active, creative, well-planned musical life that has raised the cultural level and enjoyment of their countries.

Two striking instances of this are in Britain and Japan. The BBC Orchestra is, of course, familiar to all FM listeners in this country. What is not realized is that there are, in fact, six symphony orchestras and four light orchestras supported full time by the BBC. Their activities have both deepened and extended musical appreciation for the classics; they have kept listeners abreast of modern trends. Inevitably such a powerful institution dominates the country's musical life and pretty well dictates what and who is to be heard. But the BBC has not erred on the side of nationalism. It has been intent on giving a hearing to living British composers, and has commissioned many new compositions annually. But it has allotted a remarkable amount of time to contemporary music of other countries. Several of the BBC symphony orchestras play regularly

in concert halls, so that concert audiences and homes are simultaneously served. Music heard live at home may not be acoustically better than recordings, but it has an element of immediacy and participation that recordings lack. Many hundreds of thousands of homes hear these concerts, so that in the course of a year the musical direction given by the BBC becomes musical reality for a substantial portion of the nation.

The story of NHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, is perhaps even more remarkable. It supports three excellent symphony orchestras and several light orchestras, and it has succeeded in less than a generation in giving much of the Japanese nation an understanding enjoyment of Western classical music. It has not neglected Japanese music in so doing. This broadening of the Japanese cultural outlook would have been impossible without radio and, in later years, without television. Now American conductors and soloists performing as guests in Japan come back astounded by what they have participated in. And in a profound way Japan has been changed from an isolated and seclusive region into a prospective leader of the world community now slowly being formed.

These two examples are not exceptional. Australia, with about the same population as Pennsylvania, has seven symphony orchestras supported by radio. Most of the finest orchestras in Europe today are supported full time by radio out of its levies on listeners, as are the operas.

Our own radio is now a haphazard, scatterbrained, and demoted participant in our national life. Once upon a time NBC made us notable with its own orchestra under Arturo Toscanini, and pioneered with its own opera company under the direction of Peter Herman Adler. CBS likewise supported a symphony orchestra, as did Mutual. These were private enterprise's most gallant gifts to American musical culture. The network orchestras are no more. The exigencies of earning profits have proved to be too demanding. So now we lag far behind many countries that are poorer in all other ways than we are.

It will not be enough to finance public television out of other than advertising revenues. If we are to exercise world leadership fully we would do well to finance radio as well. Then it can study and expound world news. Then it can both produce the best music and support our musicians. This country has contributed technically and financially more than any other to bring on the electronic revolution. It is good that it is stirring itself to reap more of the benefit from it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *What type of music is Swing talking about when he says that radio "can produce superior music"? What music do you think is "superior"? What do you listen to on the radio when you are at home or in the car?*

2. *Do you agree that live music on radio is more exciting than recordings? Why or why not? Can you think of any other factors besides television that have diminished the amount of live musical performances on radio?*

3. *Saturday Review, in a 1966 article, claimed that there were about 242 million radios in the United States—more radios than people. Do you think radio is living up to its vast possibilities as a communications medium?*

The Distant Message of the Transistor

Time Essay

This essay from Time Magazine discusses the worldwide influence of the transistor radio. The article is as interesting for the revealing assumptions it makes as it is for its content and style.

In terms of human lives, one of the most revolutionary inventions in this age of communication is the transistor radio. Those plangent little boxes, as large in sound as they are small in size, massaging the minds of ambling adolescents or committing public nuisances on train and bus and crowded beach, are hard to take seriously as a development in the tradition of the printing press. But in much the same way that printing opened up vast new possibilities to 15th century Europe, the transistor is letting in the world to hundreds of millions still isolated from the 20th century by geography, poverty and exploitation.

On the grassy Tanzanian plain a stately Masai herdsman strides behind his scrawny cattle, a lion-killing spear in one hand and a country-music-blaring Japanese transistor in the other. Transistors sway from the long necks of plodding camels deep in the Saudi desert, and from the horns of oxen plowing the furrows of Costa Rica. Radios are replacing the storytelling dervishes in the coffee houses of Turkey and Iran, and they are standard equipment in the tea stalls of Pakistan. Thailand's *klongs* echo to transistor music from peddlers' sampans; a visitor to an Ecuadorian *minga*, in which the Indians come together for communal road building, calculated that at least one tiny transistor radio was sounding its unavoidable message every 20 yards along the two-mile road.

Radio has long been the window on the world for isolated areas, but the cheapness and portability of the transistor set has

given the medium a new mobility and a new dimension—and a vast measure of influence. For Peru's 12 million inhabitants, there are more than 600 radio stations, and radio reaches the ears of virtually every man, woman and child in the country.* In Guatemala, six times as many people listen to radio as read newspapers. Black Africa, which had fewer than 400,000 radios in 1955, has at least 6,000,000 today. In rice field or rain forest, compound or kraal, the mere possession of a transistor radio confers status on its owner—who has perhaps gone hungry to make his down payment, and worked a little harder to keep up the installments. Thus, even before a sound emerges from it, the radio has exerted a social force. And once it is turned on, it is left on from morning to night, pouring out fuel for hopes and dreams. The possibilities that exist in this force are enormous. "If it were a question of getting the first road or the first radio into a village," says a Malaysian official, "I would choose radio any time."

Learning Through the Ears

The most important factor in radio's power is that it hurdles the literacy barrier. "I cannot read and I cannot write," says a Peruvian mining peon, in some wonder, "but I am learning through my ears." Highly conscious of what can be taught through hearing, a group of Peruvian businessmen, political leaders and educators founded and funded ERPA (Escuelas Radiofonicas Populares Americanas) with the aim of making listeners "better farmers, better cattlemen and better Peruvians." Operated as a nonprofit venture, ERPA is sending educational broadcasts to people who live as far as 15,000 ft. up in the Andes, offering organized study of such subjects as farming, health and home management, economics, religion, citizenship, sports and cooking.

Radio has become a major weapon in India's desperate campaigns to reduce the birth rate and increase the food supply. Still woefully short of transistors, the Indians have been experimenting with "Radio Rural Forums" in which clubs of 15 to 20 peasants listen twice a week to a program of advice and carry the word to others. Family-planning units have been set up at radio stations that can reach half the population. One effect is that, hearing birth control discussed on the radio, the people even in remote towns are losing their inhibitions and are willing to discuss the subject freely.

* In the U.S., 98.1% of all people over 18 listen to the radio, according to a survey made for CBS, and 71.1% of these really listen, rather than use it as background while they do something else.

Educational efforts are cropping up in many parts of the world, sometimes with odd turns. In Malawi, the most popular song on the radio is a swinging exhortation to cleanliness and health written by Jack Allison, 23, a Peace Corps medical assistant from Fort Myers, Fla. Title: *Brush Away the Flies from Your Children's Eyes*. Educational radio is only in the beginning phase in the developing countries. In most of them, commercial broadcasting has taken a strong lead and is in command. In Thailand the selling became so incessant that last year commercials were banned entirely. Even as the war rages on in South Viet Nam, that country's commercial radio is reaching into the most remote huts through the transistor. *Montagnard* kids walk through the hills whistling the tunes of singing commercials.

Take Heed

It is the ubiquitous commercial, with its suggestion of the richer, more varied urban life, that is widely blamed for one of the negative effects of the radio revolution: the escalation of expectations far beyond the capacity for their fulfillment. One ugly manifestation of this in developing lands is the increasing surge of rural people to the cities, encrusting urban areas with fetid shantytowns and filling the streets with ragged peasants looking for nonexistent jobs. Another less critical but still unhappy result is cultural loss. A Mexican family's evening once focused on singing to the guitar, but this is rapidly giving way to the disk jockey.

A far greater capacity for ill effects from the transistor age lies in the demagogic use of radio by political leaders. A significant case in point is Gamal Abdel Nasser. He is virtually a creature of radio, having used it both within Egypt and internationally ever since he came to power. His Radio Cairo reaches out to all the Arab world and far beyond. With the spread of the transistor, this reach became longer and deeper. It took only one broadcast over Radio Cairo during the Middle East war to convince most of the Arab world that the U.S. and Britain were giving Israel air cover, and many still believe it.

Fortunately, and perhaps surprisingly, such gullibility has its limits. Radio Peking sends the strongest signal on the air in Brazil. It is sharply audible in the deepest Amazon jungle. Yet the Brazilian peasant seems to be pragmatic enough, and possibly cynical enough, that he is hard to convince by propaganda. He simply wants to learn things that are useful to him. Another fortunate fact is that the Peking programs are dull. If the Communists were ca-

pable of making their shows more appealing, the results might be devastating.

As more and more transistor sets pour into the hills and jungles and ghettos of the world, hundreds of millions of lives will be lured by them into the turbulence of this midcentury, with its hankerings for anarchy, its hunger for more things and less labor. It is incalculably important that the developed nations of the world—and especially the U.S.—should take heed of the possibilities and perils that this prospect holds. The Voice of America, which in a way is tailoring its programming to the transistor listener—through short, bright bursts rather than long sequences—places its taped programs with local stations around the world. This is a start, but it is amply apparent that the Western democracies need to show increasing and intelligent concern. The distant message of the transistor is that the world is being opened into millions of ears, including those of the most isolated human beings, and what gets into their minds as a result will be of crucial importance.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. The Time essay calls the transistor radio “one of the most revolutionary inventions” of the age. To push this statement beyond Time’s meaning, do you think that the transistor radio could be a decisive factor in the revolutions that have been regularly occurring in the “developing nations”? Is radio, as McLuhan suggested, an effective method for stirring up the people?*
- 2. If one peers beneath the surface of this smoothly written essay, one can discern that its breezy style masks a rather slanted point of view. What are some of the values the essay assumes?*
- 3. Do you find this article chauvinistic? Is there really any difference between Radio Peking’s “propaganda,” which appeals to the “gullibility” of its listeners, and the Voice of America? Discuss.*

4

POPULAR MUSIC

Popular Music Since the 1920s: The Significance of Shifting Taste

H. F. Mooney

In this article H. F. Mooney, a professor of history at Central Connecticut State College, analyzes the basic themes, trends, and patterns of American popular music of the past fifty years.

People in the 1920s and 1930s, as before then, were rebellious in certain ways—rebellious sexually and artistically; and economically as well in the 1930s. Their rebellion was evidenced in a greater infusion of jazz into popular music, and in the growing popularity of black vocalists and instrumentalists; but it was limited by compromises with middle-class conventions. Most Negroes were little short of outcasts, too poor and too segregated from the mainstream of life to maximally influence taste. Black musicians were discriminated against in commercial dance orchestras, in radio and, at least until the 1930s, in recording sessions.¹ The prevailing taste in popular music was shaped by a white middle class, self-consciously hedonistic, relatively prosperous at a time when—particularly during the depression of the 1930s—income was so narrowly distributed as to prevent many people from acquiring even necessities. By 1932, the sale of phonograph records had dropped to 6 per cent of the volume of 1927, a year which was itself somewhat below the sales of the postwar months of 1919–20. Small record companies which had catered to the Negro market in the 1920s were wiped out, and

¹ Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans* (Chicago, 1962), p. 146.

the larger companies curtailed or eliminated their "race" (i.e., Negro performers') catalogues as the marginal Negro market was, as usual, the first to dip in any recession.² Consequently, the influence of Negro jazz was further minimized. Middle-class Negroes who desired to "come up," as they put it, during the 1930s and the 1940s responded to the smoothly harmonized arrangements of a white Jimmy Dorsey's watered-down jazz. Duke Ellington himself was influenced by Guy Lombardo's "sweetest music this side of heaven," and brought something of the sound of the Roosevelt Hotel ballroom to Harlem. Commercial orchestras of the period around 1920-50 followed more or less the "safe bet"—the aesthetic aspirations of the middle-class market—as did, indeed, most of the big Negro bands. They presented a music which, despite solo variations, emphasized precise, lush, ensemble harmony.³ The highest compliment most of the public could pay to big-band jazz between 1928 and 1950 was "symphonic" or "advanced." Orchestrations of bands like Boyd Raeburn's, Stan Kenton's, Claude Thornhill's or Elliot Lawrence's (out of which came some of the "cool" musicians of the 1950s) reflected the influence of Debussy, Ravel and the post-Impressionists.

Who were the middle class whose buying tastes thus helped create this trend? One hazards a reasonable guess that they were older than today's record buyers and on the whole higher on the socioeconomic scale. A sale of less than 20,000 records and a sheet music sale of 100,000 characterized a "hit" in the mid-1930s, as contrasted with a record sales of at least 500,000 and perhaps a million twenty years later.⁴ Buyers would have belonged largely among the fortunate minority with steady income. In days when one was lucky to have a job even at less than one hundred dollars a month, expenditure of seventy-five cents or even thirty-five cents for a record or a piece of sheet music was limited. Very

² Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph* (New York, 1955), pp. 191, 208, 246, 255; Leonard, p. 91.

³ Chadwick Hansen, "Social Influences on Jazz Style," *American Quarterly*, XII (Winter 1960), 501-3; N. Ertegun, "A Style and a Memory," *Record Changer*, VI (July 1947), 7; Leonard, pp. 124 ff. For Ellington's absorption of Lombardo's style, listen to "Creole Rhapsody" (1931), reprocessed in RCA Camden Album CAL 459, *Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club*.

⁴ Gelatt, p. 272; David Ewen, *Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley* (New York, 1964), p. 300; George Marek, "Oh, Dem Golden Records," and Jim Walsh, "Crosby's . . . Disk Sales," *Variety*, CCV (Jan. 9, 1957), 237, 239. Frank Sinatra recalls that Bing Crosby's popularity in the 1930s was centered among post-adolescents and even older adults. "My Life and My Music," *Life*, LVIII (Apr. 23, 1965), 99.

few, apparently, of the people who bought records desired truly Negro jazz—since, for one thing, even during past “prosperity” they had had so little opportunity to hear it. Radio networks, apprehensive over the reactions of sponsors and public, had exercised a ruthless veto over this “immoral” music. Although the censorship was aimed more at lyrics than orchestrations, it resulted in smoothing out roughness in both. The situation changed somewhat toward the end of the 1930s, when Benny Goodman, after having used the Negro Fletcher Henderson’s arrangements for several years, took advantage of increasing liberalism to hire such black artists as Teddy Wilson. But the times had not changed radically, Henderson was a middle-class Negro with remarkably sophisticated arrangements for that time; and even at that, Goodman carefully “polished” them so as to conform to the standards of European rendition.⁵ Teddy Wilson’s piano was urbane, light, deftly polished, as was that of the increasingly popular Count Basie. Soon Goodman hired the white Eddie Sauter to develop a rich, very “white” symphonic sound which caught public fancy so well that Sauter developed it further into the “progressive” sound of the highly acclaimed Sauter-Finnegan band of the early 1950s. Seen in retrospect, the very popular orchestral tendencies of the entire period between 1920 and 1950, from Paul Whiteman down to the progressive and “West Coast” movements which looked back at him with scorn, reflected the demand of the urban middle class for a highly refined, quasi-“classical” jazz.

Lyrics no less than orchestrations and vocal style reveal much about the music patrons of the 1930s. Songs like

*I get along without you very well—
Of course I do
—except perhaps in spring,
or when somebody laughs like you.*⁶

or

*Thanks for the memory
Of candle light and wine
Castles on the Rhine*

⁵ Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York, 1956), p. 144; Leonard, pp. 98–100, 122. Leonard’s second chapter brilliantly analyzes the tastes of the older middle class and the reasons for its opposition to jazz.

⁶ By Hoagy Carmichael. Copyright 1938, 1939 and renewed 1965, 1966 by Famous Music Corp. Lyrics reprinted by special permission of the copyright holder. A typical rendition was by Charlie Barnet’s orchestra on Bluebird 10119.

*The Parthenon, and moonlight on
 The Hudson river line . . .
 Remember the night that we parted
 When I got as high as a steeple
 But we were intelligent people
 —No tears, no fuss, Hooray for Us! ⁷*

were subtle and understated, aimed at an audience of some maturity and education—of at least a smattering of and respect for art history and Maxim Gorky. They were very popular before the lifting of the depression by 1941 and the deepening of the market in the war and postwar years modified the prevailing taste.

The intense, lovelorn ballad, while it lasted, reflected taste and life in the 1920s and especially the 1930s, when the purchasers of records were older and more middle-class—or middle-class aspiring—than those of the 1960s. As such they wanted more adult themes and an often timidly “respectable” jazz infused by a “sweet,” “harmonious” (or sometimes even “advanced,” dissonant), but always *European* tone. Teen-agers made up a relatively smaller segment of the population, and were not as affluent as later. Naturally, best-selling music dealt more fully with the problems of the post-adolescent consumer, as in “Mad About the Boy”:

*Lord knows I'm not a schoolgirl in the flurry of her first affair . . .
 I'm hardly sentimental . . .
 I've got to pay my rental and I can't afford
 To waste much time.⁸*

Thoroughly middle-class sentiments! Also in deference to middle-class ideas of “taste,” the best-selling records of the 1930s were frequently orchestrated like symphonic tone poems. Duke Ellington, and even a highly successful middle-of-the-road white band

⁷ By Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger. Copyright 1937, renewed 1964, by Paramount Music Corp. Lyrics reprinted by special permission of the copyright holder. An original recording has been reprocessed on RCA Camden CA (S) 872e, *Memorable Vocal Performances With the Benny Goodman Orchestra*.

⁸ Copyright 1935, 1962, by Chappell, Inc. Lyrics quoted by special permission of the copyright holder. One of the top eighty or so best sellers in the United States in 1935. See Sigmund Spaeth, *History of Popular Music in America* (New York, 1948), p. 648.

like Hal Kemp's, attempted to infuse Delius into ballad fox trots.⁹ The popular tastemakers of the 1930s appear as somewhat cautious, compromising, middle-class young adults experimenting gingerly with jazz but tempering it with "highbrow" innovations or just sweetly pretty styling.

This ambivalent generation of 1920–50, which supported ambivalent orchestras like that of Glenn Miller, would have its cake and eat it too. A generation of transition, facing both ways, it compromised between the gentility of the Victorian parlor and the libidinalism of the beatnik's pad. If the popular music of its time appealed strongly to young women, then the personality of the girl who bought the music is well expressed therein. The middle-class young woman of the 1920s and the 1930s who had broken her home ties to take a job and an apartment in the city lived in the hothouse of a pseudo-Freudian romanticism. The theme song of the day was, "Love, Your Magic Spell Is Everywhere." And, said the pseudo-Freudian (perhaps sincerely, perhaps just to give the girl the latest "line"), "Love is not love, is not truly, healthily, wholly a giving and receiving, without Sexual Expression." So the girls in their little apartments, with their radios and record players, pulsed with desire unrecognized, unacknowledgeable or unfelt by the sheltered girls of the 1880s. Susceptible and vulnerable, increasingly without real religious convictions, they awaited the Great Experience and Fulfillment of Love (or Sex), listened in glaze-eyed anticipation to songs like "I Surrender, Dear." Singers, catering to the mood, moaned with frustration, "Blue Evening (After a Lonely Day)." There was the frustration of balked expectations; there was also the painful anxiety, the fear of losing love—"How Long Will It Last?" "Why Can't This Night Go On Forever, Why Must the Morning Find You

⁹ See liner notes on RCA Camden Album 811, *Great Bands of Our Times*. The 1930s emerge as the most "intellectual" period in American popular music. The sales appeal of such songs as "Tender Is the Night" and "Moon and Sixpence" was evidently to be enhanced by the titles of Fitzgerald's and Maugham's then new novels. In the late 1930s and early 1940s were concentrated many such adaptations of highbrow music as "Reverie," from Debussy; "Pavanne," from Ravel; "June on the Isle of May," from Tchaikowsky's *Andante Cantabile*; and Victor Herbert's "Yesterthoughts" and "Indian Summer." Tchaikowsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in B Flat* furnished "Tonite We Love," and his waltz theme from the *Pathetique* emerged as "The Night Is Filled With Music," recorded like the others, as a slow, dreamy fox trot ballad with only the slightest pulsation of the bass fiddle and a light tapping of the cymbal or wire brushing of the drum to accent the rhythm.

Gone?");¹⁰ and finally, the denouement, the last bitter dregs of what had turned out to be mere sex without love—the brushoff, the awakening, the sobbing; but still so often the assertion that love had redeemed the whole sordid affair, as in Libby Holman's number, "I'm Doing What I'm Doing for Love,"¹¹ and in Grace Hayes's 1930 recording of "My Lover."

Such ballads reveal the interwar mood. In the 1920s and 1930s middle-class girls were not prone to "play around" for the fleshly joy of it. Despite an increasingly rebellious promiscuity, the code was still tinged with the ideals of monogamous love—that is, sex could be truly good and beautiful, truly redeemed, only if part of a romantic love affair. If not chastity, if not marriage, there must be Love. And this love must be, as in a marriage, monogamous, exclusive, rather than "cheap," promiscuous. In the words of the song from Sigmund Romberg's operetta *Desert Song* (1926): "One Alone." In short, something of Victorian sentiments remained. Love was not to be treated casually. One might defy the Victorian double standard, but must uphold Victorian courtly fidelity. Such songs compromised in lyrics, orchestration and vocal rendition between the sacred and the profane, the "high class" and the low-down, the refined and the sensual. They approached Sex obliquely—"Tonight Is Mine," "One Night of Love." The raw blues feeling underlying a ballad like Ruth Etting's "What Wouldn't I Do for That Man?" was refined by a soft vocal, a limp saxophone, violin and piano accompaniment.¹² Apparently girls who wanted love, both sacred and profane, were attracted toward a music appropriately ambivalent.

By 1960 the climate had changed. One reason for the shifting taste was a change in the music business. By 1941, the virtual monopoly of the ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, organized in 1914), which had practically protected New York's ascendancy in the music market, was broken by legal judgment. The consequent opening of broadcasting and recording channels to non-ASCAP composers and publishers, many of them unknowns outside the conventional music establishment of Tin Pan Alley and catering to a wider

¹⁰ An elegant 1932 recording of the latter is reprocessed on RCA Vintage LPV 504, *The Great Isham Jones*.

¹¹ Recorded on Brunswick 4459. An original pressing is in the Archives, Stanford University Music Library.

¹² The original recording, along with others of the period and genre, is reprocessed in Columbia Album C3 L35, *The Original Sound of the Twenties*.

public of newly affluent people—Negroes, workers who had migrated from rural areas, especially in the Southeast and Midwest to urban war jobs—marked the end of an era of increasingly urbane New York composers. These had been heavily Jewish. In 1930, for example, out of the forty-one hits listed in Sigmund Spaeth's *History of Popular Music in America*, seventeen were written by composers and/or lyricists with names *recognizably* Jewish.¹³ Especially after 1945, however, the dispersal of composing and publishing throughout the nation tended to diminish their influence at a time when middle-class values had been weakened by war. Such New York Jews as Harold Arlen, George and Ira Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Vernon Duke (né Dukelsky), Herman Hupfeld and Vincent Youmans had produced a pensive music of finesse and polish, often using minor strains in the cantorial tradition. Their melodic concepts influenced “white” jazz instrumentalists—themselves frequently Jewish—flowing with increasing facility through plaintive but delicately restrained saxophones from Benny Krueger in the early 1920s through Frank Trumbauer to Stan Getz; and through the arabesque clarinets of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. Until midcentury, immigrant and other minority groups, particularly in New York City, who as they rose became so influential in popular music, embraced standards still admired by many of the American middle class and by a more middle-class-aspiring lower class. The years 1920–50 were still much closer than our own to traditional WASP values. This is one reason why it was so difficult for Negro jazz to make greater headway. Aspiring Negro artists, jazz as well as nonjazz—Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Ellington, Henderson—themselves rejected much of the raw, gutty blues of an embarrassing past in favor of a concert style. The New York Jew and Negro, raised in the early years of the century—especially before Harlem became so largely a slum for ex-field hands from the South—were still awfully respectful of what some of their grandchildren would later call the “square” or “ofay” world of the symphony, of refinement and gentility. Indeed, there is evidence that even the more contemptuous Negroes of the 1920s adopted the “sweet” tones of pseudo-“classical” middle-class music because they were determined to beat the white man on his own grounds as a performer.¹⁴ Regardless of their motives and outlooks, songwriters and orchestrators, white and black, adapted the Negro idiom to the gentility of their

¹³ Pp. 641–42.

¹⁴ Hansen, pp. 496, 500.

aspirations and/or to the tastes of the white middle class, who after all purchased so many leisure-time products, including music. It may have been true that both Negro and Jew had a certain common sense of alienation, a common bitterness or sadness, and a mutual empathy; but since they also both admired the culture of the Establishment whose doors they were forcing, their music, however, sad, alienated or bitter, had nevertheless passed through a "refining" process. Excellent examples of this are, again, Benny Goodman's music; and such performances as Duke Ellington's 1940 recording of Harold Arlen's "Stormy Weather," with Ivy Anderson's subdued (by 1960 standards) vocal.¹⁵ But, encouraged by the breakdown of ASCAP's hegemony and by prosperous new markets among formerly depressed and minority groups, rival publishing and recording companies had arisen by 1950 in many other, frequently less sophisticated localities—the Negro slums of Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Oakland and the rural-music center at Nashville, Tennessee, where black and country music fused into Roy Orbison's "rockabilly" or "folk-rock." Many of the typical million-plus sellers in the 1950s and early 1960s were written, published and/or recorded in such new centers. From Louisville, Kentucky, came "Slow Poke." From Nashville, Patti Page and "Tennessee Waltz"; Jimmy Dean's "Big Bad John"; Hank Williams' "Cold Cold Heart" and "Jumbalaya"; "Your Cheatin' Heart"; "Half as Much"; and the Everly Brothers' "Bird Dog." "Rose and a Baby Ruth" came from Chapel Hill, North Carolina; "This Old House" from Arcadia, California. Such early rock numbers as "Rock Around the Clock" and "A Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," originated in Philadelphia,¹⁶ later, from the Portland, Oregon, area came "Looie, Looie, Looie, Ya, Ya, Ya."

These titles amply suggest a trend. There were no references to the Russian drama, to Penthouse Serenades, to Park Avenue Fantasies, Stairways to the Stars or to the Parthenon. The nation was apparently too prosperous to glamorize wealth and highlife, and too juvenile, too aggressively lowbrow or pseudo-lowbrow to admire "polished" or high-flown songs: many lower-class and minority-group high school students now *hated* the middle-class culture which they felt was being forced on them. Then too, cold war nationalism may have stimulated a marked taste for tunes with a folksy, grass-roots flavor. True, middlebrow holdouts for

¹⁵ Columbia 35556.

¹⁶ Ewen, pp. 328–29.

the old "culture" might in the early 1950s cling to Mantovani's "Shimmering Strings," but a decade later, even the worst "squares" had shifted to the Tijuana Brass, which in its own banal way leaned more to the Big Beat of the 1960s than toward the pseudo-"classic" modulations of the early 1940s. If any doubt remains about a change in mood between 1941 and 1966, the contrast between Herb Alpert and Gene Krupa's recordings of "Flamingo" tells the story.¹⁷ During the period 1940-60, not only had many of the urban middle class become antibourgeois themselves, but also many buyers now came from newly prosperous segments of the population less influenced by WASP standards to begin with. Minority groups who shared in rising affluence and leisure were able in larger numbers to demand *their* kind of music. Negroes in particular, thronging from the rural South into Northern cities, intensified a demand for the gospel shouts and rough-edged blues which helped change the tone of urban popular music. Even the poorer among them, filled with a new sense of pride, were aware of grievances, bitter against whites, anxious to support Negro artists and Negro music. By 1960 they were at least prosperous enough, and sufficiently concentrated in cities, to nourish a demand for a self-consciously "black" music performed by black entertainers. Negroes had become purveyors of and consumers of a musical product which aggressively emphasized their "roots." An active and even violent black protest supported within and outside the Negro minority was reflected in the scorching heat, the volume, the drive, the guttiness, the slurred tones of "soul" or "roots" or "funky" jazz, as well as in rock-and-roll and in gospel shouts.¹⁸

Such music, which blacks in particular created, appealed to youth generally by 1960. Protest, rebellion, the muscular-visceral approach to music, the dance, to life itself, is of course typical of the adolescent and the very young adult at any time. By the later 1950s, youngsters were a relatively larger segment of the population than ever before in the twentieth century. They were

¹⁷ Krupa's 1941 record is Okeh 6120. An original pressing is in the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound of the New York City Public Library.

¹⁸ Archie Shepp, tenor saxophonist with the late John Coltrane's 1963-66 group, tended to identify his music with the struggles of his black people, in particular with Black Nationalism, according to Martin Williams, "The Problematic Mr. Shepp," *Saturday Review*, XLIX (Nov. 12, 1966), 90.

also more prosperous than before as their parents' earnings and their own job opportunities increased. They were now catered to as consumers. Although relatively prosperous, they appeared to lack a sense of identification with the adult world. They were restlessly seeking status, pleasure, self-expression, sometimes an answer to the problems of the world. Such seeking brought them into conflict with the adult world. They were almost a minority group of their own. In 1959, Arnold Shaw found the major market for popular music to lie between the ages of nine or ten and seventeen or eighteen, among youngsters who were much less demanding of intricacy, restraint, nuance or polish than were a previous generation of older buyers.¹⁹ These were the youth who "bopped" to the Big Beat of rock-and-roll, and who sang "Yakety Yak," a flippant take-off on parental discipline. Such lyrics as could be heard in the gregarious din of vocal groups of the late 1950s and early 1960s were often mindlessly extroverted expressions of the gang—"Yeah, yeah, yeah"—the lyrical equivalent of the teenagers' private street corner or drive-in banter. Nobody who bought "Rose and a Baby Ruth," one of the more tender and romantic songs of 1957, seemed to laugh at its bathos, so appropriate was it to a pre-adolescent taste—the same taste which brought out the little sensation seekers to gape at *Teen-Agers From Outer Space*. The somber, heavily orchestrated, introspective ballads of the young adults of the 1930s were passing out of the major trend.

So much for the obvious. The trend was away from suavity, however, not only in this music for children, but also to an extent in the jazz which had become a cult of many intellectuals. To a certain degree, jazz is always visceral; and to a certain degree, the popularity of visceral music among both adolescents and rebellious intellectuals is nothing new in the twentieth century—it has been, in fact, a long-range trend since the ragtime of the 1890s. But modifications in jazz as well as popular music after around 1954 appear significant, coming as they did at the height of the extremely irrationalist "white Negro" or "beatnik" movement among young writers. The anti-intellectual intellectuals followed Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac, and then Norman Brown and Timothy Leary, into the outer reaches of thrill or even violence. By 1960, a searingly intense "hard bop" or "soul music" was crowding the chamber-music sound of the post-progressive cool or West Coast jazz. To be truly arty in the early 1960s, one

¹⁹ "Mr. Harper's After Hours," *Harper's*, CCXVIII (May, 1959), 82.

had to be glandular.²⁰ Taste ran to a big, honking, stomping, ear-splitting saxophone, heavier beat, shrieking revival shouts, recordings bursting with the din of screaming teen-age togetherness. The unobtrusive Maxine Sullivan and Connie Boswell of the 1930s; the Modernaires, Pied Pipers, Jo Stafford, Margaret Whiting, Mel Torme and June Christy of the "slick" 1940s; the husky-dreamy Julie London and Johnny Mathis, the Hilos and the Honey Dreamers and the Four Freshmen and other richly-chorded precision groups who held their popularity well into the 1950s despite a reversal in taste—all these were by 1960 paled by the church revival mood of the Clara Ward singers, Mahalia Jackson, Timi Yuro; or by the often inarticulate shouts of the transistor-set favorites—the Supremes, the Orlons. Popular music, often used as a psychedelic experience, became a "happening," a numbing bombardment of the auditory nerves. On whatever cultural level one might look, to Rojack of the *American Dream* or to James Bond, there must be rawness, constant stimulation. A primitive emotionalism (nonsentimental) must make no compromises with WASPishness in life, literature, music. The "well-adjusted," modal personality, the middle-class "average guy," was Out. Bing Crosby or Perry Como's accommodating, casual pleasantness was anathema; sweat and suffering made an artist popular in the early 1960s. He must, it would appear from the record jackets and liner notes, bear the stigma—or the stigmata, really, in the new religion of the Holy Barbarians—of Alienation from a crucifical Society—a Society composed of Crosbys and Comos with their casual tweeds and pipes and not-so-casual homes in Belair, their golf matches and stables of horses. Crosby and Como were passé in a period which sang, "Here's to the Losers." Perhaps the first indication of the change had been Johnny Ray's "Cry" in 1951. At any rate, music of the sort young people felt WASPs over thirty would sing, compose or listen to, went into a decline. The liner blurbs, intended to sell records at first sight, spoke less of the home and family of the performer than of his "searchings," his bitterness, his inability or refusal to accommodate to the Establishment, his mental and/or physical handicaps or deviations,

²⁰ Thus, tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, once acclaimed in 1955 as "subtle" (liner notes of NorGran Album NGN 1032, *West Coast Jazz*) was acclaimed in liner notes of 1963 as "having a more mature emotionalism . . . a gutsy maleness" (Verve Album V/V6-8545, *Getz-Gilberto*). In the early 1960s it was indeed impossible to be *subtly* male—one must wear horsehide boots—or *subtly* feminine—one must wear barbaric globs of eye make-up and great varnished swirls and swatches of hair.

his daemonic immersion in environment-obliterating alcohol, sex or drugs. Such a recitation might in whole or in part apply to many of the folk heroes, or antiheroes (musical and nonmusical) of the 1960s—Ray Charles, Billie Holiday, Parker, Mailer and his Rojack, Brendan Behan, Bob Dylan, Dylan Thomas (did the identification of the folksinger's family name with the given name of the early-deceased alcoholic poet stimulate his popularity?). The stale remnants of the placid "boy-and-girl-next-door" singers of the 1930s could hardly compete with the lacerated, gorgeously uninhibited wailing of Ray Charles—blind, drug-addicted, low class, black, and—needless to say, to the old middle class, thoroughly disreputable—with his "Get Your Buddy, and Go Get Stoned." A period in which the three leading playwrights were said to be militantly if obliquely homosexual in their work and, partly because of this, were extremely popular; a period, in short, of rising nonconformity, deviation and some sympathy for minorities, would find in Charles a welcome personification of the Outcast. The years of James Baldwin and LeRoi (*The Toilet*) Jones heard the violently surging saxophonic "sheets of sound" of John Coltrane, the explosive reed of Ornette Coleman. The suave black singers of the 1940s and earlier 1950s who had accommodated to the white hotel-and-club world—Billy Eckstine, Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald (now much too poised and benignly self-possessed) were not much imitated among younger singers—a sure sign of obsolescence. Instead, Dinah Washington, Della Reese, Roy Hamilton, Brook Benton and Hank Ballard set the trend for the Chubby Checkers, Don Covays, Dee Dee Sharps and Sugar Pie Depintos who sang ever more intensely "black." All were Negro. In quantity as well as in vocal quality, singers were now substantially—and proudly—black. Into the 1950s most singers had been white, and on the whole, rather tepid crooners. By the mid-1960s Petula Clark, one of the few top white singers, sang "soul" like blacks, which meant a full-throated openly emotional delivery such as few white or black singers had demonstrated in the past. Indeed, it had not been as greatly demanded in the past. But by 1960 the old stiff-upper-lip Calvinist distrust of emotional expression had softened more than ever before. The grim lips relaxed and opened. Songs were shouted. The older ideal of the clean-cut crew-cut Nordic hero, silently self-controlled, was shrinking, along with the phase of conformity expressed in 1954's "Counting My Blessings." Music, like the film, documents a resurgent rebellion in the mid-1950s. James Dean, Elvis Presley, Sal Mineo—all were white, to be sure, but, like Mailer's "white

Negro," dropouts from the WASP world who foreshadowed the popularity of Ray Charles's "Crying Time." Here was a *man* sobbing, and he was a glamorous youth hero on account of it. And unlike his less evocative predecessor, Johnny Ray, he was black.

By the 1960s, then, the bland "white" vocal was passé. And so was the polished "white" orchestration. The typical rock group of the late 1950s and early 1960s—amplified guitars, percussion, saxophone—was designed for rhythm and individual variations rather than for tone color. It dispensed with *fortissimo-pianissimo* modulations and played one way—loud. Never had such primitive jazz been exploited with such wide success among whites as well as Negroes. Even the more advanced jazz of the 1960s, which utilized the intricate techniques and rhythmic complexities of the bop revolution, also emphasized beat, solo variations and rhythmic experiment more than harmonics and modulation. Such a trend reflected the Negro's pride in his own roots, his "funky" contempt for white aesthetic standards; and also appeared to indicate that many whites as well, ashamed of or resentful of WASPishness, were seeking in music what some of them sought in LSD, a piling up of new sensation upon sensation to smash their Square prison.²¹

It would of course be naïve to call all this "new." Change, rebellion, the distortion or smashing of old forms, has long been a part of American culture. Change is the rule. Much of the change of 1960 was really a continuation of trends begun at least by the 1890s—the elevation of the once-degraded, the degradation of the once-elevated, the rebellion against older values. *Plus ça change, plus c'est le même chose*. The intellectual and plebeian revolt against the middle class had by 1960 turned full blast against the generation of 1920–50, themselves once rebels of a sort now passé. The rejection of the big, white-stylized, highly arranged "swing" orchestra (once thought to be so untrammelled!) in favor of smaller, cruder groups; indeed, in favor of one singer and his guitar—the epitome of individualism—came when youth was attracted by the anarchism of Paul Goodman. Joan Baez's

²¹ From liner notes by LeRoi Jones for Impulse Album A50, *Coltrane Live at Birdland* (1963): "The long tag of 'Afro-Blue,' with Elvin [Jones, drummer] thrashing and cursing beneath Trane's line, is unbelievable. Beautiful has nothing to do with it, but it is (I got up and danced while writing these notes, screaming at Elvin to cool it). . . . The crashing cymbals, bombarded tom-toms . . . [are] like the wild pulse of all living." Regarding another selection in the album, called "Alabama," he wrote: "If that real Alabama was the catalyst, more power to it, and may it be this beautiful, even in its destruction." Sorel had Arrived.

folksinging could be seen as a rebellion against the kind of society which had produced the Big Bands of the previous generation, where musicians had been strait-jacketed into an Organization formula aimed at profits more than freedom, improvisation, "soul."²² If youth in the 1960s often tended to reject large organizations, the depersonalized, self-effacing vocalists who in the 1930s and 1940s had been merely components of the big orchestras were now scarcely heard among the folk and church-revival singers.

The immense popularity of the church-revival mood also suggested a return to or reformulation of "religion." Youth, never more millenarian than in the early 1960s, had rediscovered mysticism, the shared but intensely individual purification of the psyche through hallucinogenic "trips," which somehow suggested the transports of the old tent meeting. To those who, like Dr. Timothy Leary, searched for a transcendental "spiritual discovery," the soul singing of Sister Odetta could fill a need unsatisfied by delicate secular love ballads. Young people bored by what one critic called the "dessicated" cool jazz of the 1950s bought John Coltrane's best-selling album, *A Love Supreme* (Impulse A/AS 77), whose liner notes consisted of Coltrane's devotional poetry.²³

The love music of the 1960s, sacred or profane, was not much like that of a previous generation. Of course, in all ages men sing of love, and so they did in the 1960s, sometimes with a lachrymose sentimentality which in itself catered to a different level of taste than did many of the brittle ballads of the 1930s. Nevertheless, sentimental love songs, lachrymose or otherwise, declined in popularity. Love lyrics were often so hopelessly submerged in and mangled by arrangements aimed primarily at rhythmic effect that observers could easily conclude that the love song as they remembered it had all but disappeared.²⁴ Certainly boys didn't worship girls in such 1942-style effusions as "You

²² According to Miss Baez, her simple vocal-with-guitar rejected the "commercial." "The Folk Girls," *Time*, LXXIX (June 1, 1962), 40.

²³ A college student editor, Peter B. Riley, notes that the "tough" sound of such groups as the Butterfield Blues Band (called the "Marat/Sade of Blues") "seems to act on some people in the manner of an aural LSD." *Recorder* (Central Connecticut State College), Feb. 28, 1967, 3:2. Similarly, a review of another John Coltrane devotional album, *Meditations*, says "I feel this. . . . It opens up a part of myself that is tightly closed. Seldom recognized emotions well up and sear my consciousness." Don DeMicheal in *Downbeat*, XXXIII (Dec. 1, 1966), 28.

²⁴ See for example, Tom Prideaux, "Whatever Happened to Love Songs?" *Life*, LXI (Sept. 16, 1966), 61-62.

Are a Poem Set to Music." Nor did girls much attempt to promote this sort of veneration. If one heard fewer "pretty songs" one saw fewer girls in "pretty dresses," even on Sundays. A sexually more casual generation appeared to reject the tradition of chivalric *amour*. They might be aggressively sensuous and sensual, but casually so, and not with the great daintiness or delicacy which had once characterized days of a stronger double standard and sense of sin. They were more direct and companionate in the mini-dress, car-coat-and-Levis era. God's death, or at least the weakening of Pauline concepts of deity, evidently meant you could junk much of your Platonism and let yourself go.

The noticeable dip in the popularity of the exclusive type of love song among many younger buyers cannot be traced to any one simple cause. A decline in traditional religion probably played a part. If God were not dead, He was, at least to the "hip" culture, a God created in man's image, a "swinger" to be found in "gay" bars and in jazz-happening services. As such, He did not demand chaste refinement in music. His demands of human nature were few, but He did demand of his flower children a communal love rather than middle-class monogamy. At any rate, many youths, whether "hip" or not, and particularly among the middle class, caught the spirit. They desired greater sexual freedom. They rejected the (to them) hypocritical compromises, the puritanical indirection, and often the exclusiveness as well, of many of the older ballads. For them, the egocentric, monogamous lyrics, the bourgeois-plushy orchestrations of even the passionate "Body and Soul" sort of thing was, as they would put it, "beside the point." The older love song, even the more sensual, no longer caught on. After all, among many students, particularly in the first half of the 1960s, sexual revolt was but part of a much wider rejection of middle-class mores and prejudices. It was part of a fervent attempt to regenerate man. Youthful energies flowed out toward social reconstruction—"We Shall Overcome"—or into the purification of or expansion of the individual psyche through hallucinogens—"Puff, the Magic Dragon," "The Trip." Such youth stressed the one-ness of mankind, the overcoming of the crippling guilt feelings imposed by an artificial Establishment. They opposed the middle-class mores of their parents, often attributing these to the egocentricity of Western civilization; and some turned to their version of a pantheistic Buddhism as a cure for the ills of the West. (Thus the "acid rock" emanating from San Francisco's Hashbury was infused with the raga of an oriental culture considered beatific by the hippies.) The more activist youth in the

1960s, puritanical hedonists or hedonistic Puritans who equated sensual pleasure (widely diffused) and self-expression with cosmic betterment, saw in love not a misty-eyed, pallid, etherealized retreat from the world but a means of social regeneration. (At least so went the gospel of Lawrence Lipton's *Erotic Revolution*.) These outlooks hardly promoted the popularity of such old musical standards as "When Your Lover Has Gone." All compromise with artificial bourgeois social and sexual barriers must go—among these compromises, the romantic ballad of the past. If the middle-class record purchasers of the previous generation had stressed monogamy within or without marriage, the new, young communalists rejected songs which sentimentally glorified one girl. A new world could not be built upon middle-class hypocrisy, possessiveness, exclusiveness. This dislike of the middle class by the self-styled "neo-Marxists" contributed to the decline of the old-style love song.²⁵

The youth culture we have been describing, though it did help shape a trend away from the old ballads, was only a minority of the market. However noisily influential, it is doubtful that its outlook totally determined popular trends. It just so happened that other, larger segments of the market were also not enthusiastic middle-class devotees of the old monogamous love ballad. Perhaps one of the most potent changers of taste was the horde of highly permissive and hedonistic lower classes entering the record market. These buyers, along with the less numerous upper-middle-class young rebels, weakened the hold of the romantic, oblique, sublimated "If I Loved You" approach toward love, taking it out of the sphere of the angels and pulling it down toward earth. (1955's "Earth Angel" was a step along the way.) Trends in

²⁵ Richard Goldstein's article on the "Flower Children" among the middle class, in the *Denver Post Contemporary* section, June 18, 1967, 12, 21, points up the generalized ideal of love. Such youth of course could have plenty of fun shocking the oldsters with their Four Letter Word Movement, all for a good cause. Two of the "frank" folksongs popular in the early 1960s were at least straightforward enough to ruffle the remaining hairs on a middle-class pate—especially if sung by girls of the rising generation: i.e., "Keep Her Good and Drunk and Goozy" and "Sally Let Your Bangs Hang Down," sung respectively by Gibson and Camp and by Dian and the Greenbrier Boys:

*Now we know what Sally's got
Makes a man think she's so hot
Sally let your bangs hang down.*

(from Crestview Album CRS 7807, *The Original Hootenanny*). This was hardly Norman Burroughs, but neither was it Irving Berlin or Cole Porter.

music since around 1955 especially have appeared to bear out the assumptions of sociologists, and of Professor Hayakawa's invaluable work on jazz,²⁶ that the working class generally, and especially the black lower class, lack the WASPish inhibitions which are apt to generate genteelly romantic, melancholy, frustrated songs. In short, they gratify themselves without making a cosmic issue out of it. By 1955 a best-selling rock number, "Honey Love," reduced the description of desire to three little words—not "I Love You," but "I Want It." In contrast, fifteen years previously, Ray Eberle had softly vocalized, over Glenn Miller's Debussyesque background, the Lawrence-Shapiro ballad ["I Recall a Story of Love in All Its Glory."] . . . Boys and girls who take sexual freedom for granted would hardly be as captivated by such songs as would be the more frustrated. They would be just as interested in motorcycling and, the boys at least, in hot-rodding; finding in these activities something of the same muscular enthusiasm and visceral excitement involved in their sexual relations. Indeed, an infusion of prosperous, rather unsentimental lower-class leather boys into the record market—the kind who like to be out with their buddies Sunday afternoons—may have helped create the hot-rod music craze of the early 1960s.

Thus, lower-class youth unassimilated by middle-class culture joined with middle-class rebels against middle-class culture to alter the tone of American popular music. To the lower class, sex was nothing to moan over or sing pretty little sad poems about. To the crusading middle-class student rebels it was something which must be handled robustly, erotically, "honestly," rather than euphemized or sublimated out of all recognition as their parents had frequently done. Middle-class rebel and lower-class "swinger"; hippy and minority groups had a common distaste for pretty songs. The folk music of youth in the 1960s could hardly follow schoolmarmish rules of rhyme or the meter of Victorian poetry. Rejecting the formulae of the classroom, more and more lyrics were sung—or spoken—free style, like streetcorner or coffee-house conversation.

If monogamous romantic love was out in the music of the young and many of the would-be-young, *Agapé* was in. By 1964, the tone of Erich Fromm, Martin Buber and Paul Goodman pervaded even a Broadway hit musical, *Funny Girl*. Barbra Streisand

²⁶ For example, "Popular Songs versus the Facts of Life," *ETC: A General Review of Semantics*, XII (Winter 1955), 83–95.

(first name unconventionally spelled, last name obviously minority group; exotic-ugly non-Anglo face; muscular voice throbbing with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer; personality problems²⁷—how could she have failed?) sang “People Who Need People Are the Luckiest People in the World.” Two years later, in similar Tennessee Williams spirit, Simon and Garfunkel (names which would have been anglicized by any sane public-relations man in 1930, but only by an insane one in 1966) popularized their ironic, “I Am a Rock, I Am an Island.” The neo-proletarian Togetherness, like the rough-edged songs and singers, was appropriate to the jeans and horsehide boots of the young “neo-Marxists.” This was still romanticism, of course, but it was not “bourgeois” prettiness. The point is that the “tastefully” orchestrated romantic love ballad had such severe competition that it was much less in evidence.²⁸ As middle-class youth conceived of the oneness of mankind and refurbished the vision of the noble savage, they gravitated toward the music of people considered inferior by their parents, by all who still aspired to older middle-class standards. Thus, the tastes of the young did not run heavily to “pretty” love ballads. With their fondness for the old films of James Dean and Marlon Brando and Humphrey (“gentle-tough guy”) Bogart, they liked Roger Miller’s “King of the Road.”

This brings us back to a basic generalization. Despite eddies and cross currents always present in the streams of taste, the outstanding trend in American popular music in the 1950s and the earlier 1960s was a rejection of prettiness, overrefinement, academic orchestration and lyrics, smoothness, even subtlety. Although by 1965 a few of the lyrics written for the recently expanded college market, like “I Am a Rock,” sensitively articulated the preoccupations of young adults, many lyrics, as well as most orchestrations, of the late 1950s and early 1960s were crude. Classicism, polish, formal discipline, carefully contrived arrangements, adherence to accepted rules in music, as in literature and art—these were likely to be anathematized even by many intellectuals for coldness, lack of spontaneity or “hypocrisy.” In short, there was an attack on middle-class standards, on that residue of puritanism which distrusted the “natural.” It would be a mistake,

²⁷ See Shana Alexander, “Barbra,” *Life*, LVI (May 22, 1964), 52.

²⁸ But not dead. Songs by Andy Williams, Jerry Vale, Al Martino and Tony Bennett (albeit more exuberantly and “cornily” rendered than songs in the 1930s and 1940s) were still heard on TV and especially on jukeboxes in restaurants and bars catering to people around thirty or older.

however, to assert that since music contained much protest against all aspects of the Establishment, from war to "Ticky Tacky Houses" and conformity, a thorough-going iconoclasm was the order of the day. Even though the folk song might so often protest, it could also reaffirm for large audiences a traditional patriotism—"This Land Is Our Land," "Ballad of the Green Beret." Musical trends can hardly be made any more coherent or consistent than the society which produces them. Two hundred million Americans living in the same years could among them find room for Barry Sadler's "Green Beret" and Bob Dylan's "World War III Blues." And yet, there was a similarity between the performers. Both were leather-booted, wild-animal-type young men (one a disheveled gazelle, the other a wild boar). Both were typical of years in which some of the most popular vocal and instrumental groups were called the "Animals," the "Monkees," the "Critters." Both these men were as far removed as could be from the Regional Accounting Office, the classroom or "Cocktails for Two" in the sleek white-on-whiteness of an *art moderne* penthouse in Gotham.²⁹ They would, both of them, be classified at any employment agency as Non-U. To this extent they perhaps validate the one generalization we can make about the musical temper of the later 1950s and the earlier 1960s: It was one of those times when the perennial reaction of youth against the norms of older people is accelerated, heightened, intensified. Youth boldly threw in the faces of its elders its own musical description of love: "Gimme Gravy for My Mashed Potatoes." The very appearance of Cass of the Mamas and the Papas—lazy-fat, slovenly, serenely sensual, affronted the middle-class ideal of refined womanhood as a trimly neat, highly disciplined, meticulous housewife, teacher or stenographer.

Again, lest we interpret such a generalization to mean that all middle-class restraints, social and musical, were on the junk heap, Jeremy Lerner reminds us that the popular songs of the early 1960s, if less than those of the 1930s, still paid some lip service to older values. Some sentimental lyrics continued to be written and sung even in rock-and-roll numbers, if only, as Mr. Lerner explains, to sublimate the orgasm of the music. True, these lyrics were often not clearly articulated; engulfed in a pounding,

²⁹ "Cocktails for Two" was introduced by Duke Ellington in a 1934 musical film. He played in full dress, and on a white piano. The song mentioned two hands slyly meeting beneath a serviette while an orchestra played "an exquisite *chansonnette*."

shrieking sound, they were rarely audible. But they were there. The new generation of rebels still hedged a bit.³⁰ The Critters occasionally would sing soft, subtly blended arrangements of love-lorn ballads like "Mr. Die-ingly Sad"; and if you listened carefully enough to the young black voices of the Orlons shouting "The Rules of Love," you could hear the old plea for bourgeois fidelity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Mooney's remarks on the development of popular music since the 1920's give an insight into America's changing sociology. A society's music is perhaps a good index to its values and beliefs. Explain some of the past changes in American society and its present mood as reflected by popular music.*
2. *What does "Victorian" mean? How has popular music been getting less Victorian?*
3. *What connections can be pointed out between popular music and the racial situation in the United States during the past fifty years?*
4. *Mooney claims that the lyrics and orchestrations of popular music in the late 1950's and early 1960's were crude—by which he seems to mean unintellectual and unpolished. By giving examples, state whether you think this holds true for the late 1960's and the 1970's.*
5. *Examine some records or lyric sheets from the 1930's, 1940's, or 1950's. Do your sources bear out Mooney's observations? Would you add anything to his comments?*
6. *In 1955 S. I. Hayakawa, a noted semanticist, wrote an article entitled "Popular Songs vs. the Facts of Life." The title aptly summarizes his thesis: popular songs are basically escapist and avoid reality. Do you think such a generalization is valid for the popular music of the 1960's and 1970's? Discuss examples to illustrate your answer.*

³⁰ Jeremy Lerner, "What Do They Get from Rock-n'-Roll?" *Atlantic*, CCXIV (Aug. 1964), 48.

from *The Poetry of Rock*

Richard Goldstein

Richard Goldstein, whose witty and cogent analyses of the rock scene have appeared regularly in The Village Voice, The New York Times, Vogue, and New York Magazine, was one of the first writers about popular culture to take a serious critical view of rock lyrics. In this introduction to his collection of rock lyrics, The Poetry of Rock, Goldstein reviews the development of the rock song.

Ten years ago, a single, all-embracing criterion governed the evaluation of a rock song. When matters of taste were at hand, you simply arched your back against the nearest lamppost, fixed the buckle of your garrison belt across your hip, and drawled with a hint of spittle between your teeth: "I like it. It's got a good beat. Y'can dance to it."

But those days of aesthetic simplicity have vanished with cinch belts and saddle shoes. Today's rock partisan—plugged into a stereophonic nirvana—is more likely to arch his eyebrows than his pelvis. He may casually remark, with a gleam in his hookah, "I empathize with it. It has truth and beauty. Besides, my kids say it's psychedelic."

Rock 'n' roll has come a long way from its origins in the bargain basement of American culture. Once a pariah of the musical world, it has evolved into a full-fledged art-form, perhaps the most preened and pampered of our time. Critics gush superlatives over the Beatles in little magazines. Bob Dylan addresses poets from the far side of Desolation Row, muttering nursery rhymes that fall like a well-oiled guillotine across their necks. Jazzmen do their thing in hippy beads. Serious composers marvel at the Beach Boys while filmmakers search for alienation behind the Doors.

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Rock is de rigueur. Hip Broadway turns the Hadassah on, while psychedelic swamis sell aspirin on tv. San Francisco is a teenybopper's holy land; London, a plastic Lourdes. Even Plato's Cave has become a discothèque. Amid its electronic shadows, long-haired princes tell it like it is. So shove over, Norman Mailer, Edward Albee, Allen Ginsberg, and Robert Lowell—make room for the Electric Prunes.

*I've got no kick against modern jazz,
Unless they try to play it too darn fast;
And change the beauty of the melody,
Until they sound just like a symphony,
That's why I go for that rock 'n' roll music
Any old way you choose it;
It's got a back beat, you can't lose it,
Any old time you use it.
It's gotta be rock 'n' roll music
If you wanna dance with me.**

So wrote Chuck Berry, America's first rock poet, in 1957. When he burst upon the scene, with his hips as smooth as gears and his suit spangled with delight, pop music was sharply divided along racial lines, as it had been in America since before the invention of the phonograph. The black sound of the Fifties was Rhythm and Blues, a blunt, joyous party-jive with its language rooted in funky jazz. White America first received this message from black performers like Little Richard, Fats Domino, and Chuck Berry.

But Chuck Berry was special. He sang about an America of pure motion and energy. While the beats did battle with materialism in search of pure spirit, he spent his time behind the wheel of a new Ford, digging speed. Words and images spilled in staccato freeform across the body of his songs. He chose to work in bold clean shapes, rendered heroic by their sheer simplicity. In a Chuck Berry song, you couldn't tell the girls from the cars, and some of the best marriages ended up in traffic court. He could be as dazzling as a comet or as sentimental as a greeting card. But he was always wry, even in anger. His protest songs made you feel good instead of grim.

Only when he wrote about his music did Chuck Berry get serious. He virtually defined rock for the generation to come as the sound of an inner volcano, the hum of satisfied machinery, the

* "Rock 'n' Roll Music" © 1957, Arc Music Corp.

triumph of the material not over, but in conjunction with, the soul.

Today, his lyrics have been largely ignored in the search for conscious poetry which dominates the rock scene. But behind the bouncing pop ball we seem so eager to follow lies a tradition rich in the kind of accidental art that Chuck Berry provided. No wonder outsiders like the Beatles began their careers in conscious imitation. In Chuck Berry's reckless comic energy they found a vision of America.

At its core, good rock has always provided that kind of mystical experience. But few adults tried to penetrate its gaudy clichés and rigid structure—until now. Today, it is possible to suggest without risking defenestration that some of the best poetry of our time may well be contained within those slurred couplets. But even its staunchest adult partisans seem to think that rock sprang fullblown from the electric loins of the Sixties. The Beatles get some credit for turning a primitive form into art; or, as one respected straight critic put it, for carrying pop music “beyond patronization.” But beneath its sequined surface rock has always contained a searing power to communicate where being young and yearning was at. Like blues, it became respectable only after its period of greatest vitality had passed.

Contemporary rock (sometimes known in post-graduate circles as the “new music”) is a mulatto. It was born of an unholy alliance between white Country music and Rhythm and Blues. Southerners like Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Elvis Presley fused these styles into a hybrid sound called “rockabilly.” They wrote brisk and brittle songs, laced with fiery verbal cadenzas and meant to be belted across, with a whole lotta shakin’ goin’ on. Elvis Presley earned his first million by paring lyrics down to a throbbing series of low moans and raunchy country hollers. He helped establish the tradition of sound-as-content, which has dominated rock since it moved north and captured the cities.

By the late Fifties, Presley's wail had become the cry of the city streets. Every corner worth its traffic light had a resident group—and a surly lot they were. To uninitiated ears, theirs was punk-music; coarse, constrained, and claustrophobic. But, in fact, these superstars from the slums had democratized rock. Today's music is far too complex and the cost of instruments alone too staggering to permit mass participation. But in 1958, all the equipment a beginning group needed was a plastic pitchpipe, and all it had to master to start rocking was the five vowels.

Sha da da da
Sha da da da da,
Sha da da da
Sha da da da da,
Yip yip yip yip
Yip yip yip yip
Mum mum mum mum
Mum mum
*Get a job.**

The pop song had become a chant, carried by four or five voices in a dissonant wail. Measured against the aesthetic standards of current rock, these nonsense syllables may seem ignoble. But the primary purpose of a lyric in 1957 was to convey mood, not meaning. The ideal scat song had to be simple enough for any voice to master, but intriguing enough to survive incessant repetition. Though they look absurd on paper (except, perhaps, as examples of concrete poetry), it is impossible to even read these lyrics without becoming immersed in their rhythmic pulse. That involvement was the experience these songs were intended to provide. Enshrined within the music of the late Fifties, like a sacred litany, they survive to this day, as do the unsteady bass and furious falsetto with which street singers assaulted a melody when their voices were the only instruments, and the only echo chamber within reach was under the neighborhood "el."

Without this heritage, rock is a bushel of pretty leaves pretending to be a tree. The Beatles could not have written "She Loves You" or even "I Am the Walrus" without first experiencing "Get a Job." No young lyricist works in a stylistic vacuum. Even Leonard Cohen, a recognized Canadian poet who has recently turned to song-writing, says he prepared for his new role by listening to old Ray Charles records until they warped. It shows. Cohen's rock songs have the consistency of modern verse, but unlike linear poetry, they are wrapped tightly around a rhythmic spine.

It is impossible to speak of poetry in rock without mentioning the pervasive influence of rhythm. Until recently, rigid conventions kept pop lyrics imprisoned within a metrical framework that poets had discarded long ago. Even the most adventurous

* "Get a Job" © 1957, Kae Williams Music, Inc., and Wildcat Music, Inc.

lyricists wrote even stanzas, made frequent use of rhyme, and kept that mighty beat churning through their words. Today, these rules are regarded as more of a legacy than an ultimatum. But most rock creators still rely heavily on basics. Even Dylan, who comes closest to capturing the feel of modern verse in his songs, usually caps his lines with rhyme.

. . . .

One lesson we have learned from blues is that a familiar form can produce both great art and drivel. The crucial factor is not the style, but those who choose to work in it. Probably no one has had a greater influence on the texture of modern rock than Bob Dylan. He demolished the narrow line and lean stanzas that once dominated pop, replacing them with a more flexible organic structure. His rambling ballads killed the three-minute song and helped establish the album as a basic tool for communication in rock.

More important, he turned pop composers on to themselves. The introspective music that followed has come to black fruition in groups like the Doors. But it was Dylan's success which established beyond a doubt that poetic imagery belonged in pop music. To claim that he is the major poet of his generation is not to relegate written verse to the graveyard of cultural irrelevance. Most young people are aware of linear poetry. But they groove on Dylan, not because the rock medium has overwhelmed his message for this generation, but because, in Dylan's songs, the two reinforce each other.

This, of course, is no accident. Dylan's intention is to reconcile poetry with song. Scattered throughout his liner notes are constant references to this aesthetic task ("a song is anything that can walk by itself/i am a songwriter. a poem is a naked person . . . some people say i am a poet"). He juxtaposes symbols of high and low culture as though classicism were a haughty lady being raped by a bluesy stud. If hearing "Desolation Row" is like discovering a plastic Parthenon in a Times Square souvenir stand, that is exactly the effect Dylan means his rock-apocalypse to convey.

. . . .

Dylan's remarkable achievement has been to inject pop music with poetic power by simply grafting his own sensibility onto what was already implicit in rock. As weighty as his lyrics sometimes read, they never sound artificial on record, because even

their inconsistencies are intrinsic to rock. For a poet who likes to speak in tongues, as Dylan often does, pop music offers a fertile field for exploration. Rock composers have always employed symbols (cars, roses, blue suede shoes). Even in a classic ballad like "To Know Him Is to Love Him," the clichés of teenage romance are used to express something much deeper. The lyric ("I'd be good to him/I'd bring love to him/Everyone says there'll come a time/When I'll walk alongside of him") becomes a chilling example of indirection when you realize that its author, Phil Spector, took his title and refrain from the epitaph on his father's tombstone.

Such ambiguity has existed in rock since its earliest days, and for the most elemental reason. To sell, a pop song had to be meaningful, but to get on the radio, it had to sound harmless. Disc jockeys with a more rigid sense of propriety than the most blue-nosed censor actually helped foster in young writers a profound awareness of slang and its implications. The ability of today's lyricist to say extraordinary things in ordinary words has its roots in the enforced ambiguity of top-40 radio, where composers tried to express the forbidden in the context of the permissible.

Slang is to rock what classical allusions are to written poetry. It began as a simple code, freely adapted from blues or jazz, but it soon became a major mode of communicating attitudes. Rock writers expertly hid meaning behind stray vowels and half-muttered phrases, a practice which survives to this day on some Beatle records. The penalty for failure—when sensuality became too apparent or the code too explicit—was exclusion from the radio. Just last year, an innocent-sounding ballad called "That Acapulco Gold" was yanked off the air when disc jockeys realized that its title referred to a high quality of Mexican pot.

But slang still eludes the dubious ears of disc jockeys often enough to provide a mass-snicker for the pop audiences. Today's rock poets deal with the drug experience in poeticized code, as jazzmen and blues singers before them did. It is enough for Grace Slick of the Jefferson Airplane to cry "Feed your head!" at the end of "White Rabbit" for teenagers to understand her suggestion. And John Phillips of the Mamas and Papas has only to arch his brow over a lyric to make it seem ambiguous:

*Baby, what you're holding
Half of that belongs to me*

*'Cause I'm a real straight shooter
If you know what I mean.**

In a sense, this awareness of jargon is one of a repressed culture. But it has also provided teenagers everywhere with a solid sense of their own identity—something all good poetry is supposed to convey. So, it is almost sad to note that the golden age of rock slang is passing away. With the growth of liberal radio stations across the FM dial, lyricists are now becoming increasingly direct. Those mangy young savages from England, who could make even a virtuous love song sound like statutory rape, helped force this new frankness upon our virgin cars. With their long hair, tight pants, and eyes squinting like a dirty word, these angry musicians poured a defiant vitality into rock. Ten years ago, Chuck Berry had to content himself with indirect protest (“Don’t bother me, leave me alone,/Anyway I’m almost grown”). You had to strain to catch the anger in those words, though it was present. But there’s no doubt what Peter Townshend of the Who feels when he shouts:

*People try to put us down
Just because we get around.
Things they do look awful cold
Hope I die before I get old.
This is my generation, baby.
Why don't you all f-f-f-fade away.**

With no further need for indirection in theme or language, rock poets are beginning to regard ambiguity as an enhancement rather than a necessity. For all its frankness, liberated rock remains a devious music. Lyricists still bury meanings deep within their songs. An undertone of irony is still cultivated, and sometimes lyric and melody are pitted against each other in emotional counterpoint. The BeeGees, experts at mood manipulation, often set singsong lyrics about love and devotion against tense, mournful melodies. In “Lady Jane,” Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones is a knight-errant with five days’ growth of beard. He sings a chivalric ode against a tinkling dulcimer, but he keeps his voice thick, grainy, and unmistakably indelicate.

Even in their early days, the Beatles were far from tame. In the beginning their lyrics seemed as strait-laced as the collarless

* “Straight Shooter” © 1966, Wingate Music Corp.

* “My Generation” © 1965, Fabulous Music Ltd., London, England.

suits they wore then. But there was always a smirk behind those innocent shouts of "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" When the creators of a recent television documentary about youth culture chose to score some war footage with a Beatle ballad called "We Can Work It Out," they discovered that this gentle love song actually contained an implicit anti-war message as well ("Life is much too short for fussin' and fightin' my friend").

By 1965, the Beatles had begun to apply Dylan's free-wheeling vision, and the result was a flowering of their own talent.

*I once had a girl
Or should I say
She once had me;

She showed me her room,
Isn't it good
Norwegian Wood?*

Though it doesn't look very liberated, "Norwegian Wood" is an important clue to the development of the Beatles' distinctive style. It begins easily enough, with a frank appraisal of the situation, and a concise glimpse of the hunter stalking his prey.

*I sat on a rug
Biding my time,
Drinking her wine.

We talked until two
And then she said
"It's time for bed."*

Using only the starkest of language, the Beatles create a tantalizing, but stubbornly non-specific scene. What goes on? Why does the narrator inform us, in a wry undertone, that he "crawled off to sleep in the bath"? And this Norwegian Wood; could that be yet another word for pot?

*And when I awoke
I was alone,
This bird had flown.

So I built a fire,
Isn't it good
Norwegian Wood?**

* "Norwegian Wood" © 1965, Northern Songs, Ltd.

This non-resolution was a strange twist for the lads who crooned, "I wanna hold your hand." Future Beatle songs would become even less specific, their implications even more uncertain, and when John Lennon was the author, their language more ingenious. Lennon's power as a lyricist is greatest when he rips apart the actual texture of words and re-arranges them into a sly puzzle, which is somehow as compelling as it is cryptic.

From the Beatles, and from Dylan, rock poetry radiates in every direction. There is the pastel lyricism of Donovan, the literate narrative of Paul Simon, the gentle folkiness of John Sebastian, and the raunchy power of the San Francisco blues bands. There are dozens more—all young poets who call their lyrics "pop."

But do these lyrics really amount to art? Does Wordsworth speak to Donovan from the great beyond? Is John Lennon's word-play truly Joycean? Is Bob Dylan the Walt Whitman of the juke-box? In a sense, assertions like these are the worst enemy of liberated rock. They enslave it with an artificial heritage. The great vitality of the pop revolution has been its liberation from such encumbrances of form. Rock swings free, embracing chaos, and laughing at the notion that there could be anything more worth celebrating than the present.

Rock is, and always has been, the sacred squeal of now. It's got a damned good beat. And you can dance to it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do some digging back into the early rhythm-and-blues records of black performers like Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Ray Charles. Describe their style, the subject matter of their songs, and what you feel they have contributed to the field of rock music.
2. Compare the roots of black rhythm and blues with white country and western music.
3. Rolling Stone editor Jerry Hopkins, in his paperback *The Rock Story*, mentions the practice of "covering" in the 1950's: good songs recorded by black performers would be "covered" by white singers on a different label for airing on the hit parade. What would you imagine would be the difference between the original and the cover? If you can get your hands on some of the records of the period, do a real comparison. Why do you think the use of covers died out?

4. Give some examples of the increasing liberalization of rock lyrics.
5. What do you think the so-called "drug culture" has contributed to rock?
6. What group or individual do you think has made the greatest contribution to the field of popular music in the past five or ten years? Explain your choice.
7. Goldstein brings up the importance of dance: "Y'can dance to it." Compose a brief history of popular dancing in the last ten years (twenty years, if you're more ambitious).

Who Put the Bomp in the Bomp De-Bomp De-Bomp?

Greil Marcus

Greil Marcus, who has written regularly about rock from the San Francisco-based Express Times and Rolling Stone, here presents his view of rock music as the unique property of a generation of young people, for many of whom rock constitutes a kind of religion, with its own mystique, myths, and shared experiences.

It was at the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco. Lead guitarist Barry Melton was introducing the next tune by Country Joe and the Fish: "This song is dedicated to all the teenyboppers . . . and (casting an eye at a huge chick dancing on the stage) to all the big boppers too . . . yes, we all remember the Big Bopper, and Richie Valens and Buddy Holly, who all went down that day over Missouri or something in their Lear Jet, who've gone away to Juke Box Heaven . . ."

"You know, they should teach a course in rock 'n' roll."

"Yeah, it'd be a lotta fun."

"There'd be problems . . . it'd have to be a year, maybe a two year course."

"Come on . . . they teach the whole history of European intellectual thought or political theory in one year—that's 2500 years of material! Rock's fifteen, at the most."

"Well, seventeen, if you count *Sixty-Minute Man* by the Dominoes, in 1951. But the thing is, people really *care* about rock 'n' roll, it's part of them, even if they only know it subconsciously, or when it hits them. I mean, who really cares if you leave out Marsilius of Padua. But everyone has their greatest song, and they'd scream if you left it out, and they should. Two years."

"D'you read *Silver Screen* and *Photoplay* and stuff like that for stories about rock stars?"

"Yeah . . . isn't it strange . . . we'll even go through *Peyton Place* to get to one good picture of John Lennon. You know, Dylan said a lot of people are afraid of the bomb, but more are afraid to be seen carrying a *Modern Screen* magazine . . . maybe rock's important enough to overcome the fear . . ."

"KFRC is coming out with a Top 300 survey. Everyone's supposed to send in a postcard with their all-time top ten on it, and then they count it up. Hey, we've got to offset the teenybopper vote. Get the postcards . . . my top ten's *Like a Rolling Stone*, *Eight Days a Week* and *Money* by the Beatles, *Play with Fire and Tell Me* by the Stones, *Little Darlin'* by the Diamonds, *Johnny B. Goode* by Chuck Berry, *The Kids Are Alright* by the Who, *One Fine Day* by the Chiffons, *Da Do Ron Ron* by the Crystals."

"That's great. But mine's *Like a Rolling Stone*, *Like a Rolling Stone*, *Like a Rolling Stone* . . ."

So a few weeks later, six of us . . .

"It's incredible, the top songs are all great, and *Like a Rolling Stone* was number eight, fantastic . . . Only two to go. Bet you five bucks the number one is *Lovin' Feeling* by the Righteous Brothers."

"You're on."

"And now, here it is, the number *two* hit of all time—*You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling*, by the Righteous Brothers!"

"Shit."

"AND NOW, THE ALL-TIME, ALL-TIME HIT, NUMBER ONE! IT'S *SATISFACTION* BY THE ROLLING STONES!!!"

We all won.

"Remember the Nutmegs?"

"*Story Untold*, 1956. Remember when Chuck Berry got sent to prison for taking a fifteen-year-old chick across state lines?"

"Yeah—like when Jerry Lee Lewis married his thirteen-year-old cousin and got his records banned from the radio stations . . ."

Two Berkeley professors, writing in the *New York Review of Books* about the student strike which broke out two years after the climactic sit-in of the Free Speech Movement, stated that the

remark most often heard around campus during the crisis was that of Marx, from *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts of great importance in world history occur twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

Well, the remark may have held wide currency among some circles, but among students, it was another quote which provided the metaphor for our situation, from Bob Dylan's *Memphis Blues Again*:

*And here I sit so patiently
Waiting to find out what price
You have to pay to get out of
Going through all these things twice*

The differences in metaphors are important. One seeks an academic and intellectual conclusion, a truth that will last the ages; the other tries to establish and confirm the present moment, and in doing so, to save one from it. One metaphor structures time; the other tries to escape it. More important to me, though, is the fact that one statement is drawn from the vast stores of academic knowledge, the other from rock 'n' roll. The students can play the first game, if they want to, but the professors cannot play the second. This isn't simply because professors aren't in the habit of playing Dylan records; some are. It's because the ability to involve oneself with rock 'n' roll, to understand it instinctually, to know that any one piece of music is part of over ten years of experience, to be in tune with a medium, is not something one can pick up by a little attention or a casual listening.

Rock 'n' roll was, is and will be a basic part of the experience, of the growing up years, of the present college or non-student generation. It will continue to be so for the generations that will follow. But rock 'n' roll has existed only since about 1954, and thus it's a sad fact that most of those over thirty cannot be a part of it, and it cannot be a part of them. I don't want to talk about the ability of adults to "enjoy the Beatles" or to "think Dylan has something to say," but about the rock 'n' roll era as the exclusive possession of our generation, about what our love for it and our immersion in it might imply for our consciousness and vision.

This essay will center on the "student"—in school or out of it, graduate or dropout—the person who reads, thinks about what

he hears, who likes to talk with his friends about it. I'll look at what it meant for that kind of person to have grown up with rock 'n' roll in the fifties and early sixties, enjoying it; and what it meant for the same person, somewhat older, to discover, with the coming of the Beatles and the renaissance that followed, that he loved rock 'n' roll, the old as well as the new, that this music was part of him, that he was interested in it, seriously, and with joy. I'll try to examine how ways of thinking and perceiving are formed; how people create the metaphors by which they interpret, consciously and unconsciously, the internal and external things that are important to them.

"Youth today lives mythically and in depth," wrote Marshall McLuhan. What this *means* is not important. What is, as with most metaphors, is how it works.

The old idea of popular music viewed the words as the essential basis for listening; the music, even with a catchy tune, was in the background. In Cole Porter songs, surely the best of old-time pop music, the instrumentation—watered-down swing or more sophisticated Broadway musical—was so understated it was hardly there at all. The words were the thing, whether, as with Cole Porter, they were meaningful (*Miss Otis Regrets*), or as was usual, trite (*Stardust*). It was the old Hit Parade Show, with Snooky Lanson, Dorothy Collins, and the others. They really knew how to *enunciate*—otherwise we might have missed the tag line of *The Naughty Lady of Shady Lane*. This was a slick music, perfectly suited, words and all, to serve as background sounds for cocktail lounges and piano bars. Pop music, performed live, was an atmosphere for small talk. Remember "mood music"?

And then Chuck Berry was on stage, with his flashing electric guitar. Rock 'n' roll had begun to come together, around 1954, from all kinds of sources, in all kinds of places: New York City, the West Coast, Nashville, Memphis. Roots? You could talk about Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, a Negro bluesman who had a great influence on the early Elvis; you could get really academic and talk about the Mississippi Sheiks, a thirties group that sang the blues, a prototype of the black vocal groups of the late forties and early fifties like the Ravens, the Cardinals, the Orioles, and Billy Ward and the Dominoes. The Dominoes included Clyde McPhatter, who was to become the great lead singer for the Drifters, the best of the many groups attached to Atlantic Records, then a small new company in New York City. Atlantic introduced the Clovers and Ray Charles, and brought the fantastic Robins from the West

Coast. With the help of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, they turned the Robins into the Coasters. Leiber and Stoller were brilliant song writers, responsible for *Hound Dog*, *Jailhouse Rock*, and all of the Coasters' hits. Along with Chuck Berry, they wrote the songs that expressed all the frustrations of white teenagers. They told us what our secret rebellions were all about.

Back in LA, the Coasters' home town, Dootsie Williams assembled more Negro vocal groups for his company, Dooto Records: Don Julian and the Meadowlarks, the Medallions, the Penguins. Drawing heavily on these early rhythm and blues records, on the blues, on country music, but still coming up with a tough, distinctive sound, was the Nashville-Memphis scene, centered around Sun Records; and out of those cities came rockabilly: Elvis, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis. Bill Haley somehow caught the spirit of it all with *Rock Around the Clock*, a record that still hasn't stopped selling. Alan Freed, a New York disc jockey, brought Bill Haley to town for a great rock 'n' roll show, and as Bill Haley began playing, a rock 'n' roll riot got off the ground as well. There were too many tickets sold to too many kids, and they wanted to get in.

The stars began to emerge: Elvis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Buddy Holly; and as the parental attack began—"How can you listen to that garbage?"—dozens of songs echoed the line, "Rock 'n' roll is here to stay . . ." Or the Coasters:

*In the beginning
There was nothing but rock
Then somebody invented the wheel
And things just began to roll!
You say that music's for the birds
You say you can't understand the words
Well baby if you did
You'd really blow your lid
Baby, that is rock and roll*

*THE COASTERS
That Is Rock and Roll*

Yeah, "you can't understand the words." We all heard that one. You could, of course, if you wanted to, but they were and still are unintelligible for the first few hearings, partly because the hypnotic music and the pounding beat caught your attention first,

partly because white kids weren't used to hearing the voices of black people, and white parents weren't interested in trying. The beat and the "meaningless babble" guaranteed that rock 'n' roll would be our own exclusive property.

The songs gave us a complete experience in two minutes, fading out at the end so the disk jockey could start talking quicker, giving the impression that the song never stopped. It was the nonverbal incantations that were important:

DA DO RON RON RON!
DA DO RON RON!
DA DO RON RON RON!
DA DO RON RON!

The Crystals sang it. "What does that *mean*?" David Susskind asked Phil Spector, writer and producer of *Da Do Ron Ron*, the Crystals' million-seller, the creator of the most powerful and distinctive sound in rock 'n' roll. "It's not what *I say it means*," Spector came back, "it's what it makes you *feel*! Can't you hear the *sound* of that record, can't you hear that?"

But the old lessons of pre-rock music held on, the sniveling sentiment of entertainers not interested in making music, just interested in doing what their managers told them to do. The music became quieter, softer, less "obtrusive"; and the singers, even the great Sam Cooke, began to use proper grammar, instead of the phrases and expressions that came naturally. Rock 'n' roll had always been the place where a kid could sneak off and say "ain't," and that was fading too.

The ancient hit, *I Am the Japanese Sandman* by the Chellos, had a typical rock 'n' roll chorus of odd sounds, and in the middle of the song one of the back-up singers breaks in on the leader, and complains:

All you guys say the big things
All I get to say is .
Ah he goes rang tang ding dong
Ranky sanky . . .

We thought rock 'n' roll had gotten over its inferiority complex; that it had brushed off the jibes and taunts at a spirit that told us that words were sounds we could feel before they were statements to understand. But no one was going to catch Bobby Vee singing "ranky sanky." For by the early sixties the burst of

creation that exploded in the fifties was drying up. In the words of a time-honored litany, Chuck Berry was in prison, Buddy Holly was dead, Little Richard had decided to become a preacher, and Fats Domino was back playing bars and dives. The great groups that were still around, like the Coasters and the Drifters, were eclipsed by the clean, sugary rock 'n' roll of Bobby Vinton and Annette Funicello, even though the music of the originals was as great as ever. Rock 'n' roll was going straight. Only Phil Spector, in his twenties, who'd grown up with rock 'n' roll, preserved the spirit of our music. He set up his own record company in Hollywood, and created a full, crashing sound for the singers he made into stars—the Crystals, the Ronettes, Darlene Love, the Righteous Brothers. Spector wrote the songs, coached the singers, arranged the instruments, and brought us records that were the quintessence of rock 'n' roll. Words screamed, saxophones blaring, double pianos jingling, what seemed like a thousand voices singing over it all. You strained your radio dial to wring one of Spector's songs out of the disk jockey. *That* was rock 'n' roll.

But that was about all that was left of true rock by the end of 1963. There was only one million-seller that year, an insipid ditty called *Sugar Shack* by Jimmy Gilmore. I remember New Year's Eve, listening to the radio's review of the top songs of the year. The disk jockey played the number one song, Gilmore's atrocity, and he said with disgust, "That's *their* number one. Here's mine—enjoy it while you can." He played *On Broadway* by the Drifters, a dramatic song that sold far below its worth. Later that night, about five a.m., we heard *Some of Your Loving*, a great song by a forgotten group, something we hadn't heard for years, a song I've never heard again. It was thrilling, exciting—and scary, because we couldn't possess it when we wanted to. That power belonged to the radio, and to the failing taste of the record-buying public. We had grown up with rock 'n' roll; it had been our music, and there wasn't much of it left. In that music was a place of joy, a nonverbal celebration of all the senses, of hanging on chords and notes, anticipating a sax or guitar solo, smashing the sound up on a car radio. A good part of the joy of those years came from the radio and its music. Once, overcome by the Drifters' *There Goes My Baby*, we stopped our car and pulled over, just to listen. Four friends drove by while the song was on, and all did the same thing, as five radios blasted out the same song. But it was 1963, and rock 'n' roll was slipping away from us.

Within one month the Beatles hit America, took over the number one, two, three, four and five spots on the charts at the

same time, and opened the door to a score of previously unheard British groups—the Rolling Stones, Them, the Kinks, the Swingin' Bluejeans, the Animals, the Nashville Teens, the Zombies—all of which affirmed their devotion to early rock 'n' roll and "race" (black) music. In doing so, they opened another door all the way, this one to the acceptance of rhythm and blues and nonverbal rock by white teenagers and students who'd forgotten where it all came from. Coming into true prominence about the same time as the Beatles was Motown Records, a black company from Detroit, with its stable of the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, the Four Tops, the Temptations, and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. As Motown was aided by the Beatles' popularization of their hits, the Rolling Stones, with a much tougher sound, helped make possible the Top Forty success of truly uncompromising black artists like Solomon Burke, Wilson Pickett, and the greatest of them all, the late Otis Redding, a musical descendant of Little Richard and Sam Cooke who before his death surpassed them both.

What was happening was that the people who had grown up with rock 'n' roll were taking over. These people understood rock, loved it, and they knew that for them to be able to play and sing, to produce records and manage bands, meant that they could join the greats of the past that they'd idolized in their youth. The renaissance of rock 'n' roll was a continuing celebration that has not ended. As the Beatles and the Stones re-created rock in 1964, Dylan changed everything in 1965. San Francisco began it again in 1966; and in 1967, the Beatles and the Stones once more pushed on farther than anyone else. Nineteen sixty-eight belongs to Bob Dylan, with his perfect *John Wesley Harding*, and to his band as well. Today, Chuck Berry is back at the Fillmore Auditorium, with San Francisco's Steve Miller Band backing him up. The Coasters and the Drifters and Bill Haley play at the Avalon Ballroom across town; Little Richard's back on the road; Fats Domino has released a new record, with Beatle tunes, taking something back from those who took so much from him. Rock belongs to those whose first musical memories are of Chuck Berry and the Five Satins.

Thus, a brief personal history of rock 'n' roll. What does this have to do with our "consciousness and vision"? Quite a bit, I think. To find out, we have to look at the myths and depths of rock, today's music as formed by yesterday's, and probe the dynamic of our music.

The Beatles revolutionized rock 'n' roll by bringing it back to its sources and traditions. The new era, in America, began with

a song, a joyous song, which had what one friend of mine calls the “takeover sound”—music that breaks from the radio and is impossible to resist. The first notes of *I Want to Hold Your Hand* were there, day after day. Everyone knew something different had happened. For months, every new Beatles song had part of that first record in it—that was just the way you had to hear it; that’s what a new beginning, a sense of a new beginning means. All the rules were changing, as they’d changed in the fifties. Like the Beatles, groups had to write their own lyrics and music, and play their own instruments—they had to be as involved as possible. With the coming of the Rolling Stones, a new pattern was set: for the first time in the entertainment world, singers and musicians would appear, in photographs and on stage, in the clothes they wore every day. The music and the mystique were coming closer and closer to life as we lived it. For the new groups and for those of us who listened, rock ‘n’ roll became more a way of life than a sideshow. There was a hint that those stars up on stage might even be the same kind of people as the ones in the audience. Rock became more comfortable and more exciting at the same time.

Rock ‘n’ roll seeks to do something that earlier popular music had always denied—to establish and confirm, to heighten and deepen, to create and re-create the present moment. Rock, as a medium, knows that it is only up to a certain point that this can be done. To keep a moment of time alive it’s necessary to make a song new every time it’s performed, every time it’s played, every time it’s heard. When a song gets stale it only fills time, marks time, expends itself over two or three or ten minutes, but it doesn’t *obliterate* time and allow you to move freely in the space that the music can give you. When a song is alive, the mind and the body respond—they race, merge with the music, find an idea or an emotion, and return. When a song is dead, the mind only waits for it to be over, hoping that something living will follow.

Judy Garland has sung *Over the Rainbow* some thousands of times; there’s a man who keeps count. The tally is published in the newspapers occasionally, like the Gross National Product, which is really what it is: Judy Garland’s GNP. You measure her progress that way. The same kind of mentality that demands this tune from Judy Garland, the same kind of mentality that makes her want to sing it, made a Santa Monica grandmother watch *The Sound of Music* over seven hundred times, once a day, at five o’clock. Listening to a rock song over and over, seeing *A Hard Day’s Night* a dozen times, isn’t the same—with that you participate when

you must, stay away when you desire. The mind is free to remake the experience, but it isn't a prisoner. You don't demand the same songs from Bob Dylan every time he gives a concert—you understand that he's a human being, a changing person, and you try to translate his newness into your own.

This movement of the re-creation of the moment, with the constant changing of the dynamic, is mostly the result of the radio, the way it gives one music. When a song is new, and you like it, when it possesses that intangible grace that makes it part of you, you wait and hope all day that it will come out of the radio and into your cars. You listen, stop what you're doing, and participate. Finally, you'll get tired of it, ignoring the song when it comes on. Months or years later, when it returns as an oldie, the initial experience will be repeated, but with understanding, with a sense of how it all happened. You can't pretend that grace is there when it's not. When *Like a Rolling Stone* was released, I liked it, but I got tired of it pretty quickly. A few months later I put it on the phonograph and it jumped out and claimed me. I think it's the greatest rock 'n' roll record ever made—but I didn't decide that, I accepted it.

An incredible number of songs provide this sort of experience. Because of this, because of the way songs are heard, with an intensity that one provides for himself, they become part of one's mind, one's thought and subconscious, and they shape one's mental patterns. People sense this: there is a conscious effort by the members of the generation I'm talking about to preserve and heighten the experiences of rock 'n' roll, to intensify the connection between the individual and his music, between one's group of friends and the music they share. That effort takes the form of games and contests. These games reinforce the knowledge that this music is ours, that it doesn't and can't belong to anyone else. The kids who'll follow us will have a lot of it, but they can never really know the absolute beginnings of rock 'n' roll—that's our treasure. The generations that came before us are simply somewhere else. In a strange, protective way, people who are now in middle age aren't *allowed* to possess the music we have. When the Beatles were becoming acceptable, listenable for adults, with *Michelle* and *Yesterday*, the foursome responded with hard rock and experimental music, with sitars and tape machines and driving guitars. *Day Tripper* and *Strawberry Fields Forever* blasted the Beatles back home to students, kids, intellectuals, dropouts. The exclusiveness of rock 'n' roll is well-guarded. If the adults can take it, we'll probably reject it. In a way we want to share it, but in

the end, it's better that we can't. If we're to be different, we'd best protect the sources of our differences, whenever they are re-created. That is what the Beatles did when they sang *I'm Down*, the toughest rock 'n' roll since Little Richard—they returned to the beginnings, even as they stayed far ahead of everyone else.

And we preserve our possession with games. As small boys quiz each other on baseball statistics, young people today are constantly renewing each other's memories of rock 'n' roll. If you can't identify an old song by the first few bars, something's wrong. "Who did *Come Go with Me*?" "The Del-Vikings, 1957." That's a conversation between Yale and Harvard football players, caught on the field. Once, in an elevator on the Berkeley campus, a friend and I were singing "Who put the bomp in the bomp de-bomp de-bomp, who put the dang in the rama lamma ding dang, who was . . ." ". . . that man, I'd like to shake his hand . . ." joined in another passenger. "He made my baby fall in love with me!" sang a girl entering the elevator, completing the verse. Another friend of mine once made a list of all the Beatle songs released up to the time, about eighty then, identifying the songs only by the first letter of each word in the title. He quizzed everyone on it. Two years later I asked him about the list—he remembered, and started the game all over again. Then there was the guy who, when about twelve, set up an incredible routine for responding to the current hits. He'd budget enough money to buy five records a week, and he'd buy the ones he dug the most. Then, when he got them home, having also picked up a copy of the most recent Top Forty survey, the ritual would begin: he'd draw elaborate tables, as he correlated his taste with that of the record-buying public, re-drawing the graphs each week as a song moved up or down the charts; and he had elaborate sets of figures establishing and revising the position of his all-time favorites on the same sort of scale. The next week would bring more new songs, adding to his mathematical history of his love for rock 'n' roll. And then there was the disk jockey on an FM rock show who played some records, and then announced: "You've just heard *Since I Don't Have You* by the Skyliners, and *Ain't That Just Like Me* by the Searchers, both of which formerly tied for the all-time record in repetitions of a final rock 'n' roll chorus, and *A Quick One While He's Away*, by the Who, a song that *destroyed* that record by going over *thirty!*" In live performance, the Who have taken *A Quick One* past one hundred. Anyone who's seen them do it knows why that's important.

Rock 'n' roll has always had an awareness of its music as a special thing, reserved for a certain audience. There are dozens of

songs *about* rock 'n' roll, a game within a game. There's *Roll Over Beethoven* and *Rock and Roll Music* by Chuck Berry, Little Richard's *All Around the World (Rock 'n' Roll Is All They Play)*, the magnificent *Do You Believe in Magic* by the Lovin' Spoonful, and the classic *It Will Stand* by the Showmen, released at a time when it looked like rock and roll might not:

*They're always trying to ruin
 Forgive them, for they know not what they're doin'
 Cause rock and roll forever will stand . . .*

The vitality and determination of these songs, that consciousness of rock as a special thing, something to be cherished, has reached the listener, who might have come to it on his own anyway, and helped him into the greatest game of all, the use of lyrics and phrases, verbal, "nonsense," and musical, as metaphors to describe and enclose situations, events, and ideas. "'Da do ron ron' to you too," wrote a reader in the letters column of a rock newspaper, responding to an offensive article on Phil Spector's Ronettes, and revealing at the same time the wealth of undefined and undefinable meaning possessed by that phrase David Susskind just couldn't understand.

This is a great game that never stops; and it's more than a game, it's a way of responding to life. Situations are "set"; one puts himself down; reveals an irony; takes comfort in the knowledge that someone has been there before him. There is a feeling that if we could only hear enough, and remember all we hear, that the answers would be there on the thousands of rock 'n' roll records that have brought us to the present. It is the intensity of this game of metaphors that allows one to feel this way, to have this kind of innocent confidence. It's not that people haven't used metaphors before; "metaphors," as opposed to "explanations," have been drawn from all of literature and art for the same kinds of reasons. What is different is that rock 'n' roll is a medium that is ever-present, thanks to the radio, and repetitive, thanks to Top Forty and oldies and record players, so that the habit of using metaphors in this way comes so naturally it is a characteristic of how the more articulate part of this generation thinks at any time and responds to any situation. The fact that rock 'n' roll is a body of myths private to this generation only heightens the fact.

People quote lines and phrases from songs to their elders, who can't possibly have any idea of what they're talking about; they quote them to friends, who do know. A line from Dylan can

stop whatever action is in progress and return the group to the warmth of a mental community. Since the renaissance of rock 'n' roll, people are finding out that what they thought was their private fetish is the style of a generation. There is a shared body of myths, a common style of feeling and responding, a love of a music that allows one to feel the totality of an experience without missing the nuances and secrets—and as we become aware of our myths we deepen them and practice our own mythmaking. The metaphors drawn from these myths aren't just a matter of fitting the proper words to the proper situation, but of knowing the music is there, somehow, in the same place that the idea is, that somewhere the two have met, and that you have been allowed to see the connection. It is a way of thinking that allows one to give mood and emotion the force of fact, to believe one's instinctual reaction more than someone else's statistical analysis or logical argument.

The music is all around. There's a radio in every car, at least one in every apartment. They are on much of the time—maybe all day. There's a record player, more and more, as people become aware of their music, finding "Oldies But Goodies" and "Greatest Hits" albums on it, as it also plays today's music. A hit song, one you like, is heard at least a hundred times. For the month or so it's popular, it becomes part of the day's experience. If it's on a record you buy, you have control over that part of your experience, instead of receiving it as a surprise from the radio. But playing a favorite song on your own record player lacks the grateful thrill of hearing it cascade from the radio as a gift of smoky airwaves. Rock exists—something makes one want not to control it, but to accept and experience it as it comes. After a record has passed from the charts, it will come back, as an oldie, every once in a while. You only need the rarity of renewal. It's like the surprise of hearing the Beatles' *All You Need Is Love* for the first time, with all those old songs, some virtually legends, jumping and twisting in and out of the chorus: *Greensleeves*, *In the Mood*, and a line from *She Loves You* with just a hint of *Yesterday*.

The incessant, happy repetition of words and music that is provided when a song is a hit on the radio or a favorite on the record player makes the song part of one's mind. The musical patterns and lyrics become second nature, as they merge and separate. The fact and experience of repetition, a song half-heard, half-enjoyed, a quick turning up the sound when a favorite chord comes, then withdrawal—this makes a difference as to how one

thinks or subconsciously reacts to a situation. Once a song becomes part of you it is accepted. Then you are more naturally inclined to take that song, or any song, as a metaphor, to "name" the place you're in, and leave it at that. A person who feels this wouldn't employ *For What It's Worth* by the Buffalo Springfield to help explain the Sunset Strip riots, as did two writers in the *New York Review of Books*; he'd just say, "Listen to *For What It's Worth*—it's all there." The habit and facility of taking metaphors from music, taking music *as* metaphor, and even more important, using these metaphors in a simple and absolute way, is, I think, the result of the musical experiences I've tried to describe. The metaphor isn't even principally the "meaning" of the words to a song; more often it is that the music, or a phrase, or two words heard, jumping out as the rest are lost, seem to fit one's emotional perception of a situation, event, or idea. A pattern of notes or the way in which a few words happen to fit together hit a chord of memory and a perception takes place, a perception which structures and "rationalizes" itself into a metaphor, not on the basis of a "logical" relationship, but because of the power of music and song to reach into the patterns of memory and response. "If you could just listen to it, you'd know what I mean, completely. It's all there."

"It's all there" is an expression used so often in the making of a song or a musical experience into a metaphor it's as if some members of this generation had a secret language, with this phrase as the signal that an exclusive kind of discourse is about to begin. But no two people ever hear the same song in the same way, or connect the song with the same things. An organ movement in the "live" recording of Dylan's *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* is to me the terrifying presence of an evil serpent, swallowing the singer; to someone else, that part of the music slips by unheard, and the notes of the guitar become tears.

What this means is that a strange kind of communication must take place. In one sense, the communication is perfect—one person has complete trust in the other when he is told that a song holds all the truth of a moment or an experience. They both know it; they both accept the validity of the metaphor. Thus, on a non-verbal, non-visual level, they understand each other and the way in which they both think, and they share the knowledge that only certain people can understand them. They realize the privacy and the publicness of their communication. The repetition, over and over, of a two or three minute musical experience has given them an effortless metaphorical consciousness. One knows

what the other is talking about. There is an identification and a sharing. It is the language of people who comprehend instinctually and immediately. To know "where it's at" isn't rational, it's automatic. "You can't talk about it, you have to groove with it." Of course that can be valid. Two people may try to talk about it, perhaps; but they'll get closer to the truth by placing the experience in front of them, starting with a shared understanding of a common purpose and an unspoken language of intuition and emotion, ending with a respect for the experience as well as for each other. Thus the communication is perfect, among those lucky enough to be a part of it.

But on another level, communication is impossibly difficult and confused. One person will not hear what another has heard in a song. It is hard, and wrong, to force another to put specific meanings on music he can hear for himself. It will bring forth associations for him as well. They both know the truth is there; that is not in doubt. What's there? Who can tell? I know, you know—what else matters? What is vital is that the situation has been captured, probed, made livable by understanding, a mythical understanding with a depth that is private and public, perfectly and impossibly communicable. Perfectly communicable in that there is mutual trust that the situation is *ours*, that we have each and together made it our own; it can't destroy us; it can only be relived and reexperienced with each hearing of our metaphor. Impossibly communicable in that we never know exactly what our friend *is* experiencing. But that can be accepted, when one can create or be given metaphors—imperfect knowledge that is perfect understanding, our kind of roots to joy and tragedy. In John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, the various characters of the novel all go to the theatre, where the Barthian paraphrase of *Oedipus Rex* ("Taliped Decanus") is presented. All know that the drama has affected them profoundly, but none knows just how, for himself or for the others. Yet all trust the play to give them the metaphors by which they will shape and interpret their lives, their actions, and the actions of the others. Each knows, by grace of the gift of art, that they will accept, instinctually and non-rationally, the validity of the others' pictures. All trust the play, as we trust our music. The Greeks perhaps lived with this kind of depth, within this pattern of myth. The same treasure the Greeks of the tragic era possessed is, in some prosaic way, ours again.

Out of the experience of growing up with rock 'n' roll, we have found out that rock has more to give us than we ever knew. With a joyful immediacy, it has taught us to participate with our-

selves, and with each other. A repetitive history of songs and secrets has given us a memory patterned by games, within a consciousness of a shared experience, exclusive to our generation. Fifteen years of a beat, and thousands of songs that had just enough humor in those words that are so hard to hear, have brought us a style of thought that allows ideas to create themselves out of feeling and emotion, a style of thought that accepts metaphors as myths. Those myths, when we find them, are strong enough to sustain belief and action, strong enough to allow us to fashion a sense of reality out of those things that are important to us. This is not an attempt to "justify" rock 'n' roll by linking it to something "bigger" than itself—we have nothing bigger than rock 'n' roll, and nothing more is needed to "justify" it than a good song.

The kind of thinking I've tried to describe, the manner of response, the consciousness and unconsciousness of metaphor, the subtle confidence of mystique that leads to the permanence of myth—such an intellectual mood, I think, will have a deep and lasting effect on the vision and the style of the "students" of this generation. They will, and already do, embrace an instinctual kind of knowledge. This is partly a reaction against a programmed, technological culture—but so is rock 'n' roll, a dynamic kaleidoscope of sound that constantly invents new contexts within which to celebrate its own exhilarating power to create a language of emotional communication, sending messages to the body as well as to the mind, reaching the soul in the end.

What rock 'n' roll has done to us won't leave us. Faced with the bleakness of social and political life in America, we will return again and again to rock 'n' roll, as a place of creativity and renewal, to return from it with a strange, media-enforced consciousness increasingly a part of our thinking and our emotions, two elements of life that we will less and less trouble to separate.

This is a kind of freedom we are learning about. Affecting our own perspectives—artistic, social, and political—it makes the tangible and the factual that much more reprehensible, that much more deadening. The intellectual leap, the habit of free association, the facility of making a single rock 'n' roll metaphor the defining idea for a situation or a time of one's life—that is the kind of thinking that makes sense. It is the factual made mystical, with a mythic consciousness given the force of fact, that is our translation of society's messages. It's the elusive situation or idea that fascinates, not the weight of proof or conclusion, and that

fascination, captured by metaphor, will be, I think, our kind of knowledge, leading to our kind of vision.

The isolation that is already ours will be increased, of course; but that isolation, as politics and as art, is here now. If it isn't comfortable, there is at least a kind of fraternity to be discovered within its limits.

Chuck Berry has been out of jail for a long time, the Stones for just a little while, and we're not going to let anyone put them back in.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Marcus speaks of rock music as the special and exclusive possession of a generation. Discuss why you do or do not agree that "most of those over thirty cannot be a part of it, and it cannot be a part of them."*
2. *Do you think Marcus overstates the importance of rock in the lives of its listeners? Do you agree that rock songs really do "shape one's mental patterns" and "provide a way of responding to life"? Richard Goldstein, in an article in Vogue about the break-up of the Beatles, wrote that the members of the "New Culture," as he called it, "stand at a distance from the music, and they no longer reserve a special place in the center of their lives for the pop experience." In short, he feels that rock has lost much of its mystique as a religion. Discuss.*
3. *Marcus discusses some of the ups and downs of the history of rock, including the "clean, sugary rock" of the early 1960's, with such singers as Bobby Vinton and Annette Funicello, and the great revival sparked by the Beatles in 1963. Does this have any relation to the "bubble gum" rock of the late 1960's? What developments in rock do Marcus (and Mooney and Goldstein) omit?*
4. *Both Marcus and Mooney note that rock, early in its history, was considered immoral by many older people. Why "immoral"?*
5. *In the time it takes for something to be printed about popular music, new developments have already appeared. What significant innovations have been made in rock since the preceding three articles were published?*

Bob Dylan and the Poetry of Salvation

Steven Goldberg

Steven Goldberg teaches sociology at the City University of New York. His papers on American society and student unrest have appeared in various publications. In this article Goldberg asserts that the recent songs of Bob Dylan are more than very good rock music or political "message" or protest songs; they are the work of a mystic who is trying to communicate his discoveries about salvation through faith and compassion.

We don't have many wise men left, you know. We have seen our incredible competence and our surfeit of intelligence lead us only to loneliness and rationalization. We are able to be so much, yet we are so little able to understand what it is we are supposed to be. We are learning to run faster and faster. Into the abyss. And we are leaving behind the few who might give us a hint of what to do when we get there.

Like the rest of us, Bob Dylan faces a universe that science discovers to be more and more a deterministic unity no part of which has meaning without reference to every other part. To the dispossessed this universe seems to be inhabited not by free agents in a world of free will, but by the living, irrelevant effects of an infinite number of causes. To a man who yearns for meaning, the thought that life is merely playing out directions imprinted before birth, or given in childhood, or decreed by an alien society, is intolerable unless it is a part of a master plan. The songs of Bob Dylan, a few of them, speak of such a master plan.

Bob Dylan is a mystic. His importance lies not in the perversion of his words into a politicism he ridicules as irrelevant or in the symbols that once filled the lesser social protest songs of his

NOTE: Because permission to reprint the lyrics quoted in the original article has been denied, this essay is presented without them.

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late adolescence. His only relevance is that, in a world which has lost faith that it is infused with godliness, he sings of a transcendent reality that makes it all make sense again.

The mystical experience is, by its very nature, indescribable. Dylan's genius is that he is able to give us some clues. I can merely attempt to state a few of the implications of mysticism in an effort to indicate the basic underpinning of Dylan's songs.

The mystic has always seen what science is now beginning to see: All distinction is illusory. Man's mental dissection of reality into different things, even the very separation of his mind into thoughts, results from his viewing only an artificial division of the One. With this in mind, one can appreciate that the mystical truth that "life is pain" is not in the slightest nihilistic, but an acknowledgment that all the separate joys that this world has to offer contain the basic pain of our seeming separation from the One. The mystical experience, in which all separations fuse into the infinite unity as all colors fuse into white, is a reunification with the One. Only in the life which is illuminated by the afterglow of such an experience is there the possibility of salvation. I believe that such an experience pervades all that Dylan has written since 1964.

Salvation means many things in Dylan's songs. On one level it is the conquest of guilt, ambition, impatience, and all the other obsessive states of egotistic confusion in which we set ourselves apart from the natural flow of things. On another it is the supremely free flight of the will. On still another it is faith, an acceptance of a transcendent, omnipresent godhead without which we are lost.

This is why Dylan merits our most serious attention. For he stands at the vortex: When the philosophical, psychological, and scientific lines of thought are followed to the point where each becomes a cul-de-sac, as logic without faith eventually must, Dylan is there to sing his songs. Perhaps it is only in a time like ours that anyone will listen. For a man who sees his life as satisfactorily defined by the terms of his society will have no need to roam that border area which, while it does hold his salvation, also threatens him with madness. The cynic and the atheist, who see such a need as escapist rationalization, fail to see that necessity is also the mother of discovery. We have all always been out on the street, but it is only at a time like this that any great number of us are sufficiently troubled to realize it.

The Dylan songs that are most commonly discussed are the early ramblings such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times

They Are A-Changin’,” whose simple-mindedness allows instant comprehension. It was not until 1964, when he wrote “Lay Down Your Weary Tune” and “My Back Pages,” that Dylan gave indication that he was about ready to discard the security which one can find in symbols. Where he had formerly seen his own identity in the terms of the civil rights struggle, he now ridicules professors who teach that “liberty is just equality in school.”

It was at this point that Dylan was preparing to become an artist in the Zen sense; he was searching for the courage to release his grasp on all the layers of distinctions that give us meaning, but, by virtue of their inevitably setting us apart from the lifeflow, preclude our salvation. All such distinctions, from petty jealousies and arbitrary cultural values to the massive, but ultimately irrelevant, confusions engendered by psychological problems, all the endless repetitions that those without faith grasp in order to avoid their own existence—all of these had to be released. The strength, the faith, necessary for this release was to be a major theme of Dylan’s for the next three years. In “Mr. Tambourine Man,” an invocation to his muse, he seeks the last bit of will necessary for such strength.

Having summoned up the courage to deal with his vision, Dylan is now able to expose the myriad confusions which offer us security at the expense of freedom. His declaration (in “It’s Alright, Ma”) that “I got nothing, Ma, to live up to” is a rejection of others’ inevitably futile attempts to impose a source of meaning on him. This line has been misinterpreted, I believe, as a condemnation of a society without values (values which are relative and irrelevant to ultimate meaning) by some and used as a basis for a psychological criticism of Dylan’s work by others. This latter approach may conceivably offer some interesting insights, both of the obvious possible psychoanalytic correlates of the mystical experience and of Dylan’s own compelling psychological perceptions. As Walter Kaufman would say, these are merely different snapshots of the same journey. However, Dylan’s vision is particularly fragile and one must take care not to destroy it with a lethal reductionism.

In “Gates of Eden” Dylan is well into his own parade. He has found his mystical fixed point and is attempting to illuminate it. As is the case with the other songs on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan’s vision has developed at a far more rapid rate than has his talent. As a result, his cosmology is stated more concretely (if less poetically) than in his later songs. In “Gates of Eden” Dylan’s kinship to Blake becomes apparent. It is possible that at the time he wrote “Gates of Eden” Dylan had never heard of Blake. Yet

the similarity between "Gates of Eden" and this verse from Blake's "Auguries of Innocence" is startling.

*We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro' the Eye
Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night
When the soul Slept in Beams of Light.
God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day.*

Dylan's conception of a transcendence that flows through man is similar to Blake's, and the compassion it generates is later to suffuse Dylan's work with a humanity it lacks at this point. For now Dylan is struggling to express his newly discovered Oceanus. D. T. Suzuki has written:

Our consciousness is nothing but an insignificant floating piece of island in the Oceanus encircling the earth. But it is through this little fragment of land that we can look out to the immense expanse of the unconscious itself; the feeling of it is all that we can have, but this feeling is not a small thing, because it is by means of this feeling that we can realize that our fragmentary existence gains its full significance, and thus that we can rest assured that we are not living in vain.*

This is the Eden of which Dylan sings. It is, of course, possible that even those readers who accept all that has been said thus far will conclude that Dylan does indeed speak of a godhead, yet is no more a poet than are the many philosophers who have spoken of being and existence in such an excruciatingly unpoetic way that descriptions of the unfathomable are rendered virtually unreadable. Those who are particularly concerned with a separation of form and content are most likely to look unfavorably upon Dylan's poetry. It is difficult to imagine, however, any poet more capable of speaking to his given time than is Dylan, or a time more in need of someone capable of speaking to it.

* *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* by Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard De Martino, Harper and Row, 1960.

With respect to form, Dylan faces the same problems that face all artists. His creations must give form and order to apparent chaos. In an attempt to catch the tune of a universal melody, mere awareness of the melody is not enough. For we all possess the potential to hear the tune; many of us do hear it, but are incapable of communicating even a hint of its beauty. Only a supreme talent can hope to translate the experience into art. It is not enough for the poet or the composer merely to relay random sounds, for such sounds have beauty only in their universal context. The artist must create a new form on a smaller scale that, if it will not mirror the holy chord, will at least provide harmony for it. Dylan is like the chess grand master; there is *one* correct way to play chess, but this way is far too complicated for any person or computer to comprehend. So the master does not attempt merely to extract a few moves from a plan he can know of but cannot understand; he creates his own imperfect form in order to suggest a chord that can only be sensed.

Dylan does not teach, neither does he proselytize. At most he merely affirms the existence of The Way. His effect is limited, of course, by the inherent inadequacy of words which precludes the possibility of total communication of the mystical experience. It is further limited by the fact that, while we are all capable of salvation, it is a relatively rare man who is an embodiment of the particular complex of psyche, intelligence, sensitivity, courage, and coincidence from which the mystical experience and salvation can erupt. Dylan can effect only the last; "take what you have gathered from coincidence," he tells Baby Blue. At most all that any artist or prophet can hope for is to ignite our faith. Dylan, perhaps more than any other contemporary poet, is capable of the words that can ignite this faith. If language's impotence is in its inability to convey the melody of the universe, its strength is its power to reproduce the harmonics at least of that infinitely beautiful melody.

By the time Dylan wrote the songs that were to appear on his next album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, his talent was rapidly achieving parity with his vision. He now felt more at home with that vision and was less obsessed with detailing its every aspect. This enabled him to return partially to the subject of man. About the only redeeming virtue of Dylan's previsionary songs had been an attractive empathy toward the outsider. While Dylan was not to achieve the complete suffusion of vision with compassion until *John Wesley Harding*, in *Highway 61 Revisited* he did begin to feel that the eternally incommunicable nature of the religious experience did not render human contact irrelevant. If his attentions were not loving,

at least he was attempting to reconcile man's existence with his vision. In "Like a Rolling Stone" he developed a conceit that had appeared in seminal form in "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." "Like a Rolling Stone," which is probably Dylan's finest song and most certainly his quintessential work, is addressed to a victim who has spent a lifetime being successfully seduced by the temptations that enable one to avoid facing his own existence. Dylan plays the fool, the "juggler," the "clown," "Napoleon in rags," who—like numerous literary fools before him—is discovered by the mocking victim to be the bearer of truth. To the Oriental, the fool is easily discernible as the Master whose path to truth is paved with riddle and paradox. Perhaps the Occidental most comparable to the fool is the psychoanalyst whose maddening silence is well known to the victims who come to him. In any case, the victim, imprisoned in the ego strait jacket that has been his only source of meaning, is not quick to release his protective ball and chain.

There are no deals. Standing naked, knowing that all that came before is irrelevant, Miss Lonely is still not capable of the ultimate honesty which is required for her salvation. She cannot be honest because she lacks the courage to manifest the will to discard the rationalizations that imprison her and the diversions that allow her to avoid the knowledge of her imprisonment. Dylan later will write, "to live outside the law you must be honest"; when one surrenders the limited, arbitrary, relative societal values which define life for most men, pretense will not suffice. It is with perhaps a bit too much bitterness, a bitterness which is to plague Dylan in his search for peace, that he ridicules Miss Lonely.

Bitterness surfaced in all its virulence in "Positively 4th Street," a song written at this time but excluded from the album. On one level this song may have been an attack on a critic who decried Dylan's dismissal of the relevance of politics. More importantly, I think that Dylan's bitterness arose from his having to face the most basic spiritual conflict: Having seen the vision, how does one either live a life which flows naturally from that vision or resign himself to the impossibility of such a life? This song is not all bitterness, however; Dylan's refusal to accept another man's problems is not lack of compassion, but a reiteration of the ultimately irrelevant nature of those problems and the impossibility of any man's being the source of another's courage.

There is more of brilliance on *Highway 61 Revisited*. In "Ballad of a Thin Man" Dylan lays aside his usual reticence about the use of sexual imagery (he once derided obscenity on the grounds that all propaganda is phony) when he utilizes a homo-

sexual encounter in order to deal with man's search for realization. "Desolation Row" is a denunciation of intellectual word-mongering as a road to salvation. It is this song's cornucopia of imagery that is primarily responsible for what is, I believe, the common misconception that Dylan is a symbolist. Words are already symbols; to force Dylan's phrases of rough-hewn delicacy further into the stultifying context of symbolism is to render them totally incapable of bridging the gap between word and essence.

It is only when one realizes he has been out on the street that the faith which precedes salvation becomes necessary and possible. The journey home to peace can begin only in the cobwebbed room of suicidal meaninglessness that is Desolation Row.

Dylan's poetic talents are at their zenith in *Blond On Blond*. Vision overwhelms him less than before, and he concentrates on finding peace through the kinds of women he has always loved: women of silent wisdom, women who are artists of life, women who neither argue nor judge, but accept the flow of things.

Dylan had suggested the premise of this album in "Queen Jane Approximately" on *Highway 61 Revisited*. As in many of the songs on *Blond On Blond*, here one finds not only Dylan's ever-present sense of irony and humor, but also his use of overlapping levels of meanings. As one enters this song more and more deeply he becomes aware first of its concern with the fashionable ennui that periodically affects us all, then its representation of disgust with oneself and the games he thinks he must play, and—finally—its subtle description of the endless repetition to which so many of us chain ourselves. "Visions of Johanna," an incandescently beautiful song, and "Memphis Blues Again," which is also on *Blond On Blond*, fuse all the themes discussed so far and indicate Dylan's imminent discovery that the mystical experience must give way to a life infused with mysticism and compassion lest even the mystical experience be perverted into an excuse for evasion.

There are no "messages" in Dylan's songs, neither is there ideology. The flight of a supreme imagination, the ability to tap into the highest levels of truth, preclude the artist's accepting the simplistic artificiality that is necessary for ideology's goal of widespread acceptance. If an artist is capable of no greater vision than the rest of us, then of what value is he? By imprisoning Dylan's songs in a context of political ideology we play the barbarian as surely as if we were to hammer Rodin's *Thinker* into a metal peace symbol. Dylan may well be upset by contemporary America; on one level "Tears of Rage" would seem to indicate this. Much

of Dylan's anger, however, is directed not at any political entity (politics must forever play a secondary role in his universe) but at the young themselves—many of whom have used his words to avoid fighting the battles of their own existences. It is ironic, but not surprising, that Weatherman, a group of individuals who channel their own confusions into violence, take their name from the song of a man who ridicules all forms of escape through symbol and evasion.

In itself, Dylan's political philosophy is irrelevant; he sees both philosophy and politics as evasive concern with the repetition of cause and effect that can never lead one to the Light which shines within him. Indeed, Dylan ridicules all codes and moralities that claim holy sanction. His vision concerns the God within and without.

It is quite conceivable, therefore, that, when he bothers with politics at all, Dylan's political outlook is conservative. His emphasis on personal, as opposed to societal, salvation could very possibly leave him feeling most at home with a political philosophy that emphasizes the individual's right to be left alone to his own search for God. *John Wesley Harding* appeared at a time when the indescribable revulsion felt by the young toward Lyndon Johnson was at its zenith; yet, in a time of ornate, kaleidoscopic record covers, *John Wesley Harding* had an Americana cover. Dylan's declaration that he was not about to argue or to move contrasted with the student rage that was asserting itself. If Dylan does tend toward conservatism, it is because conservatism, at least theoretically, mirrors his distrust of political routes to salvation.

In *John Wesley Harding* Dylan reiterates his belief that compassion is the only secular manifestation of the religious experience; any code which demands more than pure compassion is generated in the imperfection of experience and does not flow only from a vision of God. Indeed, while change in Dylan's universe is the natural state of things, impatience to implement change is the supreme form of egotism, the ultimate vanity: It is an individual's setting himself apart from the flow. Preoccupation with the methodology of change, like any magnification of one small aspect of the flow of life, implies a ceaseless intellectualization which precludes a possibility of the religious experience.

John Wesley Harding is not a political philosophy and our attempting to view it as such is to drain it of the wisdom it has to offer. This album is Dylan's supreme work; it is his solution to the seeming contradiction of vision and life. His vision continues to preclude a political path to salvation, but finally over-

comes the exclusion of humanity that had plagued his previous visionary songs. The mere existence of Dylan's songs had indicated the problem: If other men were totally irrelevant—if God could be experienced, but the experience was totally incommunicable—then Dylan's songs would have been silent psalms read to deaf sinners. In this album, the creative manifestation of a life infused with God, gentleness and compassion replace bitterness and cynicism. Where once there was confusion, now there is peace. Dylan has paid his dues. He has discovered that the realization that life is not in vain can be attained only by an act of faith; only when one accepts the flow of life can he manifest the will to overcome the confusion and vanity which tear him apart. It is to the children of Pirandello, drowning in their ennui and their relativism, that Dylan sings "All Along the Watchtower."

The only way in which any of us can hope to play the thief, can ignite the faith of another and rob him of his confusion, is through love and compassion. For better or worse, all wisdom is eventually distilled into a few lines; even the unfathomable mysteries of the Bible must finally reside in the compassion of the Golden Rule. Dylan concludes "Dear Landlord" with a prayer for true compassion.

Perhaps it is inevitable that, sooner or later, there will be a falling out between Dylan (with his emphasis on wisdom and the acceptance that it generates) and his public (with its desire for the passion and change that political objectives demand). I must admit to skepticism concerning how many of Dylan's youthful followers have even the vaguest conception of what he is singing about. Many look no deeper than the level of his very fine rock music, while others are merely in the market for political slogans. However, contemporary technology enables Dylan's songs to be disseminated to an incredibly large number of people. No doubt many of them are at least aware that Dylan is sending out clues. Dylan's art is capable of igniting their faith. In any age that is a considerable artistic achievement; in the lonely world of the contemporary young it would seem almost a miracle.

I hope that these observations have served as invitation. One discusses wisdom poetry with the knowledge that his observation affects his subject just as the physicist's affects his. Dylan has warned us of the danger in "Gates of Eden."

There is no denying that Dylan's work subsequent to *Nashville Skyline* does not soar to the heights Dylan navigated in the songs discussed in this essay. Perhaps this is the unavoidable price

one must pay when his growth forces him to surrender the confusions which drove him to new artistic heights. Much later, Dylan, a poet who had dealt directly with the most complex and profound questions facing man, would write in "Sign on the Window," of the meaning which can be found only in the simple life.

Indeed, it is apparent even in *Nashville Skyline* that Dylan is surrendering the surrogate joys of genius for the emotional joys of the maturity which genius must pursue in vain. *Nashville Skyline* can be seen in all its clarity only in the light of all that came before. Perhaps this is a failure of the work; certainly one would think so if he insists that any great work of art must stand alone. Alone, *Nashville Skyline* is a tightly written, cleverly executed series of clichés that would seem to be merely a collection of nice songs written by a Dylan who has gotten a bit mentally plump. As the final step in Dylan's search for God, however, it is a lovely paean, Dylan's acknowledgment of the joy of a life suffused with compassion and God. If this does not make the album particularly illuminating for the man who is unaware of Dylan's cosmology, to others it is evidence that Dylan has finally been able to bring it all back home. He has heard the universal melody through the galaxies of chaos and has found that the galaxies were a part of the melody. The essence that Dylan had discovered and explored is a part of him at last. There will be no more bitterness, no more intellectualization, no more explanation. There will be only Dylan's existence and the joyous songs which flow naturally from it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What exactly does Goldberg mean by "mystic vision"? How does Goldberg substantiate his claim that Dylan is a mystic? Do you think Dylan qualifies for this status?
2. When analyzing any poet or artist, one always runs the risk of over-interpreting or misinterpreting his works. Do you think Goldberg has slipped into either of these pitfalls in his essay?
3. Discuss Goldberg's remark, "I must admit to skepticism concerning how many of Dylan's youthful followers have even the vaguest conception of what he is singing about." Do you think Dylan's popularity stems from his music, his poetic vision, or from some other factor?
4. Do you think Dylan is as influential and important as the author suggests? Discuss.

5. *Expand on Goldberg's brief survey of Dylan's music by dwelling on one or two of his songs in detail.*
6. *Would Dylan's more recent music cause you to alter any of Goldberg's remarks?*

The Message of History's Biggest Happening

Time *Essay*

This Time essay, published just two weeks after the 1969 Woodstock rock festival, attempts to analyze the political and social significance of that event and of rock music in general as expressions of the younger generation's rejection of their elders' values and institutions.

The baffling history of mankind is full of obvious turning points and significant events: battles won, treaties signed, rulers elected or deposed, and now, seemingly, planets conquered. Equally important are the great groundswells of popular movements that affect the minds and values of a generation or more, not all of which can be neatly tied to a time and place. Looking back upon the America of the '60s, future historians may well search for the meaning of one such movement. It drew the public's notice on the days and nights of Aug. 15 through 17, 1969, on the 600-acre farm of Max Yasgur in Bethel, N.Y.

What took place at Bethel, ostensibly, was the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, which was billed by its youthful Manhattan promoters as "An Aquarian Exposition" of music and peace. It was that and more—much more. The festival turned out to be history's largest happening. As the moment when the special culture of U.S. youth of the '60s openly displayed its strength, appeal and power, it may well rank as one of the significant political and sociological events of the age.

By a conservative estimate, more than 400,000 people—the vast majority of them between the ages of 16 and 30—showed up for the Woodstock festival. Thousands more would have come if

police had not blocked off access roads, which had become ribbon-like parking lots choked with stalled cars. Had the festival lasted much longer, as many as one million youths might have made the pilgrimage to Bethel. The lure of the festival was an all-star cast of top rock artists, including Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and the Jefferson Airplane. But the good vibrations of good groups turned out to be the least of it. What the youth of America—and their observing elders—saw at Woodstock was the potential power of a generation that in countless disturbing ways has rejected the traditional values and goals of the U.S. Thousands of young people, who had previously thought of themselves as part of an isolated minority, experienced the euphoric sense of discovering that they are, as the saying goes, what's happening. Adults were made more aware than ever before that the children of the welfare state and the atom bomb do indeed march to the beat of a different drummer, as well as to the tune of an electric guitarist. The spontaneous community of youth that was created at Woodstock was the stuff of which legends are made; the substance of the event contains both a revelation and a sobering lesson.

From a strictly rational viewpoint, which may be a dangerous and misleading way of looking at it, Bethel was a neatly symbolic choice for the festival—the Biblical town of that name was a center of idolatry denounced by the prophets Amos and Hosea. To many adults, the festival was a squalid freakout, a monstrous Dionysian revel, where a mob of crazies gathered to drop acid and groove to hours of amplified cacophony. In a classic example of its good gray mannerisms, the *New York Times* in an editorial compared the Bethel pilgrimage to a march of lemmings toward the sea and rhetorically asked: "What kind of culture is it that can produce so colossal a mess?" But even the *Times* can change its tune. Next day, it ran a more sympathetic editorial that spoke kindly of the festival as "essentially a phenomenon of innocence."

There were, of course, certain things to deplore about Woodstock. Three people died—one from an overdose of drugs, and hundreds of youths were freaked out on bad trips caused by low-grade LSD, which was being openly peddled at \$6 per capsule. On the other hand, there were no rapes, no assaults, no robberies and, as far as anyone can recall, not one single fight, which is more than can be said for most sporting events held in New York City.

The real significance of Woodstock can hardly be overestimated. Despite the piles of litter and garbage, the hopelessly inadequate sanitation, the lack of food and the two nights of rain that

turned Yasgur's farm into a sea of mud, the young people found it all "beautiful." One long-haired teen-ager summed up the significance of Woodstock quite simply: "People," he said, "are finally getting together." The undeniable fact that "people"—meaning in this case the youth of America—got together has consequences that go well beyond the festival itself.

For one thing, the Woodstock scene demonstrated more clearly than ever before the pervasiveness of a national subculture of drugs. At least 90% of those present at the festival were smoking marijuana. In addition, narcotics of any and all description, from hash to acid to speed to horse, were freely available. Perhaps out of fear of rousing the crowd to hostility, police made fewer than 100 arrests on narcotics charges. By and large, the U.S. has accepted the oversimplification that all narcotics are dangerous and thus should be outlawed. The all but universal acceptance of marijuana, at least among the young, raises the question of how long the nation's present laws against its use can remain in force without seeming as absurd and hypocritical as Prohibition.

More important, Woodstock demonstrated the unique sense of community that seems to exist among the young, their mystical feeling for themselves as a special group, an "us" in contrast to a "them." The festival was widely advertised, but the unexpectedly large crowd it attracted suggests that the potential significance of the event was spread by a kind of underground network. "If you were part of this culture," said one pilgrim back from Woodstock, "you had to be there." In spite of the grownup suspicions and fears about the event, Woodstock produced a feeling of friendship, camaraderie and—an overused phrase—a sense of love among those present. This yearning for togetherness was demonstrated in countless major and minor ways: the agape-like sharing of food and shelter by total strangers; the lack of overt hostility despite conditions that were ripe for panic and chaos; the altruistic ministrations of the Hog Farm, a New Mexico hippie commune who took care of kids on bad trips. If Woodstock was youth on a holiday, it was also a demonstration to the adult world that young people could create a kind of peace in a situation where none should have existed, and that they followed a mysterious inner code of law and order infinitely different from the kind envisioned by Chicago's Mayor Daley. In the end, even the police were impressed. Said Sullivan County Sheriff Louis Ratner: "This was the nicest bunch of kids I've ever dealt with."

Hippiedom Lives

Youth's sense of community is an *ad hoc* thing: it is suspicious of institutions and wary of organization, prizing freedom above system. In this, as in many other ways, the youth of Woodstock displayed adherence to the prevailing spirit of the hippie movement. It is true enough that the manifestation of flower power in Haight-Ashbury and the East Village became a bad scene of gang rapes, deaths from malnutrition and too much speed. It is equally true that most of those at Woodstock were not hippies in the commonly accepted sense: a good half of them, at least, were high school or college students from middle-class homes. But at Woodstock they exhibited to the world many of the hippie values and life styles, from psychedelic clothing to spontaneous, unashamed nudity to open and casual sex. Youthful imaginations were captured, most obviously, by the hippie sound: the driving, deafening hard beat of rock, music that is not just a particular form of pop but the anthem of revolution. The Jefferson Airplane, one of the first and best of the San Francisco groups, sang out the message at Woodstock in words of startling explicitness:

*Look what's happening out in the streets
Got a revolution, got to revolution
Hey, I'm dancing down the streets
Got a revolution, got to revolution.*

In its energy, its lyrics, its advocacy of frustrated joys, rock is one long symphony of protest. Although many adults generally find it hard to believe, the revolution it preaches, implicitly or explicitly, is basically moral; it is the proclamation of a new set of values as much as it is the rejection of an old system. The values, moreover, are not merely confined to the pleasures of tumescence. The same kind of people who basked in the spirit of Woodstock also stormed the deans' offices at Harvard and Columbia and shed tears or blood at Chicago last summer—all in the name of a new morality.

To Historian Theodore Roszak, the militancy of the student New Left and the dropped-out pacifism of the turned-on types are two sides of what he calls a "counter-culture" by which almost everyone under 30 has been affected. Like the poor urban black, this counter-culture is an alienated minority within the Affluent Society, even though it is made up primarily of the sons and daughters of the middle class. They have seen suburbia, found it

wanting, and have uttered "the absolute refusal," as New Left Guru Herbert Marcuse calls it, to modern urban technology and the civilization it has produced. With surpassing ease and a cool sense of authority, the children of plenty have voiced an intention to live by a different ethical standard than their parents accepted. The pleasure principle has been elevated over the Puritan ethic of work. To do one's own thing is a greater duty than to be a useful citizen. Personal freedom in the midst of squalor is more liberating than social conformity with the trappings of wealth. Now that youth takes abundance for granted, it can afford to reject materialism. It is easy enough for adults to reject the irrationality and hedonism of this ethic. But the young are quick to point out that the most rational and technically accomplished society known to man has led only to racism, repression and a meaningless war in the jungles of Southeast Asia. If that is oversimplification, it is the kind around which ringing slogans are made.

Youth has always been rebellious. What makes the generation of the '60s different, is that it is largely inner-directed and uncontrolled by adult *doyens*. The rock festival, an art form and social structure unique to the time, is a good example. "They are not mimicking something done in its purest form by adults," says one prominent U.S. sociologist. "They are doing their own thing. All this shows that there is a breakdown in the capacity of adult leaders to capture the young." Some other observers agree that the youth movement is a politics without a statesman, a religion without a messiah. "We don't need a leader," insists Janis Joplin. "We have each other. All we need is to keep our heads straight and in ten years this country may be a decent place to live in."

At least two national figures have been able briefly to capitalize politically on the idealism of the young. The knight-errant campaign of Eugene McCarthy was, his enemies said, something of a Children's Crusade. Bobby Kennedy, like his brother Jack, was also able to speak to the Now Generation in language that it heard and heeded. Clearly, the passions of the Woodstock people are there to be exploited, for good or ill. It is an open question whether some as yet unknown politician could exploit the deep emotions of today's youth to build a politics of ecstasy.

The rock festival has become, in a way, the equivalent of a political forum for the young. The politics involved is not the expression of opinion or ideas but the spirit of community created—the good vibrations or the bad ones, the young in touch with themselves and aware. If Woodstock is any proof, this kind of

expressive happening will become even more important. "This was only the beginning," warns Jimi Hendrix. "The only way for kids to make the older generation understand is through mass gatherings like Woodstock. And the kids are not going to be in the mud all the time. From here they will start to build and change things. The whole world needs a big wash, a big scrub-down."

The Hunger of Youth

Psychoanalyst Rollo May describes Woodstock as "a symptomatic event of our time that showed the tremendous hunger, need and yearning for community on the part of youth." He compares its friendly spirit favorably with the alcoholic mischief ever present at a Shriners' convention but wonders how long the era of good feeling will last. Other observers wonder about future superfestivals, if they become tourist spectaculars for adult hangers-on. The Hashbury began to die when the bus-driven voyeurs came by and the hard-drug addicts took over.

It is beyond argument that the generation attuned to rock, pot and sex will drastically change the world it grew up in. The question is: How and to what purpose? Columbia Sociologist Amitai Etzioni applauds the idealism of the young but argues that "they need more time and energy for reflection" as well as more opportunities for authentic service. Ultimately, the great danger of the counter-culture is its self-proclaimed flight from reason, its exaltation of self over society, its Dionysian anarchism. Historian Roszak points out that the rock revolutionaries bear a certain resemblance to the early Christians, who, in a religious cause, rejected the glory that was Greece and the grandeur of Rome. Ultimately, they brought down a decaying pagan empire and built another in its place. But the Second Comings of history carry with them no guarantees of success, and a revolution based on unreason may just as easily bring a New Barbarism rather than the New Jerusalem. As Yeats so pointedly asked:

*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This account of the significance of the Woodstock festival was written shortly after the event. How does Woodstock look to you today, after the Rolling Stones' fiasco at Altamont and widespread charges of

avarice on the part of rock groups and promoters? What points in the Time essay do you find valid and what points invalid?

2. Do you agree that youth "is suspicious of institutions and wary of organization, prizing freedom above system," and that the young are opposed to social conformity? Are youthful attire, conduct, and politics as represented on the street, in communes, or at rock festivals perhaps equally as standardized as the older generation's attire, conduct, and politics? Comment.

3. Discuss whether you think the younger generation, as this essay suggests, is less interested than its elders in "the trappings of wealth."

4. What is hedonism? Is it a new development in the history of man? Do you think that this philosophy is embraced by the young today? Discuss.

5. Do you agree that the counterculture is a "flight from reason"? Is all this talk of revolution, love, peace, togetherness, and freedom mere romantic sentimentality and wishful thinking by the children of the affluent, or do you think the young are really helping to shape the beginnings of a new and better world?

Soul Is . . .

Arnold Shaw

Arnold Shaw, a noted critic of popular music whose books include Sinatra, a Twentieth-Century Romantic, Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography, The Rock Revolution, and The World of Soul, discusses the meaning of the term soul, especially as it applies to music.

The fifth game of the World Series of 1968 began, as such public events do, with the singing of the national anthem. The young Puerto Rican chosen to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," accompanied himself on an acoustic guitar. As he progressed through the song, some boos echoed across Detroit's Tiger Stadium. And hardly had José Feliciano completed his rendition, punctuated with a gentle "yeah, yeah" at the end, than angry phone calls began jarring NBC's switchboard, followed by a flood of telegrams and letters of outrage.

"I'm young enough," said the brother of a Tiger infielder, "to understand it, but I think it stank. It was nonpatriotic."

A Detroit housewife told a reporter, "It was a disgrace and an insult. I'm going to write my senator."

Verdict of the conductor of the U.S. Army Band: "Totally unacceptable."

Now, what had Feliciano done to create such a furor? Instead of using the traditional chords and adhering to the authorized melody line of "To Anacreon in Heaven"—the eighteenth century English drinking song to which Francis Scott Key, who was not a composer, had written the words of the national anthem—the Puerto Rican vocalist had occasionally substituted his own chords, manipulated the pitches, and altered the note values. As he had become more involved in the song, he had made considerable use of melisma, stretching one syllable over many notes. (Bluesmen

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call it "worryin'" a word.) In short, he had done what jazz singers, folk artists, and even pop singers sometimes do—changed the published version in accordance with his feelings.

"A man expresses love for his country any way he feels," said Feliciano, who was born blind, settled in Spanish Harlem in 1950, and grew up on Manhattan's slum West Side. "I did it with the intention of just communicating with young people. The anthem is a groovy thing and it should be upgraded. . . . It sure made people listen. . . ." That his treatment was heartfelt and intense no one questioned. But since it was "soul-spangled," as one newsman wrote, instead of star-spangled, it infuriated traditionalists.

Of course, there are those who would question the applicability of the word "soul" to Feliciano, since he is of Spanish and not African descent, is not an American Negro but a Puerto Rican, and is brown, not black. But there can be little doubt that his style was soulful, to substitute an esthetic for a racial concept.

As both a racial and an esthetic term, Soul has gained currency only recently. Station WOL of Washington, D.C., programming for black listeners, made its initial use of the phrase "Soul Radio" in July of 1965. Three years earlier, at the height of the twist craze, saxist King Curtis had had an R & B hit in an original instrumental titled "Soul Twist." While the term is to be found earlier in jazz and pop music criticism as an epithet of praise, the non-music world first discovered it during recent black ghetto uprisings when shopkeepers displayed Soul Brother signs in an effort to escape destruction and looting. In short, the concept took shape as an identifying symbol in the sixties.

Perhaps because of Soul's youth, definitions and descriptions vary greatly. "We don't really know what Soul is," says Ray Charles, one of its foremost musical exponents. "It's like electricity. It's a force that can light a room."

Kristin Hunter, author of *Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, is not satisfied with such an abstraction. "It may be a mystique to some," she has said, "but to me it is a concrete reality. I find it in the singing of Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, in the sermons of James Cleveland, in the rhetoric of two black spokesmen as dissimilar as Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King. . . . Not all black people have soul and not all white people are lacking in it . . . because soul is a way of being at home with yourself, at home with your body, at home in your world, and digging yourself and the world both happily and tragically."

"Soul is being natural," Al Calloway agrees, "telling it like

it is." Though this statement by the publisher of the Afro-American magazine *The Probe* does not contain any color qualifications, all of his references do. The Soul Heroes on Chicago's Wall of Respect, at Langley Avenue and Forty-third Street, are all Afro-Americans, and specifically Afro-Americans "who have steered large masses of black people away from the 'assimilation complex' bag that Du Bois talked about, and guided them to the positive course of *digging* themselves. . . . The real genius of the Wall is that it generates African-American self-pride." Calloway concludes, "One thing is certain: soul would be nowhere without the great saviour, soul food," a thought that has stirred blue-eyed jazzmen and bluesmen to seek musical salvation in pig tails, knuckles, ears, snout, neck bones, tripe, ham hocks, hog maws, sowbelly, and chitterlings (the small intestines of a pig, pronounced "chitlins"), not to mention turnip and collard greens, black-eyed peas, and sweet potato pie.

But black actress Gail Fisher asserts, "Soul is not just black. It's being groovy. Soul is everything that is good—love, warmth and rhythm, happiness, and feeling."

Black comic Godfrey Cambridge does not share this sunshine view. "Soul is getting kicked in the ass," he says, "until you don't know what it's for. It's being broke and down and out, and people telling you you're no good. It's the language of the subculture; but you can't learn it because no one can give you black lessons."

It was not until 1967 and 1968 that the mass media, and even music trade papers, gave full recognition to the concept. In June, 1967, *Billboard* issued the first in an annual series titled "The World of Soul," to document "the impact of Blues and R & B upon our musical culture." In April, 1968, *Esquire* turned to author Claude Brown and publisher Al Calloway for "An Introduction to Soul," while *Time's* cover story in June focused on Aretha Franklin, "Lady Soul: Singing It Like It Is."

By early '69, *Time* was advising that Soul had become such an in thing that soul food restaurants for white diners were springing up everywhere—West Boondock in Manhattan, Player's Choice in Hollywood, and Melvin's in Boston, to name a few. By that time there were at least three soul food cookbooks on the market, enabling suburban housewives to prepare dishes from items that once had been discards for plantation slaves from "the big house on the hill."

By '68 the scholars had also become involved with the concept. In its April issue, *Race*, the journal of the Institute of

Race Relations, described "The Rhetoric of Soul: Identification in Negro Society." This is an extremely revealing study, both because the writer tried to be objective and failed, and because the field approach proved inadequate to bridge the culture gap.

Swedish ethnographer Ulf Hannerz found that the concept had emerged from the black ghettos of large northern cities to signify what is *essentially Negro*. But he contended that it was an ambivalent concept. Being a "soul brother" meant belonging to a *select* group rather than a segregated one, marked by a high rate of unemployment, incidence of crime, and percentage of broken families—and, to add items that Dr. Hannerz somehow neglected to mention: poor educational facilities, circumscribed social mobility, exorbitant rents and food costs, inferior housing, high interest rates, and discrimination.

When it came to "soul music," the Swedish scholar found no difficulty in identifying people (James Brown) and media (the Soul Shack, a record shop in Washington, D.C., WOL Soul Radio, and WWRL Soul Brother Radio). But he was able to discern only three themes: "lack of control over the social environment," "unstable personal relationships," and "a bitter-sweet experience" (?). The style, in his view, alternated "between aggressive, somewhat boasting behaviour and plaintive behaviour from an implicit under-dog position." Apparently Dr. Hannerz was not aware of Nina Simone's social fury, Otis Redding's high-voltage demand for "Respect," James Brown's jubilant eroticism, and the many other notes of pride, militancy, and anger sounded by the soul singers.

Granting that Soul had become publicly associated with black militancy as a result of the ghetto explosions, Dr. Hannerz saw "little basis for connecting the majority of 'soul brothers' with black militant nationalism." Obviously, he was correct simply in terms of numbers. But to think quantitatively instead of historically is to miss vital differences in temper and direction.

"Soul is sass, man," says Claude Brown, author of *Manchild in the Promised Land*. "Soul is arrogance. Soul is walkin' down the street in a way that says, 'This is me, muh-fuh!' Soul is that nigger whore comin' along . . . ja . . . ja . . . ja, and walkin' like she sayin', 'Here it is, baby. Come an' git it.' Soul is being true to yourself, to what is *you*. Now, hold on: soul is . . . that . . . uninhibited . . . no, *extremely* uninhibited self . . . expression that goes into practically every Negro endeavor . . . That's soul. And there's swagger in it, man."

The dots are Claude Brown's. But his conception embodies

an all-essential time coordinate missing from Dr. Hannerz's view. Blind Lemon Jefferson has many points of contact with Ray Charles, as Bessie Smith has with Aretha Franklin and Leadbelly with James Brown. But the thundering contrasts are a product not merely of personality but of the temper of the times. The Blues, country and classic, is an expression of fortitude in the face of frustration. After World War II, rhythm-and-blues embodied the search for urban pleasures as well as the electrified resentment of a people for whom the grandiose slogans of the war had proved hollow promises. Soul is black, not blue, sass, anger, and rage. It is not just feeling but conviction. Not just intensity but involvement. A force as well as a style, an accolade as well as identification. It is an expressive explosiveness, ignited by a people's discovery of self-pride, power, and potential for growth.

. . . Soul became a musical force in the mid-fifties with Ray Charles and James Brown. But it did not acquire its electric stridency and highly amplified tension, it did not become *possession* rather than expression, until the collapse of the biracial civil rights movement. Soul is black nationalism in Pop. Stylistically it can be imitated, as it has been by white singers and instrumentalists. But the native expression derives from people whose ancestors reached these shores in chains, who cooked soul food as a matter of survival, who attended religious services in storefront gospel churches, and who have a long history of deprivation, exploitation, and segregation behind them.

To understand Soul and put it in perspective, we must go back at least to the Blues and pursue its transformation into urban rhythm-and-blues. But . . . while Blues is the root of Soul, it derives most immediately from gospel and black church music; to be precise, from shouting, handclapping, foot-stomping, jubilant, and frenzied storefront-church music.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think many people found José Feliciano's rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (as they later found Aretha Franklin's "nonpatriotic," "a disgrace and an insult," and "totally unacceptable"?)
2. What is your definition of "soul"?
3. In his article "Popular Music Since the 1920's," Mooney does not cover the world of soul. Yet one of his generalizations is that American popular music of the 1950's and 1960's marked a trend away

from prettiness, overrefinement, and academic orchestration and lyrics. Explain, using examples, how soul music furthered this estrangement from the "genteel" music of the older generation.

4. "Soul" is one of the many recent slang words the black population of America has contributed to our diction. Make a list of others. Why, in your opinion, is black slang so quickly and widely adopted?

5. Discuss the works of one soul singer, commenting on his or her technique, style, recurrent themes, etc.

Jazz and the White Critic

LeRoi Jones

In this essay LeRoi Jones (now known as Imamu Amiri Baraka), one of the best-known writers on the black experience in America, comments on the anomaly of a form of music that is produced primarily by blacks being analyzed by a body of critics almost all of whom are white.

Most jazz critics have been white Americans, but most important jazz musicians have not been. This might seem a simple enough reality to most people, or at least a reality which can be readily explained in terms of the social and cultural history of American society. And it is obvious why there are only two or three fingers' worth of Negro critics or writers on jazz, say, if one understands that until relatively recently those Negroes who *could* become critics, who would largely have to come from the black middle class, have simply not been interested in the music. Or at least jazz, for the black middle class, has only comparatively recently lost some of its stigma (though by no means is it yet as popular among them as any vapid musical product that comes sanctioned by the taste of the white majority). Jazz was collected among the numerous skeletons the middle-class black man kept locked in the closet of his psyche, along with watermelons and gin, and whose rattling caused him no end of misery and self-hatred. As one Howard University philosophy professor said to me when I was an undergraduate, "It's fantastic how much bad taste the blues contain!" But it is just this "bad taste" that this Uncle spoke of that has been the one factor that has kept the best of Negro music from slipping sterilely into the echo chambers of middle-brow American culture. And to a great ex-

FROM *Black Music* by LeRoi Jones (New York: William Morrow, 1968). Copyright © 1963 by LeRoi Jones. Reprinted by permission of the Sterling Lord Agency, Inc.

tent such "bad taste" was kept extant in the music, blues or jazz because the Negroes who were responsible for the best of the music, were always aware of their identities as black Americans and really did not, themselves, desire to become vague, featureless, Americans as is usually the case with the Negro middle class. (This is certainly not to say that there have not been very important Negro musicians from the middle class. Since the Henderson era, their number has increased enormously in jazz.)

Negroes played jazz as they had sung blues or, even earlier, as they had shouted and hollered in those anonymous fields, because it was one of the few areas of human expression available to them. Negroes who felt the blues, later jazz, impulse, as a specific means of expression, went naturally into the music itself. There were fewer social or extra-expressive considerations that could possibly disqualify any prospective Negro jazz musician than existed, say, for a Negro who thought he might like to become a writer (or even an elevator operator, for that matter). Any Negro who had some ambition towards literature, in the earlier part of this century, was likely to have developed so powerful an allegiance to the sacraments of middle-class American culture that he would be horrified by the very idea of writing about jazz.

There were few "jazz critics" in America at all until the 30's and then they were influenced to a large extent by what Richard Hadlock has called "the carefully documented gee-whiz attitude" of the first serious European jazz critics. They were also, as a matter of course, influenced more deeply by the social and cultural mores of their own society. And it is only natural that their criticism, whatever its intention, should be a product of that society, or should reflect at least some of the attitudes and thinking of that society, even if not directly related to the subject they were writing about, Negro music.

Jazz, as a Negro music, existed, up until the time of the big bands, on the same socio-cultural level as the sub-culture from which it was issued. The music and its sources were *secret* as far as the rest of America was concerned, in much the same sense that the actual life of the black man in America was secret to the white American. The first white critics were men who sought, whether consciously or not, to understand this secret, just as the first serious white jazz musicians (Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Bix, etc.) sought not only to understand the phenomenon of Negro music but to appropriate it as a means of expression which they themselves might utilize. The success of this

“appropriation” signaled the existence of an American music, where before there was a Negro music. But the white jazz musician had an advantage the white critics seldom had. The white musician’s commitment to jazz, the *ultimate concern*, proposed that the sub-cultural attitudes that produced the music as a profound expression of human feelings, could be *learned* and need not be passed on as a secret blood rite. And Negro music is essentially the expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes, about the world, and only secondarily an attitude about the way music is made. The white jazz musician came to understand this attitude as a way of making music, and the intensity of his understanding produced the “great” white jazz musicians, and is producing them now.

Usually the critic’s commitment was first to his *appreciation* of the music rather than to his understanding of the attitude which produced it. This difference meant that the potential critic of jazz had only to appreciate the music, or what he thought was the music, and that he did not need to understand or even be concerned with the attitudes that produced it, except perhaps as a purely sociological consideration. This last idea is certainly what produced the reverse patronization that is known as Crow Jim. The disparaging “all you folks got rhythm” is no less a stereotype, simply because it is proposed as a positive trait. But this Crow Jim attitude has not been as menacing or as evident a flaw in critical writing about jazz as has another manifestation of the white critic’s failure to concentrate on the blues and jazz attitude rather than his conditioned appreciation of the music. The major flaw in this approach to Negro music is that it strips the music too ingenuously of its social and cultural intent. It seeks to define jazz as an art (or a folk art) that has come out of no intelligent body of socio-cultural philosophy.

We take for granted the social and cultural milieu and philosophy that produced Mozart. As western people, the socio-cultural thinking of eighteenth-century Europe comes to us as a history legacy that is a continuous and organic part of the twentieth-century West. The socio-cultural philosophy of the Negro in America (as a continuous historical phenomenon) is no less specific and no less important for any intelligent critical speculation about the music that came out of it. And again, this is not a plea for narrow sociological analysis of jazz, but rather that this music cannot be completely understood (in critical terms) without some attention to the attitudes which produced it. It is the philosophy of Negro music that is most important,

and this philosophy is only partially the result of the sociological disposition of Negroes in America. There is, of course, much more to it than that.

Strict musicological analysis of jazz, which has come into favor recently, is also as limited as a means of jazz criticism as a strict sociological approach. The notator of any jazz solo, or blues, has no chance of capturing what in effect are the most important elements of the music. (Most transcriptions of blues lyrics are just as frustrating.) A printed musical example of an Armstrong solo, or of a Thelonius Monk solo, tells us almost nothing except the futility of formal musicology when dealing with jazz. Not only are the various jazz effects almost impossible to notate, but each note *means something* quite in adjunct to musical notation. The notes of a jazz solo exist in a notation strictly for musical reasons. The notes of a jazz solo, as they are coming into existence, exist as they do for reasons that are only concomitantly musical. Coltrane's cries are not "musical," but they *are* music and quite moving music. Ornette Coleman's screams and rants are only musical once one understands the music his emotional attitude seeks to create. This attitude is real, and perhaps the most singularly important aspect of his music. Mississippi Joe Williams, Snooks Eaglin, Lightnin' Hopkins have different emotional attitudes than Ornette Coleman, but all of these attitudes are continuous parts of the historical and cultural biography of the Negro as it has existed and developed since there was a Negro in America, and a music that could be associated with him that did not exist anywhere else in the world. The note *means something*; and the something is, regardless of its stylistic considerations, part of the black psyche as it dictates the various forms of Negro culture.

Another hopeless flaw in a great deal of the writing about jazz that has been done over the years is that in most cases the writers, the jazz critics, have been anything but intellectuals (in the most complete sense of that word). Most jazz critics began as hobbyists or boyishly brash members of the American petit bourgeoisie, whose only claim to any understanding about the music was that they knew it was *different*; or else they had once been brave enough to make a trip into a Negro slum to hear their favorite instrumentalist defame Western musical tradition. Most jazz critics were (and are) not only white middle-class Americans, but middle-brows as well. The irony here is that because the majority of jazz critics are white middle-brows, most jazz criticism tends to enforce white middle-brow standards of

excellence as criteria for performance of a music that in its most profound manifestations is completely antithetical to such standards; in fact, quite often is in direct reaction against them. (As an analogy, suppose the great majority of the critics of Western formal music were poor, "uneducated" Negroes?) A man can speak of the "heresy of bebop" for instance, only if he is completely unaware of the psychological catalysts that made that music the exact registration of the social and cultural thinking of a whole generation of black Americans. The blues and jazz aesthetic, to be fully understood, must be seen in as nearly its complete human context as possible. People made bebop. The question the critic must ask is: *why?* But it is just this *why* of Negro music that has been consistently ignored or misunderstood; and it is a question that cannot be adequately answered without first understanding the necessity of asking it. Contemporary jazz during the last few years has begun to take on again some of the anarchy and excitement of the bebop years. The cool and hard bop/funk movements since the 40's seem pitifully tame, even decadent, when compared to the music men like Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor and some others have been making recently. And of the bop pioneers, only Thelonius Monk has managed to maintain without question the vicious creativity with which he first entered the jazz scene back in the 40's. The music has changed again, for many of the same basic reasons it changed twenty years ago. Bop was, at a certain level of consideration, a reaction by young musicians against the sterility and formality of Swing as it moved to become a formal part of the mainstream American culture. The New Thing, as recent jazz has been called, is, to a large degree, a reaction to the hard bop-funk-groove-soul camp, which itself seemed to come into being in protest against the squelching of most of the blues elements in cool and progressive jazz. Funk (groove, soul) has become as formal and clichéd as cool or swing, and opportunities for imaginative expression within that form have dwindled almost to nothing.

The attitudes and emotional philosophy contained in "the new music" must be isolated and understood by critics before any consideration of the *worth* of the music can be legitimately broached. Later on, of course, it becomes relatively easy to characterize the emotional pendants that informed earlier aesthetic statements. After the fact, is a much simpler way to work and think. For example, a writer who wrote liner notes for a John Coltrane record mentioned how difficult it had been for him to

appreciate Coltrane earlier, just as it had been difficult for him to appreciate Charlie Parker when he first appeared. To quote: "I wish I were one of those sages who can say, 'Man, I dug Bird the first time I heard him.' I didn't. The first time I heard Charlie Parker, I thought he was ridiculous . . ." Well, that's a noble confession and all, but the responsibility is still the writer's and in no way involves Charlie Parker or what he was trying to do. When that writer first heard Parker he simply did not understand *why* Bird should play the way he did, nor could it have been very important to him. But now, of course, it becomes almost a form of reverse snobbery to say that one did not think Parker's music was worth much at first hearing, etc. etc. The point is, it seems to me, that if the music is worth something now, it must have been worth something then. Critics are supposed to be people in a position to tell what is of value and what is not, and, hopefully, at the time it first appears. If they are consistently mistaken, what is their value?

Jazz criticism, certainly as it has existed in the United States, has served in a great many instances merely to obfuscate what has actually been happening with the music itself—the pitiful harangues that raged during the 40's between two "schools" of critics as to which was the "real jazz," the new or the traditional, provide some very ugly examples. A critic who praises Bunk Johnson at Dizzy Gillespie's expense is no critic at all; but then neither is a man who turns it around and knocks Bunk to swell Dizzy. If such critics would (or could) reorganize their thinking so that they begin their concern for these musicians by trying to understand why each played the way he did, and in terms of the constantly evolving and redefined philosophy which has informed the most profound examples of Negro music throughout its history, then such thinking would be impossible.

It has never ceased to amaze and infuriate me that in the 40's a European critic could be arrogant and unthinking enough to inform serious young American musicians that what they were feeling (a consideration that exists before, and without, the music) was false. What had happened was that even though the white middle-brow critic had known about Negro music for only about three decades, he was already trying to formalize and finally institutionalize it. It is a hideous idea. The music was already in danger of being forced into that junk pile of admirable objects and data the West knows as *culture*.

Recently, the same attitudes have become more apparent in the face of a fresh redefinition of the form and content of

Negro music. Such phrases as "anti-jazz" have been used to describe musicians who are making the most exciting music produced in this country. But as critic A. B. Spellman asked, "What does anti-jazz mean and who are these ofays who've appointed themselves guardians of last year's blues?" It is that simple, really. What does anti-jazz mean? And who coined the phrase? What is the definition of jazz? And who was authorized to make one?

Reading a great deal of old jazz criticism is usually like boning up on the social and cultural malaise that characterizes and delineates the bourgeois philistine in America. Even rereading someone as intelligent as Roger Pryor Dodge in the old *Record Changer* ("Jazz: its rise and decline," 1955) usually makes me either very angry or very near hysterical. Here is a sample: ". . . let us say flatly that there is no future in preparation for jazz through Bop . . .," or, "The Boppists, Cools, and Progressives are surely stimulating a dissolution within the vagaries of a non-jazz world. The Revivalists, on the other hand have made a start in the right direction." It sounds almost like political theory. Here is Don C. Haynes in the April 22, 1946 issue of *Down Beat*, reviewing Charlie Parker's *Billie's Bounce* and *Now's The Time*: "These two sides are bad taste and ill-advised fanaticism. . . ." and, "This is the sort of stuff that has thrown innumerable impressionable young musicians out of stride, that has harmed many of them irreparably. This can be as harmful to jazz as Sammy Kaye." It makes you blush.

Of course there have been a few very fine writers on jazz, even as there are today. Most of them have been historians. But the majority of popular jazz criticism has been on about the same level as the quoted examples. Nostalgia, lack of understanding, or failure to see the validity of redefined emotional statements which reflect the changing psyche of the Negro in opposition to what the critic might think the Negro ought to feel; all these unfortunate failures have been built many times into a kind of critical stance or aesthetic. An aesthetic whose standards and measure are connected irrevocably to the continuous gloss most white Americans have always made over Negro life in America. Failure to understand, for instance, that Paul Desmond and John Coltrane represent not only two very divergent ways of thinking about music, but more importantly two very different ways of viewing the world, is at the seat of most of the established misconceptions that are daily palmed off as intelligent commentary

on jazz or jazz criticism. The catalysts and necessity of Coltrane's music must be understood as they exist even before they are expressed as music. The music is the result of the attitude, the stance. Just as Negroes made blues and other people did not because of the Negro's peculiar way of looking at the world. Once this attitude is delineated as a continuous though constantly evolving social philosophy directly attributable to the way the Negro responds to the psychological landscape that is his Western environment, criticism of Negro music will move closer to developing as consistent and valid an aesthetic as criticism in other fields of Western art.

There have been so far only two American playwrights, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, who are as profound or as important to the history of ideas as Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker or Ornette Coleman, yet there is a more valid and consistent body of dramatic criticism written in America than there is a body of criticism about Negro music. And this is simply because there is an intelligent tradition and body of dramatic criticism, though it has largely come from Europe, that any intelligent American drama critic can draw on. In jazz criticism, no reliance on European tradition or theory will help at all. Negro music, like the Negro himself, is strictly an American phenomenon, and we have got to set up standards of judgment and aesthetic excellence that depend on our native knowledge and understanding of the underlying philosophies and local cultural references that produced blues and jazz in order to produce valid critical writing or commentary about it. It might be that there is still time to start.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Comment on the black philosophy professor's remark quoted by Jones, "It's fantastic how much bad taste the blues contain!"
2. According to Jones, why have there been so few black jazz critics? How does this fact reflect the American "socio-cultural milieu"? Do you agree with Jones's analysis?
3. Jones asserts that an understanding of the socio-cultural milieu of the American Negro is necessary for an understanding of jazz. Shaw's essay on soul attempted to account for soul music from this viewpoint. What are some of the factors of the socio-cultural milieu of black America that yield an understanding of jazz?

4. Compile definitions of jazz from several different sources. Are the sources in close agreement? Basically, what is jazz? How does it differ from soul, the blues, and rhythm-and-blues?

5. If you are a jazz buff, discuss in detail the works of one of your favorite jazz musicians.

The Nashville Sound

Paul Hemphill

In this essay Paul Hemphill discusses the ways in which changes in musical tastes and in the music industry have affected country and western music and altered the meaning of the phrase "the Nashville Sound."

Country music is no longer strictly rural, as the name implies, but has become the folk music of the working classes. . . . In many respects, country music can rightfully claim the distinction of being America's only native art form.

—PRESS RELEASE FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION

Wesley Rose, the head of Acuff-Rose Publications, Inc., the first music-publishing house in Nashville, spends a lot of his time now talking about the good old days. Rather than discussing the new things happening to country music, like pseudo-country singers doing "now country" songs on prime-time television or country songs getting air play on many pop radio stations, he prefers to sit in his lush-carpeted office on Franklin Road, a couple of miles away from Music Row, puffing on a good pipe, reminiscing about what a great raw country talent Hank Williams was or swapping stories with Roy Acuff about the simpler times of tent shows and blackface comedy and pure country music. Wesley Rose doesn't like what is happening in Nashville these days. His company has been responsible for some of it, sure, having represented such artists as Roy Orbison, Bob Luman and Tom Jones in the past, but that is business, and apparently an entirely separate matter. Rose's heart is with country music—pure, unadulterated, nasal, gutty, *real* country music—and it is easy to understand why when you know where he came from. He was an accountant for Stand-

ard Oil in Chicago when he took over the business end of Acuff-Rose for his father, songwriter Fred Rose, who had founded the company on \$25,000 of Roy Acuff's money in 1943, and he has admitted he "didn't know a thing about the music business" when he started. Then, right after World War II, he and his father discovered Hank Williams—probably the purest example of the hungry, tortured hillbilly singer in country music's history—and once the royalties on Williams' songs began rolling in there was never any doubt about the financial security of Acuff-Rose Publications. So Wesley Rose owes his allegiance to Roy Acuff ("The King of Country Music") and Hank Williams and the whole breed of classic "hillbilly" singers they represent, and it is no surprise to hear him launch a harangue about what has happened to the Nashville music business in the past 10 or 15 years: "You go to the Opry for country music, not this rock 'n' roll or rhythm-and-blues stuff they're having now. . . . Just go down to the Opry one night when Acuff's out of town and talk to some of these people who've saved their money to come and then found out Acuff won't be there; it's like going to Yankee Stadium and not getting to see Ruth or Gehrig. . . . You can't be fish *and* fowl; up in New York they say country music's on the pop charts now, but you can't be country and be on the pop charts at the same time. . . . When I'm talking to an artist or a writer about coming with us, I want to know where he was born; if he was born in New York, he'd have to have an inoculation to know country music. . . . Anybody who believes there'll be one music has lost his head. . . . If we were to become the biggest publisher in the world, our main office would still be in Nashville because we've got an obligation to stay here. . . ."

Rose wasn't the only man in Nashville who was somewhat frustrated as the Sixties came to an end. A clear gap had developed between the traditionalists of Rose's ilk and the impatient young ones who had piled into town with little respect for the popularity Hank Snow, say, *used to* have. In a matter of only five years, Music Row had gotten away from the production of exclusively "country" music and had headed off into all sorts of directions. It was still loosely called "country music," but a lot of it wasn't. A farm boy from Billstown, Ark., named Glen Campbell, who had traveled for nearly a year with a rock 'n' roll outfit in California, was on the CBS television network every Wednesday night, and on one album ("Wichita Lineman," which did \$1 million in sales the first day) sang songs written by everybody from black soul singer Otis Redding to West Coast poet Rod McKuen.

Ray Price, a hillbilly in good standing, dropped the whining steel-guitar sounds and started recording with a dozen violins—not fiddles, please—in the background. One of the bright new singers was a Negro from Mississippi, Country Charley Pride, who pronounced it “I’m moving on” instead of “Ah’m moovin’ awn” and kept showing up on the Lawrence Welk Show. The list of “outsiders” recording songs that had started out as country was endless: Frank and Nancy Sinatra, Dean Martin, Dinah Shore, Bob Dylan, Ann-Margret. Three of *Billboard’s* first 11 “Hot 100 Singles of 1968” were originally country tunes. And at the Grand Ole Opry, where the changes were most obvious, the once steady diet of clogging and fiddling and nasal wailing had been abandoned in favor of the times: drums, electric guitars, rock ’n’ roll, turtle-necks and ruffled men’s shirts. “The Nashville Sound,” a phrase coined during the decade, had ceased to denote merely a country song conceived and weaned in Nashville; now it meant craftsmanship, atmosphere, simple lyrics, “white soul,” a more sophisticated approach to the same old truths about love and life and hard times and death. “Most of the people who record here have rural backgrounds,” explained a Nashville songwriter named John D. Loudermilk, who wrote “Abilene” and “Language of Love,” among others, and still hangs around the bus stations in Nashville when he feels like he’s losing touch with *the people*. “Take me, I was raised in the country and can remember taking a bath in the kitchen with the radio on top of the icebox playing country music. Most of us have, somewhere in our background, the sound of a banjo being plucked or a fiddle being played. But we’re not satisfied with three chords and bass and a steel. That’s our heritage, but we want to offer a whole lot more.”

The heritage Loudermilk talked about was nearly 500 years in the making, and the Nashville Sound of today is the result of the hybridization that worked on, over all of those years, what was at first a collection of simple European folk ballads. You get into a little speculation and romanticism here when you start talking about the original roots of country music, but it is generally agreed that even in the beginning it was the folks’ music. “As the couriers usually reported only to the castle lord,” says one essay,

the lesser nobles and townfolk came to rely on the wandering minstrel for news from the neighboring castles. The minstrel enjoyed a limited diplomatic immunity from the

plunderers and was usually able to travel boundaries without restraint. He frequently incorporated the gossip he heard into ballads which he sang from court to court. The ballads were sometimes based on castle slander ('Everything's OK on the LBJ?'), military exploits ('Are There Angels in Korea?'), or unusual occurrences ('Carroll County Accident?'). With the coming of Christianity, some of the ballads took on a moralistic tone ('It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels?').

Anyway, the Scotch-Irish settlers brought their music with them when they came, and the trail led from the British Isles to eastern Canada to New England to the Virginia and Carolina tidewaters to the Appalachian mountains. Because the people who preferred the frontier were cut off from outside influences and were conservative in nature, they tended to cling to their old music more tenaciously than the settlers who had located in the more densely populated areas (helping to explain why, even today, country music is equally popular in the South, rural New England and Canada). But it didn't take long for the music to change whenever it was exposed to a new environment. New homemade instruments (zither, guitar, banjo) created new sounds such as Bluegrass. Negro slaves in the South, the Civil War, hard religion, industrialization and the necessity to leave home to find work had their effect on a music that had always been simple and topical. Then came the westward migration into Louisiana and Texas and on toward California, and the music carried west by these settlers was influenced by the new life they faced and the people they met: the Cajun, the cowboy, the Mexican and even the touring Hawaiian musician. And the changes kept coming. Woody Guthrie sang about the migrant farm laborers, Jimmie Rodgers about the railroads and "goin' to California," the Carter Family about the virtues of toughing it out until you get to heaven, Gene Autry about the lonesome prairie. Then, finally, came the modern period: borrowing from Negro blues and spirituals and jazz, the world wars, migration into the big Northern industrial towns, Roy Acuff's paving the way for solo singing stars, Eddy Arnold's toning down of country music, Elvis Presley and rock 'n' roll, drums and electric guitars onstage at the Grand Ole Opry, the steel guitar, the use of tapes in recording studios and, most recently, the slick pop-country sounds of such stars as Glen Campbell and Chet Atkins and Roger Miller. You can sit in the audience at the Opry on almost any Saturday night and see a cross section of

nearly every American musical form pass across the worn old stage: Bluegrass from the Appalachians (Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys), honky-tonk from East Texas (George Jones), gunfighter ballads from the Mexican border (Marty Robbins), Cajun music from Louisiana (Hank Williams Jr.), Negro rock 'n' roll (Bob Luman), spirited mountain spirituals (Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper), cowboy songs (Tex Ritter), and pop music (Leroy Van Dyke). Let the Country Music Association and the scholars talk all they want to about country music being the only pure form of American music; what they should say is, country music is the purest *hybrid* music we have in America. If it was simple and moving and earthy, country music borrowed from it. Country music is today, just as it was some 500 years ago, the folks' music.

There are as many definitions and opinions of the Nashville Sound as there are variations on it. "The Nashville Sound, if there is such a thing, is a record cut in Nashville that has that relaxed atmosphere," says Hubert Long. "Glen Campbell sounds different. Do you call that the California Sound?" Campbell himself ("I don't care whether it's country, pop or what, I just want a good song") sees a definite trend away from hard-country: "There'll always be room for a Kitty Wells or a Loretta Lynn or a George Jones, but they'd better be good. That kind of music won't sell any more unless it's good. The market is dying out, shrinking on 'em." Argues Lou Stringer, a small-time music publisher in Nashville: "I hate to see the music blend. We don't want to forsake country music. It's a tradition of the country. Country-music fans are so loyal that Bill Anderson could sing 'Come to Jesus' in whole notes and they'd buy 'em by the thousands. Country music is our heritage. They oughta teach it in the schools." Chet Atkins says he is "a little worried that country music is going to lose its identity in all of this," although he has to share some of the blame, if that is the word, for taking the country out of the music. "There are all levels of country music," says Decca's Owen Bradley, one of the principal architects of the Nashville Sound. "When you go to a restaurant you don't order the same thing every time. Cole Porter says 'I love you' one way, Hank Williams says it another way. It's a matter of how much salt you put on your egg." *Billboard's* Nashville correspondent (and former CMA president), Bill Williams, agrees there "will always be a Loretta Lynn, a Kitty Wells, a Roy Acuff, an Ernest Tubb," but sees a marriage between pop and country: "Dylan, Buffy Sainte-Marie

and all of those other stars coming in here to record narrowed the gap between pop and country. A couple of months ago Hank Snow had horns and everything on a record. Sure, the country singers want to be pop. It's the difference between selling 70,000 singles and selling 500,000 singles. Money does it every time." That is the essence of what Jack Stapp of Tree Publishing in Nashville, the company that still reaps royalties from Roger Miller's pivotal pop-country novelty songs, says when he gives his version of the recent evolution of country music: "Say you came from New York and you never had heard country music, but when you *did* finally listen to it there were some things you liked. I mean, most of it was just too damned corny and scratchy for you, but there were certain songs you liked because they were smoother. So then they started modernizing it more because disc jockeys began to get more requests whenever something came out that was a little smoother, like an Eddy Arnold song. They finally combined the two, but still kept that simple story line that to me is country music: the pathos, the miseries, the happiness, life itself, that's what it's all about. And they could get that in there and still they wouldn't have to be so damned nasal, whiny and scratchy and corny. So it just got smoother and smoother, and then it started blending with more pop music, and so many of the songs would start going pop like Roger's did. It's just good business, to get the best of both worlds."

Maybe there is disagreement on just what the Nashville Sound is, but there is unanimous agreement on what makes it tick: the plentiful supply of talented musicians who work the recording sessions. By now the Nashville sidemen have become internationally famous, almost to the point of being industry folk heroes. Few of them can read formal musical scores. Most of them came into Nashville years ago, begging for a job on the Opry, and after playing the Opry and hacking out a living on the road as a member of somebody's band, they got tired of the harrowing life of one-nighters and poor pay and—fully developed by now as musicians, regardless of their lack of formal training—went into full-time work as studio musicians. It became profitable in the early Fifties, of course, when the recording industry began to boom in Nashville. In those years almost all of the sessions on Music Row were worked by a small clique of extremely talented musicians who had similar Southern small-town backgrounds, were constantly in each other's company and often jammed together in the wee hours at a club in Printer's Alley called the Carousel. There was Chet Atkins on guitar, Floyd Cramer on piano, Buddy

Harman on drums, Boots Randolph on saxophone, Bob Moore on bass. They played country music, sure, but their interests didn't stop there. Now Harman and Moore are perhaps the most requested sidemen on the Row, and Atkins, Cramer and Randolph have all developed singular styles and become stars in their own right. That pattern—working the Opry, hitting the road, jamming in clubs, finally going into studio work—has become the customary path for a picker in Nashville today and has developed a feeder system that guarantees the town will never run out of excellent sidemen. And it is a good living. At \$85 per three-hour session, more than a dozen Nashville sidemen are raking in a cool \$50,000 a year on recording sessions alone (the third-chair violinist for the Nashville Symphony Orchestra confesses she can make nearly \$8,000 in a summer, moonlighting on the Row). They drive the best cars and, most important to them, are home every night for dinner. "Yeah, I'd like to buy me one of those new Cadillacs," jokes Chet Atkins, "but then everybody'd think I was a sideman."

There is a temptation to say that the Nashville sidemen *are* the Nashville Sound. They are generally imperturbable Southern boys who know the neck of their guitar like most people know the back of their hand, completely unflappable people who are able to walk into a studio, take their guitar out of its case, listen to somebody hum the song to be recorded, sit down and fool around with their instrument for five or ten minutes, and then put it down on tape. Producers on Music Row spend very little time correcting the pickers on a session. The pickers know the singers and the producers and the songs, and the pickers know *each other*, which is extremely important. They have played together for years, at the Opry and on the different television shows in Nashville and on the road and on wee-hours jam sessions and on sessions. It follows, then, that when they are brought together for a session there is a beautiful interplay that is not unlike what you find when a great Dixieland quintet is jamming in a smoky New Orleans after-hours club. . . . That is exactly what happened early in '69 when folk singer Bob Dylan came to Nashville and recorded an album called "Nashville Skyline," which showed off a side of Dylan no one had seen before. *Newsweek* said the album was "just a relaxed get-together of expert musicians who seem to know each other's—and Dylan's—moves as if they were playing at the Grand Ole Opry. . . ."

This relaxed good-old-boyism prevails at any recording session in Nashville ("I've cut records in New York," says one

young singer who swears he'll never leave Nashville again, "and before it's over everybody is screaming and hollering at each other and you're a nervous wreck and couldn't sing if you had to"). Nobody is tight. Everybody has fun. It really seems more like a jam session than a recording session that is costing a lot of money and can be pivotal in the career of the singer. . . .

Before the Nashville sidemen can take over they have to have a song to work on, of course, and here is where the real action was in Nashville during the Sixties. In the old days, just about any song would do as long as it was country and was done by an old favorite like Acuff, Tubb, Kitty Wells or Lefty Frizzell. The people who were buying country records 20 and 30 years ago didn't buy them for the song so much as they bought the artist. All Decca had to do was put out a record with the name of Kitty Wells on it, for instance, and the record would make a nice profit simply because there were a lot of Kitty Wells fans around. It still happens today, which is what Lou Stringer was saying when he said Bill Anderson could release "Come to Jesus" in whole notes and "they'd buy 'em by the thousands." But as tastes changed and competition for the country dollar grew hotter and the lure of the pop charts grew stronger, the burden shifted from the singers to the writers. "You'd better have the song or you're in trouble today," says Decca's Owen Bradley. Again, it was money. Little Jimmy Dickens made a nice living for nearly 20 years by adapting his screaming-country-boy style to almost any back-home-on-the-farm song that happened to come in over the transom, but when he picked up a ridiculous novelty tune entitled "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose" he went into another orbit: the record got pop-station play, he was invited to sing it on Johnny Carson's late-night network television show, he made triple the money that a routine country novelty song would have earned, and he's been looking for another "Bird of Paradise" ever since. "Let's face it," says Bradley, "most of these guys wish they were pop singers because that's where the money is." And what the artists want, the writers—if they are smart—will deliver.

One of the traditions of country music has always been that the songs are written by the same people who sing them. Some scholars have looked upon this as a phenomenon ("Frank Sinatra doesn't write his songs," wrote one critic, "Dean Martin and Perry Como don't write their songs; why is this?"). Jimmie Rodgers wrote most of his stuff. Hank Williams was more of a writer than he was a singer. Bill Anderson, one of the newer

country singing stars, would never have sung a song if he hadn't first been discovered as a writer and then smartly used that like a poker chip to land himself a recording contract. Up until the mid-Sixties, when "pop fever" set in, most of the hit country songs were written by the people who recorded them: Hank Snow ("Moving On"), Lefty Frizzell ("Always Late"), Don Gibson ("Oh, Lonesome Me"), Floyd Tillman ("Slipping Around"), Ernest Tubb ("Soldier's Last Letter") and Anderson ("Still"). The nature of country music, going back to the days when it was holed up in the Appalachian valleys, had been that it was more an expression of a way of life than something intended to make money. The appeal of the early commercial country singing stars was, then, that they were writing what they knew and putting it on record, and if it sold that was fine with them. Corny as much of that music might have been to much of America, there was a certain engaging purity about it. The appeal of that era was, in many ways, exemplified by Hank Williams: here was a haggard country boy from Alabama, unable to handle his booze and his women and his sudden wealth, a great raw talent about to die—one way or another, for sure—before he turned thirty, here he was writing and then recording a song called "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive," and then expiring from pills and booze in the back seat of a Cadillac limousine en route to a one-nighter in Canton, Ohio, for God's sake. When Sinatra does *that*, invite him to supper.

Toward the end of the Sixties, however, even this trademark of country music began to change. Some of the bigger stars were still writing their own stuff in the traditional manner (Merle Haggard, writing and singing about the Okie life in California he had known, was the best example), but now most of them were too busy cashing in on \$2,000 one-nighters and syndicated television shows and investments in fast-food franchises to remember where they came from and to write about it. They had turned over the business of composing to a group of talented, and highly commercial, songwriters who knew what would sell and how to write and market it. To illustrate, three of the biggest "country" songs of the late Sixties were "Gentle On My Mind," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" and "Wichita Lineman," all of them sung by Glen Campbell, an Arkansas farm boy who worked more than his share of honky-tonks and road tours and recording sessions before he hit on a "pop" sound and landed a network television show. "Gentle On My Mind" was written by an Ozark mountain boy named John Hartford, who had been banging around

Nashville in a pair of blue jeans for some time, which is okay, until he hit the big time and bugged out for Hollywood, which is not. "Phoenix" and "Wichita Lineman" were written by Jim Webb, the son of a Baptist minister in Oklahoma, which is good, who now lives near Los Angeles and owns seven automobiles and wears sealskin coats and Beatle hair, which is bad (but he "can't be as honest and comfortable in my work as I used to be," which is good). Roger Miller had left Nashville and quit writing ("To me, the man was just a genius," says Jack Stapp, who unconsciously uses the past tense when he speaks of Miller). The country songs written during the late Sixties that appeared to have a good chance of becoming classics were written by Miller or Buck Owens (who happens to be a commercial writer *and* singer rolled into one sequined package) or full-time writers such as Webb, Hartford, Cindy Walker ("In the Misty Moonlight"), Dale Noe ("It's Such a Pretty World Today"), Dallas Frazier ("There Goes My Everything"), Bobby Russell ("Honey" and "Little Green Apples") and the team of Glenn Sutton and Billy Sherrill ("Almost Persuaded"). The old line that New York book reviewers once used every time a Southern author came out with another novel ("Southerners don't *read* books, they *write* them") had applied, at one time, to country songwriters, and it was part of the romance of their business. But now, with notable exceptions (one being Buddy Killen of Tree Publishing, a close friend of Roger Miller's who wrote Al Hirt's "Sugar Lips"), most of the people writing country songs could also read music. A lot of them had gone to college. A lot of them, like Hank Mills, even studied up before they tried to put down the first note.

. . . Country music *stayed* country for so long because the people who made it and listened to it were innately conservative. It took a long time for Nashville to react to the rock 'n' roll fad of the late Fifties that nearly inundated country music, but finally Music Row created—or went along with, take your pick—rockabilly. Many people along The Row are still resentful of Eddy Arnold, who took the country out of country music and became the nation's first token hillbilly. A lot of them seem to get a certain pleasure out of saying Roger Miller isn't writing songs any more, that he was a flash in the pan, that he doesn't have the staying power of, say, a Webb Pierce. But a Webb Pierce can write a pure country song for a pure country audience and even if it becomes a country hit it may sell fewer than 100,000

singles (if he writes it *and* sings it, that would bring him only \$6,500). And they have to be aware of what "King of the Road" did for Roger Miller's bank account: two million singles sold, four and a half cents each for Miller the singer and two cents each for Miller the writer, total of \$130,000 for Miller the-bum-who-abandoned-country music. And so the Nashville Sound was undergoing plastic surgery as the Sixties came to an end, and if economics was one reason, it was matched by the coming to power of a new breed of young cats who had been weaned on Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley rather than Ernest Tubb and Lefty Frizzell. . . .

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Bearing in mind Jones's article on jazz, comment on the press release that opens Hemphill's article: "In many respects, country music can rightfully claim the distinction of being America's only native art form."
2. Do you believe that country and western music is an honest and valid expression of the values and concerns of "country folk" in the same sense that soul music is said to be an honest expression of black peoples' feelings? Or is it merely a form of escapism?
3. Compare and contrast the characteristics, values, and concerns of the country and western audience with those of the rock or soul audience.
4. What factors in the early 1970's do you think caused the great upsurge in the popularity of country and western music?
5. Discuss the works of one of the great country and western performers.

5

POPULAR PRINT

What's Wrong with News? It Isn't New Enough

Max Ways

Max Ways, a member of Fortune Magazine's board of editors and a frequent contributor to that magazine, here challenges some commonly held assumptions about the nature of news and the responsibilities of newsmen.

Europe never thrilled to what happened in 1492. Columbus' return from the New World set no fast horses galloping between the great cities. No awed crowds gathered in the streets. The news seeped around so slowly that years later most Europeans probably had only a vague notion of the event. Giant leaps in communication are measured by the contrast with 1969 when a fifth of mankind saw simultaneous TV pictures of explorers walking on the moon and could hear and read lucid explanations of how the feat was accomplished along with shrewd speculation as to what it might mean for the future.

Yet today's network of news may serve the times less effectively than did the fifteenth century's. Then, 99 percent of knowledge was far from new. Basic information, basic economic and social skills, basic beliefs and values descended from parent to child. Against this static and familiar background news could be readily isolated; prodigies of nature, interventions by supernatural or political powers, the novel speculations of savants—these exceptions to the normal course were news. But now this kind of news has been outstripped by reality. The pace, breadth, and depth of twentieth-century change have dissolved the static background. Today's novelty is tomorrow's normality, doomed to be soon discarded. A high proportion of the basic information used by society is new information. The father's skill may be useless in

the son's time. Even values and creeds are in flux. Where so much is new, what is news?

Journalism has not fully adjusted itself to the transformed situation. Conditioned by its own past, journalism often acts as if its main task were still to report the exceptional and dramatically different against a background of what everybody knows. News today can concentrate with tremendous impact on a few great stories: a moon landing, a war, a series of civil disorders. But meanwhile, outside the spotlight, other great advances in science and technology, other international tensions, other causes of social unrest are in motion. Yet today's inadequately reported trends will shape tomorrow's reality.

Again and again the twentieth century has been ambushed by crisis. Looking back from the midst of some tumult, like a race riot, or of some quietly desperate frustration, like the present condition of the cities, we are able to see how disaster might have been avoided by more timely and more effective communication. But we have not yet been able to use such hindsight as a spur to foresight.

The most biting and perilous irony of our civilization turns upon knowledge. Expanding knowledge has multiplied power, which has proliferated into the hands of millions of organizations and hundreds of millions of individuals. Now that everyone has some power to effect change, every aspect of life from economics to religion has been set in motion. But at any moment the significance of any specific change will depend in part upon knowledge of other changes that are in train. If communication lags, then the sum of all the changes will seem random and confused. Obviously, the need for better communication does not fall upon journalism alone. The present challenge to education, for instance, is even more severe. But journalism's role, less discussed than education's, is critical in a society that can no longer depend upon tradition to tell it what it is and how it operates.

Certainly news has not declined in quality. Journalists are better trained, more skillful, more serious about their work than they ever were. They have marvelous new media for reaching a larger, better educated audience, which senses its own dependence upon news. With painstaking care and admirable artistry news today brings information about this change or that one. But in actual life these specific changes are colliding and combining with one another, often in ways undreamed of by their originators—and not alertly reported in the news. A relatively simple compound—automobile plus mass prosperity—brings mass ownership of auto-

mobiles, a phenomenon that can ruin cities, alter familial relations, and demand new forms and techniques of government. Adequate news analysis of this particular compound is about fifty years overdue and not yet in sight.

When news fails to add up the permutations of change, the best-informed men lack confidence that they know what's going on. Many of those who most confidently assert that they know, don't. Radicals and reactionaries both tend to ignore actual change and to derive their passionately held views from a simpler, more static society that isn't here. The noisiest debates tend to be irrelevant because their informational backgrounds are fragmentary and out of date.

Even the most powerful nation, with the highest production of new knowledge, thus becomes pervaded by a sense of its own ignorance and helplessness because it feels—correctly—that it has no adequate view of its own direction. Lack of confidence in the quality of news could be fatal in our kind of society, as it could not possibly have been in the Europe to which Columbus returned.

A Fly on the Wall?

In the last few years there has been a noticeable public disenchantment with news media. It's true that the avidity for news increases and the prosperity of news organs continues on a long upgrade. Nevertheless, many consumers of news voice doubts that the news adds up to an accurate picture of what's going on.

The understandable public anxiety about the adequacy of news cannot by itself be counted upon to generate improvement. The public uneasiness now contributes, for instance, to pressure for greater governmental intervention in television news, an irrelevant therapy that would correct no present defects and create new ones. Nor is public criticism of print journalism more shrewdly aimed. It tends, for instance, to overestimate the distorting effect of the commercial motives of publishers, motives that today do not influence news nearly as much as they formerly did. On the other hand, the public underestimates both the objective difficulty of telling today's news and certain rigidities that are deeply embedded in the craft of journalism itself, as distinguished from the commercial context in which most of it operates.

Among the areas of change that are inadequately discussed is the new situation of journalism. While eagerly reporting and critically appraising the ballerina, the bishop, and the federal

budget, journalism has been almost silent about its own performance and its own problems. The pretense that it is an unseen witness, a mere fly on history's wall, becomes less and less plausible as the role of news expands. From the demonstrator on the street to the President of the United States the behavior of the actors in the news is affected by journalism. All the subjects of news tend to conform to journalism's standards of what is reportable.

Many of these standards, mysterious to outsiders, are in fact obsolete in the sense that they were developed to fit a world that exists no more. Why so much of journalism stubbornly clings to outdated patterns and practices is a question that needs analysis. Before turning, however, to this and other imperfections internal to journalism, a closer look at its present environment, at its position in today's world, may be useful.

Strangers and Brothers

"Journalism" is used here in a broad sense encompassing newspapers, newsmagazines, radio and television newscasts or "documentaries," press services, trade magazines, corporate house organs, labor-union periodicals—in short, the enormous variety of publications that describe or comment upon the current scene or some segment of it. Along with education and the arts, journalism is one of the three great information systems that account for the bulk of "the knowledge industry," the most rapidly expanding part of every advanced society.

One reason why journalism expands is the amazing diversity of contemporary society. All the nonsense about regimentation to the contrary, there has never been a time when men varied so much in their work, pleasures, beliefs, values, and styles of life. In part, this growing diversity in life is a reflection of the specialization in knowledge and in education. To be "an educated man" no longer denotes participation in a common, circumscribed body of knowledge. Though the total of extant knowledge has multiplied many times, that part of it which "everybody knows" has increased much more slowly. Society cannot afford to imitate the university, where communication between departments is either perfunctory or non-existent. Outside the university, the world becomes smaller in terms of interdependence while it becomes larger in terms of the difficulty of communicating between heterogeneous groups and diverse individuals. Every year we become more like strangers—and more like brothers.

To deal with this difficulty, contemporary journalism has de-

veloped along a scale that ranges from publications addressed to as few as a thousand readers up to television and magazine audiences ranging around fifty million. Even in a highly specialized scientific journal some subscribers will have difficulty comprehending an article by a colleague who, in pursuit of the scientific goal of precision, may be developing a different vocabulary to express new concepts. The practitioners of each subspecialty also need to know what's going on in the nearest subspecialty, and beyond that one ad infinitum. As the circles widen, the communication difficulty increases.

Fortune, for instance, works in the intermediate range of the scale. Its subject, business, is a valid unit in the sense that its parts are interdependent and have many patterns, practices, problems, and interests in common. A fantastic variety is embraced within this unity. It's a far cry, apparently, from Manhattan's garment trade to the research scientists who developed the laser and the high-technology industries which first used it outside the laboratories. Yet the men on Seventh Avenue needed to be promptly and effectively informed about so fundamental an invention; lasers for cutting fabrics are already in commercial development. To convey such information requires bridging huge gaps between different kinds of information, different habits of mind.

Today every public question—national defense, water pollution, educational policy—involves highly specialized kinds of knowledge. The citizen cannot be adequately informed unless his education and, later, his journalism, give him some access to that essential part of a public question that lies outside his own immediate sphere of interest and competence.

Equally daunting is the journalistic difficulty that arises out of the way contemporary change originates. In a totally planned society (if one were possible) journalism's job would be to focus on the planning authority, reporting its decisions; the sum of these would be the sum of change. But not even the Soviet Union, rigidly authoritarian in theory, works that way. Some shots that the planners call are never made, and new conditions, unforeseen by planners, arise spontaneously.

The dissemination of power implicit in all contemporary society defeats the fondest dreams of centralizers. In the U.S. the decisions of government, important though they are, add up to only a small fraction of the whole impetus of change. Most of the great new government policies of recent decades—social security, welfare, civil-rights programs, increased regulation of business—

are secondary changes, efforts to cushion new conditions that had their primary source outside of government. Nor is there in the private sector any one source of change, any establishment of concentrated power, where journalism can find the conscious, deliberate origin of most changes that sweep us onward.

For many years some newsmen and some of their customers have suspected that Washington was overcovered relative to the rest of the American scene. Journalistic tradition partly explains this. In the centuries when political intervention was one of the few sources of what little was new and different, news properly concentrated upon government. Journalism still clings to the legislative act and the presidential decision because they are relatively easy to get into focus. By contrast, such gradual and multicentered changes as the loosening of parental authority or the increase of consumer credit or public acceptance of a new technology of contraception or the rising resentment of black Americans are much more difficult to pinpoint. They are not "events." They didn't happen "yesterday" or "today" or "last week." They do not fit the journalist's cherished notions of a "story."

Losing the Thread

Insofar as journalism solves the problem of where to look for change, it is then confronted with another set of difficulties: the subject will be more complex, intrinsically harder to tell, than news used to be. A scientific advance, for instance, is harder to convey than an explorer's geographical discovery. There was no great communication difficulty in saying that Columbus sailed west for seventy days, that he found a land peopled by naked men. It's all wondrous but it's not opaque. Everybody recognized the terms "sail," "day," "land," "naked." On the other hand, the discovery of deoxyribonucleic acid is, to a non-biologist, more opaque than wondrous. Yet DNA, by unlocking secrets of genetics, may cause more social change than did the age of exploration. And the consequences may follow far more quickly.

In the last ten or fifteen years journalism, thanks to a few very able science reporters, has made tremendous strides in the techniques of communicating to the public the major advances of pure science. A knowledgeable reporter, skilled in translating scientific languages, can sit down with the discoverer and his colleagues and seek ways to penetrate the opacity that surrounds any scientific discovery. Greater difficulty—and less journalistic success—comes when the new discovery begins to move out into

use, mingling with technological, economic, psychological, and even moral factors. As a source of information to the reporter the original discoverer may not be of much use at this point. Members of other academic disciplines may not be interested or adroit in bringing their knowledge to bear on the meaning of the change. Journalism may lose the thread because the change has become complex in a way that goes beyond any academic discipline.

Journalism, for instance, has not done well with the economic and social implications of the greatest technological advance of the last twenty years—the computer, symbol of automation. Since its effects spread out to every part of society, everybody needs to know quite a lot about the computer. In the Fifties, when computers and other devices for automating work were coming in, there was an almost hysterical belief that they would sharply increase unemployment. Thousands of economists and social historians were in a position to know better. They not only failed to reach the general public with a more realistic view of automation's impact on employment, they did not even get the message to the rest of the academic community. Even though U.S. employment has increased 36 percent since 1950, millions of people, including many of the best educated, are still walking around with bad cases of computerphobia.

In 1965, Charles E. Silberman, an economist and journalist, undertook in *Fortune* a careful analysis of the actual and probable future effects of computers on the number and kinds of jobs. It would have been possible—though admittedly difficult—to parallel Silberman's explanation at levels of mass-circulation journalism. Newspapers and television have made little effort to explain the economic and social meaning of the computer. Such a subject simply does not fit their working definitions of news. But if in the years ahead there occurs, for some reason unconnected with computers, a sharp and prolonged rise in unemployment, then the press will feel obliged to carry the mouthings of any demagogue who blames computers for the shortage of jobs. A lot of Americans would fall for this because education and journalism, between them, are not getting over to the public enough timely information about the significance of this sort of change.

The Invisible Americans

In recent decades journalism has missed changes more important and more complex than the effect of the computer. From the end of the post-Civil War Reconstruction period to the mid-

Fifties, American journalism was virtually silent on the subject of how black Americans lived. Lynchings were reported and deplored, as were race riots and the more sensational crimes committed by blacks against whites. But crimes by blacks against blacks were regularly ignored as a matter of explicit news policy on most newspapers. This was symptomatic of an implicit journalistic assumption that blacks were not a significant part of the American scene. Journalism bears a considerable share of responsibility for white society's disengagement from the Negro and his problems.

Yet journalists were aware that the position of the blacks in American life was building up tensions. The huge northward migrations during the two world wars created new conditions that seldom got into the news. Much of the material in Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 sociological classic, *An American Dilemma*, came from interviews with American journalists who were interested as individuals in the plight of the Negro, but who collectively and professionally did not consider facts about the condition of Negro life to be news.

In the last few years journalism has been widely denounced for giving undue attention to extreme black militants and to civil disorders arising from racial tension. No doubt there has been some shift over the years in the personal attitudes of newsmen toward racial inequality. But not nearly enough shift to account for a 180° reversal that moved the racial problem from the bottom to the top of the news. One difference is that black militancy found a way to pass the gate of news standards. In the light of the urban riots and fires, newsmen, especially those with TV cameras, suddenly found blacks eminently reportable.

The contrast in news between the past invisibility of blacks as people and the recent hypervisibility of black militants brings us to certain characteristics inherent in the craft of journalism. Why doesn't it try harder to expand its definition of news? Why does so much of journalism remain trapped in "the story," the dramatic, disruptive, exceptional event that properly formed the corpus of news in the generations when the broad background of society was shifting very slowly? Why is journalism still so wrapped up in the deadline, the scoop, the gee-whiz—and so seemingly unable to notice that most of what is new will not fit into a narrative pattern of what happened in the last twenty-four hours?

"The story," and all the bang-bang that went with it, used to be the way "to sell papers" in the days when newsboys crying "Extra" formed the sales force of the press. The business need

for this kind of razzle-dazzle has disappeared. The editorial reason for it has diminished to the vanishing point. Yet much of journalism still operates as if its circulation and its usefulness depended on the second hand of the clock rather than the depth of its perception, the accuracy of its report, the relevance of its coverage, and the balance of its judgment.

To understand why news is trapped in its own past, journalism must be looked at in relation to the third great system of social communication mentioned above, the arts. Though most journalists are loath to admit it, what they practice is an art—crude and unbeautiful, but nevertheless an art. Even in the fine arts, where individual originality lies close to the heart of excellence, nearly all artists are influenced by traditions, canons, “schools.” Descending the ladder of art toward craftsmanship, originality and novelty become less prominent and tradition becomes stronger. The artifact is acceptable because its design is more or less familiar. This may be especially true of the verbal arts of our day. Language is, after all, a huge network of conventional meanings, a heritage. In slow-moving societies language may have changed as rapidly as the realities it described. In our day, language may be a “conservative” element, lagging behind social change, forcing us to perceive today in terms of the past.

The Artistic Bias

The sublanguages of the sciences and other highly specialized activities do change rapidly. But most journalism cannot use these terms because it must transmit information outside the specialized group. In his overriding desire to communicate efficiently, the journalist tends unconsciously to be ruled by precedent in his choice of subject and in the form of presentation. That which is familiar can be communicated more easily than that which is really new. The simple subject is more communicable than the complex. Dramatic conflict, especially when it can be reduced to two sides, is a well established form of communication.

Thus journalism in our time has what might be called a formal bias that causes news to distort reality. Preference for “the story” that journalism *knows* can be communicated leads it to neglect the changes that need to be told but do not fit the standards of familiarity, simplicity, drama. This artistic bias has nothing to do with the ideology or partisanship of the journalist himself. He may take sides concerning the substance of a news story, but such substantive bias will often be overridden by his formal bias. A journal-

ist who sees a story that is attractive—artistically speaking—will tell it even if it runs contrary to his political prejudices, hurts the interests of his friends, and brings sorrow to his mother's heart. This laudable independence exacts, however, a heavy price: if the artistic standards by which the story is selected and shaped are themselves out of phase with reality the consequent distortion may be greater than that produced by a journalist's substantive bias toward one "side" of an issue.

Probably most journalists who handled news produced by the late Senator Joe McCarthy opposed the substance of what he was doing. But McCarthy got enormous attention in the press before he had a large popular following because he played up to the journalistic desire for simplification and dramatization, and had a keen sense of that seven o'clock deadline. On the other hand, most journalists who dealt with John Gardner probably approved of the substance of his influence on public affairs. Yet Gardner, who was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare during a critical period, never became a vivid figure in the news. He tended to see life "in the round." Though he recognized the puzzles and problems that engulf government today, he tackled them with an energy derived from a sense of modern society's immense material, intellectual, and moral resources. He did not cast himself as St. George versus the Dragon. He was out of touch with news precisely because he was in touch with contemporary social reality. Gardner's name would have become familiar to every American if, after resigning his post, he had gone along with newsmen who importuned him to launch a series of public attacks on President Johnson.

Ideology and extreme partisanship attract the attention of journalists who are not themselves ideologues or partisans. If news can be simplified into a framework of Cold War or of black extremists against white extremists or of poor against rich, journalists as communicators will be happy although as men and citizens they—along with everybody else—will be depressed at the picture they paint.

Both Local and National

In terms of this general view of contemporary journalism's mission, its external difficulties and its internal inhibitions, let us briefly examine some specific media, starting (as a journalistic canon requires) with the most familiar.

Daily newspapers in general do not present an inspiring spectacle of vigorous effort to meet the challenge of change. Most of

them go on emphasizing specific events—a crime, an accident, a resolution of the city council—in ways not very different from the journalism of a hundred years ago. Even though crime's incidence has increased to the point where it is a substantial part of the new normality, only a few papers have made a serious effort to explain this change, more important and potentially more interesting than any single crime.

A shift of attention has occurred from local news to national and international news. On most papers this seems to take the heart out of local coverage, while leaving national and international news to the Associated Press and the United Press International, which are the least innovative, most tradition-bound of all journalistic institutions.

Few papers have discovered the category of news that is both local and national. The problems of each city are in some sense unique. Since early in the Johnson Administration, Washington has been aware that decisions made by Congress and carried out by a national Administration will be fruitless unless they are meshed with vigorous and knowledgeable local efforts. Yet each city's problems of transportation, housing, education, poverty, have a wide area of overlap with other cities' problems. The obvious need is for local reporting that will examine what's going on in Pittsburgh and San Francisco in an effort to clarify the problems of Buffalo. Communication, through journalism, between the cities and regions of the U.S. has never been so desperately needed or in worse shape. Efforts to develop a "new federalism" are handicapped by journalism's tradition-bound rigidity that sees national news as one category and local news as an entirely separate category.

The sorry condition of daily newspapers is often blamed on the trend toward local monopoly, a diagnosis that is too easy. In many cities, before mergers occurred, all the papers lacked distinction and leadership. In cities with competing papers journalism is not notably more vigorous than in the monopoly cities. Such notable smaller city papers as the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the Minneapolis *Tribune*, and the Charlotte *Observer* are among the very few that really keep trying to improve service to the community.

Away from the Traditional "Story"

Of yesterday's best-known newspapers the Chicago *Tribune*, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, the New York *Daily News* seem less relevant than they used to be. The most improved large daily (it

had lots of room for improvement) is probably the Los Angeles *Times*. In recent years it has developed an ability to cover trends, as well as events, and to relate local subjects to the regional and national scenes. Its intelligent reporting of educational trends, for instance, enabled it to evince clear superiority over the San Francisco press when campus "stories" erupted in the Bay area, at Berkeley and San Francisco State. Because the Los Angeles *Times* was aware of the moving background behind the sensational campus disorders, it reported the events themselves with a far steadier hand than the San Francisco papers.

Two national dailies, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Wall Street Journal*, have largely freed themselves from the tyranny of "the story" as traditionally defined. The *Monitor's* interpretive articles are, in fact, more timely than many a front page sprinkled with the words "yesterday" and "today." The *Wall Street Journal's* two leading front-page articles add up in the course of a year to a better report of what's going on than all the bulletins of the wire services. "Kelly Street Blues," a four-part series on a block in a New York ghetto, put together a mosaic of detail that helps one part of society, the *W.S.J.'s* readers, understand how a very different part lives. Neil Ulman's roundup of protests across the nation against sex education in the schools was an example of the kind of report that conventional newspapers miss. The *W.S.J.'s* foreign news can discuss basically interesting subjects, such as how Soviet citizens can invest their savings or anti-Franco trends in Spain, that are not pegged to any events.

A long way from the *Wall Street Journal* lies the "underground press" that has sprung up in recent years. Its chief significance is to demonstrate that, economically, the proliferation of many publications is now feasible. Unhappily, it cannot be said that the underground press displays much innovative muscle. Its ideology seems moored in nineteenth-century anarchism, and from that viewpoint it can dislike whatever the "straight" press likes. But that hardly helps the job of reducing the lag between journalism and reality. The underground papers are as similar, one to another, as the square papers. An admittedly incomplete survey of underground papers indicates that none of them has invented a new four-letter word.

In a class by itself stands that most aboveground of American newspapers, the *New York Times*. Its influence is by no means confined to its readers. Most journalists, including broadcasters, start their day with it and each journalist assumes that the others have read the *Times* attentively. In the important matter of day-

to-day decisions on which stories deserve top play, the *Times* is the greatest single national influence. Its preeminence goes back a long way and it is still steeped in conventional news judgment and traditional journalistic forms. Nevertheless, in recent years the *Times* has produced more and more innovative journalism. Its development of daily biographical sketches of figures in the news abandons the old elitist assumption that everybody knows who these people are. The new managing editor, A. M. Rosenthal, is among those chiefly responsible for an emphasis on "in depth" reporting that breaks away from yesterday's developments. A landmark of this genre was Anthony Lukas's 5,000-word account of a suburban girl who had been found murdered in an East Greenwich Village basement; Lukas's detailed narrative transformed an incomprehensible horror into a memorable insight into the shifting values of life patterns that touch even the most seemingly secure homes. In August, when 300,000 youngsters suddenly converged on Bethel, New York, to hear rock music, the *Times* reports, departing from the conventional emphasis on the disorderly aspects of the scene, made a real effort to understand what had drawn the kids there, what they got out of it, what their values were.

Because of the *Times'* immense influence on journalism that paper's recent willingness to break out of conventional molds is one of the most hopeful signs of long-range improvement of the press. But it may be years before most papers follow such pioneering. They haven't the reporting staffs to do so. Bright, concerned young men and women are loath to go to work for papers that are clearly not alive, not relevant to the great changes and stresses that are sweeping through society.

Broadening the Scope of News

Newspapers have been slow to adjust to the liveliness of good TV reportage and the broad-spectrum coverage of newsmagazines.

From its beginning the great distinction of *Time*, the weekly newsmagazine, was not the much-parodied sentence structure of its early years but its broadened concept of news. For example, it looked at religion as a moving part of the total scene. No future historian of the twentieth century's middle decades could possibly omit from an account of the total change the tremendous shifts of religious and ethical belief that color contemporary life. Yet most conventional newspaper journalism still virtually ignores such subjects, except when they surface as dramatic confrontations.

The newsmagazines continue to broaden the concept of news. *Newsweek* has added departments on "Life and Leisure" and "The Cities." *Time's* recent addition of "Behavior" and "Environment" treats other areas that the older journalism assumed to be static. The departmentalization of news itself is more than an orderly convenience for the reader. The departmental structure forces editors to look where they know news ought to be, rather than passively waiting for news to "flow" at them—an attitude that results in today's news being defined as whatever is most like yesterday's news.

All journalism has something to learn from the pioneers of a new journalism of ideas. The quarterly *Daedalus*, under the sensitive editorship of Stephen Graubard, has reached an impressive circulation of 70,000; it provides for a highly educated readership a forum where voices from many disciplines converge in each issue upon a single subject. *The Public Interest*, another quarterly, edited by Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol, is less formidably academic in style, more directly attuned to current problems. One of the most extraordinary publications is the *Kaiser Aluminum News*, whose editor, Don Fabun, delights in translating, primarily for the company's employees, the most difficult contemporary thought into lucid, poetic words and pictures. Fabun never runs a conventional "audience-building story"; and yet the demand for his magazine continues to build because people are fascinated by what he has to say.

Not one of these magazines pursues an ideological shortcut. All are basically periodicals of explanation. They work on the assumption that relevant truths about contemporary society are difficult—but not impossible—to convey.

The Special Bias of TV

At the other end of the spectrum lies television journalism with its mass audience. Most of its faults have descended from print journalism; it multiplied its inheritance while finding some distortive formal biases of its own. The artistic bias inherent in the TV medium affects the behavior of the actors in the news. The "demonstration" becomes a dominant form of social action rather than the petition, the political debate, the lawsuit. Other media are drawn toward covering, as best they can, the disorderly scenes that television covers so superlatively. There have been months when a consumer of news might wonder whether anything except demonstrations was going on in the U.S. Such overconcentration on one

kind of news in a society where thousands of currents are running is a sure way of walking into another ambush, perhaps more grave than that represented by today's disorderly products of yesterday's inattention.

Television is exerting another, more indirect, bias upon news. The generation now of college age is the first that was introduced to news through a medium mainly devoted to dramatized entertainment. The drama is usually highly simplified and one side is morally right, the other wrong. The young viewer expects the news to fall into the same dramatic pattern. It is not surprising if he later becomes a recruit to the new anti-intellectualism apparent in the impatience of campus protesters who regard complex facts as distractions from the "gut commitment," which they hold to be a morally superior approach to public questions. Public expectation of moralistic drama presses all media toward defining news in terms of simple conflict. But what the public needs to know may lie in just the opposite direction. Society's ability to avoid ambush may depend on receiving information before the dramatic conflict develops.

Yet some of the most hopeful signs of tomorrow's journalism are also to be found in television. It has an incomparable ability to convey the integrated *quality* of a personality or of a social situation. Eric Hoffer unobtrusively interviewed by Eric Sevareid was an experience in communication that print journalism could hardly match. C.B.S. also recently did a "documentary" (that blighting word) on Japan as interpreted by former Ambassador Edwin Reischauer, which told more people more about the subject than millions of printed words, including Reischauer's own fine books.

Conventional journalism despairs of communicating such an intrinsically interesting subject as old age in contemporary society. What's the story? What's the event? What's the conflict? What's the issue? Lord Snowdon's beautifully sensitive *Don't Count the Candles* ignores those conventional journalistic questions and brings unforgettable information of what it's like to be old.

Such examples compel the conclusion that television has a great constructive role to play in the journalism of the future upon which society must depend for its sense of cohesion and for the intelligent choice of its own direction.

That poverty in America should have been "discovered" in 1962 by Michael Harrington, an impassioned polemicist, is proof that journalism was not fulfilling its mission. Where were the journalists in the years when Ralph Nader was working on *Unsafe at Any Speed*, an exaggerated indictment of auto manufacturers that

is now generally conceded to contain a lot of truth about a matter of universal interest? Nader lately has broadened his attack to other products and services where the buying public is ill-protected and ill-informed. He and Harrington both tend toward governmental remedies for the ills they identify. But the informational problem is more fundamental than the political issue. If society doesn't know about poverty it cannot deal with it governmentally or otherwise; if the consuming public doesn't know enough about what it's buying it cannot protect itself, governmentally or otherwise. The way to defend the market system is to be sure that information, an essential ingredient of any healthy market or any healthy democracy, is adequate.

It's Up to the Newsmen

It ought to be plain, but seemingly it is not, that the quality of journalism depends primarily on journalists—not on government and not on the legal owners of media. Publishers and executives of networks and broadcasting stations now have only a small fraction of the influence on news that owners used to exercise. As commercial bias diminishes, what counts now, for better or worse, is the bias of reporters, cameramen, editors. Their ideological bent is far less important than their artistic bias, the way they select and present what they regard as significant.

Journalism will always need artistry to reach the public's mind and heart. Indeed, what is now required is a higher level of art, a boldness that will get journalism unstuck from forms of communication developed in and for a social context very different from the present. Nobody except journalists can develop such forms. All the public can do is to be wary of existing distortions and appreciative of such efforts as appear to get closer to the current truth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Ways's basic charge against newspapers is that in these days of the knowledge explosion they still search out the exceptional, freakish incidents of daily life and fail to report on the forces that are reshaping our world. Gans, in his article on television news (page 214), suggests that the job of the newsman is "to cover what goes awry." The essential question seems to be, "What is news?" Discuss whether the newspaper (and television and radio) should embody the traditional*

idea of news as the reporting of events or Ways's concept of news as the reporting of processes.

2. Study a recent issue of your local newspaper and compare how many articles are devoted to explaining the complexities of our changing society with how many are about the things that go wrong.

3. Ways suggests several areas or aspects of life today that need explanation. Cite other areas and explain your choices.

4. What should be the role of the newspaper now that television is so widespread? What special functions can the newspaper perform?

5. Make a short survey of which newspaper features are the most popular with people your age.

Race, Riots, and Reporters

Terry Ann Knopf

Terry Ann Knopf, a research associate at the Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University, reports on the prevalence of inaccuracy, distortion, and bias in news coverage of racial disorders.

As racial disorders have become a familiar part of the national scene, the press has demonstrated a growing awareness of its responsibilities and a healthy willingness to experiment with new policies and procedures. The now defunct Kerner Commission, the Community Relations Service of Department of Justice and the National League of Cities have all sponsored conferences designed to examine the quality of press coverage. One press official has reported having been invited to six or seven luncheons, several receptions and a dozen dinners, leading him to remark that "the only thing I have to fear from black power is obesity."

Technical improvements have been made; operational techniques updated. (The Pittsburgh police have on occasion provided a helicopter for the press.) Central headquarters or "press centrals" have been established so as to minimize conflicting reports. In accordance with new guidelines, newspapers have tended to move away from the "shotgun" approach—the front-page buildup, complete with splashy pictures and box scores of the latest "riot" news.

There is also evidence of greater sympathy and sensitivity toward blacks. How far we have come from a 1919 *New York Times* editorial comment on violent racial disorder in Washington, D.C. "The majority of the negroes [sic] in Washington before the great war were well behaved. . . . More of them admitted the superiority of the white race, and troubles between the two races

were undreamed of. . . ." But serious problems remain. Glaring instances of inaccuracy, exaggeration, distortion, misinterpretation and bias have continued at every level—in newspapers and news magazines large and small, Northern and Southern, liberal and conservative. Many Americans—to the Left and Right of Spiro Agnew—understandably feel a certain uneasiness about the press.

The wire services, for example—probably the most under-examined segment of the press—may provide as much as 90 percent of the news contained in some newspapers on a given day. One error emanating from one wire service report in one city may be repeated in hundreds of newspapers (and news stations) across the country, and even if a correction is sent out, the chances of its being picked up by newspapers would be no greater than 50 percent.

A year ago an AP-man in Dallas, Texas, filed a story on a student takeover at Southern Methodist University. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in its evening edition on May 2, 1969, put the story on the front page and gave it a banner headline:

**BLACKS SEIZE OFFICE OF S.M.U.'S PRESIDENT
Police Are Called to Stand By.**

Dallas (AP)—Black students with some support from whites took over the office of the president of Southern Methodist University today and swore to remain until their demands are met. . . .

Reports from the scene said from 30 to 35 students were in control of President Tate's office.

The takeover occurred during a meeting of Tate and a campus organization, the Black League of Afro-American and African College Students.

The story had one major flaw—it simply wasn't true. While about 35 students had met with the university president, they were not "in control" of his office; nor had they "swore to remain" until their demands were met. No "takeover" had occurred.

Glen Dromgoole, a staff writer for the *Star-Telegram*, also covered the story and later reported what really happened. The black students had met with the president for more than five hours discussing recent demands. The talks were more friendly than hostile. (At one point hamburgers were brought in.) By the end of the meeting, agreement had been reached on most of the issues.

But misreporting is by no means the sole prerogative of the wire services. Last year, for example, some concerned parents in

Jacksonville, Florida, removed their children from Kirby Smith Jr. High School after a local radio station had broadcast an exaggerated report of a fight between black and white students. The school principal later indicated that "classes continued and there was no panic." Nevertheless, the *Miami Herald* headlined its story on April 25, 1969:

MOMS MOB SCHOOL
AFTER RIOT 'NEWS'

A story appearing in the *Boston Globe* on May 10, 1969, told of a peaceful rally by a small group of students at a local theological seminary. According to the *Globe*, the rally was "brief and orderly." But the headline above the story read: "Newton Campus Erupts."

The Question of Meaning

The use of the word "riot" presents another problem because it has no precise meaning in terms of the current wave of disorders. Webster's dictionary defines a "riot" as a "tumultuous disturbance of the public peace by 3 or more persons assembled together and acting with a common intent." The difficulty is that "riots" have become so frequent and now come in so many sizes and shapes as to have rendered the word meaningless. There is something ludicrous about lumping together as "riots" Detroit, with 43 deaths, 7000 arrests and \$45,000,000 in property damage, and an incident in which 3 people break a few store windows. Yet this is precisely what the press still does.

No law says the press has to interpret, and not simply report, the news. However, having assumed this responsibility, the press does have an obligation to make reasonable judgments based upon careful and thoughtful analysis. Unfortunately, press attempts in the direction of social science research have been rather amateurish, particularly where new trends and patterns are concerned.

The case of the Cleveland "shoot-out" serves as a good example. On July 23, 1968, an intense gunbattle broke out between the police and a group of black nationalists led by Ahmed Evans. By the time the disorder was over, 16,400 National Guardsmen had been mobilized, 9 persons had been killed, while the property damage was estimated at \$2.6 million.

Immediately, the Cleveland tragedy was described as a de-

liberate plot against the police. The *Cleveland Press* (July 24, 1968) compared the violence to guerrilla activity in Vietnam:

. . . it didn't seem to be a Watts, or a Detroit, or a Newark. Or even a Hough of two years ago. No, this tragic night seemed to be part of a plan.

A reporter writing in the *New York Times* (July 28, 1968) stated: ". . . It marks perhaps the first documented case in recent history of black, armed, and organized violence against the police."

More recent reports have revealed that the "shoot-out" was something less than a planned uprising and that the situation at the time was considerably more complicated than indicated initially. Unfortunately, following the events in Cleveland, disorders in which shots may have been fired were immediately suspected by the press of being part of a "wave." A series of errors involving a handful of cities became the basis of a myth—that the pattern of violence in 1968 had changed from spontaneous to premeditated outbreaks.

The national press bore an especially heavy responsibility. Few of the nationally-known newspapers and news magazines attempted to verify sniping reports coming out of the cities and over the wire services; few were willing to undertake independent investigations of their own; and far too many were overly zealous in their assertions of a new "trend" based on limited and unconfirmed evidence. Unwittingly or not, the national press had constructed a scenario on armed uprisings.

The news magazines should be singled out for the greatest criticism. While having more time to check and verify reports than daily newspapers, the news magazines were even more vocal in their assertions of a "new pattern." On September 13, 1968, *Time* took note of an "ominous trend" in the country and declared that the violence "appears to be changing from spontaneous combustion of a mob to the premeditated shoot-outs of a far-out few." The story went on to indicate that "many battles" had begun with "well-planned sniping at police."

Nearly a year later, on June 27, 1969, long after investigations by a task force of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, the Lemberg Center and the *New York Times* (which reversed itself on the Cleveland question) had cast serious doubt on premeditated outbreaks in Cleveland and elsewhere, *Time* was still talking about the possibilities of a

“guerrilla summer” and reminding its readers of the time in Cleveland when “police were lured into an ambush.” Once started, myths are very difficult to extinguish.

Another of the myths created by the press involves an alleged “shift” in racial disturbances from large to small cities. On July 25, 1969, a syndicated reporter for the News Enterprise Association (NEA) noted: “The socially sizzling summer has begun—but unlike recent history, it seems to be the minor, not the major, cities which are sweltering.” In an article entitled “Riots, 1969 Style,” *Newsweek* declared on August 11, 1969:

. . . the traditional riot scenario is still being played out this summer—with one major difference. This season the stage has shifted from the major population centers to such small and disparate communities as Kokomo, Ind., Santa Ana, Calif., Cairo, Ill., Middletown, Conn. and Farrell, Pa.

On September 9, 1969, the *New York Times* captioned a picture as follows:

NEW RIOT PATTERN: Rioting in Hartford, Conn., last week . . . underscored the fact that smaller cities this summer have had more racial trouble this summer than the big ones.

Similar stories appeared at about the same time in scores of other newspapers including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Baltimore News American*, the *Woburn (Mass.) Times*, the *Pittsburgh Press* and the *Georgia News*.

In fact, racial disorders occurring over the last few years—not just this past summer—have been concentrated in smaller cities. About 75 percent of all outbreaks recorded in 1968 by the Lemberg Center’s Civil Disorder Clearinghouse occurred outside the 100 largest cities. For the first six months of 1969 and for the summer period as well, no appreciable change in the percentage was noted. Furthermore, many of the cities cited as prototypes of this latest “new pattern”—Hartford and Middletown, Conn., Cairo, Ill.—had had disorders in previous years. The difference is that such outbreaks were completely overshadowed by a few enormous outbreaks in large cities such as Newark and Detroit. Nobody noticed outbreaks in smaller cities in those days.

Knowing the origin of these and other myths would be use-

ful—a faulty wire service report, an inept reporter, an unreliable source. But aside from the fact that such a task would be almost impossible, it would miss a central point—that the system of reporting ensures that errors of fact and interpretation may be repeated, compounded and reformulated as myths.

In recent years, the various components of the press have become extremely intertwined and dependent upon one another. The wire services, the nationally known newspapers and the news magazines constantly feed one another news and information. While the system undoubtedly speeds the flow of news to the public, it has encouraged a parrot-like character within the press in which the various segments tend to reproduce rather than examine each other's views.

In this respect, the *New York Times'* caption proclaiming a "NEW PATTERN" assumes greater significance. Prior to its appearance in the *Times*, I happened to talk with Jack Rosenthal who had been working on a story on the relatively cool summer. When the subject of a new "shift" in violence came up, I indicated that such allegations were false and misleading. Rosenthal wrote a thoughtful piece, dwelling on police-community relations, civic programs and the new community spirit among blacks. No mention in the story was made of a "new riot pattern"—except for the picture caption appearing above the Rosenthal story. Apparently, the caption writer had paid more attention to what *Newsweek* and the *Wall Street Journal* were saying than to his fellow staffer at the *Times*.

We come now to the question of bias. The failure of the press to tell the complete story in the case of Cornell or the right story in the case of Cleveland goes beyond a lack of initiative or an inclination to sensationalize. It also indicates a certain bias. Notwithstanding Mr. Agnew's attacks on the press, this bias cuts across political and geographical lines and is all the more pernicious for its subtlety. The press is no more aware of its bias than is the general public aware of its own. In part, we could call it a class bias in that those who comprise the press—reporters, editors, headline writers, etc.—are part of the vast American middle class and, as such, express its views, values and standards.

Both the general public and the press share the same dislike of the protesters; both are unable to understand the violence as expressions of protest against oppressive conditions. Both prefer the myth of orderly, peaceful change, extolling the virtues of private property and public decorum. People are expected to behave in a certain way. They just don't go around yelling and

cursing or throwing rocks. Both will grant that it took a revolution to secure our independence and a civil war to end slavery (at least officially) but that was all very long ago and somehow different.

The bias also has elements of racism in that the matter of color is never far from the surface. It is difficult to say where the class bias begins and racist bias ends. These elements are inseparable and serve to reinforce one another.

The reaction to recent studies on racial disorders provides one indication of this bias. A growing body of research shows that such disorders are a part of the social process. The process includes an accumulation of grievances; a series of tension-heightening incidents (such as police harassment); and a precipitating event (such as an arrest) which crystallizes the tensions and grievances that have mounted—the “last straw” which triggers the violence.

The “typical rioter” is young, better educated than the average inner-city black and more dissatisfied. He wants a better job but feels that prospective employers will discriminate against him. He is likely to be a long-term resident of the city. (In a survey in Detroit, 90 percent of those arrested were from Detroit, 7 percent lived in the same state and only 1 percent lived outside the state.) He is extremely proud of his race and is politically conscious. He is more interested and better informed about politics than blacks who are not involved in a disorder. He is also more inclined toward political activism. (In one survey, nearly 40 percent of the participants in the disorder—as compared with only about 25 percent of the nonparticipants—reported having been involved in civil rights activity.) Finally, he receives substantial support from the rest of his community which does not participate actively but regards the violence as necessary and beneficial.

Nevertheless, as important as the findings in these studies are, they have made virtually no impact on the vast majority of the American public. Most Americans continue to believe that the violence is caused by a tiny and insignificant minority, that “outside agitators” and “criminal elements” are mainly responsible for isolated outbursts which have little or no social significance.

Intellectuals must share a portion of the blame for this situation. Having completed their studies, they have been notoriously reluctant to roll up their academic shirt-sleeves and assume a leadership role in presenting their ideas to the public. There is always a trace of condescension in their assumption that good ideas from above will somehow trickle down to the “masses of asses,” as one academic I know calls them.

In any event, at least the studies are there. Greater responsibility for the failure to confront the public's resistance rests with the press. It has failed to commit its enormous power and prestige on behalf of these studies. It has failed to place the ideas before the public and push for reform in an aggressive, effective manner—a splash of headlines and stories initially, but little in the way of real follow-up. Instead, the press has opted for the status quo, reflecting, sustaining and perpetuating the outworn beliefs of its predominantly white readership.

The previously cited preoccupation with “outside agitators” is one manifestation of this bias. In a survey of six Northern cities undertaken by the Lemberg Center, 77 percent of all whites interviewed believed that “outside agitators” were a major or contributing cause of disorders. When Mayor Sam Yorty recently blamed a rash of school disorders on a conspiracy of the Black Student Union, the Students for a Democratic Society, Communist sympathizers and the National Council of Churches, he was following a long, though not very honorable, tradition, dating back to Southerners' view of Abolitionists as “Northern agents” and the attribution of interracial clashes during World War I and II to “Bolsheviks” and “Axis plots.”

Such allegations are usually made without a shred of concrete evidence. Nevertheless, the press has frequently taken its cues from the public in formulating and circulating such reports. When rumors circulated that “outside agitators” were involved in a disturbance in Omaha, Nebraska, a news story appearing in the *Arkansas Gazette* on June 27, 1969, made reference to the rumors but also mentioned that the mayor had no evidence to support such reports. Yet, the headline above the story read: “Outsiders Linked to Omaha Rioting.”

The tendency to engage in labeling is perhaps a more serious manifestation of bias. A look at the way in which the disorders are written up reveals, tragically, that the vast majority of the press and the public share essentially the same view of the violence—as meaningless, purposeless, senseless, irrational, and immoral.

Press treatment of the disorders following the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. illustrates the point. The sense of loss and injury among blacks at the time of the assassination was extremely great—far greater than among whites. The unprecedented wave of disorders—approximately 200 of them—were expressive of the anger, the bitterness, the resentment, the frustration that black people felt everywhere.

How did the press handle the disorders? How did it write about the participants? How did it describe their activity? Two newspaper stories typify the coverage at the time.

The *Buffalo News* ran this story on April 9, 1968, the day of Dr. King's funeral:

An uneasy calm enveloped Buffalo today—the day of Dr. Martin Luther King's funeral—after an evening of burning, rock throwing and looting by gangs of Negro youths. . . .

Roving gangs seemed to concentrate on [one] area, sweeping it from one end to the other several times. Gangs regrouped as soon as police moved on to other trouble spots.

The rampage seemed to swiftly gain in intensity from 7:30 to 9:30 PM, when reported vandalism started to slack off, finally dying out by 1 AM today. . . .

As the roving gangs began to concentrate on the Jefferson Ave. stores, police shut off all traffic along Jefferson between Best and East Ferry. . . .

Shortly after 7 PM, Mayor Sedita sent about 40 volunteers, mostly Negroes, into the embattled neighborhoods to try to pacify the rampaging youths.

One day later, the *Trenton Times-Advertiser* ran this story:

Trenton was in a state of emergency today, reeling from the effects of a night of terror and worrying about the threat of more to come tonight.

The orgy of destruction and looting that broke over the city about 7:30 last night continued out of control until about 1:30 this morning. . . .

Of the more than 300 youths who rampaged through the downtown and Battle Monument areas last night, 108 were in the county jail today. . . .

The riot was carried out by Negro youths almost all of them either teen-agers or in their early 20's. . . . Many of the rioters boasted they would be back on the streets tonight. . . .

Shouts of "Black Power!" "We Shall Overcome!" and "Whitey, Get Out!" were voiced by the youths. Some added, "Dr. King is dead and so is non-violence." . . .

The riot gained momentum quickly soon after 6:30

p.m. when gangs of youths began roaming the downtown area and some incidents were reported. But by 7:30, it was in full swing. . . .

The marauders literally ran the police in circles. . . . All along the way, there was the sound of broken display windows to mark the movement of the vandals. . . .

For the most part, the rioters appeared to be on a gay holiday. But the gaiety was punctuated by sudden flareups of tension between police and rioters.

No attempt is made in these stories to place the violence in a social context. The reference to the assassination of Dr. King is perfunctory, with only a passing mention of his funeral and a few shouts about his death. The reader merely understands that the violence *followed* his assassination—not that his assassination *precipitated* it.

Value-laden words receive unusual emphasis. Who are the participants? They are young and black. That much is clear. But we are also told that they are “vandals,” “marauders,” that they travel in “gangs.” What do they do? They go around “roaming,” “roving,” “rampaging” and “rioting.” What is it like to engage in the violence? A “riot” . . . a “gay holiday” . . . an “orgy” . . . “in full swing.” The participants are “marauders” not men; they “rove” instead of run; they move in “gangs” not groups; they engage in “vandalism” not simply violence.

And the particular choice of words. As described in these stories, the participants behave in a wild, aimless, crazy manner. To “rampage” does not simply mean to move about, but to wander with no fixed destination or purpose—“to move hither and thither at random” according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

The young men’s behavior appears lighthearted, even sensual. They are on a lark—a “gay holiday,” an “orgy of destruction.” Even the word “riot” has meaning here. As noted previously, a “riot” is a violent disturbance of the peace by a group of individuals. However, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “riot” originally meant:

Wanton, loose, or wasteful living; debauchery, dissipation, extravagance; a noisy feast or wanton revel.

The terms “gangs,” “vandals,” and “marauders,” along with others such as “hoodlums,” “toughs,” “troublemakers,” and “row-

dies," are among the most commonly used by the press. The problem is that we have all grown so used to viewing blacks as stereotyped criminals that it is difficult to picture them in any other role. Thus, we have such concoctions as "roving gangs," "roving vandals," "roving gangs of hoodlum youths," "roving gangs of rampaging teenagers," or (for variety) "a window-smashing rampage by roving gangs of Negro youths." The *New York Times* assertion on July 1, 1969 that "roving bands of ruffians" were involved in a disturbance in Middletown, Connecticut, seems somewhat feeble by comparison.

Headlines frequently focus on the loaded language used in the news stories. On September 5, 1969, the *Washington Post* reported that Gov. Albert Brewer had sent 100 National Guard troops into the little town of Aliceville, Alabama. The story had Sheriff Louis Coleman disputing the Governor's claim that "gangs" were active in the streets. In fact, according to the *Post*, the participants consisted of "70 singing and hand-clapping Negro children." Nevertheless, the story was headlined:

**TROOPS SENT TO ALABAMA TOWN
TO COPE WITH 'ROAMING GANGS'**

All too often, the immediate causes of the disorders are either buried or omitted from the story. Headlines such as these merely serve to consign the precipitating event and other social factors in the violence to further insignificance. Clearly, the effect of such labeling by the press is to pander to the public's prejudice, reinforcing stereotypes, myths and other outmoded beliefs. The press not only frightens the public but confuses it as well.

A task force of the recent National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence has noted that as the American public learned to accept labor strikes, they became less violent. But can we yet be sure what is the cause and what is the effect? Does less violence result in greater public sympathy? Or is a more serious public understanding of issues a prerequisite for reducing tension?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Search for examples of connotative, slanted, or loaded language in your local newspaper's articles about black or student protests and riots. How do your findings bear out Knopf's observations?

2. In an essay entitled "The Power of the Press," T. S. Matthews expressed doubts about the power of the press to move people. Does Knopf seem to suggest the opposite, namely that most people's opinions on violence in this country are shaped by reporters? Discuss.
3. Summarize and comment on Knopf's theory of why faulty reporting of racial disorders continues.
4. According to many conservatives, the riots that have become so widespread are Communist-inspired. In a rational discussion, voice your opinions on this issue.
5. If you were head of a newspaper or magazine, what are some of the things you would do to ensure that your publication's coverage of a riot was accurate and reliable?

But a Comic Strip Has to Grow

Charles M. Schulz

Charles M. Schulz, the world-famous yet unassuming creator of Peanuts, comments on his work and on the nature of the daily comic strip.

Drawing a daily comic strip is not unlike having an English theme hanging over your head every day for the rest of your life. I was never very good at writing those English themes in high school, and I usually put them off until the last minute. The only thing that saves me in trying to keep up with a comic strip schedule is the fact that it is quite a bit more enjoyable.

I am really a comic strip fanatic and always have been. When I was growing up in St. Paul, Minnesota, we subscribed to both local newspapers and always made sure that we went to the drug-store on Saturday night to buy the Minneapolis Sunday papers so that we would be able to read every comic published in the area. At that time, I was a great fan of Buck Rogers, Popeye, and Skippy.

After high school, I had a job delivering packages around the downtown St. Paul area, and I used to enjoy walking by the windows of the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* and watching the Sunday comics as they came rolling off the presses. It was my dream, of course, that one day my own comic strip would be included.

Almost twenty years have gone by since I first began drawing Charlie Brown and Snoopy, and I find that I still enjoy drawing them as much as I ever did, but, strangely enough, one of my greatest joys is gaining an extra week on the schedule. I have walked away from the post office many times with a tremendous feeling of joy, knowing that I have mailed in six strips that I

thought were really good and that I have gained a week on that oppressive schedule.

During these twenty years, I have had the opportunity to observe what makes a good comic strip. I am convinced that the ones that have survived and maintained a high degree of quality are those which have a format that allows the creator room to express every idea that comes to him. A comic strip should have a very broad keyboard and should certainly not be a one- or two-note affair. If you are going to survive, you simply have to make use of every thought and every experience which have come to you.

A comic strip also has to grow. The only way you can stay ahead of your imitators is to search out new territories. Also, what is funny in a comic strip today will not necessarily be funny the following week. A good example of this is the character of Snoopy. The mere fact that we could read Snoopy's thoughts was funny in itself when *Peanuts* first began. Now, of course, it is the content of those thoughts that is important, and as he progresses in his imagination to new personalities, some of the things which he originally did as an ordinary dog would no longer be funny. Snoopy's personality in the strip has to be watched very carefully, for it can get away from me. Control over such a character requires a certain degree of common sense. I also believe that a comic strip, like a novel, should introduce the reader to new areas of thought and endeavor; these areas should be treated in an authentic manner. I never draw about anything unless I feel that I have a better than average knowledge of my subject. This does not mean that I am an expert on Beethoven, kite-flying, or psychiatry, but it means that as a creative person, I have the ability to skim the surface of such subjects and use just what I need.

Many times people come up to me and tell me how much they appreciate the philosophy of *Peanuts*. This never fails to confuse me, for I really do not know what this philosophy is. It has always seemed to me that the strip has a rather bitter feeling to it, and it certainly deals in defeat. It has given me the opportunity to express many of my own thoughts about life and people. It is my own opinion that it is absolutely necessary for each one of us to strive to gain emotional maturity. Unless a person becomes mature in all things, he will always have fears and anxieties plaguing him. It is interesting to put these adult fears and anxieties into the conversations of the children in *Peanuts*. The passage of time is an area that will almost always show up a person's immaturity. Children have a strange attitude toward time, for they do

not have the patience to wait for days to pass. They want what they want immediately, and adults who are incapable of learning to wait for things will find themselves in all sorts of trouble.

It is also immature not to be able to realize that things that are going to happen in the future are quite often inevitable. If children are allowed to do so, they will put off almost anything, merely because it is in the future; of course, adults will do the same.

I am asked quite frequently to attempt to analyze each of the characters in the strip, but I find myself incapable of doing this. I really cannot talk about Charlie Brown, Linus, or Lucy as individuals. I can draw them, and I can think of things for them to do, but I do not talk well about them.

One thing that does interest me, however, is the set of offstage characters I have gradually accumulated. A reader once wrote to me and gave a fairly good description of what he thought Peppermint Patty's father must be like. This offstage parent refers to his daughter as a "rare gem," and apparently tolerates her tomboyishness quite well. The reader speculated that her father has either divorced his wife or perhaps she has died. I have treated Charlie Brown's father in a fair amount of detail, because I have let it be known that he is very receptive to his son's impromptu visits to the barber shop. Most of this is autobiographical, for my dad always greeted me cordially when I would drop in at his barber shop, and I used to go there and sit and read the newspapers and magazines until he closed his shop in the evening. He also never objected if I rang the NO SALE button on the cash register and removed a nickel for a candy bar.

Linus's mother seems to be the peculiar one. As Charlie Brown once remarked, "I am beginning to understand why you drag that blanket around." She seems to be obsessed with his doing well in school, and tries to spur him on by sneaking notes into his lunch which read, "Study hard today. Your father and I are very proud of you and want you to get a good education."

Some of the offstage characters reach a point where they could never be drawn. I think the little redheaded girl is a lot like the inside of Snoopy's doghouse. Each of us can imagine what she must look like much better than I could ever draw her, and I am sure that every reader sees a different doghouse interior and would be a little disappointed if I were to attempt to draw it in detail.

Linus's beloved Miss Othmar, his teacher, is a rather strange person, and I have tried to do much with her through the conversation of Linus. I have experimented with a two-level story line

at times. I have tried to show Linus's view of what is happening at school, but then show what actually was occurring. I have done this to bring out a truth I have observed, and this is that children see more than we think they do, but at the same time almost never seem to know what is going on. This is an interesting paradox, and one with which adults should try to acquaint themselves, if they are going to deal well with children.

I am very proud of the comic strip medium and am never ashamed to admit that I draw a comic strip. I do not regard it as great art, but I have always felt it is certainly on the level with other entertainment mediums which are part of the so-called "popular arts." In many ways, I do not think we have realized the potential of the comic strip, but sometimes I feel it is too late. Many regard the comic page as a necessary evil and a nuisance, but it is there and it helps sell newspapers. With a little more tolerance and with a little more dedication on the part of those who create the comics, perhaps we could do better. I look back upon great features such as *Out Our Way*, and I feel that perhaps we can never recapture some of that glory. I really shudder when I read a description of a new feature about to be launched by some newspaper syndicate and they refer to it as "off-beat." It is time we have some new features which are "on-beat," and which are about real people doing real things.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Theologians, psychologists, and sociologists have delved into the ideas implicit in Schulz's popular comic strip. Schulz mentions that a good comic strip is one in which the creator expresses ideas. What ideas in Peanuts do you think have made it so popular? Do you think something other than ideas has made this comic strip as successful as it is?*
2. *Can comic strips be categorized as strictly entertaining or both entertaining and thought-provoking? Choose a few comic strips and show whether this classification applies or not.*
3. *"Comedy" often refers to a work in which the author comments on the foibles, petty failings, and peculiarities of man through humorous situations and characters. Which comic strips do this best?*
4. *Survey the comic strips in your local paper from the standpoint of their social-class and political leanings. Describe several from this angle.*
5. *What "adult fears and anxieties" does Schulz put into the conversations and actions of the children in Peanuts?*

from *The Great Comic Book Heroes*

Jules Feiffer

*In this excerpt from his book *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, noted cartoonist, playwright (Little Murders), and screenwriter (Carnal Knowledge) Jules Feiffer discusses the world of adventure comic books.*

Comic books, first of all, are junk.* To accuse them of being what they are is to make no accusation at all: there is no such thing as *uncorrupt* junk or *moral* junk or *educational* junk—though attempts at the latter have, from time to time, been foisted on us. But education is not the purpose of junk (which is one reason why *True Comics* and *Classic Comics* and other half-hearted attempts to bring reality or literature into the field invariably looked embarrassing). Junk is there to entertain on the basest, most compromised of levels. It finds the lowest fantasmal common denominator and proceeds from there. Its choice of tone is dependent on its choice of audience, so that women's magazines will make a pretense at veneer scorned by movie-fan magazines, but both are, unarguably, junk. If not to their publishers, certainly to a good many of their readers who, when challenged, will say defiantly: "I know it's junk, but I like it." Which is the whole point about junk. It is there to be nothing else but liked. Junk is a second-class citizen of the arts; a status of which we and it are constantly aware. There are certain inherent privileges in second-class citizenship. Irresponsibility is one. Not being taken seriously is another. Junk, like the drunk at the wedding, can get away with doing or saying anything because, by its very appearance, it is already in disgrace. It has no one's respect to lose; no

* There are a few exceptions, but nonjunk comic books don't, as a rule, last very long.

image to endanger. Its values are the least middle class of all the mass media. That's why it is needed so.

The success of the best junk lies in its ability to come close, but not too close; to titillate without touching us. To arouse without giving satisfaction. Junk is a tease; and in the years when the most we need is teasing we cherish it—in later years when teasing no longer satisfies we graduate—hopefully, into better things or haplessly, into pathetic, and sometimes violent attempts to make the teasing come true.

It is this antisocial side of junk that Dr. Wertham scorns in his attack on comic books.* What he dismisses—perhaps, because the case was made badly—is the more positive side of junk. (The entire debate on comic books was, in my opinion, poorly handled. The attack was strident and spotty; the defense, smug and spotty—proving, perhaps, that even when grownups correctly verbalize a point about children, they manage to miss it: so that a child expert can talk about how important fantasies of aggression are for children, thereby destroying forever the value of fantasies of aggression. Once a child is told: “Go on, darling. I’m watching. Fantasize,” he no longer has a reason.) Still, there is a positive side to comic books that more than makes up for their much publicized antisocial influence. That is: their *underground* antisocial influence.

Adults have their defense against time: it is called “responsibility,” and once one assumes it he can form his life into a set of routines which will account for all those hours when he is fresh, and justifies escape during all those hours when he is stale or tired. It is not size or age or childishness that separates children from adults. It is “responsibility.” Adults come in all sizes, ages, and differing varieties of childishness, but as long as they have “responsibility” we recognize, often by the light gone out of their eyes, that they are what we call grownup. When grownups cope with “responsibility” for enough number of years they are retired from it. They are given, in exchange, a “leisure problem.” They sit around with their “leisure problem” and try to figure out what to do with it. Sometimes they go crazy. Sometimes they get other jobs. Sometimes it gets too much for them and they die. They have been handed an undetermined future of nonresponsible time and they don’t know what to do about it.

And that is precisely the way it is with children. Time is the

* [Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*.—EDITOR]

ever-present factor in their lives. It passes slowly or fast, always against their best interests: good time is over in a minute; bad time takes forever. Short on "responsibility," they are confronted with a "leisure problem." That infamous question: "What am I going to do with myself?" correctly rephrased should read: "What am I going to do to get away from myself?"

And then, dear God, there's school! Nobody really knows why he's going to school. Even if one likes it, it is still, in the best light, an authoritarian restriction of freedom: where one has to obey and be subservient to people not even his parents. Where one has to learn concurrently, book rules and social rules, few of which are taught in a way to broaden horizons. So books become enemies and society becomes a hostile force that one had best put off encountering until the last moment possible.

Children, hungry for reasons, are seldom given convincing ones. They are bombarded with hard work, labelled education—not seen therefore as child labor. They rise for school at the same time as or earlier than their fathers, start work without office chatter, go till noon without coffee breaks, have waxed milk for lunch instead of dry martinis, then back at the desk till three o'clock. Facing greater threats and riskier decisions than their fathers have had to meet since *their* day in school.

And always at someone else's convenience. Someone else dictates when to rise, what's to be good for breakfast, what's to be learned in school, what's to be good for lunch, what're to be play hours, what're to be homework hours, what's to be delicious for dinner and what's to be, suddenly, bedtime. This goes on until summer—when there is, once again, a "leisure problem." "What," the child asks, "am I going to do with myself?" Millions of things, as it turns out, but no sooner have they been discovered than it is time to go back to school.

It should come as no surprise then, that within this shifting hodgepodge of external pressures, a child, simply to save his sanity, must go underground. Have a place to hide where he cannot be got at by grownups. A place that implies, if only obliquely, that *they're* not so much; that *they* don't know everything; that *they* can't fly the way some people can, or let bullets bounce harmlessly off their chests, or beat up whoever picks on them, or—oh, joy of joys!—even become invisible! A no-man's land. A relief zone. And the basic sustenance for this relief was, in my day, comic books.

With them we were able to roam free, disguised in costume, committing the greatest of feats—and the worst of sins. And, in

every instance, getting away with them. For a little while, at least, it was our show. For a little while, at least, we were the bosses. Psychically renewed, we could then return above ground and put up with another couple of days of victimization. Comic books were our booze.

Just as in earlier days for other children it was pulps, and *Nick Carter*, and penny dreadfuls—all junk in their own right, but less disapproved of latterly because they were less violent. But, predictably, as the ante on violence rose in the culture, so too did it rise in the junk.

Comic books, which had few public (as opposed to professional) defenders in the days that Dr. Wertham was attacking them, are now looked back on by an increasing number of my generation as samples of our youthful innocence instead of our youthful corruption. A sign, perhaps, of the potency of that corruption. A corruption—a lie, really—that put us in charge, however temporarily, of the world in which we lived; and gave us the means, however arbitrary, of defining right from wrong, good from bad, hero from villain. It is something for which old fans can understandably pine—almost as if having become overly conscious of the imposition of junk on our adult values: on our architecture, our highways, our advertising, our mass media, our politics—and even in the air we breathe, flying black chunks of it—we have staged a retreat to a better remembered brand of junk. A junk that knew its place was underground where it had no power and thus only titillated, rather than above ground where it truly has power—and thus, only depresses.

Leaping over skyscrapers, running faster than an express train, springing great distances and heights, lifting and smashing tremendous weights, possessing an impenetrable skin—these are the amazing attributes which Superman, savior of the helpless and oppressed, avails himself of as he battles the forces of evil and injustice.

Superman, ACTION COMICS, AUGUST 1939

The advent of the super-hero was a bizarre comeuppance for the American dream. Horatio Alger could no longer make it on his own. He needed “Shazam!” Here was fantasy with a cynically realistic base: once the odds were appraised honestly it was apparent you had to be super to get on in this world.

The particular brilliance of Superman lay not only in the fact

that he was the first of the super-heroes,* but in the concept of his alter ego. What made Superman different from the legion of imitators to follow was not that when he took off his clothes he could beat up everybody—they all did that. What made Superman extraordinary was his point of origin: Clark Kent.

Remember, Kent was not Superman's true identity as Bruce Wayne was the Batman's or (on radio) Lamont Cranston, the Shadow's. Just the opposite. Clark Kent was the fiction. Previous heroes, the Shadow, the Green Hornet, the Lone Ranger were not only more vulnerable, they were fakes. I don't mean to criticize, it's just a statement of fact. The Shadow had to cloud men's minds to be in business. The Green Hornet had to go through the fetishist fol-de-rol of donning costume, floppy hat, black mask, gas gun, menacing automobile, and insect sound effects before he was even ready to go out in the street. The Lone Ranger needed an accoutremental white horse, an Indian, and an establishing cry of Hi-Yo Silver to separate him from all those other masked men running around the West in days of yesteryear.

But Superman had only to wake up in the morning to be Superman. In his case, Clark Kent was the put on. The fellow with the eyeglasses and the acne and the walk girls laughed at wasn't real, didn't exist, was a sacrificial disguise, an act of discreet martyrdom. *Had they but known!*

And for what purpose? Did Superman become Clark Kent in order to lead a normal life, have friends, be known as a nice guy, meet girls? Hardly. There's too much of the hair shirt in the role, too much devotion to the imprimatur of impotence—an insight; perhaps, into the fantasy life of the Man of Steel. Superman as a secret masochist? Field for study there. For if it was otherwise, if the point, the only point, was to lead a "normal life," why not a more typical identity? How can one be a cowardly star reporter, subject to fainting spells in time of crisis, and not expect to raise serious questions?

The truth may be that Kent existed not for the purposes of the story but the reader. He is Superman's opinion of the rest of us, a pointed caricature of what we, the noncriminal element, were really like. His fake identity was our real one. That's why we loved him so. For if that wasn't really us; if there were no Clark Kents, only lots of glasses and cheap suits which, when removed, revealed all of us in our true identities—what a hell of an improved world it would have been!

* *Action Comics*, June 1938.

In drawing style, both in figure and costume, Superman was a simplified parody of Flash Gordon. But if Alex Raymond was the Dior for Superman, Joe Schuster set the fashion from then on. Everybody else's super-costumes were copies from his shop. Schuster represented the best of old-style comic book drawing. His work was direct, unpretentious—crude and vigorous; as easy to read as a diagram. No creamy lines, no glossy illustrative effects, no touch of that bloodless prefabrication that passes for professionalism these days. Slickness, thank God, was beyond his means. He could not draw well, but he drew single-mindedly—no one could ghost that style. It was the man. When assistants began “improving” the appearance of the strip it promptly went downhill. It looked like it was being drawn in a bank.

But, oh, those early drawings! Superman running up the sides of dams, leaping over anything that stood in his way (no one drew skyscrapers like Schuster. Impressionistic shafts, Superman poised over them, his leaping leg tucked under his ass, his landing leg tautly pointed earthward), cleaning and jerking two-ton get-away cars and pounding them into the sides of cliffs—and all this done lightly, unportentously, still with that early Slam Bradley exuberance. What matter that the stories quickly lost interest; that once you've made a man super you've plotted him out of believable conflicts; that even super-villains, super-mad scientists and, yes, super-orientals were dull and lifeless next to the overwhelming image of that which Clark Kent became when he took off his clothes. So what if the stories were boring, the villains blah? This was the Superman Show—a touring road company backing up a great star. Everything was a stage wait until he came on. Then it was all worth-while.

Besides, for the alert reader there were other fields of interest. It seems that among Lois Lane, Clark Kent, and Superman there existed a schizoid and chaste *ménage à trois*. Clark Kent loved but felt abashed with Lois Lane; Superman saved Lois Lane when she was in trouble, found her a pest the rest of the time. Since Superman and Clark Kent were the same person this behavior demands explanation. It can't be that Kent wanted Lois to respect him for himself, since himself was Superman. Then, it appears, he wanted Lois to respect him for his fake self, to love him when he acted the coward, to be there when he pretended he needed her. She never was—so, of course, he loved her. A typical American romance. Superman never needed her, never needed anybody—in any event, Lois chased *him*—so, of course, he didn't love her. He had contempt for her. Another typical American romance.

Love is really the pursuit of a desired object, not pursuit by it. Once you've caught the object there is no longer any reason to love it, to have it hanging around. There must be other desirable objects out there, somewhere. So Clark Kent acted as the control for Superman. What Kent wanted was just that which Superman didn't want to be bothered with. Kent wanted Lois, Superman didn't: thus marking the difference between a sissy and a man. A sissy wanted girls who scorned him; a man scorned girls who wanted him. Our cultural opposite of the man who didn't make out with women has never been the man who did—but rather, the man who could if he wanted to, but still didn't. The ideal of masculine strength, whether Gary Cooper's, Lil Abner's, or Superman's, was for one to be so virile and handsome, to be in such a position of strength that he need never go near girls. Except to help them. And then get the hell out. Real rapport was not for women. It was for villains. That's why they got hit so hard.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Feiffer fondly refers to comic books as "junk." One quality he sees in junk is that "its values are the least middle class of all the mass media." Do you think comic books are for or against middle-class values? (Read a couple of comic books if you haven't seen any in a while.)
2. Discuss comic books as "underground" literature. (Mekas' definition of the term in his essay on underground films might be of some help.)
3. What were (are) your favorite comic book characters? Why?
4. What does Feiffer mean by saying, "Comic books were our booze"? Do you agree?
5. Do you think comic books can be considered harmful in any way? Do you think they are at all educational? Discuss.
6. Psychologists have had a field day interpreting comic books: Batman and Robin as a homosexual duo, Superman as a secret masochist (to use Feiffer's suggestion), and so on. Do you think this is a case of overinterpretation? Discuss, using other examples.

A Snob's Guide to Status Magazines

James Ransom

Humorist James Ransom presents witty profiles of several prominent magazines by characterizing their readership.

Most magazine advertising departments distribute "profiles" of their subscribers for the guidance of space-age space buyers. For example, the *National Review* subscriber, it says in the April 6, 1965 issue, is 40.3 years old, makes \$13,129.77 a year, is 72 percent married and has 1.5 children. However, making exactly the right amount of money and having exactly the right number of legs under the table—or missing from under the table—is not the whole story. The drink-stained back issues on your coffee table tell us not only how much you drink (or how much you spill) and how much money you make but what you are likely to be doing with your money as well. And what you think, and what you do for recreation—what, in fact, you are.

Therefore: (1) Be certain the image of your magazine is consistent with your image of yourself; (2) Learn to discard an inappropriate magazine as easily as you discard an inappropriate friend; (3) If it's not the magazine's image but yours that is faulty, the following should aid you in rebuilding your personality around the publication of your choice.

How to Read *National Review*

Be prepared to interpret what Barry Goldwater really meant when he said whatever he said, and insist that Ronnie Reagan never made a bad movie. Vote for the man, not the party, but always vote for the same party. Have a laminated snapshot of

Joe McCarthy in your wallet. Keep a vicious German shepherd and a Springfield rifle and a U.S. Marine Corps ceremonial sword and a Sam Browne belt and a derringer and say you're ready in case the Commie bastards or the Socialists or the Democrats or the Rockefeller Republicans or the beatnik tennis-shoe wearers or the fluoridation people ever get out of hand. OK comment: "Would you want your sister to marry one?" OK bumper strip: REGISTER COMMUNISTS—NOT FIREARMS. Alternate OK bumper strip: UNLEASH THE POLICE.

How to Read *New Republic*

Rent an overheated 14-room apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side within walking distance of Lincoln Center (but never walk there, because it's too risky) and fill it with overstuffed furniture of an indeterminate period and say you've furnished in Art Nouveau. Own a Volkswagen, but be defensive about it. Live with a woman of 40 who is intense, petite, has black hair pulled back in a severe bun and wears embroidered peasant blouses with burlap skirts and always goes barefoot. Display volumes of Martin Buber, Rachel Carson and Hermann Hesse prominently on the bookshelves and hang a huge Marlboro reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica* in the living room. Have a fancy wine rack filled with very ordinary wines, which you call "robust." Serve everything in oversized coffee mugs—including food. Have cats. OK comment: "He had the makings of a great domestic President, but he's over his head in foreign affairs."

How to Read *Playboy*

Speak glibly of J. Paul Getty's economic theories and the psychosocial ramifications of Hefner's *Philosophy*. Build expensive stereo speakers into the headboard of your king-size revolving bed. And into the cockpit of your Aston Martin. And into the bookcase in your office. And into the commode in your bathroom. Keep a stack of at least three hours of mood music on your record changer at all times. Before you take a girl to your apartment, arrange to have a friend call you three or four times after she's arrived, and never even acknowledge that the telephone is ringing. Recommend the pill. Or the coil. Or something obscure like gargling with vinegar and crushed peppercorns. If you're married, try to make it seem as though you're just living together. If you're living together, call her by a different name every night

in order not to bore the neighbors. Send a blank check (or key-card number) to Playboy Products and tell them you want one of *everything*. They'll do the rest. OK comment: "It's no good getting an unlisted number—if a woman wants to call you, she'll call you. I've had to hire an answering service myself." OK bumper strip: THE HUMAN BODY IS CLEAN! IT'S CLEAN!! Alternate OK bumper strip: THERE IS SEX AFTER DEATH!

How to Read *Fortune*

Be an overt Republican with latent guilt feelings that express themselves in an anonymous annual contribution to the Urban League. Be on the way to the top and get transferred to a different city every 2.7 years. Drop an average of \$2750 annually in the stock market and justify it by saying you're "establishing tax losses." Read aloud the story in your morning newspaper about the conviction of a labor leader. Turn up the car radio when the Dow-Jones averages come on. Wear a Harvard Business School class ring and declare frequently that "Wendell Willkie is the most misunderstood man of our generation." Strive to hide the fact that you're making only \$25,000 a year. Give Christmas subscriptions to *National Geographic* to the children of your close friends. Say you have a no-good son who wears a beard and is in Tanzania with the Peace Corps. OK comment: "I haven't laughed so hard since Roosevelt died!" Alternate OK comment: "I'm for free competition as much as anybody, but why cut each other's throats?"

How to Read *Esquire*

Be born in Kentucky but live in New York and have a slight British accent. Let it be known that you play squash every Tuesday and Thursday before lunch at the club. Be gray at the temples (a little Clairol and a soft brush should do the trick) and comb your hair over the tops of your ears. Wait a long time for Norman Mailer's long-awaited new novel. Have exophthalmos and spend several years ogling girls—then stop ogling girls and collect essays and stories by people who wrote poetry in college. Keep a running total of the number of Nobel Prize winners who have appeared in *Esquire* as against the number of Nobel Prize winners who have appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Playboy*. Say that when you go to Europe, you stay in Rome just long enough to see your tailor. Own 14 pairs of shoes and 12 sweaters

all autographed by Arnold Palmer. Spend about an hour selecting the right clothes for walking your large cocoa-brown poodle. Look very trim and wear a corset (but not a bra). Have an affair with a well-groomed older woman who knows porcelain. Like kids, but don't have any. Hate class prejudices, and have some. OK comment: "I'd like you to try an amusing little red wine I picked up in Tangier." OK bumper strip: TROUBLE PARKING?—SUPPORT PLANNED PARENTHOOD.

How to Read *Reader's Digest*

Take Gray Lines tours. Wear sensible shoes. Have your plot paid for and mention it often. Gently ply young people with statistics on smoking and heart disease. Practice the Power of Positive Thinking. Look for the silver lining. Buy a set of encyclopedias, a volume a week, at the A & P. Save trading stamps and give them to your married sister. Fail to understand how young people can do such plumb foolish things. Observe that welfare checks are handed out by the Government as a reward for indolence and depravity. Chuckle with amusement at the innocently sexual content of a small girl's conversation. Send antimacassars to the laundry. Send letters of praise to Paul and Fred Harvey. Send a dollar to provide food and medical care for an entire Vietnamese village for one month. OK sport: bowling. OK comments: (1) "There's a little bad in the best of us, and a little good in the worst of us." (2) "As long as you're up, get me a Dr. Pepper."

How to Read *The New Yorker*

Dress foppishly in a high white collar and somewhat higher top hat, white gloves, ruffled shirt front, plum-colored morning jacket and robin's-egg-blue vest. Wear your hair in dun curls down the sides of your face. Have a straight nose and a short upper lip and carry an eight-power monocle on a black ribbon pinned to your chemise. Teach your children to be patient with others who are less fortunate than they. Send your son to boarding school when he's six years old and make an effort to see him every Christmas. Get to know a nice Negro who has an M.A. in English lit and coffee-colored skin and invite him to all your parties and treat him like anybody else, or perhaps a little nicer. Invite a few Indians while you're at it. And maybe a nice Arab. Attend all "Films of More than Routine Interest." Prefer short

stories to novels: but if you do read a novel, try not to know who wrote it until you finish. Nibble yeast patties. Play the piano to gramophone records while the party goes on about you, and persist in enjoying Bix' rendition of *I Can't Get Started*, even though it was written four years after he died. OK comment: "Tom Wolfe? Didn't he write *The Web and the Rock*?" OK bumper strip: SCRIBENDI GENUS OMNIA VINCIT.

How to Read *The Atlantic*

Unless you have a Jewish name, change your name to Worthington Huntley Barnstable Feathercross and call yourself W.H.B. Feathercross. Wear buttondown oxford shirts with frayed collars and wool ties with large, loose knots. Drive a 1948 Studebaker and insist it's good for another five years. Build harpsichords. Be on the staff of a small Eastern university and play violoncello to your wife's recorder at musical evenings at which hot spiced wine is served afterward. Be one of the lesser-known judges in a national poetry competition and give all your points to a contestant who gets no points from any of the other judges. Live within your family income, even though your wife has money of her own. Refer to a novelist's first play as a literary success but a theatrical disaster and to a playwright's first novel as a theatrical success but a literary disaster. OK sport: ping-pong (but call it "table tennis"). OK comment: "The ultimate agony of neo-Hellenism was Apollonian, not Dionysian." OK bumper strip: ASHLAND SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL.

How to Read *National Geographic*

Build a carport in front of the garage, because the garage itself is given over to the accumulated issues of 23 four-color years that it would be a crime to dispose of. Spend your vacations in Mexico and Peru and tell people that the Incas had no written language. Decorate one wall of your study with inexpensive replicas of primitive art and another wall with an enlarged off-print of a 19th Century whaling map. Know what scrimshaw is and the various forms of life that abound in the seemingly desolate Sahara. Question the assumption that the horse came to this continent with the Spaniards. Read no fiction. See no movies but Cinerama, Jacques-Yves Cousteau undersea spectaculars and Walt Disney animal pictures. Be able to name all the states and their capitals. OK comment: "The next war will be fought not on the

issue of food, or living space, or political ideology—but phosphorus.” OK bumper strip: MAMMOTH CAVE.

How to Read *Scientific American*

Work at the RCA Space Center at Cape Kennedy and send your laundry home to your mother every week by parcel post. Have a Ph.D. in an arcane subspecialty such as “stoichiometric analysis” and respond evasively to your wife’s girlfriends’ questions about what it is you do. Buy your son a Wiff’n Proof game and be patient about explaining how it works. Suck on a dead pipe while you manipulate your slide rule and then make rapid notations with one of the many needle-sharp mechanical pencils you keep in a plastic pocket shield imprinted with the name of a graphic-supplies firm. Be unable or unwilling—let no one know which—to fix anything around the house. Make a small contribution to filter-paper chromatography of amino sugars. OK comment: “Nuclear power, like political power, is neither inherently bad nor inherently good.” OK bumper strip: NO ON ANTIVIVISECTION.

How to Read *Time*

Be slightly pudgy. Wear black-rimmed glasses and natural-shoulder suits with vests. Have thinning hair. Play bridge every Wednesday with the same couple. Or be a Hollywood starlet and say that because of your 14-hour-a-day shooting schedules, *Time* is the only way you can keep up with what’s going on in the world—but read only the “Cinema,” “People” and “Show Business” sections. Say that you like the way *Time* says what it says though you don’t always agree with what it says—but always agree with what it says. Take the annual current-events quiz and get 74 percent correct. Write two letters to the editor every year, one tersely laudatory and the other expounding your choice for “Man of the Year” (not, repeat, *not* the Under-25 Generation). Tennessee Williams like, but don’t who Wolcott Gibbs is know. OK sport: bumper pool. OK comment: “We didn’t go to Europe this year—*Time* gave it a bad review.” OK bumper strip: BUICK & FRIEND.

How to Read *Look*

Have a station wagon. And a mortgage. And migraine headaches. And Japanese beetles. And a wrenched back from play-

ing football with the kids on the front lawn. Enclose the porch and build a spare room onto it. Buy a power mower. And a snow thrower. Watch *Lassie*. And *Flipper*. And *Mr. Ed*. And *Peyton Place*. And *My Favorite Martian*. And don't mind if they're reruns. Buy everything on time, even your driver's license. OK comment: "Control yourself—*sure* you have a headache, but why take it out on the wife and kids?" OK distaff comment: "Not tonight, dear. I'm too tired."

How to Read *House & Garden*

Buy a player piano. Keep getting new shower curtains. Wallpaper one room in felt. Buy a spray of plastic bamboo shoots. Buy a copper chafing dish, a hand-forged French-chef omelet pan and an antique espresso machine, but don't use them except as "decor" for the kitchen. If you're the lady of the house, worry about your begonias and peonies, but try not to think about what your daughter's up to at Radcliffe. Learn origami. Make a lamp out of a samovar. Make a samovar out of a butter churn. Make a butter churn out of a spittoon. Make a spittoon out of an antique chamber pot. Make a chamber pot out of a lamp. OK comment: "Aren't Lyndon and Lady Bird a fun couple?"

How to Read *Field & Stream*

Wear a bow tie and suspenders. When it snows even a little bit, wear thermal underwear and combat boots to the office. Have a collection of six matched briars in a velvet-lined box. Smoke only one of them. Every time two or more couples come to your house for dinner, take the men out to the kitchen, steer them over to the freezer and haul out the six-pound small-mouthed bass you caught last summer up in British Columbia. OK comment: "If the little woman knew I took an occasional snort, she'd pin my ears back!"

How to Read *Argosy*

Have four people ahead of you at the barbershop.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Caricature is a very difficult and delicate kind of writing. Do you think Ransom succeeds? Write a similar satirical paragraph on a magazine not covered in the article.*

2. *Beneath the humor of Ransom's satire, he is attempting a profile of some national magazines. If you disagree with his treatment of one of your favorites, compose a point-by-point refutation.*
3. *Refer to the two Time essays reprinted on pages 246 and 312. Explain whether you think Ransom is on target about Time magazine.*
4. *Discuss the social, political, and economic values of any magazine you read regularly.*
5. *Pick up a copy of one of the magazines Ransom discusses that you are not familiar with. Do you think his comments are accurate?*
6. *Can you infer Ransom's own political and social values from the style and content of this article?*

The Underground Press and How It Went

Jesse Kornbluth

In this article Jesse Kornbluth gives an insider's report on the status of the underground press. While a student at Harvard, he was managing editor of The Advocate and was jailed for hawking Avatar, Boston's underground newspaper, in Harvard Square. More recently, he has edited a collection of articles entitled Notes from the New Underground.

Being hip in America has become big business. To make it these days, you have to do your thing reasonably well, but it's more important to be interesting and quotable—in fact, it helps to sound even freakier than you are. And after all the hustle, after you've finally had your big moment in the national media orgy, you'd better remember to avoid any sentiment that might seem human; if you're uncool too often, the fans withdraw your tenure.

This means, quite simply, that the groovy psychedelic underground we've talked so much about these last few years is now just another pillar of the society it claims to reject. The hip ghettos have their own version of the stock market, with reputations dependent on the quality of your grass, the cut of your clothes, the size of your record collection. Like all recent advances, the drug-music-media explosion of two years ago has become a scene, and as in other scenes, a cultural *mafioso* determines what's going to happen next. Last year, all the underground media were breathless over Janis Joplin and the Big Brother Band, and though their album was so marginal that its producer refused to let his name appear on the cover, it went to number one and stayed there for weeks. This year, someone seems to have decided that the scene is blues, and Columbia Records has signed a Texas albino named Johnny Winter for \$300,000, a sum that would buy a dozen black guitarists of equal heaviness.

Do you dig it when they burn you? Or as the winters seem colder, as your circle of friends tightens around your throat, do you pretend that it's still getting better all the time, that an underground persistently lives only to love you?

In the 18th century, it was thought that whatever is, is right. This gave added significance to the lives of the "important" people; they became celebrities. Whatever the Biggies decided would happen generally happened. The Press watched the Biggies, and reported their activities as History, with a few "human interest" stories thrown in for variety. And that is the way the authorized popular history of the last two centuries reads.

The lives of the unimportant people were left to novelists, poets, and the other unacknowledged social workers of the world. But with the media explosion and the bountiful economy of the last few decades, the little folk have rapidly become more important. Not important enough to have much control of their lives, of course, but just powerful enough to enable them to see how really crippled they are by modern society. And now, the dichotomy between Things As They Are and Things As They Might Be is so severe that we're all starting to freak out.

Any fool can buy a gun and change the shape of history, as the big-time pundits phrase it.

A microbiologist writes in *Unless Peace Comes*: "The most disturbing aspect of biological warfare is the possibility it might give to small groups of individuals to upset the strategic balance."

Any kid can drop a tab of LSD and get the goodGodword.

"Magic is afoot," says Leonard Cohen.

So it's harder to fool kids these days, at least in the old, *New York Times*-y ways. The television freaks don't bother to read at all if they can help it—the latest rage in California is the stoned comic book—and those who do read tend to read very closely. They read Jung and Nietzsche, the *I Ching* and R. D. Laing, Marcuse and Canetti, Vonnegut and Richard Brautigan. They're wide awake, or try to be, and they're not very interested in the Biggies, except to wonder where the next area of repression will be. They know, as Canetti writes in *Crowds and Power*, that "for every great name in history, a hundred others might have been substituted. There is never any dearth of men who are both talented and wicked."

Eldridge Cleaver has suggested that the most important battleground of the future isn't between the races—it is the war between white kids and their parents. The underground press, rock music, drugs and the New Left are only the initial weapons in that assault;

unfortunately, they have become so successful that they, too, have been incorporated into the swinging style of modern, switched-on America. And this leads us straight into a series of desperate paradoxes.

The interesting thing about the phenomenon we've come to call the underground press is that it seems quite dead these days. Most of the papers are printing the same ritualized reports of drug busts, leftist paranoia, and catch-all astrology, badly designed and graphically artless. It's winter everywhere, especially in our heads, and the universe seems to have slid into sludge—no one has anything to say that urgently requires saying. The underground press was at best a reflection of the lives of its creators; now that those lives have been maimed by the experience of the last two years, the papers are cynical, exclusive, and cater to an increasingly in-grown audience.

It's not made easier, of course, by the peculiarly macabre proclivity of midcult to "discover" a trend as it's starting to fade; the mass media serves simultaneously as executioner and alchemist. So the underground press that's finally beginning to Make It isn't the underground press I loved, the underground press that suffered and fought just to exist, but always kept a sense of humor about the war—no, of those original 125 members of the Underground Press Syndicate, about half have folded and most of the rest have been completely transformed.

So while the underground press is moribund, the underground press business is booming, and even the Mafia wants to get into the act. Johnny Carson wears a Nehru jacket. The copy-boys at Time-Life are said to make \$500 a week dealing grass to their editors. Paste-on moustaches have made it into the mainstream of the American fantasy. In a land where everyone (except the poor and the black) is hip, no one is hip, and words exist only to be emptied of meaning. Thus:

Andy Warhol does television commercials for an "Underground Sundae."

A new quiz show pits parents against their children. Predictably, it's called "Generation Gap."

"If it's not in *The New York Times* Index, maybe it didn't happen."

In spite of MassHip, there are still 125 "underground" papers, with a circulation of one to three million. The oldest of the underground magazines, *The Realist*, now distributes 100,000 copies of each issue. The *East Village Other* (EVO) prints between 60 to 80,000 and has gone national, and the *Los Angeles Free Press* is

doing at least as well. *The Village Voice*, the grandfather of the hip newspapers, has a circulation of 125,000, and has gracefully retired from the fray to print more advertising than news.

But when you sell 100,000 copies of anything, when you have a full-time advertising staff (and the *L.A. Free Press* is said to have installed a time clock so the employees can punch in), it's less than ingenuous to accept "underground" status. So the concept has been quietly redefined to mean, simply, that We haven't quite won yet. It's a small point, I know, and perhaps overly prissy of me in these "revolutionary" times, but I think this redefinition is indicative of the depressing change that's affected so many of these papers in the last two years.

Once upon a time, about a generation ago—that is, back in 1967—a feeling flashed through America. For the first time, a lot of young people had the same sense of life. And the same message came to many: It's beautiful. You can do more to enjoy it. And free yourselves, because the Crazies control the planet.

At that time, on the flip side, LBJ was dominating the straight media with his Vietnam freakout and his daily announcement that the Emperor had clothes, and someone was twisting the arms of the communications Biggies (or do they twist their own arms?) to get them to say that the Emperor's suit never looked better. That's when we first saw how very Zen this country can be; why, when they call it "the communications industry," they mean exactly that. So the first priority was to get our own news networks and broadcast our version of The Truth. And the message was poster-simple then: LOVE.

Considered as a movement in itself, the high point of the underground press was Winter-Summer of 1967. Simultaneously, the advances in studio rock music and the availability of marijuana at absurdly low prices were making a national though disorganized "youth movement" possible. We broke through our private fears, and for the first time in anyone's memory, people came together for reasons that had nothing to do with politics.

It was a wonderful and amazing circus. Everyone had access to everyone else, and people went out of their way not to judge each other. It didn't even matter if you had a crewcut and worked for IBM as long as you had the lovelight in your eyes and were willing to lay back and groove. If you had something to say, if you were doing something you wanted to show the world, you just walked into your local underground paper, and more frequently than not your message was circulated. In San Francisco, the Communications Company went so far as to distribute daily

street broadsides; if something was happening, the community knew about it. And because we young freaks *were* news, we were cool enough to avoid role-playing and ego-tripping.

The papers were printed with varying degrees of care. *Avatar* and the *San Francisco Oracle* were the products of thousands of man-hours and the attention of dedicated artists; the more typical papers were paste-up montages of someone's misreading of McLuhan. But it didn't really matter what was said; the point was that these toys were our own, and everything worked. There was so much to enjoy at one time—Sgt. Pepper, stoned sex, Country Joe and the Fish, the Love-Ins and the beautiful newspapers—that we were overstimulated, living in a stunned and prolonged ecstasy. A friend of mine spent a blissful day that summer computing the Great Progression: If every dedicated pot-smoker turned on just two of his friends, by 1975 the entire world would be stoned.

It's difficult to say what destroyed this spirit. It's fashionable to argue that too much acid, too many undisciplined kids, and too much publicity made the underground press so self-conscious that it began to devour itself. Or perhaps it was that the love we felt was too generalized to last—when you love everyone, when you can spend hours appreciating a drawing in something as impermanent as a newspaper, you can't continue to function efficiently in the straight world. And you can't go on repeating the loveword indefinitely if you want to sell papers.

What happened, I think, is that too many papers started taking themselves too seriously. For \$200, almost anyone could start a paper, and almost anyone did—this flooded the hip media scene until the local underground paper became as institutionalized as the head shop. Underground editors became mini-celebrities. It meant something to put out a paper, and the informal symposia conducted in the *Look* and *Time* articles on the hippies elevated the papers to the position of spokesmen for a movement.

The record companies, at about this same time, found in these papers an inexpensive and effective advertising outlet; their ads sustained many papers that would otherwise have certainly folded after the summer. And when the sexploitation companies saw that these papers would print just about anything; they flooded them with ads.

So an over-extended medium became unwittingly professional, and papers in search of a direction found one of the Two Answers: Politics and Religion. The Boston *Avatar* had Mel Lyman, a banjo player who had once stunned the Newport Folk Festival by playing "Rock of Ages" for 20 minutes, and who now claimed to be God.

The *Oracle* plunged into the occult. And the student-oriented urban papers embraced the New Left.

People who thought it a good tactic to call all cops "pigs" began writing for the papers, and the originals either left or were forced out. Soon most of the underground press read as one paper, and could easily be considered as such; you couldn't tell *The Rat* from the *Guardian* from the *San Francisco Express-Times*. Amidst the furor against the war, readership was increasing, and the militants wrongly took this new support for a sign to go even further. So we were awash on a wave of inanity:

The *Berkeley Barb* printed an article calling for 1,000 young men to undertake an armed *kamikaze* attack on the Pentagon.

New York's *Rat* reported, in an article about the Nixon inauguration: "Very young kids were militant and brave in the street-fighting. The less time you've spent being molded into a sitting position in a classroom, the more freely you move through inhibitory brain patterns and throw the rock."

Even *Rolling Stone*, which replaced *Crawdaddy!* as the Bible of rock criticism, romanticized the "revolutionary" sound of the MC-5, a group that has finally made a commercial success out of pure alienation.

Those who opposed the militants became the revisionist enemies of the Revolution. As early as 1966, Ken Kesey had put the radicals down ("There's only one thing that's gonna do any good at all . . . and that's everybody just look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say . . . Fuck it . . ."), but the high-school kids wanted their own scene, distinct from that of the older hippies. And because high-school students are more "oppressed" than college kids, the underground papers they started created a disciplinary controversy that had nothing to do with the papers' contents. With only a little coaching from the college radicals, however, the high schools had their own underground press service (HIPS), and a rhetoric straight from the latest SDS convention.

The original underground papers suddenly seemed dull. The Liberation News Service, founded in 1967 by Marshall Bloom and Ray Mungo, had tried to disseminate more than straight political propaganda to its 400 members, but there too the radicals were increasingly coming to power. By August of 1968, Bloom and Mungo couldn't counteract the leftist staffers, and they retired to the New England countryside, where they periodically publish a softer, more personal newsletter.

The *Oracle* folded. *EVO* moved into funk-a-delicious cartoons, Yippie politics, and six to eight pages of "personal" ads a week

("SEEKING GROOVY COUPLES, ac/dc male, attractive, tall, well-hung, desires meaningful relationships with males, females, or couples who can groove"). Only *Avatar* didn't change its purpose: "We're not foolin' but we'll not be dismal either. We have nowhere else to go, we have nothing to lose, we want only to talk with you in the best form we know."

But consistency of vision created other problems, and *Avatar* found itself isolated from the informal fraternity of underground papers. The Fort Hill community, which produced the paper as the history of their New Age lifestyle, became increasingly self-involved; the urgency of Mel's message in its turn frightened the local police force, and because it was an election year in Cambridge, and the Fort Hill folk looked like hippies (no matter what they said), and because *Avatar* was now up to 40,000 circulation and was expanding to New York, the City of Cambridge began a program of harassment which resulted in the arrest of thirty-seven street salesmen. It was a nice civil-liberties issue, but it took two weeks in court out of these lives—and because the salesmen were also the editors, the missionary zeal again became political.

The first arrests are always like warm-up pitches—the police throw hard, just to see if the batter ducks away. To the surprise of the Cambridge City Fathers, the *Avatar* declared war on them, mocking their hypocrisy, lampooning "obscene" literature, finally publishing an issue entirely written by the Fort Hill children. (The street salesmen were arrested for this, too.) Through it all, the community was having a goofy sort of fun.

But the economics of publishing an underground paper don't allow for this much fun. *Avatar's* circulation was halved by the bad publicity, the Fort Hill people became disenchanted with the newspaper medium, and worst of all, Mel Lyman announced that he wasn't going to write any more. The New York branch was still interested, but the Boston staff closed its office. "We have set before you all that we can say," Wayne Hansen wrote. "The rest becomes a dull repetition. I can no longer write. I can't do favors. I can't help anyone, I can't hurt anyone. It's the end of the tether. Remember me. . . ."

Avatar was the last of the original papers to suspend publication; the others moved further into sexploitation and acquired a new audience. *The Realist* and *Other Scenes*, a monthly anthology of hip news edited by John Wilcock, are now featuring stories about the Plaster Casters, two Chicago groupies who specialize in phallic art. The *Rat* puts you on with tabloid headlines: "INTIMATE LOVE SCENES . . . SCANDALS THAT SHAMED EVEN HOLLYWOOD." The

L.A. Free Press balances "SPIDERS IN NIXON'S CABINET" with "WHIPS CHAINS & LEATHERS."

So sexual promiscuity is this year's Revolution. There are occasional efforts to recreate the old spirit, but they are plagued by police pressure even more than are the political journals; Atlanta's *Great Speckled Bird*, a beautiful paper in the tradition of *Avatar* and the *Oracle*, has been declared obscene by the police there. Sporadic efforts are made to resurrect *Avatar*; predictably, political types took it over last summer, until the Fort Hill people kicked them out and began a new cycle of *American Avatar*, a *Life*-sized, paperback-priced (\$1 a copy) magazine with impeccable graphics by Eben Given and writing by Mel Lyman.

But the coffin isn't sealed on the underground press scene. The high school papers are the new standard bearers of journalistic freedom, and the urge to write is seeping into the junior high schools too. *Fortune* claims that 40% of the college students sympathize with the radical cause, so a campus-based network of papers clearly will continue to publish. And the Hip Establishment—*EVO*, the *Berkeley Barb*, the *L.A. Free Press*, and a few others—will ride with the trends as long as it's economically possible.

The survival of the underground press as it now exists doesn't strike me as central to the experience of many young people I know. Most of the papers still publishing could disappear tomorrow, and the only true mourners would be the editors and advertisers. This isn't because the Youth Movement has been routed, or because it doesn't have anything to say any more—I think it's the end of one assault and the beginning of the next, and because the young are so plugged into media games, it seems similar to the situation in rock music, where the scene overextended itself and one good musician often carried an entire group. Now the best musicians from the various groups are playing together as superbands; soon, it is rumored, the self-acknowledged elite of the underground press will publish a supermag. No reliable information comes from California, but it is thought on the East Coast that the magazine would be published from the country, perhaps from the Liberation farm in Massachusetts. The editors would be the cream of the underground editors—among them are Marshall Bloom, Ray Mungo and Steve Diamond of LNS, Carl Nagin, Brian Keating and Wayne Hansen of *Avatar*, Steve Lerner of the *Village Voice*, the *Avatar* artist-in-residence, Eben Given, and its designer, John Wilton.

In the world of the Restons and the Buchwalds, these are not names that stick in the mind. To appreciate their work requires patience, a great deal of empathy, and a taste for whimsy. Still, to get

these people at work on one journal, free from the pretensions of the "underground," might just be the only way to start the old cycle going.

The greatest fear in America is the fear of death, and second, I think, is the fear of having too much fun, the fear of pleasure without pain, pleasure you don't have to pay for. Out of all the despair which most underground papers articulate to the exclusion of all else, we enter a period of great hope. We've been down so long that any movement will bring us up, and the long-overdue retreat to the country will probably provide the spark the original hippie papers provided in 1967. I know it's fashionable to speak darkly of the Nixon years, and in some circles the present period is thought to be a return to the 1950's, but I think we're going to witness a revival of the happiness of 1967.

This time, we'll really be hip—we'll support only those people who seem to be valuable to our heads. We won't be suckered by sympathetic exploitation reporters from the Biggies. And we won't waste our energy in aimless debate with people who will never understand what we're about. Now that all of our projects to save the world have failed, we have only ourselves to save, and the papers we print will be the record of that attempt.

"Free yourselves," the *Rat* editorializes, and *Open City* has begun a series of accounts by people who have renounced American society; their current issue contains information about communal farms and life in the woods.

In New York, ten-year-olds recently demonstrated against an organization which conducts military drills for children. When an elderly man told one of the young protesters that he saw nothing wrong with a boy learning the proper use of guns, the answer was unequivocal: "Then, sir, I don't think we have anything more to say."

As Marcuse explains, freedom and tolerance in America are often repressive; if everyone can say anything, words are devalued, because all situations become relative. The underground press never understood this, and its papers punched the Establishment as if it were made of bricks instead of marshmallows. This time perhaps we'll know enough to avoid exhaustion through shadow-punching. This time perhaps we'll reach a purer form of journalism, with free minds reaching out for other free minds. This time perhaps we'll brighten a future that otherwise seems very bleak. And if we succeed at this, if a supermag gets enough money to rejoin the fun, or even if the local papers once again get interested in real communication, we may even make ourselves happy. And if we make ourselves

happy—and in an imaginary interview with Jerry Rubin, Eldridge Cleaver is supposed to have yelled, “Happiness at any cost!”—why, it’s possible that the new underoverground will drive the crusty old Establishment right into business, where it belongs.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Do you think the underground press can be “antiestablishment” when it accepts advertisements from the major record companies? Discuss.*
- 2. Is there any way for these newspapers to survive without being financially dependent on the establishment?*
- 3. Discuss the charge that the underground press is (and has been since its inception) geared to the overprivileged children of the white middle class.*
- 4. Kornbluth asserts that the underground papers were apolitical when they started but embraced the New Left as time went on. From your reading of underground papers, write a description of their politics.*
- 5. Discuss what constructive use a real underground paper could have in a high school like the one you attended.*

The Detective Story—Why?

Nicholas Blake (C. Day Lewis)

C. Day Lewis is Poet Laureate of Britain, a noted essayist, and, under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake, a prolific writer of whodunits. Here he comments on the perennial appeal of the detective story.

I do not mean, by this, to ask why the detective story came into existence when it did. That question has been answered succinctly, if negatively, by Mr. Haycraft—"Clearly, there could be no detective stories . . . until there were detectives. This did not occur until the nineteenth century." A negative answer, because it merely re-defines the question: after all, there were no railway systems, either, until the nineteenth century, but their creation did not produce any considerable body of literature about engine-drivers.

Nor do I intend to discuss at length the subsidiary though fascinating problem, "Why do we write detective stories?" Many solutions, all of them correct, will suggest themselves to the reader. Because we want to make money. Because the drug addict (and nearly every detection-writer is an omnivorous reader of crime fiction) always wants to introduce other people to the habit. Because artists have a notorious *nostalgie de la boue*, and our own hygienic, a-moral age offers very little honest mud to revel in except the pleasures of imaginary murder. Democratic civilisation does not encourage us to indulge our instinct for cruelty: the quite different attitude of the dictatorships towards this, as well as their different conception of justice, legal evidence and legal proof, must—as Mr. Haycraft points out—account for the Nazis' banning of all imported detective-fiction and characterising it as "pure liberalism" designed to "stuff the heads of German readers with foreign ideas": a people whose blood-lust was sublimated by reading and writing fiction murders would certainly have less zest for murdering real Poles.

FROM *The Art of the Mystery Story*, edited by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946). Reprinted by permission of A. D. Peters and Company.

An agreeable monograph might indeed be written on *The First Plunge Into Detective Writing*. Gone, alas, are the good old days when "without an idea in his head and with no previous knowledge of crime or criminals, Leblanc [creator of the great Arsène Lupin] took up his pen, and his impudent hero sprang into spontaneous being." So expert and exacting is the detection-fan today that the detective novelist must possess a good working knowledge of police procedure, law and forensic medicine if he is to escape severe letters from the public pointing out his errors (how many plots, I wonder, have been complicated by the writer's need to skirt round some obstacle raised by his technical ignorance?). From what dark incentive, by what devious and secret psychological passages have detective writers—timid and law-abiding persons for the most part, who faint at the sight of blood and tremble when the eye of a policeman is turned upon them—first set out upon the sinister paths of crime fiction?

The question is enthralling. But it must here be subsumed under my general question: "The Detective Story—Why?" Why, I mean, has the detective story attained such remarkable popularity, rising—as Mr. Haycraft tells us—from a ratio of twelve in 1914 to ninety-seven in 1925 and two hundred and seventeen in 1939, and holding its own even against that most insidious and degraded of mental recreations, the cross-word puzzle?

We may imagine some James Frazer of the year 2042 discoursing on "The Detective Novel—the Folk-Myth of the Twentieth Century." He will, I fancy, connect the rise of crime fiction with the decline of religion at the end of the Victorian era. The sense of guilt, psychologists tell us, is deeply rooted in man and one of the mainsprings of his actions. Just as, in the primitive tribe, the idiot or the scapegoat is venerated and the murderer wreathed with flowers, because he has taken upon himself the guilt of the community, so in more civilised times one function of religion is to take the burden of guilt off the individual's shoulders through the agency of some Divine or apotheosised Being. When a religion has lost its hold upon men's hearts, they must have some other outlet for the sense of guilt.

This, our anthropologist of the year 2042 may argue, was provided for us by crime fiction. He will call attention to the pattern of the detective novel, as highly formalised as that of a religious ritual, with its initial necessary sin (the murder), its victim, its high priest (the criminal) who must in turn be destroyed by a yet higher power (the detective). He will conjecture—and rightly—that the devotee identified himself both with the detective and the murderer,

representing the light and the dark sides of his own nature. He will note a significant parallel between the formalised dénouement of the detective novel and the Christian concept of the Day of Judgment when, with a flourish of trumpets, the mystery is made plain and the goats are separated from the sheep.

Nor is this all. The figure of the detective himself will be exhaustively analysed. Our anthropologist, having studied Mr. Haycraft's work, will have been informed that many readers of crime fiction remembered the name of the detective but not of the book or its author. Sherlock Holmes, Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot were evidently figures of supernatural importance to the reader: and to the writer, for their creators bodied them out with a loving veneration which suggested that the Father Imago was at work. The detective is, indeed—to change the metaphor—the Fairy Godmother of the twentieth-century folk-myth, his magic capabilities only modified to the requirements of a would-be scientific and rational generation. It will be noted, too, that these semidivine figures fell into two categories. On the one hand was the more primitive, the anthropomorphised type—Holmes and Wimsey its most celebrated examples—in which human frailty and eccentricity, together with superhuman powers of perception, are carried to a supralogical conclusion. On the other hand there was the so-to-speak modernist detective—generally a policeman rather than an amateur—a figure stripped of human attributes, an instrument of pure reason and justice, the Logos of the detective world.

Such may well be, in brief, the theory advanced by posterity to account for the extraordinary hold which the detective novel possessed on the twentieth-century mind. It would be difficult, at any rate, to explain the popularity of a so fantastic offshoot of literature without reference to some fundamental instinct in mankind.

But the general lines of such an inquiry have not been sufficiently adumbrated if they do not include the minor curiosity of class-bias in crime fiction. It is an established fact that the detective novel proper is read almost exclusively by the upper and professional classes. The so-called "lower-middle" and "working" classes tend to read "bloods," thrillers. Now this is not simply a matter of literary standards, though the modern thriller is generally much below the detective story in sophistication and style. When we compare these two kinds of crime fiction, we cannot fail to notice that, whereas in the detective novel the criminal is almost invariably a squalid creature of irremediably flagitious tendencies, the criminal of the thriller is often its hero and nearly always a romantic figure.

This is, of course, as Mr. Haycraft has pointed out, a natural

development of the Robin Hood myth. The detective story's clientele are relatively prosperous persons, who have a stake in the social system and must, therefore, even in fantasy, see the ultimate triumph of their particular social values ensured. It is significant that even the "thrillers" most popular with the ruling classes usually represent their hero as being on the side of law and order—the bourgeois conception of law and order, of course (that unspeakable public school bully and neurotic exhibitionist, Bulldog Drummond, is a case in point), or as a reformed criminal (e.g. Father Brown's right hand man); or, like Arsène Lupin, he starts as a criminal character but, after a number of anti-social adventures, gradually goes over to the other side. Not so with the lower ranks of democratic society. Having little or no stake in the system, they prefer such anarchistic heroes, from Robin Hood down to the tommy-gun gangster, who have held to ransom the prosperous and law-abiding. To such readers the policeman is not the protective figure he appears to your politician, your stockbroker, your rural dean: for them his aura is menacing, his baton an offensive weapon rather than a defensive symbol: and therefore the *roman policier* does not give them much of a kick.

The guilt-motive perhaps operates here too. On the whole, the working classes have less time and incentive than the relatively leisured to worry about their consciences. In so far as their lives are less rich, the taking of life (the detective story's almost invariable subject) will seem to them less significant and horrifying. They themselves sometimes kill for passion; seldom, unlike their more fortunately placed brethren, for gain. The general sense of guilt (which is the reverse or seamy side of social responsibility), the specific moral problems which tease the more prosperous classes, affect them less nearly. So, for them, the detective novel—the fantasy-representation of guilt—must have a shallower appeal.

It is the element of fantasy in detective fiction—or rather, the juxtaposition of fantasy with reality—that gives the genre its identity. Mr. Haycraft mentions Carolyn Wells' dictum that "the detective novel must *seem* real in the same sense that fairy tales *seem* real to children." By implication, this statement defines very accurately the boundaries of the detective novel. The fairy tale does not reach its greatest heights when—as in the Irish fairy stories—fantasy is piled on fantasy, but by a judicious blending of the possible with the impossible. Similarly, in crime fiction, if we set down unrealistic characters in fantastic situations, we cross the frontier into the domain of the pure "shocker." If on the other hand both

our action and our characters are realistic, we produce fiction of the Francis Iles' type which, as Mr. Haycraft rightly points out, does not come within the strict canon of the detective story.

The detective novelist, then, is left with two alternatives. He can put unreal characters into realistic situations, or he can put realistic characters into fantastic situations. The former method produces the classical *roman policier*, of which Freeman Wills Crofts is perhaps the most able living exponent, where the crime and the police investigation are conducted on strictly realistic lines, and the element of fantasy necessary to the detection novel is achieved by making the characters simple ciphers—formalised simulacra of men and women, that have no life outside the plot they serve. To call this type of novel "mere puzzles" and decry it for its "un-lifelike" characters is to misunderstand the whole paradox of the detective story.

The second alternative, which has produced the at present most fashionable kind of crime fiction, is to place "real" characters in unreal, fantastic, or at least improbable situations. This school of writing covers a wide range. At one extreme we find such books as John Dickson Carr's, where the plot possesses the mad logic and extravagance of a dream, while the *dramatis personae* are roughed in with just enough solidity to stand out against the macabre and whirling background (Carr's Dr. Fell, incidentally, may be coupled with Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe as the most notable old-style or anthropomorphic detective in contemporary fiction—wayward, masterful, infallible). At the other extreme we get the work of such writers as Ngaio Marsh. Her Inspector Alleyn, like Michael Innes' detective, is gentlemanly, unobtrusive and almost provocatively normal. Her characters have real body, but derive nothing from text books on morbid psychology. Where the characters are ordinary people and the plot is neither *outré* nor melodramatic, one might suppose that the element of paradox necessary to the detective story would be missing. But murder is in itself such an abnormal thing that its mere presence among a number of nice, respectable, civilised characters will be paradox enough.

It is reasonable to suppose that this—the "novel of manners," as Mr. Haycraft calls it—will remain a predominant type of detective fiction for some time to come. Certainly we can be sure that the general raising of the literary level in the genre has come to stay. Fresher observation, more careful, realistic handling of character and situation are demanded today, and the general level of detective writing is thus improved. But something has been lost in the process. The high fantasy of the old masters cannot now be

achieved. No detective novelist today could allow his hero to exclaim, in a moment of strong excitement, "Hold! Have you some mucilage?"

Another interesting line of development is in the detective himself. For some years, the sleuth has been undergoing modification—a toning down from the Sherlock Holmes to the Roderick Alleyn type. Even when, as with Peter Wimsey, his pedigree, family background, hobbies and tastes are diligently documented, he has become a much less far-fetched personality. If this process continues, we may expect in the future a school of detectives without personality at all. I myself rather fancy the idea of a detective who shall be as undistinguished as a piece of blotting paper, absorbing the reactions of his subjects; a shallow mirror, in which we see reflected every feature of the crime; a pure camera-eye. Professor Thorndyke and Dr. Priestley are precursors to this anonymous type. Inspector Maigret is its highest development up to date.

At first sight Maigret, the most formidable embodiment in crime fiction of the "stern, unhurrying chase" of Justice, might seem also the best model for the ambitious writer today. But his influence may well be disruptive of the detective novel as we know it. It is not simply that Simenon breaks the rules, by allowing Maigret to keep so much of his detection-processes under his hat. The real trouble is Simenon's deep and unerring sense of evil, which in practise runs counter to the basic principle of the detective story—that evil must, both for myth-making and entertainment, be volatised by a certain measure of fantasy. In the Maigret stories, evil hangs over everything, as heavy, as concentrated, as real as a black fog. It is a raw wine, which must burst the old bottles. You may remember that remarkable story in which the criminal is so fascinated by Maigret that he cannot keep away from him: he is like a moth dashing itself again and again into a passive flame. Now this exemplifies a proved psychological truth. As the Greek tragedians knew, crime carries within itself the seed of retribution; some fatal flaw (or saving grace) in human nature impels a wrong-doer to betray himself: that is why even the most painstaking and cold-blooded murderer is apt to leave a glaring clue behind, or talk too much one evening in the public bar.

This is all very right and proper in real life. But the traditional pattern of the detective novel would be disintegrated if writers emphasised the fact that the criminal does, unconsciously, hunt himself down. The fictional detective's occupation would indeed be gone. Perhaps this is the direction we are to move in. Perhaps the detective story, as we know it, will be supplanted by the crime novel. If

so, future generations will look back on Simenon and Iles as the fathers of the new genre. It should be some time though, in any event, before we cease to read murder for pleasure.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *If you have inspected a bookstore or magazine rack recently, you are aware that detective fiction is very popular these days. Lewis suggests that this type of fiction helps man to cope with his sense of guilt, a function that religion formerly filled. Do you agree with this analysis?*
2. *Discuss Lewis' theory that we "read murder for pleasure" and that this serves as an escape valve for human "blood-lust." Is this really why detective stories are so popular? How does this compare with Warshow's main idea in "The Gangster as Tragic Hero"?*
3. *This article was written before the popularity of the James Bond books and movies. How would Bond fit into Lewis' scheme of things?*
4. *Discuss the changes that have taken place in the detective hero by comparing Sherlock Holmes and James Bond.*
5. *Lewis speaks of a class bias in crime and detective fiction. Analyze this factor as it is manifested in the heroes of detective or crime stories you are familiar with.*

Science Fiction

Joseph Elder

*In this excerpt from the introduction to *The Farthest Reaches*, a collection of new works of science fiction, Joseph Elder briefly discusses the science-fiction genre and its relation to the mainstream of literature.*

What we really seek in space is not knowledge, but wonder, beauty, romance, novelty—and above all, adventure. Let no one devalue these by fatuous charges of “escapism”; they are essential to man because of his very nature.

Arthur C. Clarke . . . addressed these words to The Fifth Goddard Memorial Symposium of the American Astronautical Society in the spring of 1967. Three cheers and one cheer more for Arthur C. Clarke! His words struck a responsive chord in me. . . . We hear enough about the uses of space: space for research, space for peace, space for war, space for commerce and industry, etc. What about space for the soul?

This, to my way of thinking, is what science fiction is all about. It may be firmly rooted in scientific fact and reality. Occasionally, it comes up with some startling predictions which, in time, are proved accurate. On the other hand, it is frequently (indeed, more often) far off the mark, or it doesn't even pretend to have anything to do with the world of “real” science. We didn't need *Mariner V* to prove that Ray Bradbury's Mars of *The Martian Chronicles* bears no resemblance to the realities of our neighboring planet; but if Bradbury's isn't one of the great works of science fiction, I'll eat my space helmet. It endures, as does all great science fiction, because it embodies to an extraordinary degree the very wonder, beauty,

FROM the Introduction to *The Farthest Reaches*, edited by Joseph Elder. Copyright © 1968 by Joseph Elder. Reprinted by permission of Trident Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

romance, novelty, and adventure to which Mr. Clarke referred in his address. In essence, science fiction may have very little to do with science.

Escapism? Of course. Science fiction is just that, and, as such, it opens infinite doors to adventure, exploration, and ways of life totally alien to our own. It creates whole new worlds of imagination in a way that no other form of fiction can. Does it need any other *raison d'être*? In my belief, no.

There are those who claim mainstream status for the genre, those who feel that it can and sometimes does equal the best of what the straight fiction boys are doing. I hope I do not offend my good contributors by taking an opposing point of view. What science fiction do we have to rival Dickens or Tolstoi or Kazantzakis? Will there ever be science fiction to compete with the masterworks of literature? It seems to me extremely doubtful, though not impossible (to the SF fan, *nothing* is impossible) that there will be, for the simple reason that science fiction, by its very nature, is and always will be a *category*, a tributary of the mainstream, in the same way that western fiction, for example, is saddled (pun fully intended) by *its* own nature. The reader, and indeed the writer, of the western is excited by cowboys and Indians, blazing sixguns, the beckoning spaces of the frontier, the strange ways of the redman. Whether he admits it or not, the diehard science-fiction fan, and writer, is excited by spacemen and bug-eyed monsters, blazing ray guns, the awesomeness of infinity, the wonder of limitless life forms in the universe.

The parallels are close and obvious. In neither western nor science fiction, however, does one find the ultimate communication between mind and mind, between heart and heart, or confront the deepest truths of human feelings and relationships as one does in the great works of mainstream fiction. To be sure, the western has its occasional A. B. Guthrie, and science fiction its rare Bradbury, and they are very good indeed; but we have yet to produce our Proust of the prairie, our Stendhal of the starways. The comparison admittedly may be unfair, for of course the mainstream novel has had a long headstart on western and science fiction as recognized genres of literature. A Ph.D. scholar, unearthing (perhaps literally) these words a century hence, may ridicule them as a Nobel Prize is handed out to some as yet unborn practitioner in either category. One hopes so.

It seems more likely, however, that both western and science fiction will be things of the past in another hundred years or so. (Though not the mystery novel: Crime, alas, will always be with

us.) As we escape farther in time from our frontier heritage, and our landscape is further eroded, polluted, and submerged in the spreading megalopolis, and the Indian is at last no longer isolated on his reservation, who will be left to sing of sagebrush and sixgun? Our western lore will be tainted by quaintness. We will know of it only from writings of the past, and great literature is nurtured not by lesser literature, but by life.

Science fiction? It will no longer be fiction when we have colonized the solar system and set foot on those now seemingly inaccessible planets orbiting the distant stars. Something *like* science fiction may replace the genre as we know it, but it will be more akin to our present western than science fiction. It will be based not on speculation about what we *may* encounter in space, but on the reality of what we *have* encountered (and that will be stranger than anything dreamed of in our philosophy). The fictional settlers will be fighting for survival, not against duststorms and Indians, but perhaps against the methane storms and ammonia-breathing natives of Jupiter. An Earth hungry for the romance and adventure of space, which most of its half-starving billions of inhabitants will never hope to know firsthand, will demand and thus create this new category of space fiction. Science fiction as we know it will be one with the auk and the dodo, a victim of man's inexorable trek to the stars.

Although I shall not be there to mourn its passing, I regret it even now. One need not make excuses for science fiction. It is sufficient unto itself, and I am thankful that I am here and now able to enjoy it for what it is. (I suspect the above postulated space fiction will be about as thrilling as the last Audie Murphy movie.) Science fiction, it seems to me, is capable of lifting the reader from a humdrum world and stirring in him a sense of wonder, which he had perhaps forgotten how to feel, as no other kind of fiction can. The mystery story may have somewhat the same effect, but it is a question of degree. Be the weapon a blunt .45 or a subtle draught of poison, it remains a simple, recognizable, prosaic instrument of death not to be compared with those blazing ray guns. A body dumped from the Orient Express is a body is a body is a body, but, ah, those scaly aliens blasted from their spaceship on the Alpha Centauri run! The aliens are a bit more sophisticated these days (they even looked like us on a popular television show), but aliens are—well, alien, and mysterious in ways that no human fictional character, neither Fu Manchu nor wily redskin, can be.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Time Magazine* (March 29, 1971) stated that science fiction has "undergone an explosive growth in both production and consumption, particularly among members of the pot-rock generation." *Time* claimed that "the interest in SF can be seen as part of the national anxiety about the future of the planet." Elder gives rather different reasons for the popularity of science fiction, and Damon Knight, in the introduction to *One Hundred Years of Science Fiction*, states, "Science fiction deals with what may be, not with what will be." Compare and evaluate these theories of science fiction's great popularity.
2. Robert A. Heinlein, author of *Stranger in a Strange Land* and many other works of science fiction, has suggested that the term "science fiction" should be changed to "speculative fiction" in order to include its new dimensions. Elder quotes Arthur C. Clarke's remark, "What we really seek in space is not knowledge. . . ." These two statements seem to be opposed. Which do you think is the more adequate accounting of the purpose of science fiction? Illustrate your answer with examples like the works of Bradbury, Heinlein, or Herbert, *The Andromeda Strain*, 1984, *Amazing Stories Magazine*, *As-tounding Science Fiction Magazine*, and so on.
3. Damon Knight claims that science fiction "always postulates a world changed in some way from the everyday world we know." Does this seem an adequate definition to you? Would this fit in with Elder's descriptions of the genre?
4. From the science fiction that you have read or seen, do you think it leans more toward optimism or pessimism about the future? Cite as many examples as possible.
5. Reuel Denney, in his book *The Astonished Muse*, raises several questions about the nature of science fiction: "Is it the only kind of literature displayed in country drugstores in which young readers are invited to cast off their ethnocentrism and consider the possibility that there are alternative hypotheses about human nature and society?" "Does it lack manifest sexuality because so much latent sexuality is stored in it?" "Is it self-concealing secularization of essentially 'religious' concerns?" Discuss one or all of these questions.

Mush

Nora Ephron

Nora Ephron is a free-lance writer of book reviews for The New York Times and Esquire and of articles for Holiday, Good Housekeeping, and other magazines. In this article she takes exception to the kind of romantic sentimentality disguised as "art" that is epitomized by Erich Segal's Love Story and Rod McKuen's poetry.

"... there may be a new trend gathering momentum. It is a return to romanticism, a yearning for years past, when life was simpler and values stronger."—Time magazine

The media have been calling it a return to romance, but of course the return is only on the part of the media. The rest of the country never went away. The poems of Kahlil Gibran and books like *A Friend Is Someone Who Likes You* and *Happiness Is a Warm Puppy* have been selling hundreds of thousands of copies in recent years. Heart-shaped satin boxes of chocolate candy, single red American Beauty roses, record albums by Mantovani and the George Melachrino Strings, rhinestone hearts on silver chains—all of it sells to the multitudes out there.

What has changed, however, is that sentimentality is now being peddled by people who seem to lend it an aura of cultural respectability. Take Rod McKuen and Erich Segal. Both of them have hit the jackpot in the romance business: one is a poet, the other a professor. And each thinks of himself as much more than the mush-huckster he is. McKuen, the author of five slim volumes of sentimental poetry and countless songs, is the fastest-selling poet in America; Segal is the author of *Love Story*, which has sold almost 500,000 copies in hard cover, had the largest paperback first printing (4,350,000 copies) in history, and is on

the way to being the weepiest and most successful film ever made. All of it is treacle, pure treacle, with a message that is perfect escapism to a country in the throes of future shock: the world has not changed, the old values prevail, kids are the same as ever, love is just like they told us in the movies. This optimism comes in nice small packages that allow for the slowest reader with the shortest concentration span and the smallest vocabulary.

To lump Segal and McKuen together here is not to say that they know each other—they don't—or that their work is alike. But there are some disarming similarities. Both appeal primarily to women and teen-age girls. Both are bachelors who enjoy referring to themselves as loners. Both belong to professions that rarely lead to commercial success. Both have the habit of repeating compliments others have paid them, and both do it in a manner that is so blatant it almost seems ingenuous. Segal, for instance, speaking on the prototype of his book's heroine: "Jenny exists and knows she is the inspiration for one of the strongest feminine figures in modern literature—honest to God, that's really what one critic wrote." Or McKuen: "There are a lot of people who take potshots at me because they feel I'm not writing like Keats or Eliot. And yet I've been compared to both of them. So figure that out."

More important, both of them have hit on a formula so slick that it makes mere sentimentality have the force of emotion. Their work is instantly accessible and comprehensible; and when the reader is moved by it, he assumes that it must be art. As a result, Segal and McKuen, each of whom started out rather modest about his achievement, have become convinced that they must be doing something not just right but important. Can you blame them? The money rolls in. The mail arrives by the truckload. The critics outside New York are enthusiastic. And to those who aren't, Segal and McKuen fall back on sheer numbers. Millions of people have read and loved their work. The stewardess on American Airlines Flight No. 2 from Los Angeles to New York loves every bit of it. "I'm so sick of all the crap in the world," she says. "All the killings, the violence, the assassinations. This one getting it. That one getting it. I don't want to read any more about that kind of thing. Romanticism is here to stay." She really said it. Honest.

I am a big crybaby. I want to tell you that before I tell you anything at all about Erich Segal. I cry at almost everything. I cry when I watch *Marcus Welby, M.D.* on television or when I see movies about funny-looking people who fall in love. Any

novel by Dickens sets me off. Dogs dying in the arms of orphans, stories of people who are disabled but ultimately walk/see/hear or speak, having something fall on my foot when I am in a hurry, motion pictures of President Kennedy smiling, and a large number of very silly films (particularly one called *The West Point Story*) will work me into a regular saltwater dither.

One other thing about me before I begin. I love trash. I have never believed that kitsch kills. I tell you this so you will understand that my antipathy toward *Love Story* is not because I am immune either to sentimentality or garbage—two qualities the book possesses in abundance. When I read *Love Story* (and I cried, in much the same way that I cry from onions, involuntarily and with great irritation), I was deeply offended—a response I never have, for example, with Jacqueline Susann novels. It was not just that the book was witless, stupid and manipulative. It was that I suspected that unlike Miss Susann, Segal knew better. I was wrong to think that, as it happened. I was fooled by his academic credentials. The fact is that *Love Story* is Erich Segal at the top of his form; he knows no better and can do no better. I know that now. I know that I should no longer be offended by the book. And I'm not. What is it that I'm offended by? Perhaps you will begin to see as we go along.

Dear Mr. Segal: I realize that you are a busy man but I must tell you something that will probably make you inspired and honored. This past summer a very dear friend of mine passed away. She was seventeen and hardly ever unhappy or sad. Leslie had read your book. Not once but three times. She loved it so much. It was funny but everyone related Love Story with Leslie. She cried and said the story was so beautiful and realistic. When she was buried a copy of your book was placed next to her. . . . I wish you knew her. She was so unpredictable. That's what life is. She had an instant heart failure, and thank G-d she didn't suffer. I hope you don't think I'm a foolish college kid. I felt any person who could capture young hearts and old must be sensitive to life.

That is a typical letter plucked out of a large pile of mail on Erich Segal's desk. There are thousands more, from old ladies who say they haven't cried that hard since the Elsie Dinsmore books, from young girls who want to interview Erich for their high-school papers, from young men who have read the book

and want to go to Harvard and play hockey and marry a girl who has leukemia. The mail has been coming in in sacks since about Valentine's Day, 1970 (*Love Story* was published ten days before). The reviews of the book were exultant. The movie is now on the way to being the biggest film in history. And what has happened to Erich Segal as a result of all this? "I always was the way I am," he says, "only I was less successful at it. The difference being that people used to think I was an idiot ass-hole dilettante and now—you can find a nice adjective." Yes, Erich was always this way, only now he is more so. You can find a nice adjective.

"Erich, Erich, you're so pale," shouts Mrs. Jessie Rhine, a lady from Brooklyn, as Erich Segal, the rabbi's son, signs an autograph for her and rumples his curly black hair and stubs his toe and rolls his big brown eyes. His aw-shucks thing. Mrs. Rhine loves it, loves Erich, loves his book, and she would very much like to slip him the name of her niece except that there is this huge group of ladies, there must be a hundred of them, who are also surrounding Erich and trying to slip him the names of *their* nieces. The ladies have just heard Erich give a speech to eleven hundred New York women at the Book and Author Luncheon at the Waldorf-Astoria. Robert Ardrey, the anthropologist, who also spoke at the luncheon, is hanging around Erich, trying to soak up some of the attention, but it does him no good. The ladies want Erich and they are all asking him where they can get a copy of his speech.

Erich's speech. Erich has been giving his speech for months on the book-and-author circuit and he has found that it works. The audience especially responds to the way Erich's speech praises *Love Story* at the expense of *Portnoy's Complaint* and then rises to a crescendo in a condemnation of graphic sex in literature. "Have you any doubt," Segal asks the ladies, "what happened between Romeo and Juliet on their wedding night?" The ladies have no doubt. "Would you feel any better if you had seen it?" No, eleven hundred heads shake, no. "Fortunately," Segal concludes, "Shakespeare was neither curious nor yellow." Wild applause. Everyone loves Erich's speech. Everyone, that is, but Pauline Kael, the film critic, who heard an earlier version of Erich's speech at a book-and-author luncheon in Richmond, Virginia, and told him afterward that he was knocking freedom of speech and sucking up to his audience. To which Erich replied, "We're here to sell books, aren't we?"

The phenomenon of the professor as performer is not a new one: many teachers thrive on exactly the kind of idolatry that

characterizes groupies and middle-aged lady fans. Still, there has never been an academician quite as good as Erich at selling books, quite as . . . you can find a nice adjective. He checks in with his publicists once or twice a day. Is everything being done that could be? What about the Carson show? What about running the Canby review again? What about using Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's quote in the ad? Is this anecdote right for Leonard Lyons? "I've been in this business fourteen years and Erich is the closest thing to what a publicist's dream would be," says Harper & Row's Stuart Harris. "All authors feel they have to make a publicity tour, but they don't know how to do it. Erich knows. He knows how to monopolize the time on a talk show without being obvious. *I* would know he's obvious, *you* would know he's obvious, but millions listening in don't know. So many authors don't know how to say anything about their books. They're shy. Erich knows how to do it without being blatant. He had to make a speech the week he was number one on the *Time* magazine best-seller list. He wanted to get that over to the audience, that it was number one, so he got up and began, 'I just flew down and made three stops. Every time the plane landed, I got off and went to the newsstand and bought *Time* magazine to see if I was still number one on the best-seller list.' The audience adored it."

We're here to sell books, aren't we? Yes indeed. And Erich knows that every book counts. One night in a restaurant, an out-of-town couple shyly approached Segal and asked him to autograph a menu for a neighbor who had loved his book. "Why a menu?" Segal asked. Because, the couple explained, it was all they had. "I'll tell you what," said Segal. "There's a bookstore around the corner that's still open. Go in and buy a copy of *Love Story*, bring it back, and I'll autograph that."

Erich has been around the country several times, giving his speech, talking about his book, never letting the conversation wander away from its proper focus. "My novel, *Love Story*, and Paramount's film of it mark, I believe, the turning point in the morals of the younger generation." Erich said that in New York several weeks after publication. Note how it is self-aggrandizing, but in the cause of public morality. Note how it is reassuring to older people. Note the way the name of the book is plunked into the sentence, along with a plug for the film and a plug for the film studio. Erich got so carried away with slipping these little factual details into his sentences that Jacqueline Susann, who is no slouch herself in the self-aggrandizement department, felt called upon to advise him against it. "Every time you mention the book's

name," she told him, "you don't really have to add that it's number one on the best-seller list."

Exactly what has made *Love Story* so phenomenally successful is something of a mystery. There are theories, but none of them fully explains what happened. Yes, it makes readers cry. Yes, it has nothing whatsoever to do with life today and encourages people to believe the world has not changed. Yes, as Segal points out, the book has almost no description; people tend to read themselves into it. And yes, it has come at a time when young people are returning to earlier ways. As the critic for Yale's *New Journal* pointed out:

Segal has perceived that the revolution we all talk of being in the midst of is in large part a romantic one, a movement not so much forward as backward, away from technology and organization and toward nature and people. . . . *Love Story* is a trick, a joke, a pun on those among us to whom an alliance with the fortyish-matron set would be anathema. Segal has tricked us into reading a novel about youth today that has little sex, no drugs, and a tear-jerking ending; and worse, he has made us love it, ponder it, and feel it to be completely contemporary. We are, deep down, no better than the sentimental slobs who sit under the hair dryers every Friday afternoon. It's all the same underneath. Segal has our number.

When *Love Story* was first published, Segal himself seemed to possess a measure of self-deprecation. He admitted that his book was banal and cliché-ridden. But as time went on, he began to relax, the self-deprecation turned to false humility, and he took his success seriously. He acknowledged in a recent interview that he might well be the F. Scott Fitzgerald of his generation. He says that he has been compared to Dostoevsky. He claims that his novel is in the tradition of the *roman nouveau* developed in France by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute. He implies that people who hate his book are merely offended by its success. When *Love Story* took off in France, he called an associate long distance and said, "We are no longer a movement. We are a religion."

Can you blame him? Can you honestly say that you would have reacted any differently to such extraordinary success? Three, four years ago Erich Segal was just another academic with show-

biz connections. "I lived for the day I would see my name in *Variety*," he recalled. He was born in Brooklyn in 1937, the eldest son of a well-known New York rabbi who presided over a Reform synagogue but kept a kosher home. "He dominated me," said Segal. "From the time I was the littlest boy I wanted to be a writer. My mother says that when I was two I used to dictate epic dramas to her. I believe her. I used to dictate tunes to my music teacher. I was that kind of spoiled child. But I came from a nice Jewish family. What kind of job was it being a writer? There was no security. My father wanted me to be a professional person." Rabbi Segal sent his son to Yeshiva, made him take Latin, and insisted he attend night classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan after he finished track practice at Midwood High School in Brooklyn. "I was always odd man out," said Segal. "It is true that I ended Midwood as president of the school and won the Latin prize, but those were isolated. What kind of social life could I have had? I spent my life on the subway."

At Harvard, which he attended because his father told him to, Erich was salutatorian and class poet. He ran every year in the Boston marathon and ran every day to keep in shape—a practice he continues. He also wrote two musicals, one of which had a short run Off-Broadway, and performed in the *Dunster Dunces*, a singing group that often sang a Segal original, *Winter Is the Time to Snow Your Girl*. Despite his activity, he always reminded his friends not of Larry Hart but of Noel Airman. (The influence of *Marjorie Morningstar* on Jewish adolescents in the 1950's has yet to be seriously acknowledged.)

Segal got his Ph.D. in comparative literature and began teaching at Yale, where no one took his show-business talk much more seriously than they had at Harvard. Yes, Erich was collaborating with Richard Rodgers, but the show never got off the ground. Yes, Erich had a credit on *Yellow Submarine*, but how much of that was writing anyway? And then came *Love Story*. Script first. Erich's agents didn't even want to handle it. Howard Minsky, who decided to produce it, received rejections from every major studio. Then Ali McGraw committed herself to it, Paramount bought it, and Erich started work on the novel, the slender story of a poor Catholic girl named Jenny who marries a rich WASP named Oliver and dies after several idyllic, smart-talking, poverty-stricken years.

Not a single eye was dry, everybody had to cry. Even Erich Segal burst into tears when he wrote it. "In this very room," Segal said one day in his living room at Yale, "in that very chair at that very typewriter. When I got to the end of the book, it really hit

me. I said, 'Omigod,' and I came and sat in that very chair and I cried and I cried and I cried. And I said to myself, 'All right, Segal, hold thyself. Why are you crying? I don't understand why you are crying. When was the last time you cried?' And I said, 'The only time I've cried in my adult life was at my father's funeral.' Now it's stretching a lot to make any kind of connection whatsoever. So I finally concluded, after all the honesty I could muster after forty-five minutes of crying and introspection, that I was crying for Jenny. I mean, I really was crying for Jenny. I got up and wiped my face and finished the thing."

Segal's apartment, in a Saarinen-designed dormitory, is a simply furnished, messy one filled with copies of *Variety*, unopened mail, and half-packed suitcases—Segal is rarely at Yale more than three or four days a week. He spends the rest of his time on promotion tours or in conference in Hollywood. (Two other Segal scripts have been produced: *The Games*, about marathon runners, and *R.P.M.*, about a campus revolt.) His icebox has nothing in it but yogurt, and Segal is relaxing in his living room, eating a container of the stuff and saying that he is happy with the lecture on *Phaedra* he delivered that morning because it convinced one of his students that Hippolytus was in fact a tragic hero. Student opinion of Segal at Yale ranges from those who dislike his book and his huckstering to those who rather like it and envy him for his success in what is referred to in cloistered environments as the real world. But most agree that whatever failings Segal has as a personality are overcome by his ability as a teacher. He teaches classics with great verve—in suede pants, he paces back and forth onstage, waves his hands, speaks quickly, gulps down a cup of coffee a student has given him, and generates enormous excitement. Segal has written several scholarly works, one a book on Plautus called *Roman Laughter*.

"It's a tremendous relief to be able to walk into a classroom and speak freely," Segal is saying. "I don't mean your mind. I mean your vocabulary. I don't go in for Buckleyish sesquipedalian terms, but I do go in for *le mot juste*. Even to be able to say, 'Aristotelian catharsis'. . . . On a podium, if I said that, they'd say who is this pompous bastard. This to me is a normal way of speaking. This is the existence whence I emanate. This is the way I really am." But if this is the way you really are, Erich, who is that traveling around the country delivering those speeches? And why?

"What am I going to say to them?" he replies. "I don't know. I had to sell books. I mean, do you know what I mean? I'm embarrassed but I'm not sorry, because the end justifies the means,

you know. Three or four *yentas* who buy the book will get it to the readers who have never bought a book before, and get the readership I really cherish, which is the readership of the young people." He paused. "Do you think I was pandering to them?"

No. Not really. Because Erich Segal really believes in what he is saying, is really offended by sex in literature, is really glad he wrote *Love Story* instead of *Portnoy's Complaint*, thinks that—however accidentally—he has stumbled onto something important. Don't be fooled by the academic credentials: a man who can translate Ovid cannot be expected to know better—or know anything at all, for that matter—when it comes to his own work. "You see, I wrote the book in a kind of *faux naïf* style," Segal explained. "And if you think it's easy to write as simply as that, well, you're wrong. But little did I know that I was creating a whole style that's perfect for the Seventies. Let's face it. Movies are the big thing now, and this is the style that's right for the age of—as McLuhan called it—electronic literature. Writing should be shorthand, understated, no wasting time describing things. I had no idea that I was solving the whole problem of style this way. But I like it. I'm going to keep it for all my other novels." Can you blame him?

It is a well-dressed, well-behaved group, this crowd of young men and women, lots of young women, who are waiting patiently in Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., for the concert to begin. You won't see any of your freaks here, no sir, any of your tie-dye people, any of your long-haired kids in jeans lighting joints. This is middle America. The couples are holding hands, nuzzling, sitting still, waiting like well-brought-up young people are supposed to, and here he is, the man they've been waiting for, Rod McKuen. Let's have a nice but polite round of applause for Rod, in his Levi's and black sneakers. You won't see any of your crazy groupies here, squealing and jumping onstage and trying for a grab at the performer's parts. No sir. Here they are not groupies but fans, and they carry Instamatics with flash attachments and line up afterward with every one of Rod's books for him to autograph. The kids you never hear about. They love The Beatles, they love Dylan, but they also love Rod. "He's so sensitive," one young man explains. "I just hope that he reads a lot of his poetry tonight."

They want to hear the poetry. They gasp in expectation when he picks up a book and flips it open in preparation. And onstage, about to give them what they want in his gravelly voice ("It sounds like I gargle with Dutch Cleanser," he says), is America's leading poet and Random House's leading author. "I've sold five million

books of poetry since 1967," says Rod, "but who's counting?" As a matter of fact, Random House is counting and places the figure at three million. Nevertheless, it is a staggering figure—and the poetry is only the beginning. There are records of Rod reciting his poetry, records of Rod's music, records of Rod singing Rod's lyrics to Rod's music, records of Rod's friends singing Rod's songs—much of this on records produced by Rod's record company. There are the concerts, television specials, film sound tracks and a movie company formed with Rock Hudson. There are the Stanyan Books, a special line of thirty-one books Rod publishes and Random House distributes, with *Caught in the Quiet* its biggest seller, followed by *God's Greatest Hits*, compiled from the moments He speaks in the Bible. McKuen's income can be conservatively estimated at \$3,000,000 a year.

That literary critics and poets think nothing whatsoever of McKuen's talent as a poet matters not a bit to his followers, who are willing to be as unabashedly soppy as their bard and are not, in any event, at all rigid in their distinctions between song lyrics and poetry. "I'm often hit by critics and accused of being overly sentimental," Rod is saying to his concert audience. "To those critics I say tough. Because I write about boys and girls and men and women and summer and spring and winter and fall and love and hate. If you don't write about those things there isn't much to write about." And now Rod will read a poem. "This poem," he says, "is about a marvelous cat I once knew. . . ."

McKuen's poetry also covers—in addition to the subjects he lists above—live dogs, lost cats, freight trains, missed connections, one-night stands, remembered loved ones and remembered streets, and loneliness. The poem about the cat, which is among his most famous, concerns a faithful feline named Sloopy who deserted McKuen after he stayed out too late one night with a woman. Her loss brings the poet to the following conclusion: "*Looking back/ perhaps she's been/the only human thing/that ever gave back love to me.*" McKuen's poetry, which he reads to background instrumental accompaniment, is a kind of stream-of-consciousness free verse filled with mundane images ("raped by Muzak in an elevator," for example) and with adjectives used as nouns ("listen to the warm," "caught in the quiet," etc.). A recent McKuen parody in the *National Lampoon* sums up his style as well as anything; it begins, "*The lone\$ome choo choo of my mind/i\$ warm like drippy treacle/on the wind\$wept beach.*"

Occasionally McKuen can be genuinely piquant and even witty. "*I wrote Paul this morning/after reading his poem,/I told*

him, it's okay to drop your pants/to old men sometimes/but I wouldn't recommend it/as a way of life. *I didn't mail the letter.*" But for the most part, McKuen's poems are superficial and platitudinous and frequently silly. "It is irrelevant to speak of McKuen as a poet," say Pulitzer prize winning poet Karl Shapiro.

There was a time when Rod McKuen might modestly have agreed with Shapiro. Ten years or so ago, when he was scrounging in New York, living on West Fifty-fifth Street with Sloopy the cat and trying to make ends meet, McKuen might gladly have admitted to being just a songwriter. Even recently, after only two of his books had appeared, he told a reporter, "I'm not a poet—I'm a stringer of words." But then it happened: the early success mushroomed. "I don't think it's irrelevant to speak of me as a poet," McKuen says today. "If I can sell five million books of poetry, I must be a poet." Three million, Rod. "If my poetry can be taught in more than twenty-five hundred colleges, seminaries and high schools throughout the United States, if it can be hailed in countries throughout the world as something important, I must be a poet. In France, one newspaper wrote, 'Rod McKuen is the best poet America has to offer and we should listen to him and mark him well.'"

The saga of Rod McKuen and his rise to the top is a story so full of bad times and hard knocks that it almost serves as a parody of such tales. Rodney Marvin John Michael James McKuen was born in 1933 in a Salvation Army Hospital in Oakland, California. His mother was a dime-a-dance girl; his father deserted her just before their son was born and McKuen has never met him. "*I remember hearing children/in the street outside. . . . /They had their world/I had my room/I envied them only/for the day long sunshine/of their lives/and their fathers./Mine I never knew.*"

McKuen's mother Clarice worked as a barmaid, scrubbed floors and operated a switchboard to pay bills. Then she married his stepfather, who drove tractors to level dirt for highways; the family moved from one construction site to the next in California and Nevada. "My stepfather used to get drunk and come home in the middle of the night and yank me out of bed and beat me up," McKuen recalled. "That was kind of traumatic."

At eleven, McKuen dropped out of school and went to work as a lumberjack, ditchdigger, ranch hand, shoe salesman and cookie puncher. At fifteen, he received his first serious rejection from a young lady. At eighteen, he became a disc jockey with San Francisco's station KROW, dispensing advice to the lovelorn.

After a stint in Korea writing psychological-warfare material for radio, he returned to San Francisco and was booked into the Purple Onion. A screen test followed and in the mid-Fifties he worked at Universal on such films as *Rock*, *Pretty Baby* and *Summer Love*. In what must have been a move of some distinction, he walked out on the filming of *The Haunted House on Hot Rod Hill*. For his film career, McKuen had a dermabrasion, which partially removed his adolescent acne scars; he also has a long scar across his chin, the result of an automobile accident.

In 1959 McKuen moved to New York and before beginning to compose music for the CBS Television Workshop, he sold blood for money and crashed parties for food. Then in 1961, after the CBS job folded, he helped compose a rock song called *Oliver Twist*, which was noteworthy mainly in that it rhymed "chickens" with "Dickens." When no one famous could be found to record it, Rod did it himself; when the record took off, he began touring the country with a back-up group (he does not play a musical instrument and has only recently learned formal composition). As Mr. *Oliver Twist* he played Trude Heller's, the Copacabana lounge, and did a twelve-week tour of bowling alleys around the country. "He was a pretty big act," said his then-manager Ron Gittman. "He wasn't your Ricky Nelson or your Everly Brothers, but he pulled people." The constant performing six nights a week proved too much for McKuen's voice: his vocal chords swelled, he could not speak, and after six weeks in bed the old tenor voice was gone and a new froggy one had emerged.

McKuen moved back to Los Angeles, played the Troubadour, and continued to set his lyrics to the simple music he composed in his head. In 1965 he opened at the Bitter End and was praised by *The New York Times* and compared to Charles Aznavour and Jacques Brel. Eddy Arnold, Johnny Cash and Glenn Yarbrough began to record his songs of love and loneliness. The market had changed. "In the Fifties and early Sixties there were formulas," said rock publicist Connie de Nave, who handled Rod when he was doing the *Oliver Twist*. "Your group wore certain colors, sweaters over pants, their hair had to be well-groomed, no smoking or drinking onstage. In the mid-Sixties suddenly the individual could wear what he wanted. He didn't have to spend \$18,000 on arrangements for nightclub acts. All the outlets where Rod had to do the *Oliver Twist* died. The college market began. The change made things ripe for Rod. Before lyrics had been simple and uncomplicated. Now they wanted depth. No one could come out and

go 'Oo, wa, oo wa.' You came out with your stool and you sang, and you didn't even have to sing that great. You just had to feel. And as Rod was growing, the market came around."

Stanyan Street and Other Sorrows, McKuen's first book of poetry and songs, was an accidental by-product of a Glenn Yarbrough recording. When requests about the song began to pour into the record company, McKuen decided to publish a book containing it. With his own money, he paid for the printing, stored the books in his garage, and put the covers on and mailed them out in Jiffy bags. "I was very unsophisticated about it," McKuen recalled. "I didn't know what sort of discount you gave bookstores. I made them all pay cash and pay in advance. We had no salesmen, so I called the telephone company and got the yellow pages of all the major cities. We sent mailers to every bookstore. I knew people were asking for it and it wasn't listed in *Publishers' Weekly* or the guide to books. No one knew where it was from or how to get it." In a year, *Stanyan Street* sold 60,000 copies—about 120 times what the average book of poetry sells in a lifetime. Random House took over the distribution, signed McKuen to his next book, and gave him a Mercedes Benz.

Today Rod McKuen lives in a thirty-room house on a hill facing Beverly Hills, which has a pool, orange trees, four in help, several sheepdogs and cats, and a barbershop for Rod and his streaky blond hair. He spends about half the year on the road and in Europe; he has an illegitimate son in France whom he sees frequently. When he is in Los Angeles, he rarely leaves his house except for a recording session or a trip to his office on Sunset Boulevard. "I have about fifteen people who work for me there," said McKuen. "I don't like to think they work *for* me. They work *with* me."

McKuen is sitting now in the music room of his house. He is wearing a yellow pullover sweater and the ever-present sneakers and Levi's and he is talking about the return to romance he feels the country is in the midst of. "I paved the way for Erich Segal," he says. "It's been my strange lot to have preceded all sorts of things for some time now. I told everybody that folk music was going to come in very big three years before it happened and nobody believed me and of course it did happen. And I went around telling people there was going to be a romantic revival and nobody believed that either. I think it's a reaction people are having against so much insanity in the world. I mean, people are really all we've got. You know it sounds kind of corny and I suppose it's a cliché, but it's really true, that's just the way it is."

It is not entirely easy to interview McKuen, you see. Not that he isn't open and garrulous—but for one thing, most of his thoughts seem to end up in statements he supposes are clichés; and for another he tends to ramble. Ask him about his childhood and within seconds he will be off on a ramble about prejudice and the Army. Ask him whether his poetry paints too sanguine a picture of the world and before you know it he will be telling you about capital punishment. Ask him about his new book:

“My new book has its roots in my childhood and in how I feel now, about getting back to basics. You notice in this house, I like lumber. I like wood. Frank Lloyd Wright was my favorite architect because everything he did sprang out of the ground. And even though you see a lot of gadgets and stuff like that I like them because they are gadgets. They don't try to be anything else. I don't like artificial flowers, for instance. . . .” Like that.

In any case, it really doesn't matter to Rod McKuen how the interview goes, because he is sick and tired of being written about and criticized for what he is doing. Rod McKuen, who in the old days would talk to *Stamp World Magazine* if they wanted to profile him, has now become what he calls “gun-shy.” Writers describe him as a guru and he hates it. Critics confuse his songs with his poetry and criticize him unfairly and he hates it. Everyone is out to get him. “You know, it's pretty fashionable to knock me down,” he says. “There's something criminal, apparently, about being a successful poet. Too many writers take umbrage at that. It's not fair. I don't think poets should starve. I don't think anyone should starve. That's another problem we have in this country that should be changed. . . .” And off he goes on a ramble about poverty in America, leaving the reporter to wonder about it all.

What does it mean?

What does it signify?

What is McKuen trying to say?

And the answer is probably best put in a poem McKuen himself wrote: “*If you had listened hard enough/you might have heard/what I meant to say. Nothing.*”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. From reading Ephron's essay, how do you think she would define “mush”?
2. Summarize Ephron's evaluation of Segal and McKuen. What do you think of her assessment?

3. One point Ephron makes about Segal and McKuen is that their work is "instantly accessible and comprehensible." Does this make it inferior? Discuss.
4. Explain just what it is that Ephron is offended by in *Love Story*. Do you share her feelings?
5. Several reviewers have said that *Love Story* is a "clean" book (and movie) after the rash of eroticism in recent novels and films. Newsweek said that "if this is the sort of backlash we can expect from Portnoy's ode to masturbation, we're in real trouble. The banality of *Love Story* makes *Peyton Place* look like *Swann's Way* as it skips from cliché to cliché with an abandon that would chill even the blood of a *True Romance* editor." In the final analysis, why do you think *Love Story* has been such a phenomenal success?
6. Charles R. Larson, writing in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, suggests that the only possible explanation for the popularity of *Love Story* is "the sterility of the age which permits a nation to elect as its leader a President who then surrounds himself with the most mediocre men in the history of the country." Discuss.
7. Time, in an article entitled "Weepin' & Woonin' with Rod McKuen," raised the question: "Why do people buy his product? As an exercise in camp? Almost certainly not. They seemed charmed and disarmed by his sentimentality, his square hipness. What the McKuen phenomenon proves is that, no matter how sophisticated or cynical the times may seem, there is always a vast market for the banal." Discuss your reaction to this analysis. What do you find attractive or repulsive about McKuen's poetry and songs?
8. Do you think we are experiencing a romantic revival in the arts today?

Love Story: A Romance of Upward Mobility

Herbert J. Gans

Herbert J. Gans (author of "How Well Does TV Present the News?" on page 205) here examines, from a sociological standpoint, the plot of Erich Segal's Love Story, one of the best-selling novels and highest-grossing films in history.

It may be forgotten by 1972, but right now the biggest thing in popular culture is *Love Story*. The hard-back book has been high on the best-seller list for over a year; the paperback recently went through a record reprinting of almost five million copies; and the movie may replace *The Sound of Music* as the biggest money-maker of all time.

The story is a bittersweet saga of upward mobility. Jennifer Cavilleri, a Radcliffe music major of humble Italian-American origins, meets Oliver Barrett IV, a hockey-playing Harvard student of immense wealth and Social Register lineage, marries him, puts him through Harvard Law School when his father disowns him, and shortly thereafter dies of leukemia, in the process reconciling him with his father (at least in the book—in the film, their reconciliation is left uncertain).

Conservative critics of the counterculture have fallen all over themselves to welcome the film as a return to old-fashioned romance, a victory of the square over the hip, and proof that the movie audience never really liked *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and other films that reject material success and other Puritan virtues.

But *Love Story* is not really as old-fashioned or romantic as its admirers have claimed. Of course, Cinderella marrying the Prince is an old Hollywood theme, and so is the film's implicit cul-

tural-political message: that there need be no conflict between love and success, impulsiveness and self-control, ethnic *Gemeinschaft* and WASP *Gesellschaft*, or, for that matter, the lower and the higher classes. Jenny comes from an earthy, close-knit community; and her father, a cookie baker, stands for familial love, whereas Ollie's father, an utterly proper bank director, seems interested only in his son's maintaining the family's power and prestige. Oliver has long been fighting with his father—and himself—over whether to break out of the family mold; but when he meets Jenny, he finds that he can have the best of both worlds, becoming part of her family and still winding up with a job in a top New York law firm. In fact, Jenny helps him keep his nose to the grindstone; and thus the ethnic working-class girl makes sure that the upper class remains on top in American society.

Jenny is no Cinderella, however, but an aggressive and ambitious girl who has come to feel at home in the upper-class milieu of Harvard and Radcliffe and has no intention of leaving it after graduation. There is nothing Italian about her; she left the Catholic Church before she met Ollie, and her working-class origin survives only in her liberal use of profanity. (Like many a status-seeker, she is an anal compulsive. Her favorite expression is "bullshit"; her most frequent reference to Ollie's anatomy is to his ass; and Ollie's otherwise boorish roommates have her pegged correctly as "tight-assed.")

Although Jenny is not a cold and calculating social climber and loves Ollie for more than "his numeral," their romance is by no means as tender as it appears. The relationship consists largely of teasing bouts in which Jenny downgrades Ollie; her usual name for him is "Preppie," as in "Move your ass, Preppie," when he carries his wife over the threshold; and she manipulates him unmercifully. When they first meet, she tells him he is too stupid to invite her for coffee, after which he must do so; when she announces that there is no chance he would marry a "social zero" like her, she forces the issue and he pops the question. And in the book, her first words after the marriage ceremony are "Now I can be a bitch."

Innocent Ollie seems to need being put down. After one of their teasing bouts, he says (in the book), "Damn, why can't I ever quit when I'm ahead?"—to which she replies, "Because, Preppie, you never are." In many ways Jenny only takes the place of his father; when she teases him for finishing third rather than first in his law school class, she makes the same demands for perfection as the old man. In trying to reconcile father and son, she

aims to move Oliver closer to the paternal thumb; and on her deathbed she suggests her desire for his dependency by announcing that for her, the marriage was happiest when she supported him.

All of this is, of course, implicit; both film and book emphasize only the loving part of the relationship. Its dual nature is nicely summarized, however, in Jenny's statement that "Love means never having to say you're sorry," which she makes to discourage Ollie's "I'm sorry" after a quarrel, but which also means that there is never a need to apologize for hurting one's mate. Furthermore, although their sexual relationship is highly satisfying, the remaining passion is devoted largely to teasing. Jenny has difficulty giving and accepting straightforward affection, and Ollie really rises to emotional heights only in his fights with his father.

For a sociologist, the most intriguing question about *Love Story* is why this often hostile romance has been perceived as sentimental by so many reviewers and has gone on to become the most popular book and film of the year. I think there are several reasons. For one thing, the truly sentimental part of the romance is a success story, describing Jenny's achievement of upward mobility through charm, intelligence, and love without resort to deliberate social climbing. Upward mobility has always been a popular movie topic, but often the status-seeker has been a cold-hearted schemer who is finally punished for his or her inability to love, as in *Mildred Pierce*, *What Makes Sammy Run*, or, more recently, *Valley of the Dolls* and *The Adventurers*. Jenny does not travel the low moral route, making it easy for reviewers and audiences to celebrate her success, to feel sorry that she has to die before reaping all the fruits of her achievement, and to blind themselves to the latent hostility that pervades her romance with Ollie.

More important, the film provides simple and satisfying answers to some pressing questions for a variety of audiences. It tells older moviegoers that some young people are still square and that even if a boy hates his father, the right girl will resolve the problem. Rich audiences are shown that wealth is good and that their sons will amass more: Ollie, despite an early threat to return his inheritance to the workers exploited by his ancestors, has had enough of poverty while in school and takes the highest-paying job he can get, with nary a detour for antipoverty work or even the Peace Corps.

For less affluent audiences, Jenny offers proof that a working-class girl can not only win an American aristocrat but do so by constantly telling him she is better than he. Ticket-buyers of ethnic

origin will learn that Italian Americans can make it into and at Radcliffe—although this year's Radcliffe directory listed only about a dozen Italian names among the 1,200 students. (Moviegoers with ethnic pride may be displeased, however, that Jennifer is played by Ali McGraw, the latest in a long line of black-haired Irish or Scotch-Irish actresses to portray Italians and Jews; and Oliver, by Ryan O'Neal.)

The female audience is reassured that love at first sight is still possible and that men are innocents who can be manipulated even while making a happy marriage. Presumably, male ticket-buyers went to see Ali McGraw and to take their wives or girl friends to a "woman's picture," but they can identify with Ollie's athletic and intellectual prowess and his ability to parlay his angelic innocence into material and emotional success.

There being no census of moviegoers, it will never be known whether adults actually came back to the movie theaters for this picture; but, even so, the film's primary appeal is to adolescents. It has nothing to say to adherents of the counterculture or other upper-middle-class sophisticates, whose reviewers have treated it scornfully; but it tells lower-middle-class and working-class girls—and not just the upwardly mobile—that they can go to college to find an ideal mate, sleep with him before marriage, and reject the parents' religion and ethnic culture without having to break with them. To young men of the same background, the film suggests that they can cut themselves off from their families if they find the right girl.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important reason for the film's popularity with young people is that Jenny and her Preppie, though young adults, often behave like adolescents in a dating relationship. The continual teasing that marks their romance is a typically adolescent device to delay premature emotional intimacy, as is the coming together of two people of wildly different social backgrounds, although that is also a way by which adolescents explore the world as they search for their identity. And when Jenny tells Ollie that she loves him in part for his athletic achievement and social status, while Ollie is attracted by her beauty, brilliance, and musical skills, they are emphasizing the kinds of surface qualities that are important to teenagers during the dating period. Moreover, like most dating relationships, this one ends before it can develop into a mature marriage.

Also, since the two lovers are in their twenties and the actors playing them have just turned thirty, the film may be telling teen-

age moviegoers that adolescent relationships may not be limited to their own age group, thus perhaps reducing, or at least justifying, anxieties that accompany real-life adolescence and dating. The adolescent *Gestalt* of the film is enhanced, intentionally or not, by the performance of both stars; Ali McGraw is gawkish, and Ryan O'Neal often looks as if he were suffering from a severe case of puppy love.

Finally, all of the characters are cardboard stereotypes, without real depth or structure, thus allowing audiences, young and old, to supply the missing details from their own experiences and to their own satisfaction. The wooden acting only enlarges the vacuum. Moreover, the film leaves unanswered such crucial questions as who is to blame for the antagonism between Ollie and his father and whether the two are actually reconciled at the end, enabling the audience to project its own answers or wishes onto the film.

I suspect that soothing messages embedded in an ambiguous story and delivered by only partly delineated characters may be prime requirements of all really successful popular culture, as of the most persistent folk culture, partly because the audience can fill in the blanks and identify with characters it has helped to create. Although the serious critic is right in condemning *Love Story*—and similar examples of participatory popular culture—for a cliché-ridden plot, superficial characterization, and Pollyannaish treatment of important familial and social issues, the audience is also right in enjoying what is, after all, only a quickly forgotten evening of tearful escape. True, the film left me cold; but I presume it was not made to enchant a middle-aged sociology professor.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Gans's approach to *Love Story* differ from Ephron's?
2. Do you agree with Gans's interpretation of Jenny's character? Discuss.
3. According to Gans, what is the cultural-political message of *Love Story*? Do you agree with his assessment?
4. Gans suggests that "all of the characters are cardboard stereotypes, without real depth or structure, thus allowing audiences, young and old, to supply the missing details from their own experiences and to their own satisfaction." Segal's comment, quoted in Ephron's article,

that Jenny is "one of the strongest feminine figures in modern literature" conflicts with this statement. Who do you think is right? Are the two main characters of Love Story flat stereotypes or well-developed characters?

5. Comment on Gans's claim that Love Story is really a story of adolescent love.