

CHANNELS

OF COMMUNICATIONS

MAY-JUNE 1985

\$4.00

THE MEDIA GRAB

BY BEN H. BAGDIKIAN

TED & JESSE & CBS

BY LES BROWN

CBN Counts Its Ble\$\$ings

'Magnum'— The Champagne of TV?

Counterfeit Documentaries

What's Playing on the Telephone





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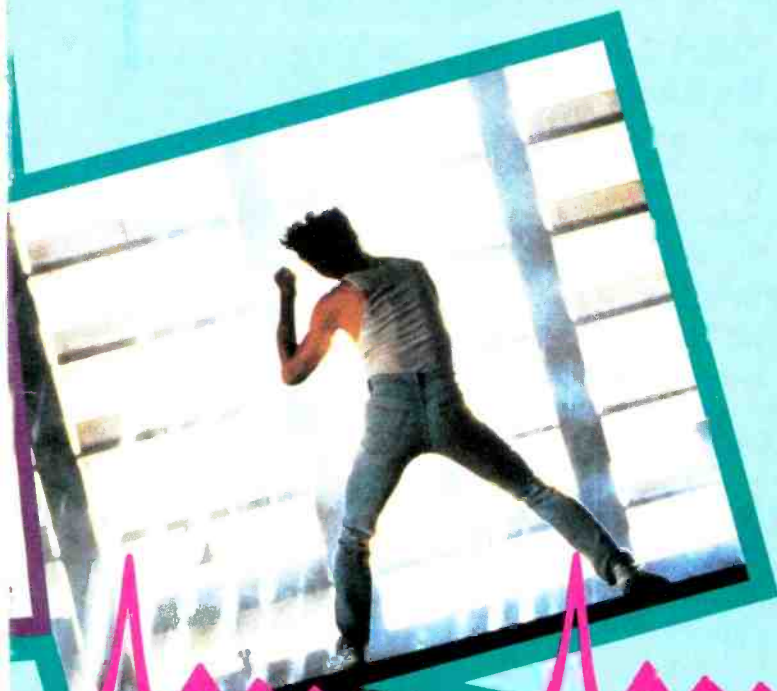
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The power to shape the nation's
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for sale to the highest bidder.

BY BEN BAGDIKIAN

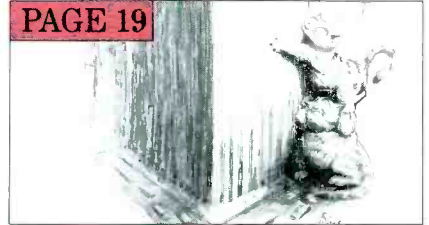


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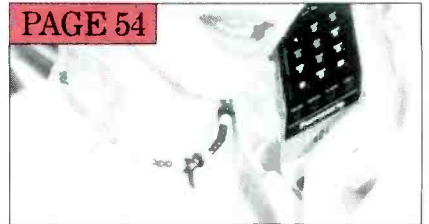


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MORE JOY OF SETS.



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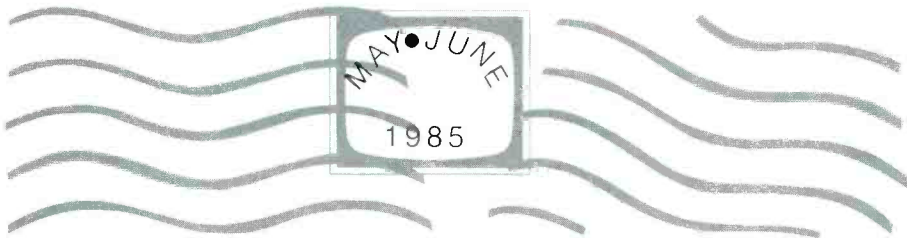
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On the Record

YOUR ARTICLE "The Rockefellers' Mediocre Little Secret" [March/April], which characterized Outlet Communications as "never famous for distinguished broadcasting" and lacking in "high standards and public service spirit," is very puzzling to us. Before the Rockefeller Group acquired Outlet [in 1983], their senior executives visited each television market and learned firsthand of the respect and appreciation that local elected officials and civic leaders have for Outlet's dedication to serving the local needs through top quality news and public affairs programming.

The Outlet organization has produced outstanding public service radio and television programs. Through its annual on-air fund-raising projects, our Detroit radio station, WORS-FM, has been acknowledged as a major reason for the continued financial survival of the Detroit Symphony. Our television stations regularly air prime time station-produced documentaries that exceed normal standards. KOVR in Sacramento recently sent a team to India, and Orlando's WCPX to Ethiopia. Outlet's stations have won 25 Emmys in the past three years.

We can not speak to your personal perceptions, but we can let our record speak proudly for us.

FREDERICK R. GRIFFITHS
Outlet Communications Inc.
Providence, Rhode Island

Easier Franchise Renewals

I READ WITH INTEREST "Who Came Out Ahead in the Cable Act?" [March/April]. While it's true that it may be too early to tell which side will benefit most from the 1984 cable act, the case can be made that cable has scored some important points in the area of franchise renewals.

Author Michael Botein argues that even though Congress intended to give cable operators virtually automatic renewal, the act's language is so ambiguous that "a city with the backbone and the

money to defend its action in court probably will be able to evict any recalcitrant cable operator." What he did not mention is the provision that a franchise renewal must also be based on "the quality of the operator's service." In other words, the act requires that a city must evaluate an operator's proposed renewal on the assumption that if past service adequately met subscriber needs and other technical requirements, there is a reasonable basis for granting renewal of the franchise.

It of course remains to be seen how these loosely worded provisions will be interpreted by the courts, but it's significant that the act limits the definition of "quality of the operator's service" to signal reception and the handling of subscriber complaints and billing.

Botein suggests that public hearings could serve as a check against the cable operator's apparent advantage. Adverse publicity might be generated by the hearings. But the cable industry doesn't seem overly concerned that this will actually happen.

Cities now will need not only backbone but more money and patience to outlast cable operators who contest the denial of a franchise. Most cities will think long and hard before denying a franchise renewal.

ERIC XAVIER
Berkeley, California

Touchdown

YOUR USE OF THE PHRASE "The Electronic Hearth" in your 1985 *Field Guide to the Electronic Media* to describe the home television environment has some fascinating etymological echoes. Although "hearth" is of decidedly Anglo-Saxon origins, its Latin equivalent is "focus." And the word itself yields additional rewards. "Hearth" has those nifty symmetrical bookends or goalposts at each end, and within itself contains the words "hear," "ear," "earth," "art," and "heart." Not bad company for those who would communicate.

JOHN CULKIN
New York City

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CROSS CURRENTS

Through the Looking Glass

We loom larger in the Soviets' newscasts than they do in ours.

THERE'S a "tremendous asymmetry" between Soviet television's evening news and our own, according to Ellen Mickiewicz, a political scientist who uses a satellite dish at Emory University in Atlanta to look in on their network transmissions. In their nightly newscasts the Soviets spend much more time on the United States than our newscasts spend on them. During one month last fall, the Soviet program *Vremya* ("Time") devoted 7 percent of its air-time to us, while *ABC World News Tonight* (chosen to represent U.S. newscasts) devoted only 1 percent to the Soviets.

The difference is even greater when the minutes are added up because their news programs run so much longer than ours: The Soviets devoted 56 minutes to us, compared with the four minutes ABC devoted to them between October 22 and November 23, according to an early report from Mickiewicz's research project.

"We loom tremendously large in their news," says Mickiewicz. "For them, we are *the* other country in the world." Even when the topic is a peace demonstration in West Germany or a riot in Chile, America's involvement is often emphasized. The cold

war message has a vast reach; as many as half of all Soviet adults watch *Vremya*, Mickiewicz estimates. The program is carried on both national networks at once, usually for a half hour, but often expanding to 40 or 50 minutes, not including sports and weather reports. In Russia proper, two thirds of the homes are tuned in.

While keeping an eye on the capitalists, the Soviets seemed less preoccupied with their own domestic affairs than we did with ours during the month of broadcasts analyzed. The Soviets spent slightly more than half of their time on domestic issues, while ABC spent almost three fourths on ours. (ABC's domestic coverage may have been swelled by the Presidential election held halfway through the period, but Mickiewicz says the asymmetry she found in the newscasts also has turned up between Soviet and U.S. print media at other times.)

"We tend to view them as isolated and parochial, and think of ourselves as being open and embracing," says Mickiewicz. "What surprised me is that they cover so much more of the world than we do." During the month, *Vremya* covered in some way 53 countries while ABC covered 30. Of course, the substance of the

coverage (also being studied at Emory) is often radically different. So are the Soviets' criteria for choosing what countries to cover. The breadth of coverage may be intended to impress domestic viewers with the nation's global concerns and also lend prestige to small countries for diplomatic purposes, Mickiewicz speculates.

Other aspects of Soviet news will be analyzed as Mickiewicz's research team continues to monitor the primary Soviet television network with financial assistance from the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation. Mickiewicz, an authority on Soviet media (and dean of Emory's graduate school), says the team's findings about Soviet media help explain an interesting policy debate going on within the Soviet hierarchy.

The leaders have learned through polls that their people are keenly interested in the West. And some officials acknowledge that constant news reports about the West are responsible, even though the reports typically emphasize America's nuclear bellicosity and social decay. According to published documents Mickiewicz has seen, the hierarchy is reconsidering how much of the West television should show. STEVE BEHRENS

RCA Corners the Sky

Commercial stations get an offer they can't refuse.

FOR 10 years RCA American Communications ("Americom") has been the world's primary distributor of cable programming. Now the company aspires to play a similar role in commercial television. The RCA subsidiary is offering each of the country's 841 commercial stations a free 3.7 meter satellite receiving dish and \$1,000 toward installation costs. For their part, the stations must promise to keep the dishes trained on Satcom K-2, which RCA will launch in December as one of the first satellites in the Ku-band of super high frequencies.

"No catch," RCA promises in its invitation to stations. "By accepting and installing a Ku-band antenna to receive Satcom K-2, you will help us establish program distribution to virtually every commercial TV station." When enough

stations come aboard, RCA will have built a network for non-network programming.

At present, most syndicated programs are "bicycled"—a distributor mails tapes to every station that has bought his program—or beamed via the thousands of microwave relay towers that dot the country at 50 mile intervals. The syndicated program most widely distributed by satellite, Paramount TV's *Entertainment Tonight*, has a "network" of 151 stations that receive the show nightly. But most satellite distribution of broadcast programming is done on an ad-hoc basis.

This could change significantly, given RCA's initiative and Satcom K-2's physical advantage: Receiving dishes for Ku-band satellites are significantly smaller than those using the established C-band (10 feet in diameter, compared with 16 to 30 feet). The smaller size enables stations

to install the free antenna on studio roofs rather than at distant transmitter sites.

Americom will turn over four of K-2's 16 transponders to its parent company, which owns NBC. Three quarters of that network's affiliates are already interconnected through satellites owned by Satellite Business Systems. These and NBC's remaining affiliates will move to RCA's satellite shortly after its launch.

United Satellite Systems Broadcasting (USSB), which will lease as many as 10 K-2 channels, plans to use RCA's satellite to provide independent stations with a diet of syndicated programs, starting in 1986. The agreement calls for USSB, a division of Hubbard Broadcasting, initially to lease four RCA transponders for some \$75 million over six years. If business booms as USSB expects, it will exercise its option on the six remaining transponders. RICHARD BARBIERI

If You Can't Beat 'Em . . .

Cable operators have begun doing business with their competitors.

IN ITS years of feasting, just a scant while ago, the cable industry could afford to sneer or snarl at competitive media, just as the broadcast industry had done to cable in earlier days. But this is a desultory era for cable programmers and operators, with new systems grinding ever so slowly to completion, and old promises disappearing conveniently into the small print. Suddenly cooperation is looking like a more sensible policy than hostility. In a striking change of heart, cable operators and programmers have recently joined forces with the private cable, VCR, and satellite dish industries in order to drum up new business.

Private cable, or SMATV, has been a bee in cable operators' bonnets for several years, since the two perform the same service, often in the same area. (SMATV operators wire hotels, motels, hospitals, and apartment complexes, and bring in programming via satellite dish

like a cable operator.) Traditionally, pay cable programmers kept affiliates happy by refusing to sell to SMATV operators. But a year ago, Showtime/TMC broke ranks and declared that it would sell to private cable. And this past February HBO also took the leap. Programmers simply could no longer afford to ignore SMATV. Close to a million people now receive programming through private cable, and HBO estimated that it was forgoing up to \$100 million a year.

But HBO has chosen a cautious method of pursuing that \$100 million. The company announced that while it would sell programming directly to the very few SMATV firms that operate in more than one area, it would do the rest of its marketing through local cable affiliates. If the affiliate doesn't want to break bread with an enemy, says HBO spokesman Al Levy, "then that is the long and short of it." Since the announcement, very few cable operators have offered HBO or Cine-

Glenn Jones, head of Jones Intercable



max to SMATV systems. At the moment HBO seems as reluctant to offend current affiliates as it is eager to get new ones. That calculus may change if SMATV keeps growing and cable does not.

Meanwhile, Jones Intercable, a multi-system operator with 460,000 subscribers, announced in April that it would test-market a package of two pay services with a video-cassette recorder. This is something like giving away free cookies with a diet plan, since the increased use of VCRs is generally considered liable, in part, for the lack of growth of pay services. But the move seemed a recognition of the VCR's tremendous market power, and, as Jones chief executive Glenn Jones put it, "We see a great deal of synergy with VCRs and cable."

The plan, which is being offered to 50,000 subscribers in four cable systems, provides a choice among five pay channels, as well as the use of a General Electric VCR, for \$44.95. In the largest of the four systems, Oxnard, California, it now costs subscribers \$33 a month for two pay services, so the VCR costs only an additional \$12. If the subscriber sticks with the plan for two years, he will own the VCR outright. The viewer's enthusiasm for the recorder is thus used to make him a convert to pay cable. And Jones will also turn a profit on each recorder sold.

Finally, HBO has declared a truce in its war with the 800,000 or so owners of home satellite dishes. In May, HBO announced that it had authorized its cable affiliates to act as sales agents to dish owners, as they already are to SMATV operators. Until recently satellite-dish owners have been picking cable signals off the air with impunity, but both HBO and Showtime/TMC have announced plans to scramble their signals to prevent piracy. Dish owners will be able to purchase descramblers either from a private firm or from the cable affiliate (whose own device will unscramble the signal for cable subscribers). In either case, they will have to contact the cable operator in order to have the descrambler activated. Coding the signal should thus convert pirates into subscribers and create a whole new market for HBO.

JAMES TRAUB



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The explosion of electronic media has ushered in the dazzling second age of television. A new order of video communications is taking shape with cable, satellites, videotex, computers, and home video sweeping across the electronic landscape still dominated by broadcast television. Everything is on fast-forward today—technology, business, policy-making.

This means that our world is changing even more dramatically than it did with the arrival of television.

Only one magazine, CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATIONS, covers these exciting times incisively and authoritatively. Edited by Les Brown, formerly of The New York Times and author of numerous books on television, CHANNELS gives you more than vital information in a clear and lively manner—it is the guidance you need in a perplexing new world of media.

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C-SPAN, Tarheel Style

North Carolinians tune in and talk back to their politicians.



Governor James Martin (second from left) appeared on OPEN/net in April.

GOVERNOR JAMES MARTIN of North Carolina recently held his largest town meeting ever, with participants from all over the state. The forum took place on OPEN/net, a two-hour program originating in Raleigh and carried on 80 North Carolina cable systems and one public radio station. It gives residents a chance not only to see state decisions being made, but also to participate. From 8:00 to 9:00 on Friday nights, viewers can watch prerecorded public meetings on such issues as toxic waste, state parks, day care standards, and children's mental health. In the hour that follows, viewers can call in questions and comments to a panel of state legislators. On a recent show, lawmakers answered parents' questions about child support legislation.

Since its beginning a year ago, OPEN/net, the Open Public Events Network, has not lacked for callers on any of its programs. The cable systems that carry it

reach a potential audience of two million viewers.

Like C-SPAN, the national cable network that covers Congress, OPEN/net is fulfilling one of cable's blue sky promises: to bring state government to the people and make officials accessible to the electorate.

Funded by the State Agency for Public Telecommunications, private foundations, and trade groups, OPEN/net is budgeted at \$4,000 a week and is offered free to cable systems. Its largest expense is for satellite transponder time. Various local newscasters appear as moderators during the call-in segment.

In a program aired after a series of damaging tornadoes had hit the state, OPEN/net abandoned its scheduled discussion and provided an emergency call line. For three hours, state emergency managers took calls from as far away as California, where viewers with satellite dishes were able to watch. Several callers offered donations, others sought information on relatives in the area.

Program director Ben Kittner says the idea is attracting interest in other states. He is already working with programmers developing similar shows in Pennsylvania, Texas, Arkansas, and Minnesota.

In providing a direct line to state officials all the way up to the governor, and a chance to observe them closely as they answer questions about higher taxes and fewer state services, OPEN/net and its offspring might just improve the way we do politics.

C. BLAIR PALESE

Retirement by Tape

Robert Townsend finds a way to get off the road.

ROBERT TOWNSEND says he's been trying to retire for 20 years. But after leaving the presidency of Avis Rent-A-Car in 1965, he wrote *Up the Organization*, a best seller whose provocative ideas on corporate management made Townsend a hot property on the lecture circuit. His retirement has been on hold ever since.

Now, at age 64, he has come up with "The Robert Townsend Video Survival Kit," a series of 10 video cassettes that captures his singular blend of iconoclasm

and business savvy. The kit, being distributed by Seven Tables Ltd. of Reno, Nevada, features Townsend's advice on a variety of issues, from incentive compensation to executive insubordination, and is intended as a training tool for actual and aspiring corporate managers. By creating the package, Townsend has also come up with what may be an infallible strategy for finally getting off the road and gaining that long-sought retirement: In person, his sagacity costs \$10,000 a lecture; on tape, it's only \$1,000 for the works.

JEFFREY L. WOLF

Perennial Bicentennials

TV's next celebration may have more substance than the last one.

AMERICA'S BICENTENNIAL NINE years ago was little more than a big party, with fireworks bursting above tall sailing ships, and kids painting fire hydrants to look like Revolutionary War soldiers.

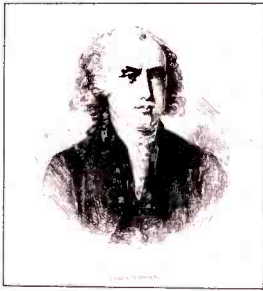
The observance could have dealt with equality, revolution, and other powerful themes, but it mostly celebrated the start of a successful war against Great Britain, says Columbia University historian Richard B. Morris. Its emphasis was less on substance and more on hurrah.

Things may be different two years from now when the U.S. Constitution's anniversary rolls around, partly because of commemorative television programs now being planned. About a dozen producers are seeking funds to make bicentennial shows for PBS, which has already carried Fred Friendly's all-star seminar series *The Constitution: That Delicate Balance*. And a network producer has plans for a movie based on Professor Morris's forthcoming book *Witnesses at the Creation*.

Lou Reda, who worked with Civil War historian Bruce Catton on the CBS miniseries *The Blue and the Gray* two years ago, has in mind a comparable adaptation of Morris's book, which tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, who pamphleteered for ratification of the Constitution in the *Federalist Papers*. Reda and his partners at Capital Cities Productions want to show what the Founding Fathers "went through" during the Constitutional Convention that hot Philadelphia summer.

For the bicentennial, television will dress up some actors as Washington and Franklin, to be sure, but even more it will broadcast sober talk about how the "Living Constitution" affects Americans today. This seems to be many producers' "reflex reaction" against the conventional historical drama, says Sheila Mann, executive director of Project '87, a coordinating office set up by the American Political Science Association and the American Historical Association. New

Americans will be seeing more of James Madison in coming years.



York public television station WNET, for instance, is planning a short series of reports on contemporary constitutional questions and hopes Bill Moyers will be available to host it. (Moyers, who's under exclusive contract to CBS till mid-November 1986, says he has made no commitment on the series.)

William Peters, a former network documentary producer who now heads Yale University Films, is planning a hybrid program, probably for PBS, that combines aspects of drama and documentary, but is decidedly not a docudrama. He plans to use the format he developed for ABC's 1976 program *Suddenly an Eagle*. An actor-narrator in modern dress would deliver dramatic, key speeches from 1787, punctuated by "footnotes," with actors portraying Lincoln and other leaders commenting on how the same constitutional issues later affected their times.

This approach carries more weight than a standard historical drama, as Peters sees it. "Americans raised on movies tend to think of drama as fiction. The more superbly it's done, the more they think so. But our technique does not allow you to think it's fiction."

Peters wants to get his show on the air next year, as background material for the celebration. Already this year historians have held minor celebrations marking lesser events that occurred before the 1787 convention. The biggest splashes will probably come on May 25 and September 17, 1987—anniversaries of the convention's start and of the Constitution's signing. Thereafter we can expect constant bicentennial windings for every event in the Republic's past.

But it won't be long before the bicentennials have to make way temporarily for a bigger party, says Sheilah Mann. "Come 1992, we have the *quincennial* of Christopher Columbus discovering America." And, considering how long it takes to find funds for a public television series, it's none too early to start the hunt. In fact, WGBH in Boston already has its first grant for programs to mark Columbus's 500th. S.B.

The Downs and Ups of Public Service

Decline in Peabody entries began with deregulation.

FOR THE PROFESSIONAL broadcaster, no award carries more prestige than the Peabody. A Peabody means that a broadcaster has done the exceptional, whether in entertainment, cultural, or informational programming, or in the performance of public service, because he's been measured against the field by an informed jury.

Whenever a broadcaster's right to his license is questioned, he flashes his Peabody in confutation. A Peabody not only makes a station operator feel right proud but also makes him feel a bit more secure as a licensee.

So it is curious that in the last four years the annual submissions in the George Foster Peabody Awards competition have declined steadily, and in some categories quite drastically. In radio the number of entries seeking the award dropped 37 percent over the last three years. In television, public service programming went down 31 percent in a single year. What's the reason?

"The trends are pretty clear," says Barry Sherman, an associate director of the Peabody Awards and an assistant professor of television at the University of Georgia, which administers the awards. "There's a direct linear relationship between the decline in Peabody submissions and deregulation." The dropoff in important radio programs began as soon as radio was deregulated in 1981, he said, and it happened again with television when it was deregulated three years later.

Public service used to be the leading category in the Peabody competition, says Sherman, but now the shift is to entertainment and documentary. In the three years following radio deregulation, public service entries went down 28 percent. And one year after the FCC lifted its guidelines encouraging public service, news, and local TV programs, public service entries dropped from 122 to 84.

But if this seems an indictment of an industry making hay in a permissive, pro-business regulatory climate, it is belied by Group W Television, one of the companies keeping broadcasting's venerable public-service tradition alive. A longtime keeper of the flame, Group W has just kicked off what is perhaps the largest and most significant public-service campaign in more than a decade.

It's an effort in mass education on the

importance of donating human organs to medicine, now that miraculous advances have been made in transplant surgery. The creation of a local station, KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh, the project has been pumped into a national campaign by Lawrence Fraiberg, president of the Group W television stations, who saw its possibilities for saving thousands of lives every year. The object of the campaign is to make people commit to something their forebears never had reason to think about—leaving behind their organs to prolong the lives of others.

Fraiberg offered the entire Group W campaign of spot announcements, news features, and full-length programs free to all stations, and found close to 120 takers around the country. Most will supplement the Group W materials with broadcasts of their own, tied in with local medical institutions, to create awareness of those waiting for donated organs locally. The keystone of the campaign is a documentary, "Second Chance," airing in June, which addresses public misconceptions about organ donations, legal questions, and the need for family concurrence with the wishes of deceased donors.

So, paradoxically, just when public-service broadcasting is in decline it is also rising to heights. Fair enough, especially if Group W's campaign helps bring about an awareness that can save thousands and, in the process, remind fellow broadcasters of the medium's awesome potential for good. L.B.



Brian Reames (left), a heart transplant recipient featured in *Second Chance*.

Cable and the Cities: A Clash of Rights

by Nicholas P. Miller and Larrine S. Holbrooke

THE RULES of the cable television game may be turned inside-out in the course of a legal tournament now being played in federal courthouses across the land. Cable companies are challenging municipal authority over the medium. If the cable operators prevail, they will have broadened their First Amendment protection while gutting the authority of local governments to franchise and regulate them.

The contest effectively began when a cable company called Preferred Communications decided to ignore the Los Angeles franchising process and assigned itself the south-central section of the city. Los Angeles had divided the city into 14 sections with intentions of awarding each to a single cable company. When Preferred was rebuffed by utilities companies in its attempts to hang cable without a franchise, it took the city to court. It alleged, in *Preferred Communications Inc. v. City of Los Angeles*, that the city's franchising process violated both the antitrust laws and Preferred's First Amendment rights to disseminate news. But the district court judge saw no violations of the law or the Constitution and threw the case out without a trial.

Victory came when Preferred appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which disagreed with the district court and sent the case back for trial. In doing so, the court also set forth its views on cable operators' free-speech rights in unusual detail. It held that exclusive Los Angeles franchises would violate the First Amendment unless the city could prove there is room for only one cable on utility poles or in buried trenches. There has never been any serious doubt that the First Amendment protects certain cable activities from regulation—those involving program content—but the question remains whether the First Amendment restrains other government regulation of cable.

The circuit court handed down its deci-

sion on March 1, and cable operators rejoiced that it granted them full First Amendment protection. But the jubilation may be premature, because the court decision does not provide an accurate account of the developing First Amendment law for cable.

The issue did not get a full hearing in Los Angeles. The question before the appeals court was only whether Preferred should have a trial in a lower court. Like all such decisions, it wasn't based on the merits of the case; the court was bound by law to accept Preferred's allegations as true.

It also didn't address two key questions, the first being whether cable TV is

THE INDUSTRY SEEKS TO BREAK MUNICIPAL FRANCHISING POWER.

a natural monopoly. Cable has been treated as such since its beginning on the presumption that it is the kind of business, like a power utility, that makes economic sense only as a monopoly.

The other question yet to be answered is equally important: What difference does it make to cable's First Amendment rights if it is a natural monopoly? As a monopoly, it must be regulated to protect the public interest. And it is cable's monopoly status that seems to distinguish its legal foundation from those of the print and broadcasting media. The Supreme Court declared long ago that each medium must be assessed for First Amendment purposes by standards suited to it, for each may present its own problems.

Perhaps the most striking difference in the First Amendment treatment of the media is the government licensing of broadcasters, a requirement that would be unthinkable if applied to newspapers. Would-be cable operators like Preferred naturally seek to redirect First Amendment analysis of cable along the lines of the print media, since the franchising process could not survive if print precedents were applied to cable. Municipalities,

on the other hand, would prefer a jurisprudence akin to the broadcasting model.

Changes in cable's First Amendment status would have profound significance for its future. If courts adopt the implications of the *Preferred* decision—that is, if they apply the First Amendment to cable as it now applies to print media—much of the unique promise of the medium may never be fulfilled.

For one thing, cable would remain a monopoly in most communities for economic reasons, but it would be an unregulated monopoly. Like any unregulated business, it would offer only profitable services. Relieved of the obligation to provide public access and educational channels, many cable systems would drop them. Without requirements for mega-channel systems, many specialized "narrowcasting" channels would disappear. No longer required to wire poor neighborhoods as well as affluent ones, cable operators would, in effect, increase the information gap between rich and poor.

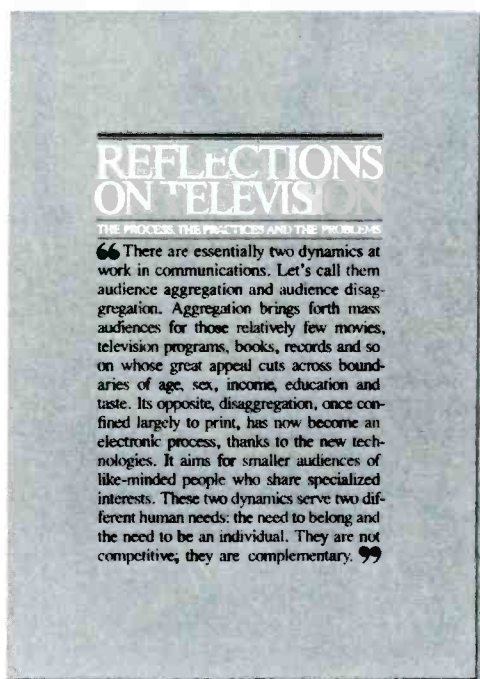
Many cable operators cheered the *Preferred* verdict, but the reaction seems premature and a bit puzzling. If the views that, in their opinion, are articulated in *Preferred* eventually became settled national law, cable operators with existing franchises could find themselves in very uncertain situations where any operator meeting minimal standards could come in and build competing systems in the most profitable sections of an existing franchise. Price and service competition would be the order of the day.

The issue of cable's First Amendment status is getting an extra push toward resolution by Harold R. Farrow, an Oakland attorney who has raised it in numerous lawsuits, including *Preferred*, on behalf of cable companies. But Farrow's firm has yet to win a case where the trial judge examined the evidence. In fact, he lost a case in Jefferson City, Missouri, and two requests for injunctions in Sacramento.

These rulings have been handed down early in the legal tournament. So far, none of the cases has gone to the U.S. Supreme Court and definitively established cable's status, but one likely will. ■

Nicholas P. Miller and Larrine S. Holbrooke, of the Washington, D.C. firm of Miller & Young, represent cities in cable franchise matters.

If you think television executives should have a good talking to, you'll want to read this book.



The occasion was unusual in itself. Gene Jankowski, President of the CBS/Broadcast Group, went to a special New York University seminar to open himself to any and all questions about television posed by a panel of faculty and students, headed by NYU President Dr. John Brademas.

What was discussed? Issues of television ratings, program selection, entertainment, news, social impact, the government's role, new technologies and more.

What came out of it? New understandings all around the table, for CBS and NYU alike, as conceptions and preconceptions came up for rigorous examination.

The whole dialogue has now been edited and compiled in a book, "Reflections on Television: The Process, the Practices and the Problems," which we hope will contribute to public understanding of how the medium actually works. Individual copies are available, upon request, to CBS/Broadcast Group Communications, Dept. B, 51 West 52 Street, New York, NY 10019.

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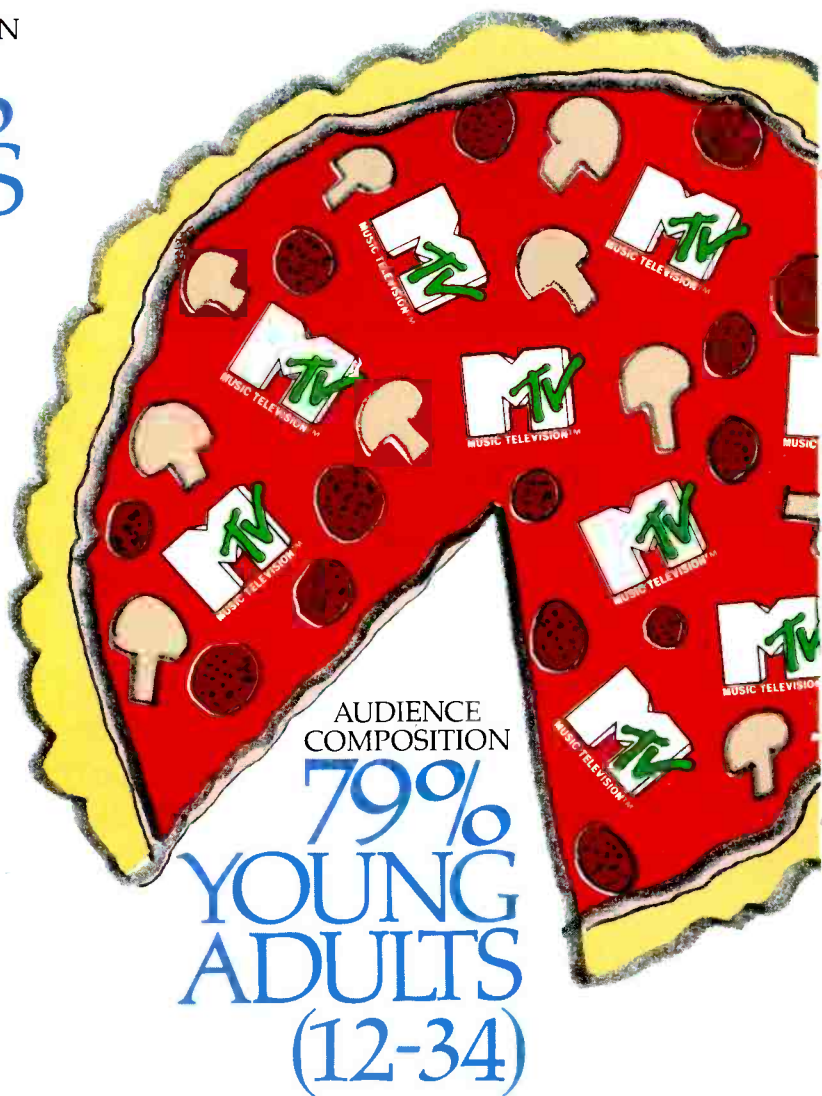
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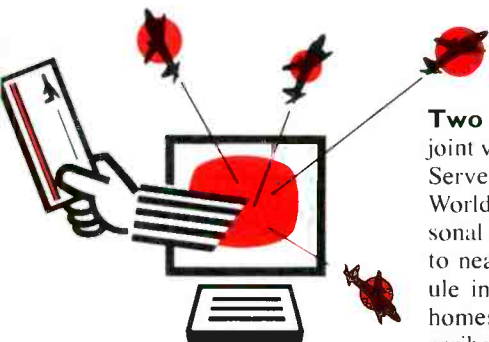
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Dallas
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SOURCES: MTV based on NHI Diary, Nov. 1984 2+ 7A-1A. NICKELODEON based on NHI Diary, Feb. 1985 2+ 7A-8P. VH-1 based on MTV Networks Inc. estimates, Feb. 1985 12+ Total Day. Nielsen subject to qualifications available upon request.

QUOVIDE

SHORT TAKES ON NEW TECH



Two on the aisle. A new joint venture between CompuServe videotex and Trans World Airlines allows personal computer owners access to nearly every airline schedule in the world. From their homes, CompuServe subscribers can reserve tickets on

any of 100,000 flights. In its first five months the 24-hour service attracted 3,600 of CompuServe's 185,000 customers. Subscribers pay \$40 initially and about \$30 per hour every time they tap the database.

Drive-in movies. VCR owners in Glendora, California can now reserve rental tapes by phone and pick them up without leaving their cars. Using charge cards, customers of Video Movies to Go can rent tapes and return them at any time by dropping them into bins outside the store. Rental dates are tracked by computers and late charges billed automatically. The firm claims it can process a rental order in less than two minutes.

Take-out only. A video-cassette dealer in Erie, Pennsylvania has been ordered to stop allowing customers to rent tapes and view them in his store. Several film studios had sued Maxwell's Video Showcase, which maintained 40 viewing rooms in each of its two stores. The court ruled that the showings constituted "public performances" in violation of the Copyright Act.

Look, no hands. Voice Control Systems Inc. plans to sell a \$500 voice-activated dialer that allows car phone users to place calls without taking their eyes off the road. The system's microphone is near the dashboard, and most of its circuitry, including a specialized computer chip, is in the car's trunk. The driver merely utters the word "dial" and a phone number, and the automatic dialer does the rest.



New news. Data Cable Corp. is test-marketing an international news service for personal computer users. Press X Press will cull stories from Western and Communist news agencies and send them by cable to homes and businesses for a \$20 monthly fee. Using a satellite dish, the Denver-based company will pick up news, weather, sports, and financial stories from the Cable News Network, Time Inc., Xinhua (China), and Tass (Soviet Union) news services. The service will be available nationally starting in September.

Read all about it. Using a simple technique it calls "data-burst," a Minneapolis-St. Paul public television station lets viewers use their VCRs to do supplemental reading. After journalists discuss timely newspaper articles on a weekly news review show, KTCA-TV rapidly broadcasts close-ups of the articles for viewers to record and read later, using their VCRs' "freeze frame" feature.

Reusable discs. Researchers at Hitachi Laboratories in Tokyo are developing a new method of recording and erasing material on optical discs. Video and audio discs now in use store their material in a series of permanent physical depressions. In contrast, discs using a new family of metal alloys developed by Hitachi record information as heat-sensitive spots of color that can be changed again and again.



Larger type. A software program that enlarges the letters on a computer screen as much as 10 times is helping people with impaired vision. "PC Lens" costs \$500 and can be used for word processing and

business spreadsheets. The designer, Arts Computer Products of Boston, has sold 1,500 copies in a year.

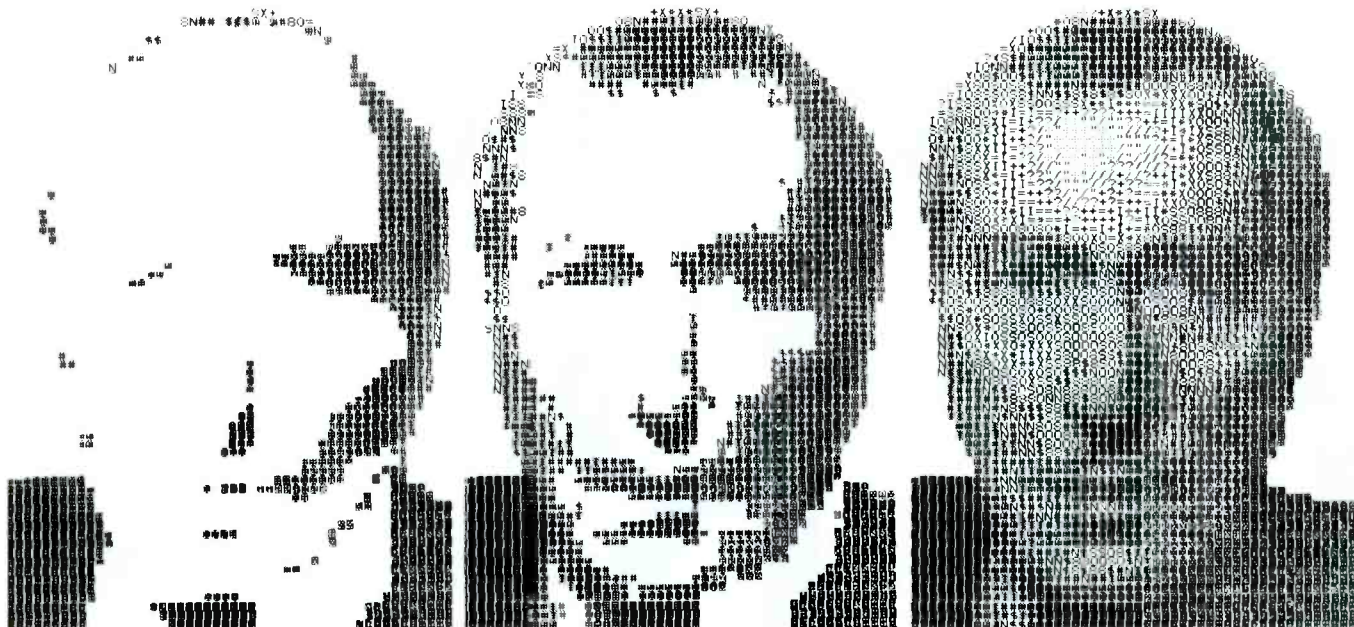
Reach for the stars. Amateur astronomers will soon be able to receive clear images from distant galaxies on their personal-computer screens by buying time on an orbiting observatory. Developed by the Independent Space Research Group, an amateur astronomy organization established in part by students at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the telescopic satellite is scheduled to be shuttled into space by 1987. Although not the first telescope in space, it will be the first available to amateur astronomers. Necessary equipment will cost computer owners about \$500. To save money, the group is building the satellite with "off-the-shelf" parts.

Faceprints. Nashville parents are providing the local police with videotapes of their children, to be used in case of abduction. The tapes—more than 1,000 are now on file—will supplement more conventional ways of identifying missing children, such as fingerprints and dental records.

Newspaper for the blind. An experimental program at Sweden's Chalmers University is making a daily newspaper available to blind people. An FM radio station broadcasts the contents of the local daily, *Göteborgs-Posten*, in digital form to tiny radio receivers attached to home computers, which can absorb and store the entire newspaper in a few minutes. Using special software, blind persons can listen to articles read aloud by a synthesized voice or can read computer printouts embossed in Braille.

CYNTHIA CATTERSON AND C. BLAIR PALESE

Javier Romero



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ARBITRON RATINGS



THE MEDIA

G R A

by Ben H. Bagdikian

The country's news columnists have had an instant revelation: After 20 years of reporting on take-overs and attempted take-overs of media companies, they are finally conceding in front-page stories that the power to shape the nation's news and popular culture is up for sale to the highest bidder. Editors who have long been reporting about mergers and acquisitions among the country's newspapers, magazines, broadcast properties, and book publishers are now surprised to find that all this consolidation may have consequences for the national character as well as the earnings statements.

When Capital Cities acquired ABC it was obvious that Peter Jennings had a new boss on the nightly news. But there were public assurances, as there had been for other mergers over the years, that the public had nothing to worry about, since Capital Cities was already in the media business. The recent purchases of Teleprompter Inc. by Westinghouse; the Southern Progress magazines by Time Inc; Ziff-Davis by Rupert Murdoch and CBS; *U.S. News & World Report* by Mortimer Zuckerman, and *The New Yorker* by S. I. Newhouse Jr. were accompanied by the same reminders that the new owners were already in the business. Behind this assurance stands the apparent assumption that an inflexible morality among media owners restrains

Ben H. Bagdikian, author of The Media Monopoly, teaches at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley.

them from unduly influencing news and entertainment.

It is an illusion without support in history or human nature. Gross propagandizing, it is true, can reduce profits. But where monopoly reigns, as in 98 percent of the cities with local papers, consumers have no alternative and owners have great latitude. Even owners in competitive situations will generally use their power for personal reasons if they feel that the stakes are high enough, or if their most passionate interests are involved. Some will even publicize their politics at the expense of profits, as William Randolph Hearst Jr. once did and as Rupert Murdoch does today. Yet the usual news

“

We now have a small group of powerful owners with remarkably similar political and social views.

”

reports on take-overs dwell almost entirely on which investment house won out, and how corporate dividends will be affected.

It is true that when Murdoch took over the *Chicago Sun-Times* the top editors and reporters reacted the way the Romans did to Alaric the Visigoth. Murdoch does have some peculiar ideas about what to feed the American public as “news.” But he was considered a flaming

exception, though in fact he is only less patient and subtle than most media owners in making his inroads on the editorial process. And now, of course, he's branching into television with his probable acquisition of the Metromedia stations.

The long silence on problems of concentrated media ownership ended dramatically when outsiders tried to break into a game previously reserved for original players. When the ultra-conservatives Jesse Helms and the Fairness in Media group said they would try to buy CBS in order to reshape the network's news along right-wing lines, the arcane truth that control of the mass media has serious social consequences suddenly became obvious to those who had neglected it before.

Building and using media empires is not a new phenomenon. Hearst and Pulitzer did it in the 19th century; Luce, Sarnoff, and dozens of others in the 20th. But something new began in the 1960s. Large newspaper chains, and then giant ones, began to buy one another, electronic firms bought book publishing houses, and big fish generally indulged their appetites for smaller ones. Soon media companies became large enough to diversify into other kinds of media with which they once competed. ABC boasted this year that its TV and radio networks each earn greater advertising revenues, and its magazine group carries more ad pages, than any competitor in their respective media, while its cable ventures make it the nation's largest supplier of cable programming. Cable and the other new media came under the control of companies with deeply vested interests in

**The power to shape
the nation's news and popular culture is
up for sale to the highest bidder.**

B

the old media, who found it in their interest to thwart innovations. This was why a regulation was adopted in 1971 prohibiting network ownership of cable systems. More recently, the development of teletext was effectively halted when most local stations refused to accept the teletext transmissions of CBS and NBC, fearing the viewers would tune out to use them during the commercial breaks.

The giants pursued these acquisitions for the same reason giants do it in soap and oil—a relatively small number of corporations, they know, can effectively control their market. But soap is only a commodity; those who control the media control information, knowledge, social values. It should come as no surprise that the social implications of media concentration receive such scanty news coverage.

Media corporations represent money: Daily papers and broadcasting have consistently been among the leading profit makers in American industry. And they represent power: The major media have enormous political and social influence. Those who control the media can make the most empty-headed political hack sound like a Founding Father and the most self-serving piece of legislation resemble the Golden Rule. What they dislike, they can ignore or condemn. To control the media is to control the attention of the American public.

Yet this issue rarely finds its way onto the front page or the evening news. In 1979, when American Express tried to take over McGraw-Hill, a major publisher of business magazines, Harold McGraw, chairman of the latter, publicly stated that it would be unwise for a major



banker to exercise control over news about banking. The tactic worked, but rarely since then has the forbidden issue of conflict of interest been raised in the mainstream media.

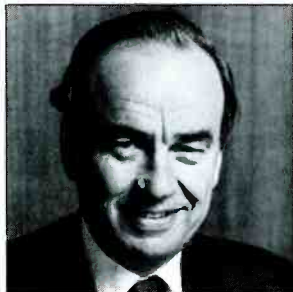
Journalists, who tend to be naive about owner influence, commonly deny the problem by saying, "No one tells me what to write." They seem to ignore editors, who are responsible to owners, who every day tell them what to cover and therefore what *not* to write. Journalists take exaggerated comfort from the few chains with moderately good records, such as Otis Chandler's Times Mirror and the Knight-Ridder newspapers, with 40 papers between them. They ignore the majority, who cut back real news and emphasize inexpensive fluff in order to maximize profits. The Thomson and Donrey chains, with 130 papers between them, are two of many examples.

Concentration of ownership continues. When I completed research on a book in 1981 there were 50 national and multinational corporations that controlled most of the 25,000 media outlets in the country (daily papers, magazines, radio and television stations and networks, book publishers, and movie studios). In the intervening four years the 50, by my informal calculation, have been reduced to 43, with the number getting smaller each year.

There are several dangers inherent in this trend. Democracies depend on the sort of rich mixture of information that can only come from a large number of owners with diverse views. Individuals are thus free to choose the ideas, the kinds of information, that suit their own needs and interests. Yet we now have a small group of powerful owners with remarkably similar political and social views. As a result, our major media probably offer the narrowest range of ideas available in any developed democracy.

Most media-owning giants have also invested heavily in other industries, or have on their boards executives from other industries. Among them are RCA and Gulf & Western, which own subsidiaries that produce defense products and have board members from the weapons industry; *The New York Times* and Time Inc., which have interlocking directorates with the oil and gas industry; and Gannett and Times Mirror, which interlock with space research. These are all industries whose profits are extremely sensitive to public opinion and govern-

ment policy. What a company's media subsidiary reports as news could seriously affect the parent's profitability. As the major media have become integrated into the top levels of the country's industrial and financial structures the problem has become more profound. And as more foreign interests buy into the American



When Murdoch took over the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the top editors reacted the way the Romans did to Alaric the Visigoth.

media—their participation is already significant in newspapers, magazines, and book publishing—the problem becomes global and influences the reporting of foreign affairs.

Since most of these firms are publicly traded on the stock market their stock can be bought by anyone with enough money or credit. The firms, in turn, must conform to the demands of Wall Street investors. Few big investors will tolerate low dividends while basic institutions are being built, so most companies are under pressure to show maximum short-term profits. That is not the way for a company to develop good television programs—or many other kinds of products, for that matter.

Media giants are more and more likely to own interests in several media. CBS, for example, is as ramified as ABC. Until recently each medium jealously watched other media, objecting publicly or through their lobbyists in Washington to every sign of unfair advantage gained by the competition. The broadcast networks, for example, used to ridicule the promise of cable at every turn. Now, when the government is virtually encouraging gigantism (through the FCC's rule allowing a single firm to own 12 television stations, for instance), all the watchdogs live incestuously in the same kennel.

The ultimate interest of any of these new media giants is to maintain the status quo, an interest that news coverage is sure to reflect. I don't mean to suggest that the chief executive officer of each media-owning corporation personally makes news assignments or edits stories and broadcasts reports. That would be impractical and unnecessary. He merely hires and fires the people who do. And surely many owners are inhibited by professional standards, though the standards

vary widely from one organization to another. Owners will not quash every piece of news that displeases them, if only because crude censorship can damage their reputations. Nevertheless, when it comes to the central interests of the owners, management does not hesitate to override the policies or convictions of

professional employees. In 1974, for example, Funk & Wagnalls, a book publishing subsidiary of Readers' Digest Inc., cancelled a book one month before publication because its anti-advertising message might have offended *Readers' Digest* advertisers. In 1978 staff members of the Horvitz newspaper chain were ordered not to cover or report on a public lawsuit embarrassing to owners of the newspaper chain. Television news rarely reports on issues concerning broadcasting—deregulation, for a recent example. There's good reason for this: The industry is better off when the public is not too well informed.

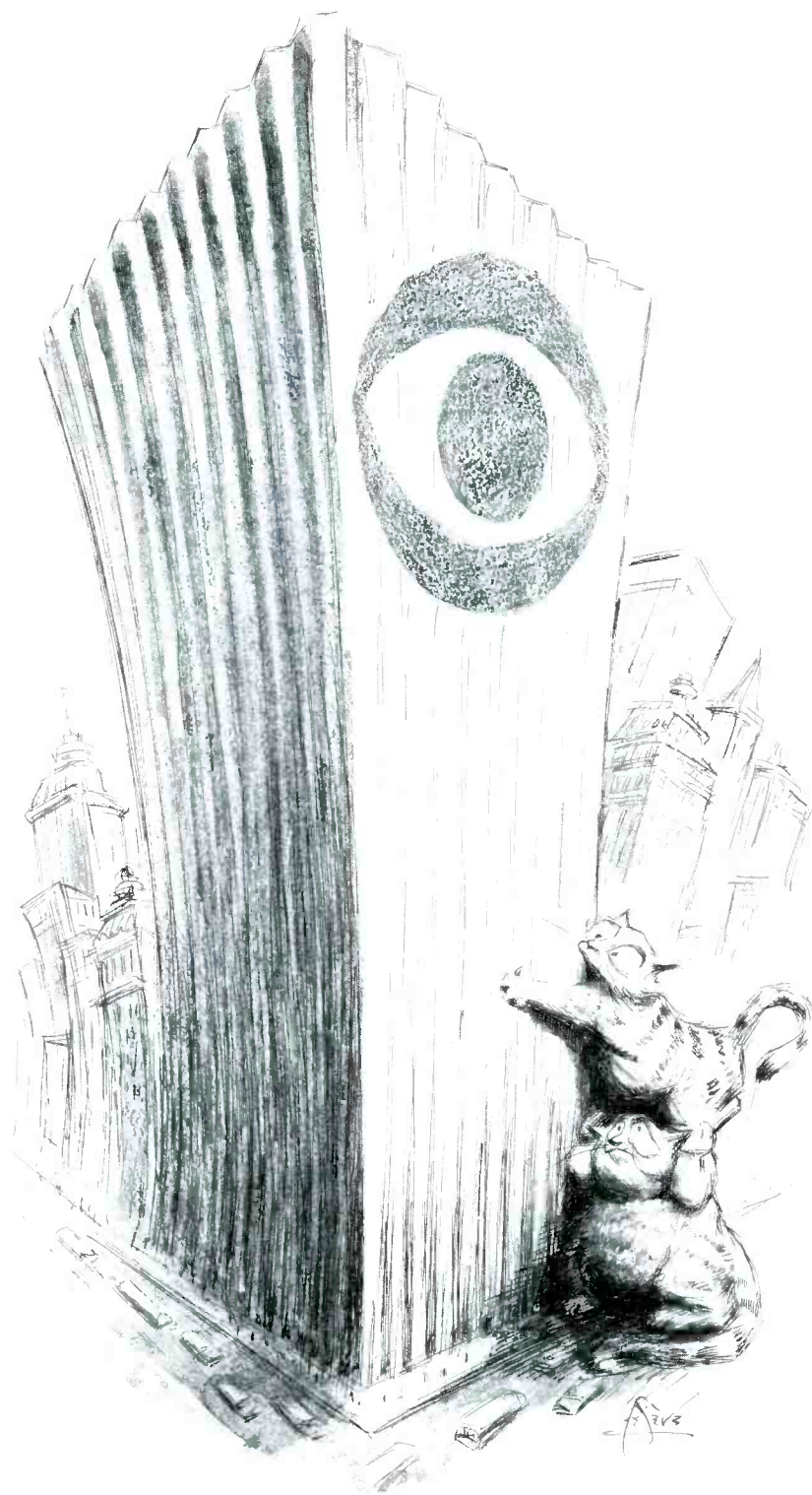
The encouragement that the Federal Communications Commission and the Reagan Administration are giving to the dominating few in the mass media represents an alarming return to the early days of monopoly in broadcasting. Radio began in the United States as a monopoly of the Navy, and was replaced in 1919 by a commercial cartel consisting primarily of AT&T, Westinghouse, and General Electric, which in turn created the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). It took governmental action to compel a more competitive, democratic broadcast system. With the new communications act in 1927, newcomers felt welcome. A young cigar firm executive, William Paley, formed CBS to compete with RCA's broadcast arm, NBC. And an FCC order had to come down before NBC would divest itself of one of its two radio networks. The divestiture led to the creation, in 1943, of the American Broadcasting Company. It will take similar action to prevent broadcasting and other major media from returning to the unhealthy, primitive state of diminished competition in news, ideas, and popular culture. ■

TED & JESSE & CBS

by Les Brown

A Charles Barsotti cartoon in the last issue of *Channels* depicted four working-class fellows hoisting a few at the bar, and one of them saying, "Hey, why don't we buy NBC?" We chuckle at the absurdity of it. But then a swashbuckling businessman from Atlanta runs into the street yelling that he's going to buy CBS, and instead of being amused at the absurdity of it, everyone—the press, Wall Street, the whole broadcast industry—goes wild with excitement.

We've all learned to take Ted Turner seriously ever since he turned a frail and obscure Atlanta UHF station into the world's first cable superstation. Those who considered Turner just dumb-lucky at the time surely became believers a few years later when he created the first all-news television network, CNN, after such big-time operators as CBS, Post-Newsweek, and Time Inc. considered the idea and decided it wouldn't fly. Even more amazing than the fact that it *did* fly was that Turner's Cable News Network established itself as the fourth major television news organization in a period of only 18 months, even though it reached fewer than 30 percent of American households. You take a guy like Turner seriously when ABC and Group W throw their combined weight against him in the



**What if 'unfriendly' forces
were to capture
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abc ABC NEWS CLOSEUP THURSDAY JUNE 6 8PM/7PM **CENTRAL & MOUNTAIN**

Magnum:

The Champagne of TV?

Many dismiss the Tom Selleck series as just another

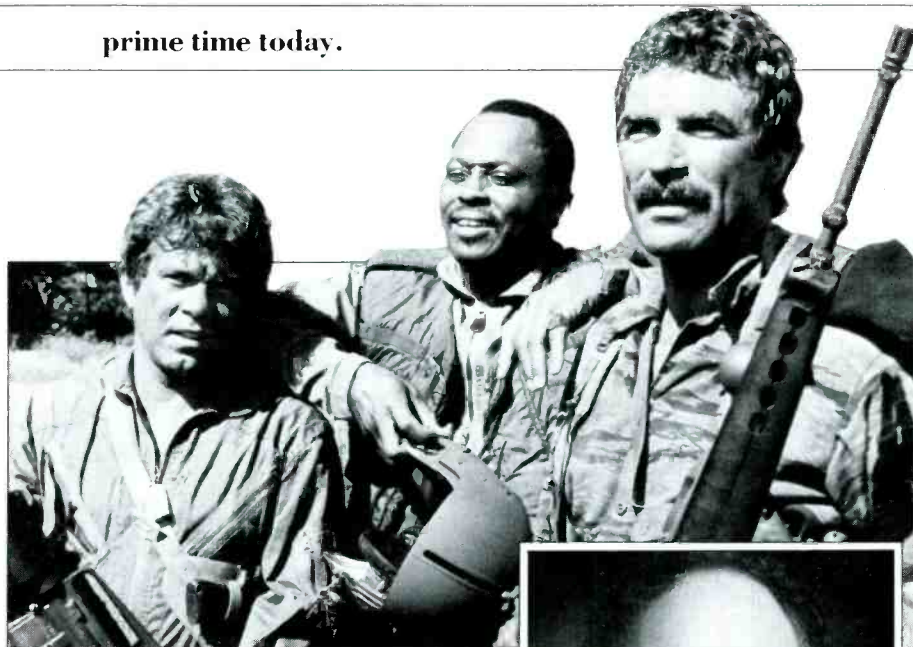
'hunk' show, but a leading scholar explains why he regards it as the best series in prime time today.

by Horace M. Newcomb

TWICE IN RECENT YEARS, *Magnum, P.I.* was nominated for an Emmy as the best dramatic series, but it never won. The show bides its time, content to be named, along with *Dallas*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *St. Elsewhere*, as a television production of high style. Content, too, to accept the offhand disdain of television columnists who can tolerate the high camp of the prime time soaps, who gush predictable praise for shows from the MTM studio, but cannot for the life of them understand why *Magnum* is allowed to keep such company. Last year the series took a long step toward recognition when Tom Selleck was named best actor in a dramatic series. The choice was appropriately applauded, for even the most reluctant critics agree that Selleck is much the center of the series and a superb television actor.

Magnum, P.I. premiered on CBS in December 1980, within a year of the network's cancellation of *Hawaii Five-O*, another drama set in the islands. Until NBC positioned *The Cosby Show* against it this past season, it was listed consistently among television's top 20 shows, drawing typical ratings of 19.1 (29% share), and it still ranked number 16 in 1984-85.

Horace M. Newcomb, a professor of radio-television-film at the University of Texas at Austin, is co-author with Robert S. Alley of The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American Television.



Macho with a difference (from left): Larry Manetti, Robert E. Mosley, and Tom Selleck. Co-creator Donald Bellisario (right): The show reflects his unorthodox approach.



The show has not done as well in the coastal cities as in middle America. Audiences attuned to the upscale urban wit of *Hill Street Blues* may stare with incredulity at my assertion that *Magnum* is an excellent, even the best, television series. To them, it's nothing more than a "hunk show," catering to viewers who want their men tall, their cars fast, and their guns hot. But it's far more than that.

Selleck stars as Thomas Magnum, a disillusioned former naval intelligence officer who struggles to make a living as a private detective. He survives primarily on the generosity of a writer of mystery novels, Robin Masters, who is never seen in the series. Magnum lives in the guest quarters of the Masters estate and engages in constant though affectionate antagonism with the estate manager, Jonathan Higgins, played by John Hillerman. Rick (Larry Manetti) and T.C. (Roger E. Mosley) round out the central cast as two

of *Magnum's* Vietnam combat buddies.

Extending beyond *Magnum* and his compatriots, the show has created a broad and varied fictional world. It is a world filled with the most conventional detective-story components—threatening thugs, lost children, and wandering spouses. It is a world crammed with humor, from slapstick to wordplay. And it is a world grounded in melodrama of the first order, inviting us to be as concerned about character, values, and emotions as about adventure and mystery.

This range of styles, in fact, may account for some of the perplexity on the part of reviewers. Tuning in on any given night they might encounter one of several

Magnum, P.I.s. Unless they return for some of the others they may miss the program's true innovations. Because so much on television is similar (and that's different from saying it's all the same), our tendency is to celebrate only the spectacular departures from the norm. Some of these shows, like true eccentrics, wear well. *All in the Family* is the best example. But as that show's history indicates, the most visible innovations succeed primarily in establishing their own conventions. Witness *Hill Street Blues* and *St. Elsewhere*. Their wonderful narrative experiments are now used primarily to rework again and again successful formulas—with the familiar world-wise, world-weary perspective, with irony as a way of being, with cynicism that passes for humor.

Magnum is different. Recently, for example, the series offered a two-part Return-to-Southeast-Asia episode—an almost obligatory journey for a dramatic series today—complete with realistic action, a macho sense of duty, and self-conscious soul-searching about America's past. A week later the series followed with a comic mystery focused on a recurring con-man character who *may* have been the ghost of a friend killed off three years before in one of the show's most famous serious episodes. To regular *Magnum* viewers this variety is not disconcerting. The series avoids predictability by exploring all the elements in its genre.

'We don't know why *Magnum* left the Navy after so many years,' Bellisario says. 'But we'll find out.'

All genres, of course, grow by responding to social and cultural shifts, reversing themselves, becoming ironic, sprouting new branches, redefining character patterns. Slowly the terrain of the form—the nearly infinite variations possible in a detective or western or science fiction story—is defined. In literature or film these developments take time, each instance marking itself in terms of all its



Higgins (John Hillerman) being gagged by two hoodlums. The show's unconventional storytelling allows minor characters to move into the foreground.

predecessors. In television, however, this range can appear within a single series.

In the traditional series this rarely occurs. Each episode stands by itself. Characters and situations develop only slightly, if at all. The coming of mini-series offered new possibilities for extending television narratives. *Dallas* and *Dynasty* push those possibilities in one direction, *Hill Street Blues* and *St. Elsewhere* in another. Both types can be called open-ended serials. They offer more complex worlds in which one episode's action can have consequences in a later episode. Because the stories continue from week to week, viewers can experience them as more probable, more "realistic" than conventional series.

Magnum uses this potential in a different way. Its creators have established and refined a new television form that stands between the traditional self-contained episodic forms and the open-ended serials. Call it the "cumulative narrative." One episode's events can greatly affect later events, but they're seldom directly tied together. Each week's program is distinct, yet each is grafted onto the body of the series, its characters' pasts.

"I'd love to tell you that these things are all thought out in advance," admits Donald Bellisario, executive producer and co-creator of the series. "The truth is it happens because of my style. It's pretty much a stylistic thing I do." Bellisario imprinted that style on the series as he wrote

or rewrote every script the first year and many since then, and supervised the editing of every show until this year.

"I don't have everything worked out when I begin to write," Bellisario says. "I sit down and see a scene and follow it where it takes me. It enables characters to develop in a greater way. And at the same time, I'm able to leave mysteries in the show. Sometimes I discover something I didn't realize was there." The same openness applies to the series as a whole, the producer adds. "It can go in different directions."

There is a clear *production economy* in the procedure. Although a cumulative narrative requires a producer to pay attention to its internal past, it is not as difficult to write and produce as a weekly open-ended serial with a linear plot. A serial's need to meld stories can play havoc with tight production schedules, while its multiple storylines and large casts can lead to cost overruns—the downfall of Steven Bochco, the recently deposed executive producer of *Hill Street Blues*. And unless recent experiments with *Dallas* prove otherwise, syndication is still dependent on self-contained episodes. They can be jumbled out of their original sequence and broadcast with little damage.

Magnum is not the only "cumulative." ABC could have had a powerful cumulative series with *Call to Glory*, but cancelled it this winter without making a good-faith attempt to develop an audience. The network should have learned from CBS's experience with *Cagney & Lacey*, the other notably successful cumulative. When that show was cancelled, its loyal and growing audience persuaded CBS to reconsider. *Cagney & Lacey's* partisans, I'm convinced, wanted to see more about the rich lives led by the two policewomen, not merely a standard police show.

Such satisfying familiarity and intimacy results from the powerful narrative economy available in a cumulative series. The producers, writers, directors, and, most importantly, the characters they create *remember* events from the fictional past. The past plays an active, significant role in the plots of the present. Nothing is lost. Everything is cross-referenced. And as characters remember, so do we.

What we remember is not merely that something happened. Rather, it is that each

moment in an episode I view can reveal something about the show's history.

In a great many instances, cumulative series expand into the past, explaining how the characters got to this place. In one sense, these series are *about* their own pasts. They don't need to recapitulate "last week's episode." The essential connections are not in the sequence of events, or in their causes and effects, but in their resonance. Each event reverberates with the harmonics of a hundred others. Tone and texture make the shows work, and liberate them from a repetitive style or motif. Seen in first run or rerun, they are more like a mosaic or a tapestry than a series. Viewing reruns out of sequence actually creates its own pleasures.

The private-eye genre often becomes, in this series, little more than a pretext for exuberant innovations of plot and form. Take, for example, last season's premiere episode. In the story by Bellisario, "Home from the Sea," Magnum paddles out to the Pacific on his surf-ski on the Fourth of July. In a voice-over narration he explains that he likes to be alone on this holiday. Paddling out to sea to prepare for a big race is as fine a way to be alone as he can imagine.

The series uses voice-over narration with particular effectiveness, providing a central perspective and permitting Magnum's ongoing moral dialogue with himself. In his narration of "Home from the Sea," Magnum analyzes certain family relations, inspects his own deepest secrets, and, finally, discovers how he can save his life. Once again, a narrative device becomes an exploration of the strongest sort of memory, and memory becomes our story.

When a rude power boater swamps him and he loses his ski, Magnum first thinks he can swim to shore. He is, after all, a powerful athlete, a former Navy football star, given to regular exercise and friendly competition (details all dropped into previous episodes). But when he discovers that a powerful current is sweeping him out to sea, he knows he must tread water until help arrives—if it does. He remembers, in flashback, a day when he was six years old. Off another shore of this same ocean, near San Diego, his father taught him to tread water beyond his endurance, pushing him to stay afloat for "just" five minutes.

From this recollection, we intercut re-



Cumulative narrative: Each show is grafted onto the characters' past, refining a new form that stands between episodic series and the 'open-ended' serial.

peatedly between Magnum's present predicament and various moments in his past. We also follow his three friends, Higgins, Rick, and T.C., as they slowly grow worried about his absence. They're drawn to his plight by an almost mystical sense of communication, a sense created from their awareness—and ours—of the bonds between the men, the past dangers shared, the affection expressed in constant, bickering banter.

When dawn comes, of course, they rescue him. Rick has "sensed" the location, and waits nearby in a boat. T.C. flies over in a helicopter and Higgins leaps out with a life preserver. Magnum, still in delirious conversation with his father after more than 21 hours in the water, refuses to be rescued until he completes the assigned task. He insists on another 30 seconds. His voice-over continues, challenging his absent father: "I made it, Dad. Why didn't you?" We learn that Magnum's father, a Navy pilot, died over Korea, and was buried with military honors on July 4th, 1951. This is why Magnum celebrates the holiday in seclusion. And perhaps this is why he went to Annapolis, then fought in Vietnam.

To the non-viewer, all this may sound maudlin, but for those familiar with the accumulated stories, a sudden revelation is an exercise in characterization and motivation. It explains much that we may have expected, it opens new areas for speculation. New information may, for example, have something to do with why Magnum seems unable to settle into a conventional post-Vietnam life. This, for Bellisario, is one of the "big topics" left

hanging, something to be explored later.

"We've never explained why Magnum left the Navy after so many years of being a successful officer. All we know is that he says he woke up one day at 33 and realized he'd never been 23. But the result is that he went from being a Navy officer, ramrod straight, to *boom*, that quick, being a private detective, a very offbeat sort of character. We don't know why he left. But we'll find out. It may be the final show of the series, but the reason will be there."

What is already clear to the audience, of course, is that whatever that original reason, it will have to take into account the character we've come to know. Magnum hates Navy bureaucrats, official pol-

Magnum, P.I.'s broad fictional world combines detective-story components with melodrama of the first order.

icy, and public posturing. His motivation for being a detective, like that of many fictional detectives before him, seems to relate to the disillusionment, the anger, and the violence of war. Because his war is the war of our own most recent past, it is quite possible to say that in being about memory and history, *Magnum* is about Vietnam.

For the most part the show takes what I

believe is a widely acceptable view of the war: Vietnam was a mistake. Good people were lost. The troops were thwarted by the ineptitude and ambition of politicians and high-ranking officers. Soldiers may have had no business there, but once committed they fought for their buddies. In keeping with this critique of the war, clearly less political than those of the '60s, the program deliberately tries to counter the all-too-easy representation of Vietnam veterans as crazies, victimized and haunted by the war.

"We decided to treat these guys as if they were World War II vets," says Bellisario. "They have good memories of the camaraderie, the times they spent together. They have flashbacks, but that doesn't interfere with their lives. They don't 'suffer' from flashbacks. They have memories. Good ones as well as bad."

The viewpoint was consistent in *Magnum's* most recent return to Vietnam.

Voice-over narration allows

Magnum to carry on a moral

dialogue with himself.

Led by war colleague Tyler P. McKinney, the characters return on a rescue mission. They succeed in liberating a Cambodian patriot, but the costs are substantial. Tyler, among others, dies. In the final scene, the regular characters are once again on a Hawaiian beach. Rick turns to the group and asks, "What if we hadn't gone?"

The question, clearly, is about Vietnam, not about this most recent adventure. It is not a rhetorical question, for after a brief and pointed pause, *Magnum* answers. "We did," he says. His words are followed by long thoughtful shots of the other characters. As they walk away, the camera pulls back for a high shot and *Magnum* continues. "Maybe Long Teng was right. We wound up going to Chong Kir and Bang Li for that most basic truth—freedom. But did Tyler? I don't know. Ultimately, it didn't matter. What matters was, we were faithful to that



Magnum (shown here with guest star Carol Burnett) is motivated by the disillusionment, anger, and violence of war.

truth." Such an answer is Reaganesque in its political cast, and surely more emotional than analytical.

The issues surrounding Vietnam are not settled in America, nor in this show. Despite Bellisario's desire to reposition the war, we all know Vietnam was not World War II. *Magnum* and friends feel ambivalent about the war. None of these men has, so far, been able to establish a lasting relationship other than that shared among themselves. Drawing expertly on the private-eye tradition, the writers make the men marginal in their personal and professional lives. T.C. learned flying skills in combat and runs a helicopter service. Rick skates on the edge of the Hawaiian underworld. The rambling stories of Higgins, a retired British Army sergeant-major, are often comic, but increasingly become a litany on the horrors of war.

Politics has invaded the characters' lives. Their present experience spins out of war—the most brutal of human interactions, the most distorted of political choices. In this context, even occasional slapstick and silliness are tinged with the knowledge that everything may suddenly slip into pain, and even the strongest sense of honor eventually must be humbled.

All this explains why *Magnum P.I.* is, for me, the best show on television. It repeatedly explores some of commercial television's most powerful recurring themes—the gauzy relations between memory and history, private and public,

personal and social. Its narratives capture the terrible and delicate sense of random causality that all of us have felt. The unexpected flows naturally. The most formulaic characters behave in unexpected ways. There are ventures in unconventional storytelling: Sometimes a subplot or minor character moves to the foreground. Sometimes there's a bit of popular culture history, as when the show honors the form of Dashiell Hammett or Agatha Christie. Sometimes there's a bravura performance—Hillerman playing one of his own siblings.

Always, because a dense and textured world has been established, I find myself learning more about the characters than one script itself tells me. *Magnum* revels in familiarity, but surprises me with new perspectives. It never forgets that its premise is popular entertainment, but neither does it condescend by assuming its audience will not notice and be delighted by small shifts in perspective.

This suggests moral complexity, and that is what I most appreciate. Even those things that offend me in *Magnum* may, in time, be questioned by the program. They may even change. Having seen this series, I see detective shows differently. I see television differently. And because the show examines, in a television way, the world I have personally experienced, I see the world differently. *Magnum* is a show that does not forget. And it refuses me the luxury of forgetting the past that brought me here. ■



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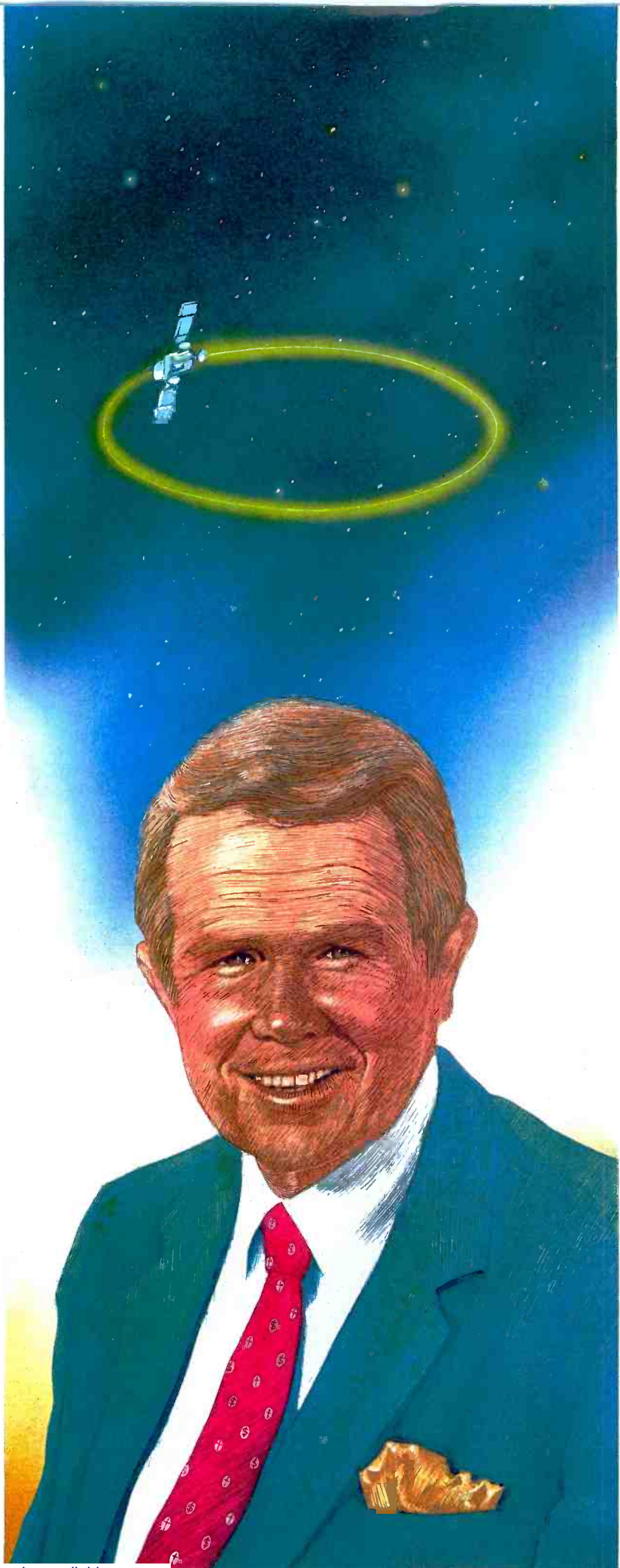
CBN COUNTS ITS BLESSINGS

BY JAMES TRAUB

THERE ARE NO UNHAPPY ENDINGS at CBN Cable; they are not allowed. Sometimes on *The Rifleman*, one of the jewels in CBN's diadem of ancient reruns, Chuck Connors shoots a gun out of a desperado's hands. But Chuck sets things to right by saying, "You can't go around usin' people like this," or something of that ilk, and the desperado becomes a model citizen. Or maybe in the middle of the afternoon Wink Martindale, on *Tic Tac Dough*, has to send away a contestant empty-handed, but then Wink turns to the winner and says, "John, you've had a good time, haven't you?" And John says, "Wink, I've had a wonderful time." Or perhaps Pat Robertson, the broadcaster and sometime evangelist who founded CBN and hosts *The 700 Club*, will survey the short-term prospects of mankind and see war, disease, hunger, and moral collapse arising from liberal values. "But the long range," he says, with a big grin that makes his eyes disappear in wrinkles, "is not just good, it's absolutely glorious."

There are no unhappy endings at CBN because nobody there believes in them. They believe that God has something glorious in store for themselves and for everyone else who is the same kind of Christian they are. Everyone at CBN has the warmth, the good nature, the special equanimity, of the already saved. Their happy endings, like those of Chuck Connors, Dobie Gillis, and Flipper, are fore-ordained. And the present is looking

David G. Klein



Pat Robertson wants to make money and announce the Kingdom of God. No problem: In his theology, God likes profit. He also likes CBN's reruns.



In recent years *The 700 Club* has become less a tent show than a talk show.

pretty sunny, too: CBN is one of the few cable networks making money, and that's about as sure a sign of God's favor as they could ask for.

CBN makes a small fortune off of 25-year-old smiles and scowls. In 1984 the network added seven million households to its audience (reaching a total of 27 million), doubled its advertising revenue, and began turning a profit. The network is now ready to make itself a real force in American culture. After three years of ransacking the television archives, CBN programmers are scheduling half a dozen new shows for the fall, including *The Campbells*, a series about an immigrant family struggling for survival in the Canadian wilderness, and *Butterfly Island*, a four-hour mini-series set in Australia. They will also be wheeling out a set of "new" reruns, in living color. Until now CBN has done very well with reruns, and not at all well with original programs. But Robertson's executives view their programming as a direct expression of their values—possibly a unique perspective in the world of commercial television—and they would clearly prefer to show their own programs instead of someone else's.

Pat Robertson's grin seems to sum up CBN. He's a happy fellow, with his own happy program. The program is *The 700 Club*, a daily 90-minute talk show in which Robertson and two co-hosts chat with like-minded politicians, educators, and just plain folks before a live studio

audience and several million viewers a week. It's a Christian show, which at CBN means that it takes for granted a set of conservative values based on a particular and generally literal interpretation of Scripture.

On camera, CBN's spiritual and corporate leader offers a sense of warm authority, of intimacy and reassurance, that reminds one of President Reagan, or at times Walter Cronkite. When Robertson guffaws and shakes his head with amazement at the foolishness of liberals trying to tear down God, why, even a liberal would have to do some stock-taking. His self-confidence seems invulnerable, his convictions unshakable.

Robertson seems destined for greater things. His faith in a morally stable, Norman Rockwell sort of world seems to strike some deep chord in the national mood—much the same chord that President Reagan strikes. Suddenly he's a celebrity, courted by conservative Republicans, flying to Africa with Vice President George Bush. No less an authority than the *Saturday Evening Post* recently nominated him for President. The *Post* quoted conservative activist Paul Weyrich to the effect that a grass-roots draft-Robertson movement was already underway. Robertson chuckled at the suggestion, and then laid out for the *Post* a 2,500-word platform outlining his principles. It began with a nod to the

liberals (for more worker-owned businesses); moved on to a conservative social program of school prayer and an end to abortion and mandatory school busing, and concluded with the special Robertson touch of transcendent optimism—"With God's help, we can see the next four, eight, or 12 years to be absolutely incredible opportunities for our society and our world."

Robertson is no stranger to the world of politics and secular calculation. He was born into Tidewater aristocracy, the son of the late Virginia senator A. Willis Robertson, and a descendant of William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison, the ninth and 23rd Presidents. He rides horses, and has the courtly manner and fine carriage of the landed gentry.

After graduating from Yale Law School in 1955, he landed a corporate job in New York. A few years later, though, he underwent a profound conversion, left work, and took a degree at the New York Theological Seminary. At this point many another well-heeled young minister would have joined a prosperous First Baptist church as assistant pastor. But Robertson heard a different calling, one both more humble and more ambitious—to buy a television station and raise an electronic ministry. And so, like St. Thomas casting off for distant India, he headed back home and raised funds to purchase a UHF station in Portsmouth, Virginia. By 1961 he was a voice crying in the wilderness, a voice audible to all of 38,000 local television households.

In 1973 Robertson reached a crossroads. Was he operating a ministry or a TV station? The choice was clear—a TV station. "I felt like I was playing soccer and everyone else was playing football," he says in his slow and elegant Virginia cadences. "I'm a pragmatic person. When I see the facts, I react accordingly, rather than dealing in sentiment." So Robertson substituted Hollywood reruns for most of his schedule of unwatched religious shows. The ratings, he says, went up 400 percent. He was no longer preaching to an empty church.

By the late 1970s *The 700 Club* was syndicated to independent stations all over the country. Almost as an afterthought he packaged a cable network comprising his and other religious shows, and put it up

How can a network proud of shows like *Flipper* produce fine original programming, as CBN plans to do? Creativity requires aesthetic standards and the questioning of orthodoxy, qualities that CBN's pious atmosphere discourages.

on the satellite in 1977. CBN Cable was not so much a new cable network as an additional means of distribution for *The 700 Club*. Robertson wanted to become a big preacher and a big broadcaster, and he didn't think cable could make him one. Between 1979 and 1981, according to John Roos, CBN Cable's vice president for marketing and advertising, the network looked to broadcasting, trying to put together three hours of original programming to sell in syndication. A news show, *USam*, and a soap opera, *Another Life*, eventually made it to the air, but the package flopped for lack of buyers.

Undaunted, Robertson turned back to CBN Cable. By 1981 cable was growing quickly enough to offer scope for an ambition of any size. But CBN Cable had stalled at about five million households, and other well-manicured ministers were elbowing their way onto satellites. For the second time Robertson booted off little-watched religious programs in favor of old sitcoms, quiz shows, and westerns. CBN Cable became a for-profit subsidiary of the non-profit Christian Broadcasting Network, which runs three local television stations, a radio station, a vast charitable apparatus, and CBN University, a graduate institution with a Christian orientation.

A different sort of minister might have paused at the Rubicon of profit-seeking—might, indeed, have felt pangs at watching a vast corporation grow up around himself. But Robertson has a curious relation to the world, one that allows him simultaneously to embrace it and recoil from it. When he writes of the daily world he falls naturally into the cadences of the Book of Revelations. In his 1982 book *The Secret Kingdom* he writes: "Honor, decency, honesty . . . are replaced by gluttony, sensuality, bizarre sexual practices." People search for false gods. In Germany, it was Nazism; "in Europe and especially the United States, [it is] the god of central government under the religion of secular humanism." The world is irredeemable; or is it? Note the fighting words, "central government" and "secular humanism." Maybe all the world needs is a good dose of conservative reform.

The whole argument of *The Secret Kingdom* is that the world is far more hospitable to true Christians than they know.

The "kingdom" of the title exists not in Heaven but right here on earth, "an invisible world [which] undergirds, surrounds, and interpenetrates the visible world in which we live." Christians don't live in the corrupt world, they live in the invisible world. Earthly success, for them, *proves* blessedness. "When God blesses us and keeps us," Robertson writes, "He can cause our plans to succeed. He can cause people to like us. He can cause us to be preferred and chosen above others of equal talent." Robertson illustrates this principle by recalling his own success in borrowing \$3 million, despite inadequate collateral, to buy modern broadcasting equipment.

The daily incarnation of Robertson's theology, *The 700 Club*, has become over the last few years less like a tent show and more like one of the morning network newscasts. But the secret Kingdom is never far away, nor is Robertson's access to it. One of the show's ads for *The 700 Club's* products features a comic sad sack whose expenses have shot out of control. "Life can be one financial surprise after another," declares a suddenly solemn narrator, "unless you're tuned in to God's will." The voice recommends that concerned viewers purchase a Robertson cassette. "Knowing the Will of God."

It is the flowing back and forth between money and miracles, between current events and deathbed conversions, that defines Robertson's special appeal. He makes his opinions sound divinely inspired, and his faith scientifically based. One moment he's talking about "jawboning down the dollar on international markets," and the next he's plunged into a prayerful trance, an ecstatic state in which he divines cripples throwing off their crutches, cancer symptoms vanishing—right now. "Amen," says Robertson in a hushed voice, emerging from his rapture. Then he flashes his biggest grin to let us know he's back with us. "Amen," he repeats in familiar tones.

When Robertson sat down for an interview, nattily dressed in navy blazer, blue polka-dot tie, and gray flannels, the first thing he told me was that he was not an evangelist but a broadcaster. After grudgingly describing his background, Robertson worked himself into a statistical lather—ratings and "cume" households, growth curves, biggest this, first that. "We're in the game like everybody else."

he said proudly. He spoke of his own show in terms a programming executive would use. He had brought it "into more conformity with what our research showed the majority of adults wanted to hear about." Research showed the viewers wanted more news and "a touch of supernatural powers." So that's what Robertson gave them.

Finally I agreed that Robertson sounded like a broadcaster, not an evangelist. He looked perturbed, as if I had lodged an accusation, which perhaps I had—that he seemed mighty proud of mastering a cynical vocabulary. "I thought that was what you were interested in," he protested. No, it's not, I said. As if challenged to produce his much-loved public identity, Robertson immediately quoted from the prophet Malachi. There were no further numbers.

A plaque adorns the pillared entrance of the neo-Georgian mansion in Virginia Beach that serves as CBN's headquarters. It reads: "The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations"—Matthew 24:14." It seems designed to remind visitors, and perhaps employees, that the feverish commercial calculations going on within are not quite what they seem to be. And sometimes the reminder is necessary.

CBN executives want to shout from



Some of CBN's popular reruns: *Wagon Train* (above), *The Rifleman* (right), *Flipper* (above right). CBN's westerns pull in as much as 10 percent of the viewing audience weekend afternoons, while its sitcoms attract a young audience late at night.



the rooftops that, whatever their private convictions, they do not run a Christian network. They know that "Christian" means preaching to most viewers, and preaching does not sell. Officials tirelessly point out that there is no preaching on CBN except Saturday and Sunday mornings, that the rest of the week is good, solid, wholesome fun. "At all costs," says New York sales manager Doug Greenlaw, "we want to present ourselves as a family entertainer. Our connection with *The 700 Club* is only on a value-driven level."

CBN is carried on 5,400 cable systems not only because people want to watch it but because it makes cable operators an offer they can't refuse. At a time when most advertiser-supported cable networks charge operators who wish to carry their channel, CBN actually *pays* the operator up to 20 cents per subscriber. This it does through buying up advertising time on channels the operator is unable to sell and subsidizing 50 percent of the operator's cost of promoting both CBN and his own system.

CBN's programmers are also well



versed in the arcane rites of counterprogramming. In the late-night period, when other channels carry news, talk, and old movies, CBN airs its comedy block—*Dobie Gillis*, *Love That Bob*, *Burns and Allen*, *The Very Best of Groucho*. These venerable chestnuts bring in the target 25-to-40 age group whose members are, apparently, thrilled to stumble across their childhood in the watches of the night.

But CBN's masterstroke of counterprogramming is its 14 hours of westerns every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, which largely compete with sports on other channels. Many Americans, it turns out, prefer frontier mythology. During the weekend daytime block CBN claims it draws half again more adult men than ESPN, the cable sports network. CBN's average program rating stood at 1 as of this January. Every weekend the network's diminutive audience doubles, triples, quadruples until it reaches as much as 10 percent of the viewing audience at 5 P.M. Saturday with *Wagon Train*. CBN could probably make a bundle as the Western Network.

The only show on CBN Cable that doesn't fit in with the programming philosophy is *The 700 Club*. The show runs live every morning at 10, again in the afternoon, and a third time at 9 P.M. That's up to four and a half hours of a program that attracts a tiny (though loyal) audience. Because of the *Club*, CBN cannot compete in prime time. Not only do the network's ratings drop off during the show, but the audience, once gone, fails to return in large numbers for the 10:30 western.

The 700 Club enjoys a sovereign presence because CBN is not, in fact, a replica of other cable networks. When the network's moral standards come into direct conflict with profit, it's profit that's likely to yield. Tim Robertson, Pat's son and CBN's programming chief, reports that after solemn debate he rejected wrestling as unfit for family viewing. He even spurned a plea from a Christian wrestling outfit.

But the moral and commercial aspirations at CBN rarely clash. CBN's marketing position and moral philosophy are generally one and the same. Tim Robertson, like any other programmer, selects programs not because they make him feel good but because they will appeal to a large audience with the right demographic characteristics. They must *also* make him feel good. At any other network an executive would defend *Wagon Train* because people watch it; only at CBN will it also be turned into a Christian icon. And it will be painted in the most solemn hues. There's no trace of irony, not even a faint smile at the show's



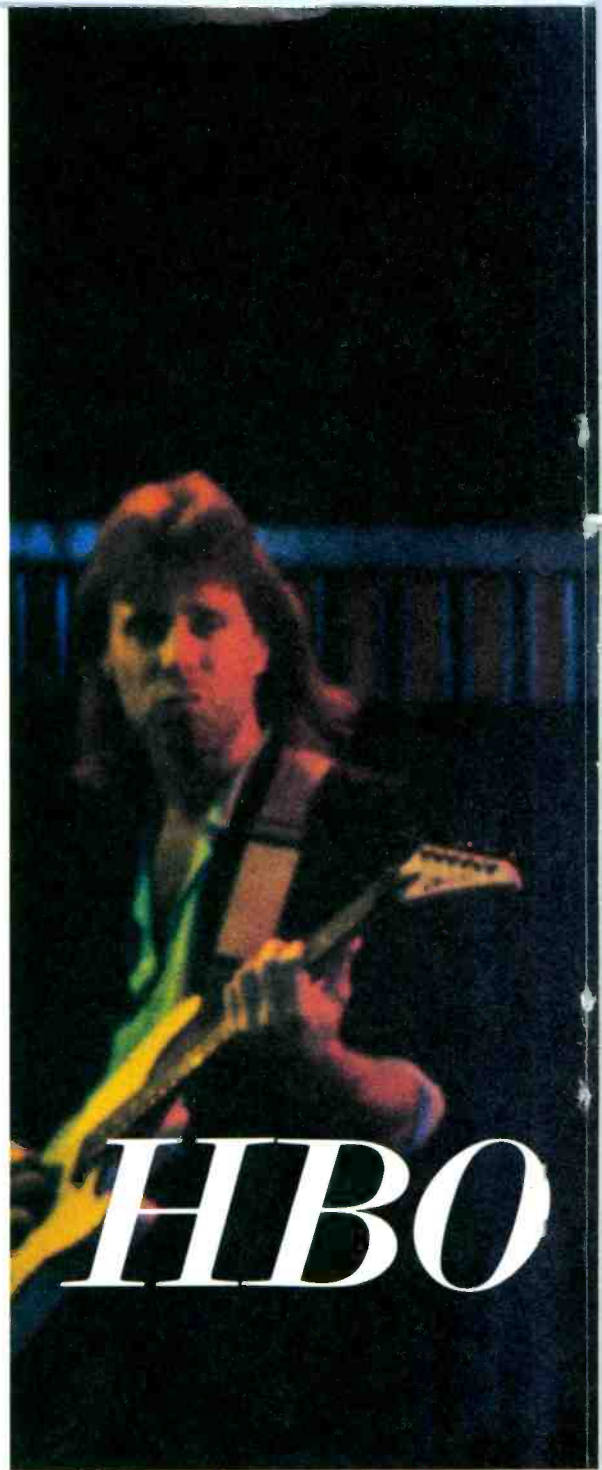
A CBN special, *Don't Ask Me, Ask God*, "answered" such profound questions as "Why is there war?"

creaky sententiousness. At CBN irony is almost a form of hostility.

I asked Tim Robertson, an astute programmer who used to run CBN's Boston television station, whether he thought that westerns are socially valuable, or simply not harmful. Robertson is only 30 years old, and his round face and unmarked features make him look younger still, but he is so circumspect that he imparts immense weight to his every answer. At first he agreed that most westerns were simply harmless. But then he thought about it some more. "Take *The Rifleman*, for example," he said. "*The Rifleman* is about a single parent trying to raise a son in a hostile environment. That's a very relevant problem for the 1980's." Robertson began warming to the topic. "I would say," he went on, "that *The Lucy Show*, which we would love to have, is a pro-social program. The question is: Do people have to pay for the consequences of their actions? Whenever Lucy does something wrong, she has to accept the consequences."

I studied Robertson; he seemed perfectly sincere. We plunged onwards. I asked him if he was bothered that most of his shows were fantasies—practically cartoons. Here he paused once more. "I don't know that television *should* be just like life," he finally said. "Maybe television should hold up something a little bit better. These are shows that say that you can be a good person and still be a winner. You can win. That's essentially the message of Christianity: You can win." Somehow it sounded more like Dale Carnegie than the New Testament. Jesus, after all, washed the feet of his disciples, identified with "the least of them," and prophesied that the meek shall inherit the earth. Yet these more recent disciples teach that God turns the faithful into win-

*No one
delivers the
big events
like
you and*



It's a big event when Tina Turner turns on her Grammy-winning style... when the heavy hitters battle it out for the title in World Championship Boxing... when Robert Redford scores big in the hit movie *The Natural*. That's entertainment worth paying for.

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Can programming consistent with such a philosophy be "universal" and "pro-social" and "relevant," to use CBN's own words? What does it mean for a program to be "wholesome"? It means that good people, defined in a certain way, always win, while bad people always suffer. It means no ambiguity and perfect predictability: Chuck Connors never kills the wrong guy, then to suffer remorse; Dobie never cheats on Zelda, or even gets her. It means, basically, warmhearted nonsense. *Flipper* and *Gentle Ben* are stalwarts on the CBN lineup. Because their atmosphere is so dreamlike, so whipped and blended and bland, these shows have become, with the passage of time, jokes on themselves. Perhaps few contemporary shows are any less trivial, but their textures are more uneven and naturalistic, and their crises somewhat more plausible. Many people watch CBN's reruns because, as Doug Greenlaw frankly admits, the shows are "camp." They're funny because they're ridiculous. They have television's special mediocrity of telling a banal story with professional polish.

I asked Tim Robertson if CBN's standards have changed over the years. He thought about that for quite a while. "Ten years ago," he answered, "we wouldn't show a movie with adultery in it. Now we'd consider showing one if we felt the ultimate resolution was right. Do the parties have to pay the price for their actions? I guess the adulterer would really have to be pretty tortured." That evening after leaving CBN I read a recent story by John Updike. It was a story about a woman who, feeling trapped by a husband whom she nevertheless loves, chooses to have an adulterous affair. The last paragraph reads, in part: "And though there was much in the aftermath to regret, and a harm that would never cease, for things thus bent are never put right, Betty remembered those days . . . as bright, a single iridescent unit . . . a rainbow, a U-turn." Even in the shifting cadences of that lovely sentence one can sense Updike's belief that the truth of human experience is infinitely complex—a revelation unlikely to disturb CBN's smiling complacency.

On many a desk in CBN's offices sits a placard with one of Pat Robertson's sayings: INNOVATION INTEGRITY EXCELLENCE. Perhaps it was meant as an admonition, but it seems to be accepted as congratulations. People at CBN seem to take it for granted that the network has within it the talent and the dedication to



Pat Robertson's son Tim shares his father's convictions as well as his shrewd judgment.

produce admirable programming: only money is lacking. As revenue rises, the old reruns will fall away like dry leaves to reveal a bloom of original programming every bit as innovative and excellent as . . . what? It's not clear where CBN looks for its aesthetic standards; the three networks, perhaps. CBN has plans, currently on hold, to film a remake of *The Rifleman*, with Chuck Connors now a grandfather. And the celebrity pet show—*Doris Day's Best Friends*—will air soon. The show came fully equipped with a sponsor, and who can look a gift puppy in the mouth?

Original programming, in any case, may prove too costly an indulgence for CBN. Tim Robertson says flatly that CBN Cable, unlike most of show business, does not believe in deficit financing. This means that the network must pay for its original productions out of the advertising revenue it earns from its reruns; the revenue base will have to grow enormously in order to finance many of the network-quality shows that CBN has in mind. The network does not, in any case, need original programming to turn a fat profit. What it needs, says Richard Zackon, a CBN consultant, is to continue its increased investment in high-quality reruns and syndicated shows. Why risk the profit margin just to make original programming? "We don't want to be self-sacrificing fools," as John Roos puts it.

Even if CBN does make new programs, they aren't likely to be artistic ones. The reason for this is that no one at CBN seems to take much account of aesthetic standards, as opposed to standards of propriety. Perhaps artistic considerations are considered symptoms of secular humanism. Programmers and producers aspire to make shows that, like *The 700 Club*, are professional and wholesome, as if those two adjectives ex-

hausted the aesthetic vocabulary. For evidence, one has only to turn to CBN's first and only original special, the 60-minute *Don't Ask Me, Ask God*.

This show stirred great excitement at CBN. When it first aired in January of last year, *Don't Ask Me* received, says Pat Robertson, the highest audience share of any religious show in history—10.5 (and a 37 in Cincinnati, Robertson added). It stands as CBN's chief bid for programming respectability. And yet *Don't Ask Me, Ask God* is a very odd specimen indeed. Each of the show's five segments purports to answer one of the questions Americans (according to the Gallup poll) would most like to ask God. In each portion a star or ex-star, among them Warren Beatty and Doug McClure, poses the question, a dramatic vignette illustrates it, and then Pat Robertson, the show's emcee, answers it with a quotation from Scripture. (The show might be titled, *Don't Ask God, Ask Pat*.)

Despite its profound subject matter, the show has no more genuine drama, and even less verisimilitude, than a television commercial. Perhaps owing to its marvelous graphics and more or less up-to-date electronic music, *Don't Ask Me* seems not so much polished as varnished. The vignettes are curiously antiseptic, as if they had been culled from CBN's stock of reruns. And Robertson's answers reduce profound mysteries to mere riddles. Why does God cause suffering? He doesn't; the Devil does. Doubt is erased, the truth is proved to be self-evident, and a happy ending is conjured like a rabbit from a hat.

CBN's limits as a cable service—its inability to provide some public service beyond the evocation of nostalgia—have nothing to do with money. They have to do with imagination, a quality that is not honored on anyone's little placard in Virginia Beach. Imagination requires free thinking, which in turn requires questioning, which in turn requires freedom from orthodoxy. At CBN all the questions have one correct answer, an answer that is self-evident and foreknown. As a matter of policy the Christian Broadcasting Network hires no one who is not a Christian, even if token infidels were hired, the atmosphere of unanimity would effectively discourage the heterodox. And not only does everyone there share more or less the same philosophy, but the philosophy they share says that the whole rainbow-shaded range of experience can be expressed in a crowd of 25-year-old reruns. The same set of values that will not abide the violent or the sleazy will have no more tolerance for the difficult, the dangerous, the open-ended. CBN may never be worse than its competitors; but it may never be better, either. ■

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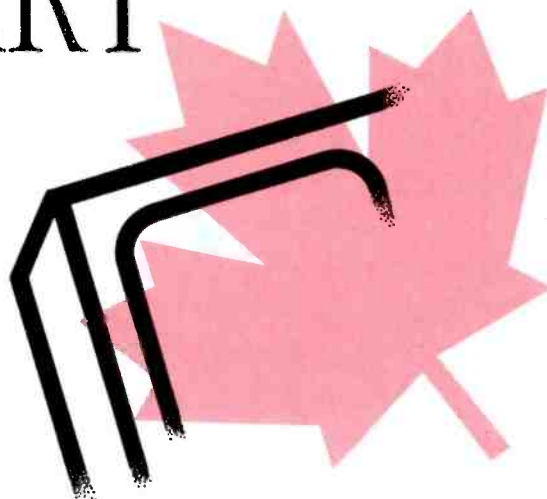
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Illustrations by Javier Romero

ANNIVERSARY ANGST



Always under scrutiny, CBC is being questioned more intensely, and its budget pared away, as it nears its 50th birthday. Some say it's Canada's nationhood that's really at stake.

Ross McLean, a television columnist for the Toronto Globe and Mail, teaches journalism at Ryerson Institute in Toronto. A long-time CBC producer and program director, he has also produced programs independently and for the CTV network.

BY ROSS McLEAN

Late next year the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will complete a half century of singular accomplishment—and uneasy existence. Today no one can be sure whether it will be in any shape to celebrate.

In the new era of media abundance, public broadcasters everywhere are under siege. Canada's are no exception.

The new Conservative government swept into power with the force of a tornado last fall, confronted Canada's growing deficit, gulped, and announced its urgent intention to lop \$4.2 billion off proposed spending. When the budget year began in April, CBC, already hurting after several years of no-growth budgets, had lost \$85 million from its proposed \$929 million appropriation.

The Conservatives, who had governed Canada only three times in CBC's existence, commonly suspected that the public broadcasters too often spoke for the Liberals and against them. It affected their suspicion not at all that the Liberals suffer a similar paranoia regarding CBC. In the budget cut, observers saw vengeance at work and vaulted to the most sinister conclusion: The new government meant to overhaul the corporation, shedding its president, Pierre Juneau, as the first step.

Some call Juneau a master bureaucrat. They mean it kindly. A strong-willed, shrewd manipulator with an aloof manner, he spent most of his career on the cultural side of Canada's civil service—at the National Film Board and then at the broadcast regulatory commission. In 1982 his Quebec soulmate Pierre Trudeau named him to a seven-year term as head of CBC.

If the triumphant Tories sought to squeeze out Juneau, as was widely conjectured, few expected them to be successful. With four years yet to run in his term, he is protected from outright dismissal.

Moreover, he does not yield readily. To resign under any assumption of partisanship would damage his self-image as a public servant. Juneau is more than an administrator whose job is in jeopardy; he stands as a symbol of CBC's effort to set its own house in order.

Since the beginning of broadcasting in their country, Canadians have worried that they might someday lose their struggle against the United States' engulfing influence and surrender their national identity. In fact, it was when American radio programs began to be aired widely north of the border that the state established its network. "It is either the state or the United States," said CBC founder Graham Spry. Today, some regard the budget cuts as an assault on public broadcasting, and believe the U.S. threat is greater than ever before. On February 13 a group of prominent Canadians published an open letter to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in full-page newspaper advertisements.

"Not since the CBC was first established by a Conservative government . . . has public broadcasting been more seriously threatened. Or been so essential in preserving the upper half of the North American continent as a proud and distinctive nation," the letter said. "Satellites, cable, and backyard dishes have diluted the reach and influence of earthbound, national television networks the world over. In most countries, that's good business. In Canada it's a business that could lose us a country."

They pictured CBC as one of the few cross-country links without which Canadians would have little opportunity to exchange facts, fantasies, opinions, trends, and the shared values that create a distinctive society. "Budget cuts are being made blindly," they charged. "Canadian culture is

too fragile and the CBC too essential to its healthy development for policies to be formulated by default." The signatories urged an immediate parliamentary review, and no budget cuts in the meantime.

The government's sharpest response to CBC defenders came from Barbara McDougall, a junior finance minister in the cabinet: "I believe that those who would suggest that our nation's identity depends upon an acceptance of the status quo at the CBC, whatever the cost, underrate the intelligence of Canadians and overrate the right of any publicly funded institution to transform itself from sacred trust to sacred cow. . . ." She said CBC would survive, but not necessarily without being trimmed back.

In the months that followed, observers on Parliament Hill found the CBC's defensive efforts to be singularly inept. One consultant called its executives "absolutely mad for not paying more attention to the politics and the machinery of government." Most attached blame to the ascetic and aloof Juneau.

But the president was active on other fronts, taking the case directly to the public. CBC, he would tell one university group after another, was not a problem, but a solution—in fact, "the main solution to the dilemma of a Canadian broadcasting system that is becoming less Canadian every day."

He was at pains to dispel the widespread notion that CBC was fatter and less productive than it should be. He argued that since 1978 added costs and inflation had sliced more than \$420 million from the corporation's spending power.

The usual analysis is that CBC has become over-mandated and under-financed. Juneau accepts that point, but growing numbers of Canadians go one step further to conclude that times have changed, and some CBC functions should be dropped.

"The problem, however, is that it is not easy to find the CBC services that people would agree to cut," Juneau observes. The options include two television networks (one in English and one in French) and four radio networks (AM and FM for each language), which are broadcast across the vast country by a staggering total of 1,460 transmitters, including repeating stations. CBC also operates Radio Canada International, which broadcasts on shortwave in 12 languages.

"Should we discontinue the stereo network?" Juneau asks. "Should we forget the 30,000 native people and the 38,000 other Canadians who live rather isolated lives in the north? Should we broadcast only in one language? Should we cancel the international service? I don't think there would be any consensus on these ideas."

It has been 17 years since CBC received its marching orders from Parliament, when the Broadcasting Act was last redrafted. For most Canadians, there were few sources of television in 1968. Almost a third of all households received only CBC channels on their sets. Today only 2 percent rely exclusively on CBC. It draws only 22 percent of the country's viewers, while other Ca-

nadian channels together garner 46 percent, and American channels—widely available on cable—get 32 percent. CBC's share may shrink further if private broadcasters follow through on recently announced intentions to create a second commercial network and several cable superstations.

Some assail CBC for putting public money and air-time into programs that can be seen readily on other channels. It carries sporting events in quantity even though CTV, the independent commercial network, maintains a full sports schedule, and an all-sports pay-cable network has been available since last fall. Critics also complain that the country is so saturated with *Three's a Crowd*, *Remington Steele*, *Kate & Allie*, and other such imports that there is no further need for CBC to carry them. Yet one third of CBC's prime time schedule was made in the U.S.A.

CBC is not the problem, its president, Pierre Juneau, insists, but instead is "the main solution for a broadcast system becoming less Canadian every day."



There are reasons—built into CBC's particular hybrid structure—why it continues carrying these popular programs. Half of CBC's 61 television stations are affiliates whose owners recently watched in horror as CBC gradually reduced its American imports. They dread the moment, which may be inevitable, when CBC no longer delivers *Dallas* to them. And, like U.S. network affiliates, they retain the right to opt out of a certain portion of CBC's schedule.

CBC also has its own direct incentives for carrying the imports. One is expense: An imported hour of drama costs one tenth as much as an hour made by the CBC. Another incentive is income: CBC earns a tidy sum—about \$100 million a year—from television advertising. The situation worries Peter Herrndorf, a magazine publisher and former CBC executive who was once considered Juneau's heir

Pierre Juneau

apparent and who still says "we" when talking about the network. "We've always paid too dear a price for our commercial revenue," he says. "We have given sponsored U.S. programs pride of place and have accepted an uncomfortable relationship with our private station affiliates. We are



CBC itself makes the majority of its programs—a situation that outside producers aim to alter.

manifestly different—not in a blur around the edges."

Herrndorf was speaking about CBC, but the same is often said about Canada. "We not only claim to be different," says cultural mandarin Bernard Ostry, "we claim the right to be different, and the right to preserve that difference."

Few Canadians would agree on the details of that different cultural identity, but the idea has great political weight, at least for some. Canadian

children grow up knowing and caring more about U.S. history and politics than their own. By the age of 12, a Canadian child will have seen 12,000 hours of television—10,000 of which was American-made.

Yet the average Canadian doesn't feel menaced—or any less Canadian—because of this immersion in another country's culture. In a poll two years ago, four fifths of the Canadians surveyed wanted unfettered access to American television.

Their reaction to broadcast budget cuts has also been less manifest than CBC might have wished. There was a scattering of objection, but no observably widespread outcry. Forty percent of the Canadians polled this spring didn't know about the budget cuts, and half of those who knew approved of the cuts. Even CBC loyalists, fierce in defending its existence, can be impatient with certain of its programs and practices.

CBC has existed under constant scrutiny, but it will get an even bigger dose in coming months as the government launches a new task force, appointed by communications minister Marcel Masse, that is assigned to forge "a new Canadian consensus" on the service's role. Many of the issues have been aired in earlier inquiries.

Certainly there will be strong arguments to delegate more television production to outside companies. CBC now produces more than 90 percent of its non-American programs, although Juneau aims to reduce the portion to 50 percent.

A blue-ribbon group of investors, which has bid to buy the CBC English-language television net-

CBC's Canadian-produced fare includes (clockwise from top) the nightly feature magazine, The Journal, hosted by Barbara Frum; a movie, Chautauqua Girl, set during the era of traveling tent shows; Charlie Grant's War, a tale of a Canadian who saved many Jews from Nazi death camps, and a drama titled Hockey Night.



work, will probably find some way to talk with the task force. And rival broadcasters, who stand to gain ad revenues, are bound to urge that CBC discontinue its regional and local broadcasting.

Many believe CBC can no longer remain a hybrid—a public broadcaster with obligations to the national culture that nevertheless seeks popularity by airing American programs. Their vision is of a CBC that will, by the year 2000, rely exclusively on Canadian talent.

The sentiment was expressed quite directly to Masse in a recent college appearance. An audience member pointed out that the CBC budget cut was equal to the cost of a single F-18 jet fighter.

"Should we give up our national defense and give money to the CBC?" responded Masse.

"The CBC," someone shouted, "is our national defense."

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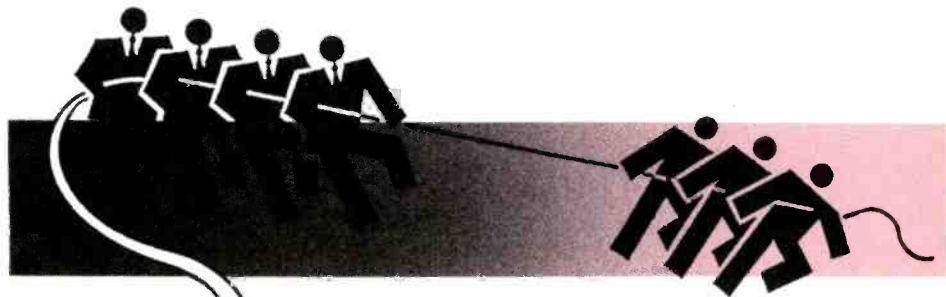
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The Station New England Turns To



MEDIENPOLITIK



While the Christian Democrats rush to usher in cable and commercial television, the parties out of power are trying to put on the brakes.

'Let's think it through' is the way Germans approach such changes.

BY GARY GEIPEL

In West Germany, where low-key politicians are the ones who last, Christian Schwarz-Schilling has gained the notoriety of a James Watt. Even if his public career flames out early, however, he's leading a revolution that may permanently alter the established order of German television. As head of the country's telecommunications agency, the Bundespost, Schwarz-Schilling is spokesman and chief flak-catcher for the conservative administration's campaign to wire the country for cable television and end the 30-year public television monopoly that gave Germans a choice of no more than three TV channels.

Schwarz-Schilling's revolution—coming years after similar developments in the rest of Western Europe and America—is being slowed by a characteristically German approach to social change: Let's think it all through. What could go wrong? What does the church think? What does Herr Professor think? One step at a time.

On broadcasting issues, this process of abstract questioning and debate has been institutionalized and even labeled. *Medienpolitik*, not market forces and the speedy introduction of new technology, is sculpting Germany's new media landscape. To a degree unmatched in any Western nation, deciding what flies and what flops in telecommunications is the province of politicians, social scientists, theologians, labor leaders—the spokesmen for Germany's well-ordered society. The result is an ideological struggle, a clash of personalities, and a political brawl all rolled into one.

Politically, the contest is between Schwarz-Schilling's Christian Democrats—whose view of the world roughly parallels Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's, and who want to play midwife to private broadcasting and new television technologies—and the left-wing Social Demo-

crats, who think Germany's existing public broadcasting services, over which they have the dominant ideological influence, are perfectly adequate. The fledgling Green party, which questions the legitimacy of German society in general, would like to do without new media altogether.

How the public feels about the new television is still a matter for speculation; most speculators bet that Germans are ready to take a chance on Schwarz-Schilling's promises of "free opinion flow, program diversity, more jobs, and more technical innovation."

"The hook's been swallowed," says Günter Götz, the young head of Neue Mediengesellschaft (the New Media Company). Götz's firm is a partner in Germany's first operating private cable-TV network, Sat-1, and publisher of several new-media journals. "I often give talks and seminars on the new media," Götz says. "Up until two years ago, every discussion was marked by questions about social risks—concerns that everything must be fine and good. Not a soul asks those questions today. Now they ask where to find jobs in the new media and when will the boom come."

There are still opponents of the new media, however, who are noisy and quite influential. Though out of power in Bonn for the foreseeable future, the Social Democrats and the Greens have weighed in with a wide range of technical, financial, and moral arguments against the *verkabeln* of the nation. (*Verkabeln*, verb: to lay cable and prepare connections. The German language is often quicker to adapt than its political processes.)

The government shouldn't be laying outdated copper cable, they say; it should wait for fiber-optic technology to become affordable. The huge investment in cable will prove disastrous when too few families hook up to the service, they insist.

Gary Geipel, a California writer, studied telecommunications politics in Munich as an ITT International Fellow.

And cable TV will serve only to spread lowbrow imported entertainment, leading to what the Social Democrats call *massenverdummung* (noun: a situation in which masses of people become stupid).

Enter Schwarz-Schilling. If cable opponents had special-ordered their antagonist, they could have done no better than the outspoken 54-year-old head of the government's postal and telephone (and now cable-laying) monopoly, which is the largest employer in Europe. Schwarz-Schilling's brazen, messianic defense of his cable policies constantly triggers conflicts with his opponents.

In a scathing cover story, *Der Spiegel* magazine last fall called Schwarz-Schilling "ripe for resignation," and condemned his cable program as a financial and moral disaster. Klaus Warnecke, a Social Democrat media expert and a member of the Bavarian state parliament, describes the Postminister's policies as "a mixture of cultural and technical idiocy, and fiscal thievery."



Many consider Schwarz-Schilling (standing) the James Watt of the West German government. He is shown here conversing with Prime Minister Kohl (right) at a media policy conference.

"There was no reason for us to change our existing broadcasting order," Warnecke says. "No majority of Germans was screaming for more channels; video recorders had taken care of their additional desires."

Schwarz-Schilling nevertheless retains Chancellor Helmut Kohl's firm support and claims to have no regrets. "I believe that current developments in the field of communications have historical meaning equivalent to the appearance of the printed book," he says, and he can hardly wait to lay more cable. He brought cable within subscribing distance of 11 percent of German households last year, and he hopes to more than double that figure by 1988. Even if he does, Germany would still lag behind neighbors such as Holland, where

as many as 85 percent of all homes are cabled.

Very little cable was laid while the Social Democrats were in power, which is not surprising, considering that former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt believed private television poses a threat "far more acute than nuclear energy." The Social Democrats were banished to the opposition benches in parliament almost three years ago, and can't do much to slow cable-laying, but they've succeeded so far in preventing cable's widespread use.

Since January, for example, Schwarz-Schilling's telecommunications ministry has been paying big deutsche marks to lease six channels on the orbiting Intelsat V for the use of cable networks. But, as of spring, the transponders were still unused because the heads of Germany's 11 states couldn't agree on a formula for allocating them that would protect the existing public broadcasters while giving new entrepreneurs a fair start. That long-running debate among the states has run aground on such issues as whether to allow commercials to be broadcast on Sundays and how much cable programming must be German-made. And in three states governed by Social Democrats—Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Bremen—private television remains barred from cable networks.

Politicians aren't the only people who wield power in *medienpolitik*. The head of the Sat-1 cable network must answer to groups such as the powerful Lutheran Church. A church official recently called the very existence of Sat-1 "unconstitutional" because it "lacks legal grounding and excludes the participation of socially relevant groups." It is as if NBC could be called unconstitutional because its board lacks a clergyman.

The attempt to share regulatory authority reaches an extreme in Bavaria. Its first private radio stations, which went on the air this May, and also any television networks seeking carriage on Bavarian cable, won't answer first or even primarily to their audiences but to the new Central Office for New Media, a board that includes more than 40 representatives of political and social groups. On that board and on other *medienpolitik* battlegrounds, Germans will be trying to reconcile the new television with their national traditions, fears, and (some would say) hypocrisies.

Germans' affinity for American popular culture, for example, troubles many nationalists. "In some ways, Germany is closer to being the 51st state than Puerto Rico," says Götz. The news on Sat-1 has all of the anchor chit-chat and fancy visuals so common on American newscasts and previously absent from German TV. Sat-1's schedule features a heavy dose of *The Love Boat*, *Matt Houston*, and the rock music show *Solid Gold*.

We don't want coca-colonialism to become the standard on German TV screens," Warnecke says. He fears that if private television catches on, "every new broadcast hour will be filled with some crappy American series," which will lead to the dreaded *verdummung*, and programs will become nothing more than "carriers for commercials, just like in America."

Although American programs dubbed in German have crept into Germany's public TV lineups,

Since private broadcasters don't exist in West Germany, Bertelsmann and other big publishers stand to dominate cable.



Christian Schwarz-Schilling, West Germany's telecommunications minister, contends that current media developments "have historical meaning equivalent to the appearance of the printed book."

Gary Geipel



In a most scathing recent cover story, Der Spiegel newsmagazine called Schwarz-Schilling's cable plans a financial and moral disaster.

the networks remain more quality-minded and elitist than others in Europe. They devote much of prime time to seemingly endless discussion programs, scientific documentaries, and serious operas and plays. Even most "game shows" consist of learned contestants being quizzed on such topics as the lives of Prussian kings.

"Not a soul wants to watch great cultural extravaganzas on television," Götz contends, "but it's the centuries-old German way that everything must be somehow educational. There isn't a true entertainer in this whole country."

New-media opponents fear that Germany's language as well as its culture will be debased. Politicians of every stripe proclaim that German must be the language used on new TV channels, but their own speeches help popularize such good German phrases as *pay-TV*, *technologietransfer*, and *videoboom*. Germans are assimilating Americanisms at an amazing clip. And because most young Germans understand English, American programs could conceivably be shown without dubbing.

Götz predicts that "at most" two of the several

private national cable networks expected to develop will survive the uncertainties of *medienpolitik* and the audience-building period to become profitable: Sat-1, which was launched in January by a group of major publishing houses, and perhaps RTLplus (a partnership between Radio Luxembourg and the big publishing house Bertelsmann), which starts up this summer.

It's not surprising that both networks, and many of the smaller television ventures, are dominated by publishers, who are the only media giants in a nation that has previously put broadcasting off-limits to business, and who have raked in three fourths of advertising expenditures in the country.

Medienpolitik has also attempted to give public broadcasters a strong position in the new media. The public TV network ZDF, for example, was allowed to join with Swiss and Austrian television to produce 3-Sat, a cable channel already competing with Sat-1.

Debates over such things as cultural sovereignty and linguistic purity aren't unique to Germany, of course. What distinguishes its approach to the new television order is that *medienpolitik* gives leaders unparalleled power to avoid what might be inevitable in a country where the marketplace governs the media revolution.

"The discussion need not be rushed," says Klaus Warnecke. "The longer it stays in the headlines, the more time people will have to start asking, 'What will the new media actually bring us, and what will they cost?'"



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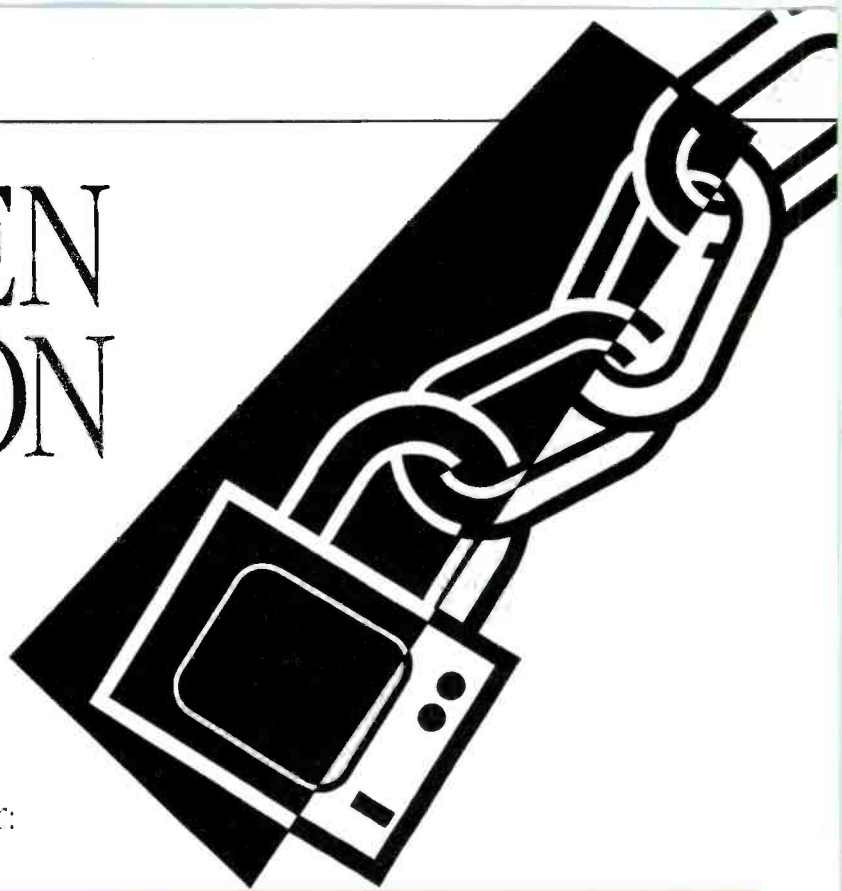
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FORBIDDEN TELEVISION



By going to extraordinary lengths to segregate television, the masters of apartheid have created their own monster: Bop-TV, a lively black channel that is increasingly popular with whites.

BY ALLISTER SPARKS

Having developed apartheid about as far as it can go on earth, South Africa is now extending it into the air. For the past 18 months one of the tribal "homelands" established under the Pretoria government's system of racial and ethnic compartmentalization, the awkwardly named BophuthaTswana, has been broadcasting its own television channel. But at Pretoria's behest, the programs are supposed to go only to black areas where there are large concentrations of the Tswana tribe. Whites are not supposed to watch.

Years of systematically dividing the population into separate living areas has made possible this astonishing attempt at airwaves apartheid. Thus Bop-TV, as it is called, is beamed by directional antennas to the black ghetto of Soweto but not to Johannesburg, which is only 20 miles away. It is aimed at the black townships of Mamelodi and Atteridgeville near Pretoria, but not at the capital itself.

The technique has not yet been perfected, however. There is some "spillage" into the white areas, and this has caused an unseemly scramble among viewers who are bored with the dry fare dished up by the semi-official South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and unaccustomed to anything desirable being reserved for blacks. Whites continue to buy elaborate aerials and amplifiers to try to pick up spillage of the livelier Bop programs, including American series. Newspapers carry large maps showing which white suburbs can get the off-limits signal, and real estate ads brag about a "beautiful house in suburbs, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, swimming pool, Bop-TV." A spokesman for the Estate Agents Board says good Bop reception can add \$1,000 to the value of a house.

This is not appreciated at the austere SABC,

which keeps warning the frenzied suburbanites not to waste their money. The spillage, it says, will be mopped up just as soon as the corporation's engineers refine their methods. It plans to spend \$1 million this year on new equipment to do the job.

The SABC must go to all this trouble because the government's strategy to rationalize its racial ideology requires it to set up BophuthaTswana as a nominally independent country, complete with its own broadcasting service. The tribal homeland is actually more nearly the equivalent of an Indian reservation in the United States. Because BophuthaTswana's independence is not recognized by the rest of the world, it cannot apply to the International Telecommunications Union for its own broadcasting frequency. It is dependent on South Africa's willingness to let it use one of the channels allocated to the SABC by the international body, and on the SABC's operation of repeating transmitters in Johannesburg and near Pretoria that beam Bop-TV narrowly to black areas where Tswanas reside. Thus South Africa has the legal control it needs to keep the Bop beam segregated.

It exercised that control by putting Bop-TV on a UHF channel. Since SABC channels are in the VHF range, Bop-TV viewers need a different receiving aerial, which costs about \$175. As a further safeguard, South Africa has written a clause into the contract between the two governments specifying that neither side may broadcast "anything which is contrary to any rule or law operative in either country." So if Bop-TV steps out of line, the SABC can simply pull its plug.

South Africa's white rulers have long feared television. Until 1975 they prohibited it altogether, cleaving to the view of an early minister in charge of broadcasting, Albert Hertzog, that television would corrupt the Afrikaner with programs from

Allister Sparks, former editor of the Rand Daily Mail, is now The Washington Post's correspondent based in Johannesburg.

the outside world, which was, and is, felt to have lost its sense of racial pride. SABC channels are controlled to exclude "undesirable" material.

It is revealing that this censorship has been aimed less at violence and sexual permissiveness, and more at shows that might undermine the ideological concept known as "Christian nationalism"—the ordained right of each *volk*, or ethnic group, to its own cultural identity and separate nationhood. Thus the gun-blazing *A-Team* and the amoral cads of *Dallas* have both had record runs, but Alex Haley's *Roots* was rejected, and there was much agonizing before the broadcast of two episodes dealing with the Holocaust in the BBC series *The World at War*. Many Afrikaners were Nazi sympathizers during the war, and it was feared the concentration camp scenes might upset some sensibilities.

There is also blatant political control of newscasts and panel discussions. Events are always reported from the official standpoint. Those damaging to the government are played down or omitted altogether. In interviews, servile hacks put set-up questions to official spokesmen, who are never interrupted as they deliver their prepared replies. Dissenting views, whether of white liberals or moderate blacks, are kept to the level of tokenism. Real black nationalists are rigorously excluded.

Segregated television really began three years ago when the SABC introduced two channels of its own for blacks. It generally limited the audience to blacks by the simple expedient of broadcasting in the main tribal languages, even though 80 percent of the city blacks—the only ones who can afford television sets—use English as their everyday language. This was intended partly to promote the government's policy of emphasizing tribal differences among the black African majority, and partly to limit cross-color contact.

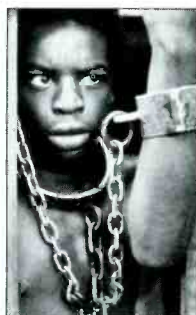
The insistence on linguistic purity caused some headaches for television commercial scriptwriters, who sought to tantalize viewers in city ghettos but were not allowed to use any of their everyday lingua franca. They had to address them in the African equivalent of Victorian English. One copywriter tells how he had a candy commercial rejected by the SABC because it featured a circus elephant. He was told that the elephant was a sacred animal to the Venda and Swazi tribes and so its use might offend them. Another writer was told he could not use the English words "toothpaste" and "potato chips," even though blacks already use them and there are no equivalents in the Zulu, Xhosa, and Tswana languages for these commodities. He had to refer in his commercials to "slices of potato fried in oil" and to "the soap that washes teeth."

Though Bop-TV is beholden to South Africa, its location in a nominally independent territory means that it does not have quite the same constraints upon it. The service is in English, and the programs are brighter. These differences encourage channel-hopping by both whites and blacks. The result is that viewership figures show Bop-TV gaining ground among whites living in the narrow spillage areas. The number of white viewers increased from 50,000 to 81,000 between the first and

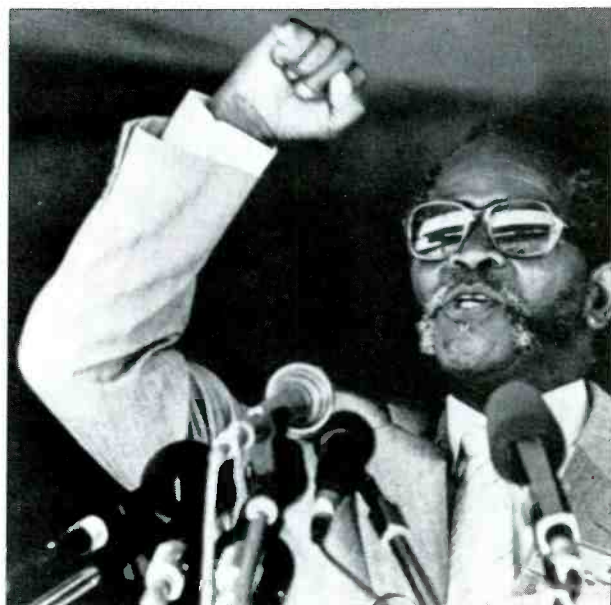
second quarters of last year. In Soweto, Bop-TV overtook the SABC's black channel viewership within three months of its inauguration.

The channel has run *Roots* and other entertainment programs that have raised Pretoria's ire. But it is the newscasts in particular that have nettled the South Africans. Bop-TV news has highlighted labor disputes, giving the often vigorously expressed views of black union leaders, which South African television never reports. After incidents of racial unrest, it has interviewed blacks who were involved and not just the white police chief who ordered the demonstrators dispersed.

Some newscasts went so far as to feature members of the black underground who cannot be quoted in South Africa under penalty of law. Bop-TV showed a clip from a press conference given in Zimbabwe by the exiled president of the outlawed



Bop-TV raised Pretoria's ire by airing Roots (above) and a newscast of exiled black leader Oliver Tambo (right).



Reuters/Beitman Newsphotos

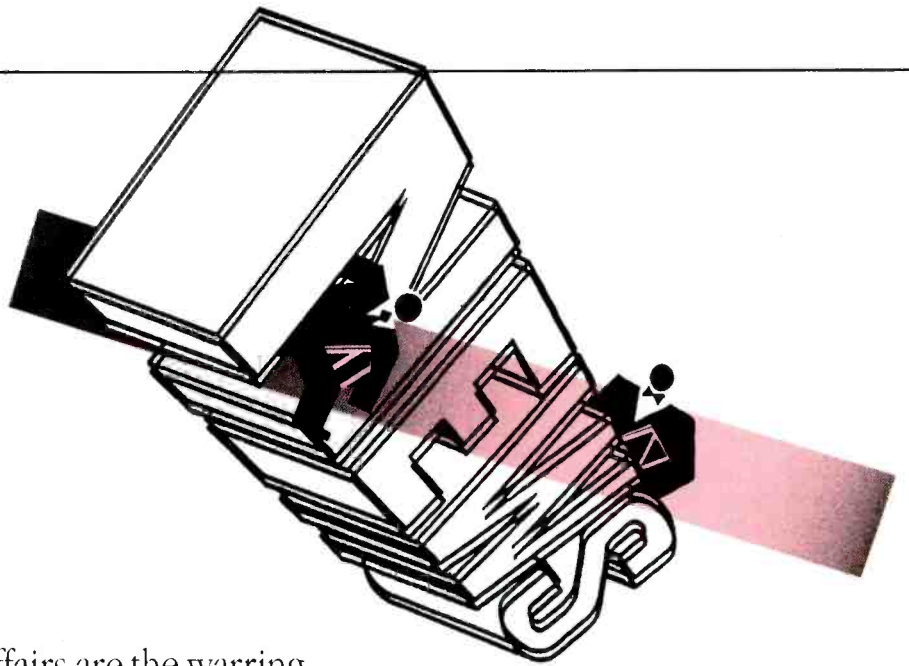
African National Congress (ANC), Oliver Tambo. It also broadcast an interview with another black figure who cannot be quoted, Willie Mandela, the wife of the imprisoned ANC leader, Nelson Mandela. That, South Africa protested, violated the broadcast agreement. Late last year South Africa lodged a formal protest with the "homeland" government. Since then the station has toed the line more carefully.

The advent of Bop-TV with its directional beaming raises fascinating possibilities for the further development of airwave apartheid. There are nine other tribal homelands under the government's system of "separate development," and it is surely only a matter of time before these ask for the same facilities BophuthaTswana has. Moreover, an Afrikaans newspaper columnist has suggested that Indians and the mixed-race people known here as coloreds, who were recently given token representation in Parliament, should be accommodated in broadcasting as well.

One can picture all those television channels relayed from the SABC's towers in a multiplicity of pencil-like beams, each aimed at its own ethnic ghettos, all crisscrossing one another like searchlights during an air raid. ■

Ads for real estate in white neighborhoods stress the availability of Bop-TV. It's said that good reception of the station can add \$1,000 to the value of a house.

TWO TRIBES



In Britain, News and Current Affairs are the warring camps of broadcast journalism. Set in their divergent ways and split by a 40-year-old rivalry, the groups are agreed on only one point: their separateness.

W

hen American television newscasters drop in on their colleagues in Britain, they are struck by a peculiar split between two groups of broadcast journalists. Whether they go to the BBC or to the commercial firms that constitute the ITV network, they find within each network two tribes, each with its own traditions, values, and heroes. One is called News, the other Current Affairs. The tribes work in different buildings, have different career structures and personal backgrounds, and battle endlessly for budgets and journalistic glory.

At the heart of the News tribe are the London newsrooms of the BBC and ITV's Independent Television News. Both are organized like a newspaper's, with seasoned generalists sitting at a central desk looking for stories. They rely heavily on wire services, government departments, press releases, and other media for inspiration. They dispatch reporters, many of whom are all-rounders who learned the trade at small newspapers. There are no schools of journalism in Britain, and few journalists there have college degrees. They believe fervently in the old maxim, "Facts are sacred, comment is free." And to them "comment" means not only opinion but analysis as well. They justifiably take pride in their speed and mastery of electronic news-gathering and regard their Current Affairs rivals as dilettantes.

Current Affairs, in contrast, is not modeled on the newsroom, but on the traditions of feature journalism and documentary film. In the BBC and at commercial companies such as Granada and Thames, there is a thriving world of daily and weekly programs created by staffs without news backgrounds. Most have liberal arts degrees; others come from cutting-rooms and film schools. Above all, they value flair, imagination, and the

BY PETER H. FOGES

ability to tell a good story. They are skeptical of official sources, and often adopt a man-on-the-street view of society. Many believe passionately in cinematic method as the only true vehicle for television journalism, and their efforts have far more polish than reports by their rivals in News. They look down on News, not without a touch of British snobbery.

Newscasts produced by the News tribe are duller than their American counterparts, but those responsible would argue the case for a little dullness. There is less glitz and less fuss made over the anchors. But the evening news programs essentially share the American network news format. They present a conventional, almost corporate view of the world.

Current Affairs programs, on the other hand, are more varied in form and less predictable. Several, such as Granada's *World in Action* and Thames's *TV Eye*, are weekly half-hour single-subject documentaries. *Panorama*, the BBC's 30-year-old flagship, includes long, stylish filmed reports. Some cover such specific beats as economics and parliamentary politics, and others, including one called *Breakfast Time*, are light-hearted concoctions nearer to show business than journalism.

These two distinct approaches can also be detected in American television journalism, particularly in the contrast between the institutional style of the commercial networks and the varied approaches of the independent filmmakers who produce documentaries for PBS. Nevertheless, the American networks' news divisions are unified, and manage to deploy the same reporters and producers in both hard news and public affairs.

Why has Britain developed two competing jour-

Peter H. Foges, now director of national public affairs programming at WNET/Thirteen in New York, was a BBC producer and director for 15 years. From 1979 to 1984 he headed the BBC-TV bureau in New York.

nalistic domains? The curious history can be told through the career of one man, the late Richard Dimbleby.

The BBC's very first news reporter, the first to broadcast an eyewitness account from the scene, Dimbleby became Britain's Edward R. Murrow. Both were patron saints of the new profession of radio journalism, both became national institutions as war reporters, and both pioneered in television. Dimbleby and Murrow knew and admired each other, and their paths often crossed. Both died in 1965, at the very moment when television was emerging as the single most potent news-reporting instrument the world has known. Dimbleby and Murrow epitomized the first age of electronic journalism. But what a different age it was in Britain.

Television news everywhere has the same roots—radio news, the theatrical newsreels of the 1930s and '40s, and the documentary film. After the war, when television took off in America, there was a swift and uncontroversial marriage uniting these three media. NBC and CBS hired newsreel cameramen to work alongside radio newsmen. It seemed like the natural thing to do.

In Britain it was an altogether different story. Before the war, the BBC had been cautious about news, fearing controversy and the power of the press lobby. With its war reporting, however, BBC News had gained immense prestige and credibility. Even when allied armies were in retreat it did not flinch from saying so. Thus it was surprising when in 1945 the BBC's director-general, William Haley, announced that the News Division would return to its timid prewar ways. The postwar BBC, he ruled, would not gather the news itself. It would have no domestic news reporters. If the two wire services didn't carry a certain story, it simply would not be news for the BBC. The old adage, "when in doubt, leave it out," would become holy writ. BBC radio was running for cover. That was doubly true for the fledgling BBC television, which resumed operations that same year.

Haley, who later went on to become editor of the London *Times*, was one of many in the cloistered establishment at the time who distrusted television. His arguments had moral overtones, as though there were something a little wicked about pictures. Not only did he gag BBC journalism in general, but he was determined to impede the development of television news in particular. "I doubt," he wrote in a confidential 1946 memo, "whether the implications of a completely visual news bulletin have been fully comprehended. There is all the difference between a news bulletin and a newsreel. The first is a vital public service charged with responsibilities of all kinds. The second, in essence, is entertainment." For years thereafter BBC-TV transmitted BBC radio news bulletins late at night, accompanied by a blank screen. Later, as a concession, a still picture of the Houses of Parliament was allowed.

It was these timorous and austere attitudes, combined with the perennial budgetary wrangle, that led Dimbleby to quit the BBC staff in 1945 and try his luck as a freelancer. From then on he regarded the News Division as the enemy of good

muscular journalism. He found work in two small BBC-TV departments, the oddly named Talks Department, and the Film Department, where a kind of resistance movement was growing. If television couldn't have a news service of its own, then it would have to invent from scratch new kinds of programs, and a new television language, using the talents of the newsreel cameramen, documentary producers, and others who had been frozen out of News. The Current Affairs tribe was born.

Rather surprisingly for the time, the leader of this tribe was a woman—Grace Wyndham-Goldie, one of the true visionaries of modern broadcasting. With her powerful intellect and formidable presence, she dominated a whole generation of young men she had picked as her team—and who now run British broadcasting. She was one of the first people anywhere to realize the power and potential of the medium. Before the war (BBC television began regular broadcasts in 1936) she was Britain's first television critic, and later she volunteered to be one of the first postwar producers. Television's short history is peopled with powerful characters who pounded tables, changed working methods, demanded air-time, and got things done. Grace Wyndham-Goldie was one of the greatest of these dragon-slayers.

While she was seeking to develop a new kind of television program, the American networks had spawned several, including CBS's *See It Now* and NBC's *Today* show. In 1953 and '54, Murrow and producer Fred Friendly dared to tackle the subject



UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos

Murrow and Dimbleby epitomized the first age of electronic journalism. Their paths often crossed, and both died at the moment when television was emerging as the most potent news instrument the world has known.



Copyright BBC

of Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt in several landmark broadcasts. There was nothing like them on the BBC. At the same time Mrs. Wyndham-Goldie was putting together the new kind of program she had sought. She chose Richard Dimbleby to anchor a new weekly 50-minute broadcast called *Panorama*. It was Britain's first program to go out into the world with cameras and report on human conflict and suffering. The magazine-format program pioneered an entirely new style of interviewing and reporting, quickly won a

Edward R. Murrow (top) in 1958. Richard Dimbleby (above), here introducing BBC's weekly show Panorama, regarded the News Division as the enemy of muscular journalism.

Those who would unify the factions argue that today's complex events require a coordinated effort.



Tribal leader: Visionary Grace Wyndham-Goldie (above) used her intellect to dominate a generation of men who now run British broadcasting.

huge audience, and made Dimpleby once again the paramount broadcast journalist of the day.

In 1955, the same year the BBC invented *Panorama*, its monopoly on television news was finally challenged by the arrival of commercial television, and with it Independent Television News (ITN), the country's first journalistic endeavor born in the television age, which had none of Haley's Calvinistic qualms. It won large audiences, and forced the BBC News Division to compete. Even today, ITN is regarded by most observers as the more inspired of the two.

Thirty years have passed. But time has not built many bridges between News and Current Affairs in Britain. Both are entrenched in their ways despite some half-hearted efforts to unite them. In 1959 another BBC director-general, Hugh Greene (brother of the novelist Graham), unified the top management of News and Current Affairs. But tribal animosities survived his reform. And in commercial television the pattern of separate tribes was borrowed and set in concrete.

After *Panorama*, BBC Current Affairs created many remarkable new programs. With a crew drawn from the brilliant but defunct print magazine *Picture Post*, the topical, irreverent nightly television magazine *Tonight* left a mark still felt in British broadcasting. Then came the satiric show that launched David Frost's career, *That Was the Week That Was*. Grace Wyndham-Goldie's department became the single most creative unit working in British television. Film directors John Schlesinger, Jack Gold, and others like them began their careers there, as did Ned Sherrin, David Attenborough, and Huw Wheldon.

At the time, the BBC fiercely resisted unifying News and Current Affairs to preserve the merits of the two tribes' divergent ways. It was feared that, in a merger, the values and budgetary needs of News would predominate.

By the 1970s, however, new arguments began to be heard. Critics said there was too little editorial supervision over Current Affairs producers. After a damaging row in 1971, the BBC found itself apologizing to the Labor party for a wickedly clever, satirical documentary by Richard Dimpleby's eldest son, David, on out-of-office Labor politicians. Several Current Affairs executives lost their jobs. The department came to be perceived within the political elite as "dangerous," and the BBC tried to tame it. Strict procedures were set up to govern its Northern Ireland coverage. "As between the British Army and the gunmen, the BBC is not and cannot be impartial," the corporation's chairman pledged to the government in 1971. As the post-war consensus within British society began to break down, the broadcast journalist's job became harder. There was to be no shelter from the storm.

The News divisions were also battered. During the '70s, for example, the British labor unions objected to the bias they saw in ITN and BBC news. They said television presented strikes as antisocial union behavior rather than, say, as a reaction to managerial incompetence. Detailed studies of news bulletins eventually led to changes in indus-

trial reporting. Such attacks on broadcast news have become common, indicating that fewer and fewer people can agree on one set of objective "facts."

External pressures took their toll. Current Affairs lost some of its intellectual vivacity. But the external pressures did not force the tribes together. Instead, the greatest recent pressures for reform and unification have come from within broadcast journalism itself. Many insiders have come to believe that a new kind of factual programming is needed to explain complex 1980s events. The increasingly sophisticated and well educated audience also has shown irritation with old forms of television journalism. Most News and Current Affairs programs have been losing audiences since the late '60s.

In an influential series of London *Times* articles, the noted journalist and broadcaster Peter Jay argued that the split between News and Current Affairs has produced a "bias against understanding." He argued that the News divisions—staffed by the wrong people, its work predicated on the wrong definition of news—can produce only confusing fragments of news. It cannot adequately interpret or analyze developments, in part because that is expressly forbidden by its professional ethos. As for Current Affairs, the fixation on film has led it to rely on a microcosm, with strong dramatic ingredients, to represent a larger issue—an intellectual fallacy in Jay's opinion.

Jay practiced what he preached in the early '70s on a single-topic weekly broadcast called *Weekend World*, produced by London Weekend Television. It came to be regarded as one of the best-informed television programs in Britain. Similarly, both *Channel Four News* and the BBC's *Newsnight* present almost an hour of news analysis daily. (Each was staffed by recruits from both tribes.) In America, the *MacNeill/Lehrer NewsHour* provides analysis in the style advocated by Jay. However, all of these programs are transmitted either during fringe hours or on networks with relatively small audiences. Traditionalists say the real test will be to mount news analysis programs on mainstream networks during prime time.

The other internal pressure for unification is financial. In its increasingly difficult fiscal situation, the BBC simply will not be able to go on flying at least two teams of reporters and producers to every spot where news might occur. Those days are over. Outsiders always wondered how an organization so visibly strapped for cash could justify such profligacy. But when Current Affairs is eventually unified with News, a valuable anomaly will be lost.

The department that Grace Wyndham-Goldie and Richard Dimpleby forged was a remarkable social and cultural asset, and served the British public well. Yet Current Affairs was the unintended consequence of Haley's postwar prejudice against television news. A more enlightened policy in 1945 would almost certainly have led to less intellectual diversity on British television today. ■

HUCKSTERING HEALTH

'Social marketers' are bringing the hard-sell techniques of Madison Avenue to Peru, Egypt, and other underdeveloped countries. But instead of soft drinks or figure salons, they're selling breast-feeding and family planning.

Before mass-media advertising of infant formula was finally banned in 1981, the Nestlé company promoted sales in Malaysia with TV commercials featuring clips of the company's annual baby beauty contest. And in dozens of languages around the world the company's singing radio commercials urged listeners to give their babies Lactogen and love.

Health workers fought against the promotion of infant formula because bottle-fed babies, especially those in poor Third World homes, more often have infections, are malnourished, and die earlier than those who are breast-fed. But they couldn't deny the effectiveness of the marketing know-how that had moved mountains of formula and other packaged goods, and began applying those techniques in their own work.

Today it's good health, not Lactogen, that the Third World's radio jingles and televised babies are likely to be selling. Public health authorities, backed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), UNICEF, the World Bank, and other funders, have increasingly adopted a practice called social marketing:

- On Gambian radio, a storyteller accompanied by traditional musicians sings a song advising listeners to wash their hands with soap and water.

- An animated spot on Peruvian television features a trim young couple in their living room, surrounded by multiplying rabbits. "Do you know what responsible parenting is?" asks a sober male voice.

- A soap opera sound-alike on Egyptian radio turns out to be rural mothers discussing how they prepare a diarrhea remedy for children.

What social marketers are promoting is not as simple or instantly gratifying as a bottle of Coca-Cola. "We're asking people to adopt new behav-

iors," says social marketing expert Richard Manoff. Broadcast spots alone won't do the job, but they do help to "legitimize" the message a public health worker brings to a village. Billboards are used to reinforce the message. Comprehensive campaigns involve local health officials, doctors and nurses, schools, and incentives.

In many Third World countries, where 20 to 80 percent of the people can't read, radio is the best medium for reaching the masses. In remote regions of Latin America, radio is used as a kind of electronic bulletin board. Just as a family can report that Uncle's operation went well, the public health nurse can announce that she'll be in town to vaccinate children the following week.

In Gambia, radio came to the rescue when pamphlets failed to teach mothers how to mix a preparation to combat the dangerous dehydration that accompanies diarrhea. Most of the mothers had never before seen printed pictures and couldn't interpret the how-to drawings. Turning to radio, local officials encouraged mothers to listen to a program explaining the color-coded pamphlet, which would then serve as a reminder of the process. Mothers who could mix the remedy would win a free measuring cup, and they would have a chance at winning the Happy Baby Lottery. The grand prize, of course, was a radio.

ANew York adman would be at home with some of the techniques social marketers employ: focus groups, pre-testing of messages, and audience segmentation analysis. The research not only indicates message effectiveness, it often pinpoints weak spots as well. One Honduran radio campaign on breast-feeding illustrates the point: A spot encouraging new fathers to treat their breast-feeding wives with affection featured a national

Pat Aufderheide, a Washington, D.C. writer, is cultural editor of In These Times newspaper.

BY PAT AUFDERHEIDE



When the spots went on the radio in Honduras, health officials objected that they reinforced folk myths about health. But the commercials got the point across.

soccer hero. However, researchers discovered that viewers found the spot hilariously unbelievable since in Honduras soccer players have a reputation as womanizers.

The radio campaign also featured a catchy jingle designed to counter the belief that breast-feeding was old-fashioned and only appropriate for poor mothers—a legacy of years of infant formula advertising. “We have to find the best places in people’s minds to insert our messages,” says Manoff. While planning the UNICEF breast-feeding campaign in Brazil, marketers found they couldn’t simply imitate infant formula ads, with their romanticized images of maternal love. Mothers were already afraid they could not breast-feed adequately, and idyllic spots on behalf of breast-feeding might only backfire and raise mothers’ anxieties. So the marketers adopted the reassuring theme, “Every mother can! Stay with it!” and offered practical information and statistics showing that breast milk prevents childhood disease.

Where broadcasting doesn’t reach the target audience, social marketers use related media. An Egyptian government radio station had an ex-

In foreign-aid grantsmanship, social marketing benefits from the “sex appeal” associated with up-to-date marketing and media. But some health education veterans wonder how new or improved the idea really is, and raise eyebrows over imitative advertising techniques. “We already know that the same formula that sold soap won’t sell smoking reduction,” says Dr. Lawrence Green, a health educator at the University of Texas. And, he argues, while social marketing may actually provide the integrated educational campaigns that proponents say are at its heart, they look an awful lot like traditional health education—but with more money and mass media behind them than public health educators can usually muster.

Even so, social marketing is far less expensive than the major social reforms and public-works projects needed to permanently improve health conditions. “The water problem cannot be solved just by getting people to boil their water,” Manoff says. “The government has to provide a potable water supply to its people.”

Some health educators are critical of social marketing campaigns, finding them overly manipulative. Many hard-sell broadcast messages push a single solution to a health problem, and “don’t give the viewer a choice,” according to former World Health Organization official Akbar Moerfi.

While short-range successes have been noted, even the most enthusiastic social marketers aren’t claiming long-range success so far. “We know we can get a big bang for the buck,” says Elizabeth Booth of a consulting firm specializing in social marketing. “We don’t know yet what it will take to maintain that impact over time and really change behavior.” Effectiveness is hard to gauge in Third World countries that lack statistical research. “No quintile analysis, no Nielsen,” says Novelli, shrugging his shoulders. And many of these media campaigns end just when a commercial advertiser would begin to increase the investment.

Some Third World countries are resisting mass media campaigns, with their taints of Madison Avenue and “cultural imperialism.” Indonesia bans all commercials, whether for Coke or contraceptives, on its new television system. In Bangladesh, officials initially felt that short, repetitive commercials were too manipulative. “But resistance is lessening as they see results,” says Manoff associate Daniel Lissance.

Marketers of all kinds specialize in results, of course, and seldom disdain shortcuts. In planning a campaign against the infant diarrhea in Honduras, for example, strategists capitalized on the folk belief that the stomach always contains a sack of worms, which are released, causing diarrhea, when people eat badly. When the spots went on the radio, they featured “Lombrolfo” and “Lombri-cio,” two worms chatting gleefully about the dirty food and water taken in by their host child. Government officials were scandalized, objecting that the commercials reinforced misconceptions about health, but Lombrolfo and Lombri-cio scored a perfect hit with listeners. ■



Academy for Educational Development

In Gambia, a radio program teaches mothers how to mix a rehydration solution to fight the effects of diarrhea. Those who learn the formula have the chance to win the Happy Baby Lottery.

tremely small audience, so public health officials sent out soundtrucks, alerting villagers to tune in for valuable prizes as well as information. In villages beyond the reach of broadcast television in the Philippines, a nutrition project deployed vans equipped to show video cassettes promoting the use of food supplements. Follow-up studies showed that more villagers remembered the messages brought to them by VCR than by health workers going door to door.

Besides promoting good health practices, social marketing often sells products as well—condoms, food supplements, and the like. After television promotion, a new contraceptive tablet “leaped off the shelves” of Egyptian pharmacies, says William Novelli, president of an advertising firm involved in social marketing. Ad agencies also benefit: A new Washington, D.C. firm that specializes in social marketing recently won a \$21 million AID contract to promote contraceptives in developing countries. In fact, such partnerships with the private sector have made social marketing popular with AID under the Reagan Administration.

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Prime Time for the Telephone

'Dial-it' services earn millions with pay-per-call programs.

by Richard Barbieri

YOU'RE LIKELY TO FIND only a few listed in the telephone directory, but "dial-it" telephone numbers get millions of calls every day. These "mass announcement services," as the phone companies call them, are adding a new dimension to a century-old medium. By providing entertainment as well as information, private dial-it entrepreneurs are bringing pay programming and large audiences—an ingenious kind of "leased-access" arrangement—to the telephone.

Dial-it services present short audio programs, from 30 seconds to three minutes in length. They cost very little to produce and to call, and can make money not only for the entrepreneur but also for the phone company. (New York Telephone is expected to earn \$56 million from its dial-it services this fiscal year.)

Although the dial-it phenomenon is relatively new as a private enterprise, it has its origins in early telephone services—the time and weather reports. The first American time-of-day line was started in New York in 1939, and within a few years similar services were offered in 69 cities. Back then operators, not recordings, an-

nounced the time.

The next innovation, SportsPhone, came more than 30 years later, which is surprising since it serves such an obvious need. Recordings of fast-talking announcers give fans up-to-the-minute scores and news of player trades and injuries, 24 hours a day. (It also helped establish the "976" exchange, which is now assigned to dial-it numbers across the country.) Today, in New York City alone, SportsPhone gets more than 100,000 calls a day during football season.

SportsPhone paved the way for other successful informational offerings. The Dow Jones Market Report provided stock quotes and financial news to 18 million callers in 1984. Along with dial-it lines for horse-race results and winning lottery numbers there are such esoteric services as Dial-a-Bird ("Mountain bluebirds are still reported in several nearby areas"), Astronomy Hotline ("New infrared studies of the Milky Way galaxy support the idea that a massive black hole exists there"), and Dial-a-Diet ("Every day divide the food you eat into different categories; eat red meat rarely, if at all").

Telephone became a show biz medium

as well in the early '70s with Dial-a-Joke, which, like SportsPhone, is offered in nearly every city that has dial-it programs. Now Philadelphia has a number for the Michael Jackson-obsessed ("Hi, Michael fans. Wasn't it just yesterday that we were talking about how reclusive M.J. is? Well, you've all heard the rumors about . . ."). There is a Chicago number called Lovecasts ("Scorpio should think carefully before financing a lover's speculative venture"). New Jersey's Dial-a-Story entertained some 6,000 callers one day last January with a children's tale about the invention of corn flakes.

In Los Angeles you can be romanced by a reader of love poetry or seduced by a "soft-porn" dial-it service: "Hellooo," coos a woman's voice. "Love, romance, and passion, a candlelight dinner. Let's get lost in each other. Move with me." She emits one little pant between each word: "Warm, soft, passionate. Aahhh. I must be dreaming. I luuff you!" This and similar messages titillated more than 500,000 callers in the number's first six months of operation in 1983.

There are even steamier messages just a phone call away. While they tend to be the most frequently called, these "dial-a-porn" services are also the most controversial, provoking demands for censorship. Gloria Leonard, publisher of the porn magazine *High Society*, started it all in 1983 by winning a number in New York Telephone's dial-it lottery (which is how some phone companies award their numbers). Today Leonard's so-called Hotlines operate in seven cities that collectively scorch between 400,000 and 600,000 ears a day.

They also agitate elements of the citizenry who contend that Hotline and its imitators are transmitting pornography over telephone lines in violation of federal law. Last year Congress ordered the Federal Communications Commission to devise a way to make these services inac-



A TV commercial for SportsPhone, which paved the way for other successful informational "dial-it" services

cessible to children. The FCC's solution was to limit their operation to the nighttime hours, but Leonard challenged the commission in a federal appeals court last summer, and won. The FCC is expected to propose new remedies later this year. Leonard maintains that her First Amendment rights would be violated by any federal restrictions on Hotline. Meanwhile her phones continue to ring, bringing her about \$10,000 a day, and even more to the phone companies.

Since the Bell System breakup the local phone companies have gone their own way with dial-it services. Each has reserved a number of lines: New Jersey Bell, for example, has nine, New York Telephone 44, and Pacific Bell upwards of 100. While the local phone companies are no longer allowed to determine the price and content of dial-it programs, they still handle the billing of the calls and, in most cases, lease the answering equipment to programmers.

Charlie DeNatale, president of Phone Programs, a dial-it programmer with services in six cities, including New York, Chicago, and Detroit, explains, "When Bell was involved, we were contracted by them and they paid us a monthly fee. Now we make our money on a per-call basis," he says, which generally amounts to two cents a call. The dial-it programmer must assure a minimum number of calls (100,000 a month in New York City, where programmers pay back 9.4 cents for every call below the minimum).

Hundreds of independent companies operate dial-it services. One is Sun-Dial Productions in Atlantic City. The company operates all of New Jersey Bell's nine dial-it numbers, which received 40 million calls in 1984. The lottery-results line alone gets 35,000 calls a day. Callers within New Jersey pay 13 cents, the price of a local call. In turn, the phone company gives Sun-Dial two cents a call. At that rate, 40 million calls earned Sun-Dial some \$800,000 last year.

Programmers have also found that longer messages are even more lucrative. A San Francisco company known as Megaphone charges soap-opera lovers 55 cents to hear plot summaries when they can't get to their TV sets. Intercepting satellite feeds as the programs air in the East gives Megaphone time to record the summaries and make them available during the soaps' West Coast broadcasts. (At first Megaphone ran the summaries before the shows aired, but the networks soon put a stop to that.) Megaphone keeps more than half the price of each call. Even higher-priced services are un-

High Society publisher Gloria Leonard, whose x-rated Hotlines rake in upwards of \$10,000 daily



This ingenious kind of 'leased access' adds a new dimension to an old medium.

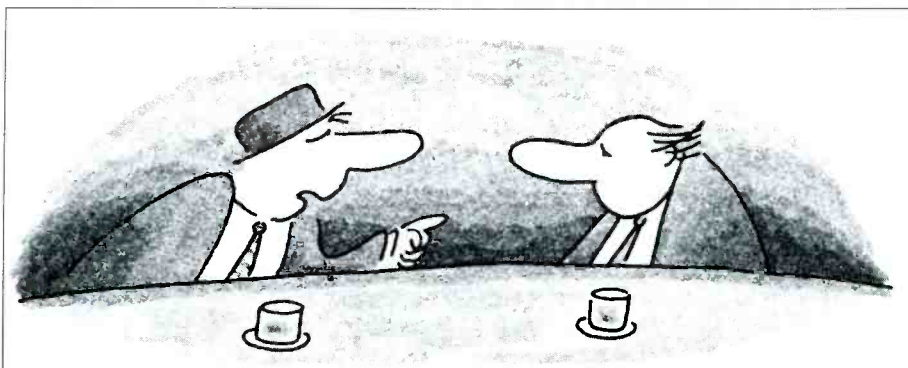
der consideration: A dial-it line applicant in Pennsylvania wants to charge \$5 a call for celebrity interviews.

Local dial-it services have a counterpart in AT&T's national dial-it lines using the 900 area code. The messages on these numbers, which cost 50 cents each, are generally longer than those on local services. Callers to AT&T's national dial-it numbers can hear sports messages, trivia quizzes and, for vacationers, tips from Bargain Hotline ("The clouds are gone, the weather is springlike, and it's vacation time in Bermuda, where you'll find tremendous bargains on woollens this time of year"). AT&T leases equipment to outside companies that operate the programs. One 900 dial-it service offered periodically is Dial-a-Shuttle, which gives updates on Space Shuttle flights. The first flight, three years ago, drew 1.2 million calls.

Dow Jones, already earning a bundle off its Market Report, has signed up 5,000 people for something called Dowphone. Callers dial a toll-free number to get to an

introductory message—the top headlines from that day's *Wall Street Journal*—and then they dial a personal code number to get audio reports on stocks they regularly trade. Dow Jones bills them directly for the personalized stock service—50 cents to \$1 per minute—and charges a \$25-a-year membership fee.

Advances in speech-synthesis technology are making the telephone an even more powerful narrowcasting medium by enabling computers to deliver information normally provided by a recorded voice. Computerized speech already allows such services as Dowphone to offer messages more complex than stock quotes—the full texts of newspaper articles, for example. DECTalk, a device that allows a personal computer to speak in a nearly human-sounding voice, is currently being called by people on the road who want to tap into databases through a telephone. When the new speech technology is perfected it will, in the words of one communications analyst, "turn the telephone into a library." ■

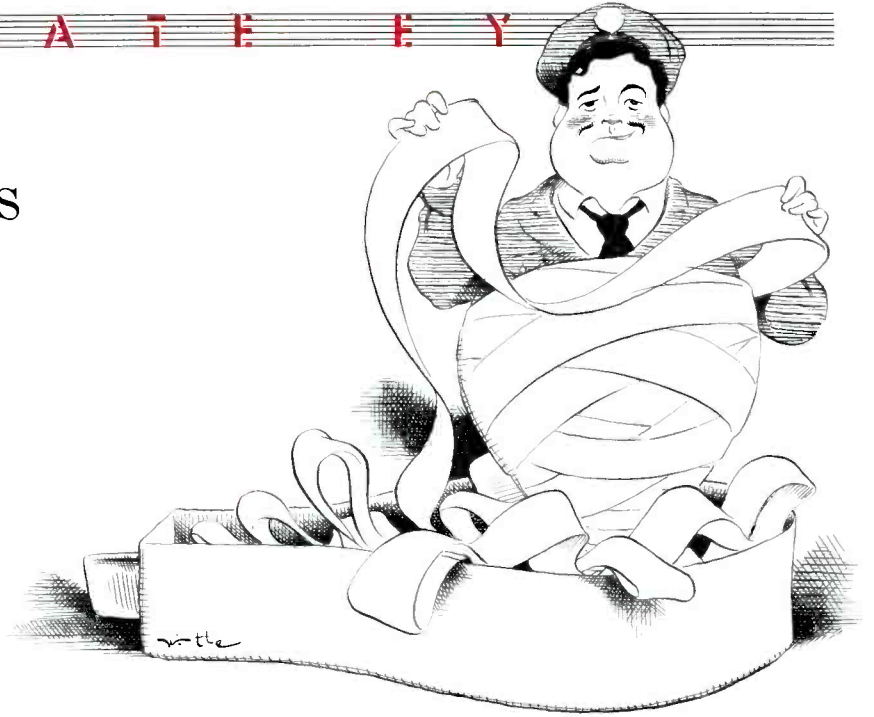


"JUST THINK, SEVENTY MILLION AMERICANS ARE WATCHING TELEVISION NO MATTER WHAT'S ON."

CHARLES BARSOTTI

How Sweet It Still Is

by William A. Henry III



WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS, I felt almost as though scores of lost Leonardos or unknown plays by Shakespeare had come to light. I could hardly admit in public to my level of exultation. No sentient adult is supposed to feel that way about a television series. Yet at the press conference to confirm the rediscovery of dozens of lost episodes of *The Honeymooners*, the hundred media heavies milling around me seemed to have been similarly transformed from cynical reporters to blissful devotees.

The Honeymooners is my all-time favorite television series and arguably the whole country's. *I Love Lucy* and its sequels have been more widely seen, to be sure. But there were hundreds of *Lucy* episodes. *The Honeymooners* numbered 39 installments, one season's worth, as an independent series. Every fan, practically every American, has seen them often enough to recall plots, recite passages of dialogue, break instinctively into Ralph Kramden's aggressive buck-and-wing or T-shirted Ed Norton's elaborate preparatory rolling up of his imaginary sleeves.

Along with the 39 familiar episodes, dozens more were aired as skits on Jackie Gleason's variety series. Not all of those would be admitted by purists to the *Honeymooners* canon. For the first season, Pert Kelton rather than Audrey Meadows played Alice Kramden, and the character seemed more a battered harridan than a saint; the show was an almost unrelieved shouting match, a television copy of a radio hit about a squabbling couple, *The Bickersons*. Early shows did not feature Ed Norton (or his wife) either, an unthinkable omission in a series that epitomized the comic vagaries of male bonding. A couple of installments even violated the most distinctive quality of *The Honeymooners*' domesticity: the absence of children. In one, Ralph and Alice adopted an infant until the mother demanded that the child be returned. That resolution was wise, the initial impulse all wrong. The Kramden marriage was complete in itself, a safe harbor from the humiliations visited by the world.

William A. Henry III, a critic for Time, is author of Visions of America, a book about the 1984 Presidential campaign.

'THE HONEYMOONERS' FORESHADOWED THE SOCIAL REBELLION OF DECADES TO COME.

No new set of problems at home could have been borne by Ralph, that biggest and most unruly of children.

Still, even if one excluded such oddities, dozens of *Honeymooners* installments might be worth recapturing from the variety hours, if only they could be found. But could they? Rumor asserted that CBS had destroyed all its tapes in some act of carelessness or, alternatively, in a fit of vengeful lunacy after Gleason left the network's ranks. An opposite rumor held that CBS had every foot of every show, secreted in some vault, but refused to release any of it for reasons of pique or legal anxiety. In recent years, the latter story was proved untrue. Curator Ron Simon of Manhattan's Museum of Broadcasting—a creation of CBS chairman emeritus William Paley—had been able to search CBS's archives and most relevant others, including those of at least one *Honeymooners* writer. In all, Simon found just four "lost" episodes.

The one person who had not spoken up was Gleason. After the Museum's exhibit stirred interest, including calls from syn-

dicators, he suddenly "discovered" that he had maintained a virtually complete set of *Honeymooners* footage all the while. He soon negotiated a deal to repackage them into several hour-long specials and some 75 half-

hour sitcom installments, to be highlighted in a network TV special, shown on cable's Showtime channel, and later broadcast via syndication.

Announcing this joyful resurrection was the purpose of the press conference I crowded into with so many eager others. Gleason played coy about whether he knew he had the shows all along, or only looked for them after the upsurge of publicity. The shows are so obvious an asset that one might have expected him to exploit them at his earliest opportunity. But instead, like many an actor who has been made famous by a single role—like Carroll O'Connor with Archie Bunker, or the 19th-century barnstormer James O'Neill (father of playwright Eugene) with *The Count of Monte Cristo*—Gleason has felt so confined by Ralph Kramden that he has all but spurned the memory, generally refusing, for example, to make publicity appearances to promote the reruns. Unlike O'Connor and O'Neill, he had other real successes. Unlike them, he was the

prime literary creator of his greatest part. Nonetheless, he has bridled at the awareness that no matter what else he achieved in a fertile career, he would always be remembered best for that bygone triumph. No one likes to peak early, then spend half his adult life regarded as a has-been.

It is always hard to fathom why one popular work achieves the status of a classic, while others quickly date and pass into oblivion. Critics can speculate after the fact but cannot reliably predict what will be admired by generations to come. In the case of *The Honeymooners*, it is easier to cite reasons why the show might be viewed as passé. Its grim, urban blue collar America scarcely exists any more: Even the poor are more prosperous today than they were then, and employed people, particularly New York City bus drivers, almost all live far better than Ralph and Alice Kramden did. If one revisited the Kramdens' rundown neighborhood today, moreover, the neighbors would mostly be black, Hispanic, or perhaps Chinese.

Marital mores, too, have changed utterly. Bellowing husbands threatening to beat their wives do not seem so funny in our era of raised consciousness, and a childless woman would hardly occupy herself nowadays just with cooking and cleaning a two-room apartment.

At the time that *The Honeymooners* was being made, *Ozzie and Harriet* might have seemed a more likely prospect to survive into our era, or perhaps *Father Knows Best* or, if one sought a working-class setting, *The Life of Riley*. They were all conventional family stories, and family stories endure. All those shows featured mothers and fathers and their natural-born offspring coping with modest everyday problems. They were less comedies than what a later generation of TV executive called "warmedies." They epitomized the quintessential niceness that people perceived in President Eisenhower and his America. In contrast to those genially but insistently conformist series, the two acknowledged masterpieces of the era, *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners*, portrayed ardent individualists whose lives were dominated by their own ambitions rather than sublimated to the needs and wishes of children. Their marriages, although sound, involved combat more than cooperation. Their families were not nuclear but extended: They paired off with neighbors so completely that they dined, partied, and vacationed together.

Back then, these relationships were regarded as a little exotic, and the characters were laughed at as much as they were laughed with. But both shows seem, however unconsciously, to have hinted at the social rebellion of decades to come. Three of the four couples in the two shows remained childless without shame or apology. All of the women felt some impulse toward careers, and all agitated to get their way at home. The husbands who bellowed in macho fashion usually either gave in or were pointed up as buffoons. And Ralph Kramden and Lucy Ricardo surely were born to live in a Me Decade. Not only did they act out impulses that characters on other shows suppressed to the point of denial, they yearned for celebrity, for glory, for almost any kind of public notice. Their fondest dream in life was not to fit in but to stand out.

All this sociological analysis may be excessive. Asked by *60 Minutes* why *The Honeymooners* had lasted, Gleason said sim-

ply, "Because they were funny." They are. And somehow they are just as funny, perhaps because they seem just as true, on the 10th or 15th or 60th viewing as on the first. They exaggerated normal human behavior just enough to enable people who cannot laugh at themselves to believe they were laughing at someone else—while letting the rest of us recognize the all too familiar excesses of our temperaments. In one installment, Ralph got into an argument with the landlord and suffered through a shutoff of the heat, a barricade that kept him from getting food, and finally an eviction, all to protest paying a few more dollars rent per month. At the end he sat in the street with his few sticks of furniture around him as snow started to fall. At long last ready to give in, he insisted he was doing so not because he

KRAMDEN, LIKE LUCY, WAS
BORN TO LIVE IN THE 'ME'
DECADE. THEIR FOND DREAM
WAS NOT TO FIT IN
BUT TO STAND OUT.

was wrong or because he had hugely inconvenienced himself for the sake of a dubious principle, but because he must be solicitous of the health of his wife. Practically any rational person in the audience would see himself in the story. We all at times attach insane importance to some tiny point of honor (or what we label honor), and then

find ourselves painted into a corner, longing for some graceful, face-saving exit. Despite his excess of pride, Ralph Kramden won the audience's affection as well as its abuse because his pain and yearning were so palpable, his frustration and self-doubt so naked, and the ocean of sentiment so vast beneath his crust of bravado.

Trying to assess what makes a comedy funny, for its own time or any other, is like trying to nail down quicksilver. But it stands to reason that people laugh at things they regard as part of the human condition, and at people whom they view as in some way reflecting themselves. The humanity of the *Honeymooners* characters was demonstrably inclusive, well nigh universal. Ralph Kramden, the fat, loud, untalented nobody who yearns and struggles to be somebody but always fails, touches something deep in the heart of Americans. They root for the underdog all the more when they know that he is going to lose, and they know that he knows it, too, but still he keeps valiantly trying. By the same token, there is something admirably sane, heroically pedestrian, in Ralph's deferential pal Ed Norton, the happy slob who knows, and comfortably accepts, his place far back in the anonymous throng. It may be that almost everyone can be ranked either with the Ralphs, who will never quite be satisfied, or the Eds, who see nothing as worth such a struggle. There ought to be a high place in our secular heaven for Alice Kramden, the prototype of the spouse who is driven practically crazy by a partner's ill-considered scheming yet who forgives him and abides with him in a display of almost maternal devotion. Only such forbearance can keep most marriages intact.

The Honeymooners plots, like those of most situation comedies, disrupt the situation on which the comedy is premised only to restore it to the status quo. But because of the essential subject matter of *The Honeymooners*—the curse of ambition—there was a special resonance between the formulaic stories and the particular people they dealt with. The closing message of nearly every episode was a simple but unshakable truth, beloved of dramatists in every modern society since the day when the middle class replaced the nobility as the mainstream audience: Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home. ■

Counterfeit Documentaries

by James Traub

CONSERVATIVES who insist that television is incorrigibly left wing will surely be heartened by the rise of a wholly new programming genre, which I am christening, right here and now, the "counter-documentary." In this format an organization feeling aggrieved by a broadcast is afforded air-time by the offending network to present its own view in a form more or less comparable to the original. Not just equal time or editorial reply, the counter-documentary fights journalism with its own tools.

Television scholars may one day look

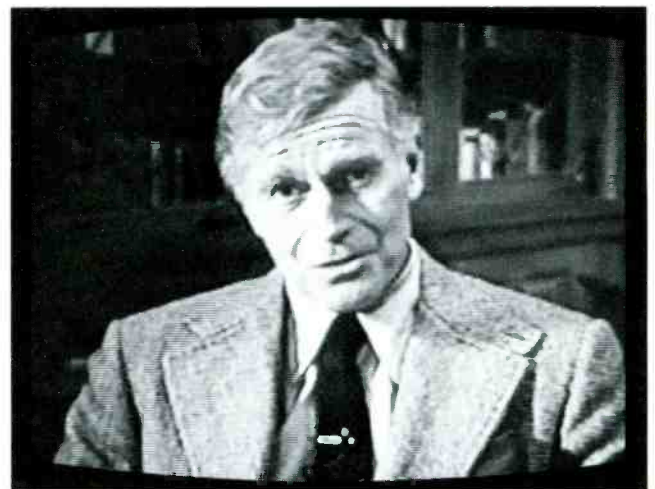


Reed Irvine condemns the PBS Vietnam series in the counter-documentary produced by his right-wing Accuracy in Media organization.

fact, solicited the NCPAC segment. The Fairness Doctrine, after all, requires only that the opposing side on a controversial issue gets a chance to express its point of view. Even so, the commercial networks consider the Fairness Doctrine a gun held to their heads. Thus, the fact that PBS and NBC were willing to risk their credi-

in a very different light. At the moment, the media, especially television, are dodging bullets from what used to be called "the Far Right," now referred to, tactfully, as "conservatives." General William Westmoreland's libel suit and Jesse Helms's attempted coup d'état at CBS are only two recent attacks. AIM, in fact, contributed funds to the Westmoreland offensive until they had a falling-out over legal tactics. Leftist groups, of course, are no less disgusted with the media, but nobody quakes before the American Civil Liberties Union (though NBC's Friedman says that he also wants to give left-wingers a shot). The Right is mad, and must be mollified. CBS refused to offer Westmoreland something like a counter-documentary, and he sued, cost-

THE MOST REMARKABLE THING
ABOUT THESE TWO COUNTER-
DOCUMENTARIES IS THAT NBC AND
PBS AGREED TO AIR THEM.



AIM's forceful narrator is the former Old Testament prophet Charlton Heston.

back and date the rise of the counter-documentary to the March 20 edition of NBC's *Today Show*, when the network invited the highly vocal National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) to respond with its own report to an NBC News segment on the new Soviet premier, Mikhail Gorbachev. And on June 26 PBS will be yielding up its bully pulpit for an hour to the conservative group Accuracy in Media (AIM), which has produced a documentary entitled *Television's Vietnam: The Real Story* in response to PBS's 13-part series, *Vietnam: A Television History*. The counterdoc will be wrapped inside a two-hour program, "Vietnam: Op/Ed—an *Inside Story* Special Edition," which will include an analysis of the two works and a panel discussion with their producers.

The most remarkable thing about these two programs is that NBC and PBS volunteered to air them: *The Today Show*, in

bility in public speaks well for their self-confidence, their faith in the virtues of free debate. As *Today* producer Steve Friedman puts it, "People on the Right always complain about bias in the press, but they never get specific. We thought it would be interesting to let them make their own show, and see how it stands up next to ours." Give them their best shot, and let the public compare. If this is the animating spirit of the counter-documentary, then long may it flourish.

But while NBC may be dealing from strength, it's easy to see the counterdoc

ing the network millions of dollars. A less powerful or less self-confident producer might surrender an hour of air-time rather than duke it out in court.

As the documentary is a powerful form, so is the counter-documentary. By permitting the aggrieved party to behave, for the moment, like a news organization, the counterdoc lends the appearance of journalistic detachment to what may be an altogether one-sided point of view. Indeed, the form seems likely to be used mostly by passionate ideologues who don't even believe in journalistic detach-

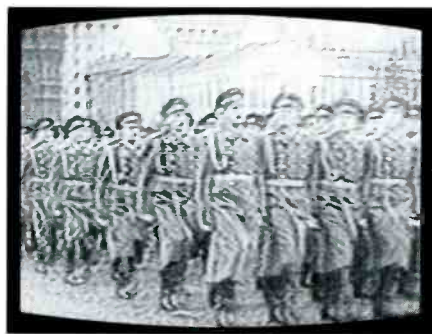
ment. This is certainly true of both of the shows in question. Terry Dolan, NCPAC's executive director, told *The Today Show's* Bryant Gumbel, "We were trying to prove a point that I have as a bias. I think the facts support my particular bias." In his view NBC takes the left-wing position, he takes the right. There is no center. The producer of AIM's Vietnam counterdoc, Peter Rollins, has said much the same thing. NBC and PBS disagree with this premise, yet the mere fact that they have offered their adversaries equal status almost seems to imply acquiescence—an acquiescence that would, of course, completely undermine their credibility. Indeed, it would reduce the networks to the status of special pleaders. A comparison of the shows in question, fortunately, refutes this argument.

NBC's Gorbachev profile by Moscow correspondent John Cochran was constructed along familiar, if entertaining, network lines: Cochran simply interviewed the very few Westerners who had ever met Gorbachev. The Soviet leader was described as sensitive, intellectual, curious, and even, along with his wife, charismatic, like the Kennedys. Westerners, said Cochran, considered the premier "tough and shrewd," but likelier than his predecessors to be "flexible." Cochran later denied that he had a "point of view," but evidently accepted the views of his Western informants. What he did not seem to have, however, was a bias—that is, an overwhelming predisposition. He seemed to have simply added up everything he had been told and averaged it out.

The NCPAC segment, on the other hand, had the feeling of counterpropaganda. Dolan, the narrator, spoke only to arch-conservatives, including Senators Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire and Steven Symms of Idaho. The show was stern and didactic, and stuck to facts, or rather stuck facts to opinions, so that one was never sure where one ended and the other began. Dolan pointed out that Gorbachev had been a protégé of the late premier Yuri Andropov; and then he described Andropov as "one of the most brutal Soviet dictators," as if Gorbachev could only have absorbed a penchant for brutality from the relationship. The segment's implicit assumption was that Gorbachev must be brutal because he's a Soviet leader—an article of faith on the Right. The NCPAC broadcast, in short, supplied not so much the missing facts as

a fiercely tendentious response to a mild-mannered and not terribly persuasive report.

The counterdoc scheduled by PBS, *Television's Vietnam*, recasts the NBC-NCPAC debate in far larger terms. The Vietnam war, like Soviet-American relations, divides Left from Right with a vengeance. Did we abandon our loyal allies? Or did we thwart the Vietnamese people's yearning for self-determination? Scarcely anyone who lived through the



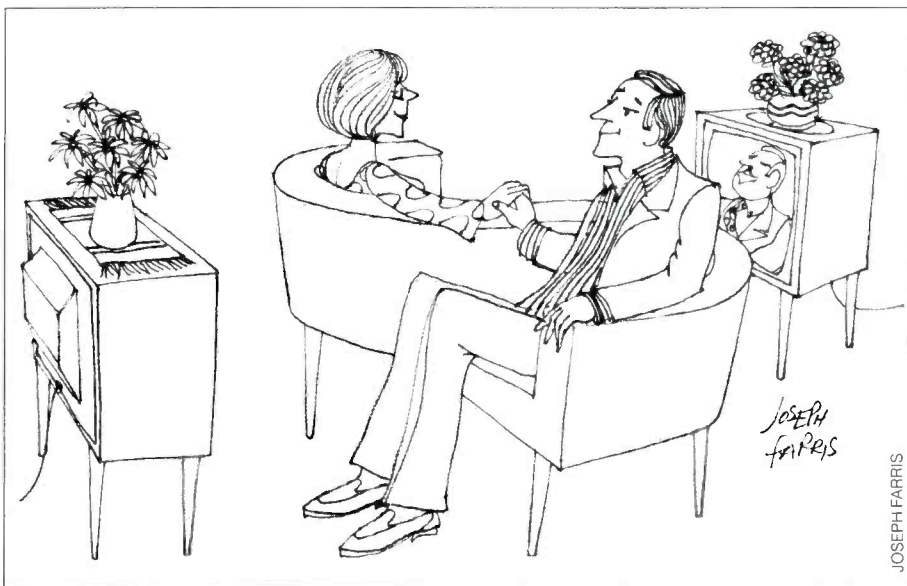
NCPAC's report on Gorbachev, aired by NBC, used clips of parading soldiers to stress Soviet militarism.

war can speak of it noncommittally. Perhaps it's impossible to make a dispassionate documentary about the war; AIM certainly has not attempted to make one. The show's heavy artillery often seems to whistle right over the PBS documentary to crash into the virtually abandoned bunker of the Left. When the AIM counter-documentary shows us Jane Fonda clambering aboard a North Vietnamese tank, we know that old scores are being

settled.

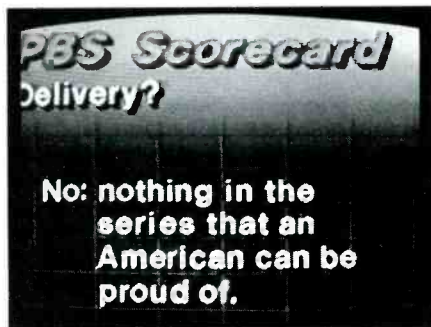
The AIM documentary violently rebuts the balance claimed by the producers at WGBH who made *Vietnam*: indeed, it virtually questions their patriotism. In a preliminary version of *Television's Vietnam*, narrator Charlton Heston, the former Old Testament prophet, at one point accused the PBS documentarians of a "deliberate misrepresentation" and labeled one statement a "blatant example of historical disinformation," and another a "falsification of history"—almost McCarthyite language. PBS demanded that the phrases be changed, and they have been. But AIM seems to believe that it is conducting a holy war against Communist fellow travelers.

Television's Vietnam is not a work of history or journalism so much as a sustained polemic against Communism. The real cause of the Indochinese war, says the documentary, was "the imposition of Communist rule over all of Indochina" rather than a long-standing struggle against imperialism, as the PBS series strongly implies. AIM's historians accuse the public television series of glossing over Communist atrocities and of mistaking the coerced obedience of the people for genuine popularity. Vietnam, the past, isn't even the issue; worldwide Communist aggression is the issue. "The situation in Central America," says Representative John McCain, a former POW, "is far graver than [the one in] Indochina." Senator Steven Symms clarifies: "The target is Mexico, not El Salvador. That's where the Soviets are aiming their



arrow." One hears, not the hum of arrows, but the buzz of mighty axes being ground.

The PBS Vietnam series, like Cochran's report on Gorbachev, has a point of view, though it wells up subtly from the story itself through pictures and interviews, rather than from an obtrusive narrative. The series clearly depicts Ho Chi Minh as more a nationalist than a Communist, explains the war as a tragedy rather than a noble struggle, and asserts that America alienated the South Vietnamese people by acts of violence and negligence. But the PBS Vietnam series takes serious account of alternative points of view (though not in every case), seeks out credible, apparently neutral witnesses, and does not, by and large, seem driven to its conclusions by fierce ideological winds. The entire series is shot through with an ambiguity that no



AIM charged, among other things, that the PBS series failed to deliver on a promise to promote American self-esteem.

dogmatist, of the Left or Right, would condone. It generally refuses to offer a satisfying "melodrama of heroes and villains," to use AIM's sarcastic charge. The viewer is thus drawn into sympathy with the American soldier, the South Vietnamese villager, the North Vietnamese "nationalist."

It is this wider sympathy that seems to be the goal of the series. Nothing separates the journalist from the ideologue more conclusively than the ability to see things from more than one point of view. A good journalist is not objective the way a geologist is objective; he can not avoid a point of view. But he can produce balanced work by remaining agnostic about the truth. PBS's *Vietnam*, though certainly flawed, has precisely this secular mentality; AIM's counterdoc, though it lands several punches, does not. Perhaps the *Inside Story* special June 26 will allow the public to recognize precisely this distinction; if so, it will be time well spent. ■

How Not to Make How-To Cassettes

by Brian Winston

NOT EVERY video cassette is worth a thousand words, as you quickly discover, sampling the vast range of "how-to" tapes now available. In addition to the 7,000 feature films you can rent or buy, there are also at least 1,500 instructional titles—such as *How to Build an Igloo*, *Less Stress in Five Easy Steps*, and such edifications as *Love Skills: A Guide to the Pleasures of Sex*. There is even *Meet Your VCR*, a cassette that shows how to use a cassette recorder. Others, such as *How to Marry a Millionaire*, qualify as both "fictional" and "instructional" in a cassette directory.

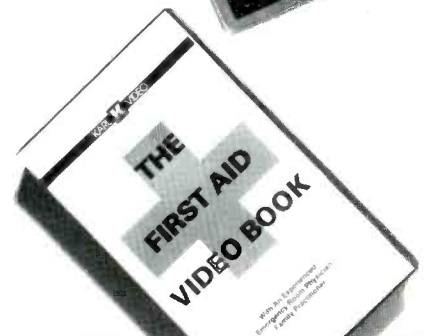
It's no wonder the best-selling how-to tape is *Jane Fonda's Workout* (Karl Video, \$59.95). No printed page could represent physical movements so clearly, and Ms. Fonda's exercises can be done right in front of the TV set, unlike, say, golf or tennis. My only problem is with the editing—I mean, Ms. Fonda and all her lithe assistants seem to be going on without pause, but I notice there are cuts from shot to shot. Being an audiovisual sophisticate, I assume Ms. Fonda rested on each cut—so I did, too. This way, you hardly notice you're exercising.

Exercise and the how-to cassette make such a happy marriage that even a Sid Caesar exercise tape has joined the rush to market. But after physical education, video's instructional value is quite murky.

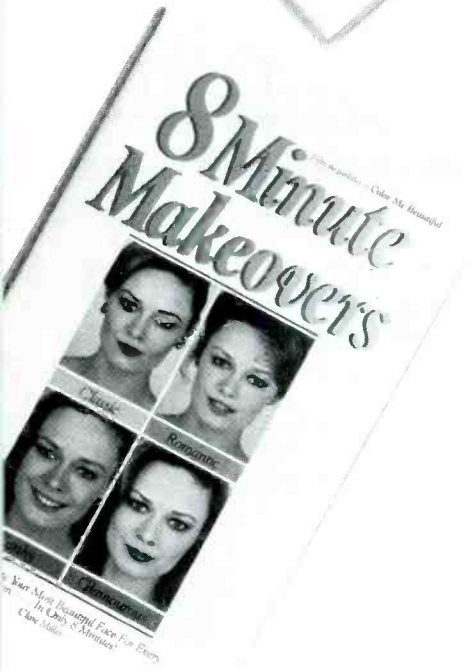
To teach the simpler kinds of cooking, for example, video demonstrations are of limited value. After all, printed directions like "add a teaspoon" are easily comprehended. It would be inconvenient to relocate your VCR in the kitchen, and impossible to scribble lists of ingredients as

they appear on the screen. However, if any cuisine could benefit from video treatment, the Japanese could. And the Japanese themselves have produced a three-volume *How to Cook Japanese Dishes* (Increase Video, \$39.95 each). Unfortunately, the pictures on the three cassettes (sushi, tempura, and teriyaki/sukiyaki) are not worth many words. The actors sound and move like automatons, and even the Americans speak English as if unfamiliar with the language. Too much time is wasted on talk, without demonstrations, and any decent Japanese cookbook could explain as much about preparing the food.

The crucial question to ask before investing in any of these how-to tapes is whether pictures in a book would be adequate. *Eight Minute Makeovers* by Clare Miller (Kartes Video, \$34.95) is a book/cassette package that clearly makes use of video's capabilities. The makeups take



Brian Winston is chairman of New York University's Department of Cinema Studies, and a contributing editor of Channels.



game but not its strategies, the package could prove useful. A number of pro-football coaches explain plays and strategies quite well. Assuming you know what a quarterback is, this how-to may even deliver on its repeated promise to give you insights that the network sports commentators don't provide.

Emergency first aid would seem an ideal subject for video instruction, if properly backed up with a manual. But *The First Aid Video Book's* failure in this task could prove dangerous (Karl Video, \$39.95). Remedies for each emergency are illustrated by a perfunctory demonstration in long shot, with hand-drawn stills and written instructions that scroll boringly up the screen. The director's voice can be heard cueing cameras, and the voice-over explanation frequently doesn't match the image. The only certain advice I picked up was: Get medical assistance as quickly as possible. Entirely unsupported by written material, the tape began with elaborate instructions on cueing each segment for quick access in crisis. Therein lies the rub: VCR counters are quite inaccurate, and books are much faster for this kind of reference anyway. Hardly a media breakthrough.

Instead of innovating instructive techniques suitable to cassette, many of these tapes use a standard documentary approach, with no actual demonstrations. A cassette on a particular line of computer software, *The World of dBase* (RCA/Columbia, \$49.95) is a respectable production in the "industrial film" genre. Actors appear in hypothetical situations, accom-

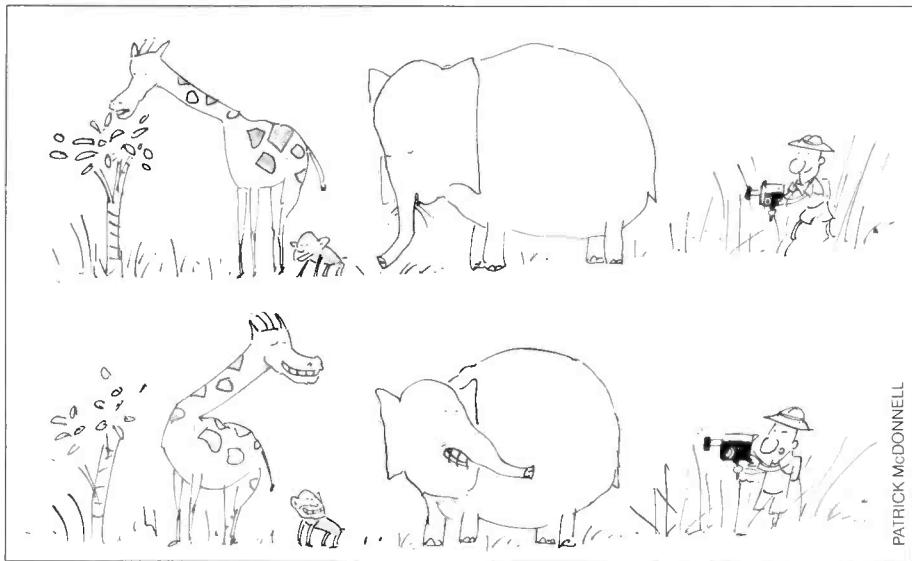
panied by carefully coordinated eye-catching graphics. The tape is a lucid orientation to the topic, but I would not want to orient myself again and again. For this topic, a good interactive tutorial floppy disc for the computer itself would be more instructional. Again, the choice of medium was ill-considered.

How to Teach Your Baby to Read (Karl Video, \$39.95) is also marginal. First off, it tells you to buy a companion book of the same title. Both book and tape reveal that you teach your baby by showing him or her words written in red ink on very large flash cards. Tots are shown responding (and failing to respond) to that ploy. General instructions are given, along with a lecture, not entirely foolish, on education. The book, more useful than the tape, comes in a box with some actual flash cards, the same instructions, and a much-expanded lecture. The tape therefore seems quite pointless—rather like the idea of teaching your baby to read.

Of course, video publishers would like to copy their ink-and-paper brethren and establish a lucrative trade in coffee-table cassettes, where pretty pictures would be all. This desire is apparent in *The Wines of California* (Kartes Video). For \$69.95, you get two cassettes and a \$4.95 encyclopedia on the subject. The tapes are talky but straightforward documentaries featuring pleasant California vistas and vintners explaining their craft. One segment shows how to open champagne by turning the bottle, not the cork. As I watched, I could not help thinking that the \$69.95 would be better spent on a sampling of the beverage in question. But then I already knew how to open champagne. ■

eight minutes each, and eight of them are shown being applied, each one cross-referenced to an accompanying text ("Turn to page 112"). In this way the producers effectively combine the vividness and detail of video with the denser information a book can deliver.

How to Watch Pro Football (MCA Home Video, \$39.95) is also useful. The tape comes with a pamphlet explaining the tape's action in terms of those curious diagrams of football plays. The tape and pamphlet are interdependent; one is needed to follow the other. For somebody who understands the rules of the



PATRICK McDONNELL

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THE POLITICS OF PERSONALITY

From Richard Schickel's recent book, *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity*, published by Doubleday. Schickel, the film critic for *Time* magazine, held the same job at *Life* magazine from 1965 to 1972.

Following the phenomenon that is Ronald Reagan, there is one more short step to take down the road toward a perfect politization of personality. And the minute that thought occurs, one begins to wonder if Walter Cronkite, if his soul has dark nights, regrets having been born just a shade too soon, before he, or we, could quite imagine him in a part yet grander than the one he so admirably played.

Remember that he emerged just when we needed him, not long after Eisenhower's retirement from office, as a man we could turn to for reassurance as successive Presidents failed us. If he was not quite the father figure of our yearnings, then he was an excellent substitute, an admirable stepfather. He was, indeed, not just a network's anchor-man, but the nation's, granting to his job title metaphorical overtones, since for many he was, indeed, an anchor, preventing them (or so it seemed) from being wrecked by the gale force winds of change, or by the ugly riptides of reality as they tore at us in the past two decades: "the most trusted man in America," according to a survey, and with good reason. We knew that he worked hard at his job, shaping what seemed a calmly accurate, carefully objective portrayal of the day's events. Yet we knew, as well, that he was not without his human sympathies—you could hear the anxiety in his voice when an astronaut was in trouble, the sorrow when a great figure passed from the scene. He did not abuse his welcome in our homes any more than he abused his power

when he was invited into the presence of the mighty. His private life—what little we know of it—was exemplary, his interests—tennis and sailing—were suitable to a responsible figure, tony, but not exotic. Above all, he was not an ironist. He exemplified the solid value of small-city America, where he began learning his trade as a wire service reporter.

But Cronkite's biography is significant only to the degree that it presents no facts at odds with his image. The main thing is that if Daddy were to disappear, this is the sort of man we would like Mommy to find as a replacement. . . .

It is no wonder that, as the 1980 election loomed before us, another poll showed a large, wistful percentage of the population would be glad to see Cronkite declare for the presidency. It is difficult to imagine such an endorsement coming to any other television figure that we yet know about. Certainly his visibly ambitious, rather abrasive replacement, Dan Rather, is not going to gather that kind of affection to him—no matter how many sleeveless sweaters he dons to warm and soften his image. Of course, Cronkite as candidate rather than objective commentator would soon have dissipated the affection that had gathered around him by the necessity of taking positions bound to offend this or that element of his constituency. Or would he have? Perhaps he might have managed a sort of Eisenhowerish remoteness from the dailiness of politics, found a way of beaming benignly down on the hurly-burly of

the political trading floor, as he did when he so soberly contemplated our political conventions—"old iron ass" as he was sometimes called by colleagues. About this we will never know, since—further proof of his wisdom—he politely quashed this yearning discussion of a possible candidacy, the value of which was mainly symbolic, a reflection, among others, of the quiet but persistent unease that has grown up over electoral politics in the last two decades. □

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THE DEATH OF THE BUSINESS LETTER AS WE KNOW IT

From "Some Things Won't Change," an article by Beth Pancik in the March 4 issue of *Government Computer News*.

With the advent of "electronic mail," the business letter may become an anachronism. It will take on a set of new conventions, some dictated by machine protocol, and others evolving as a set of courtesies. Aesthetics will be relinquished in the interests of efficiency. Personalized letterhead stationery and bond paper will be exchanged for a liquid crystal display on a bland square of glass, and documents with engraved corporate seals and flowing executive signatures will be replaced by the conventions of computerized Zapmail. Dates will be omitted because electronic transmission automatically dates documents, in many cases indicating the time the letter was delivered as well. Likewise, the address will be replaced by some electronic designation required by the computer system. The signature presents an interesting problem. Electronically transmitted documents may require some other form of signature: a mark or designation unique to the originator and as difficult to duplicate as the signature. □

THE INDUSTRY'S VIEW: NO HOLDS BARRED

Addressing the UCLA Communications Law Symposium last March, CBS Worldwide Enterprises' senior vice president John M. Eger pictured a bright future for the international trade in television programming.

In the spirit of optimism I want to touch on the natural forces of television technology. The world is getting cable, pay-television, satellite channels, DBS channels—the Middle Ages of television technology are ending, and a possible renaissance is upon us. There are those who view all these changes as unhealthy first steps to world homogenization: As the web of communications grows and the world shrinks, their ancient but hidden fears seem to grow. But let us not be afraid of change that can promote closer ties, economic stimulation, and an abundance of choice for all the people in the world.

Every new service that goes on line tends to erode the barriers to international program exchanges. And, increasingly, there's a feeling in the air that wide-open competition and freewheeling innovation will become the rule, rather than the exception.

There is no longer a great deal of dissent to the thesis that the nations of the world are interdependent and must cooperate in their own self-interest. Surely communications in general and television in particular offer endless possibilities for productive, mutually beneficial synergism in both culture and commerce. Most importantly, the public will be

served, for the public interest and the private interest are not mutually exclusive. Nations which fail to take cognizance of this may cut themselves off from the mainstream of economic development. □

CITIZEN QUELLO

From a speech given last March by FCC commissioner James H. Quello, entitled "Press Under Fire: Jefferson Revisited."

If Jesus Christ had a second coming to earth to become President of the United States, he would no doubt be manufactured into an inept "nonleader" by the segment of the press that views its role as that of an "adversary" to any incumbent. I certainly think that Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan would appreciate my point.

In this "adversary" posture, were George Washington and his Continental Army preparing to cross the Delaware, the press would be concentrating on the inhumane suffering of underclothed and even barefoot American soldiers in the bitter cold of Valley Forge. I can also imagine the line of questioning to the soldiers: "Did you know your leader is a member of the wealthy landed gentry? That he is warmly-clothed, riding a horse, relatively comfortable, and that he will reap all the glory while you have a good chance of being maimed or killed? Did you know George Washington doesn't actually know the number of enemy, and has to resort to distorted estimates of their strength? Do you realize Paul Revere didn't even notify the press whether the British were coming by land or by sea? Aren't you in grave danger here at Valley

Forge? Do you realize the British would reduce their forces to a token police force of only 50,000 mercenaries if you agreed to disarm and disband?"

A few might even editorialize: "Isn't British red better than dead?" In my view, several recent events have tended to erode public trust in media, particularly the electronic media.

An honorable field general selected to lead our troops in an unpopular, undeclared war certainly not of his making was unjustly maligned in CBS's "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception." It is now apparent that the battle to clear the general's name would have been better fought in the court of public opinion rather than in a libel court which required clear and convincing evidence of malice. As I see it, General Westmoreland made a command decision regarding enemy strength which he had the right and obligation to make, right or wrong. The one-sided documentary charging conspiracy represented shoddy journalism. To CBS's credit, their own in-house investigation revealed violations of guidelines and poor journalistic practice. CBS won the lawsuit, but suffered a journalistic embarrassment and, I think, a public relations defeat.

In another example of journalistic malfeasance, an Israeli general won critical battles for his beleaguered country, a strong ally of the United States, but was maligned by inaccurate reporting by *Time*, a magazine that usually knows better.

Still another recent example is ABC's unbelievable accusation that the CIA—the U.S. government—

actually employed a murder squad to kill a Honolulu financial figure. The CIA denied the charge, and ABC, without apology and after a long delay, merely admitted it could not substantiate the charge.

Finally, I think the insolent approach to the President by some nationally known reporters at press conferences has helped to produce the so-called "Teflon President" because the President has been seen reacting graciously to undignified assaults. A discerning and sophisticated public seems more capable than ever of reaching independent judgments on candidates. . . .

Thomas Jefferson spoke of press freedom as an experiment; and that experiment has lasted for nearly 200 years. That might raise the inference that it is no longer an experiment and its permanence is assured. I would like to caution otherwise.

Freedom of the press, like all freedoms under our form of government, is conferred by the people. That carries with it the obvious notion that it can be taken away by the people. To the extent that the American people perceive that the press, especially the electronic press, is pursuing its self-interest to the detriment of the public interest, the press has reason for concern.

It has been suggested that the proper role of the press is to be an adversary of government. I believe that this is a simplistic and dangerous philosophy. The proper role of the press is to seek the truth and to inform. The press must present facts in a timely manner and in a context that is calculated to educate the populace in the most truthful, complete manner possible. □

PASSPORTS READY?

From Mark S. Fowler's address before the National Association of Broadcasters' annual convention in April. Fowler recently completed his fourth year as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

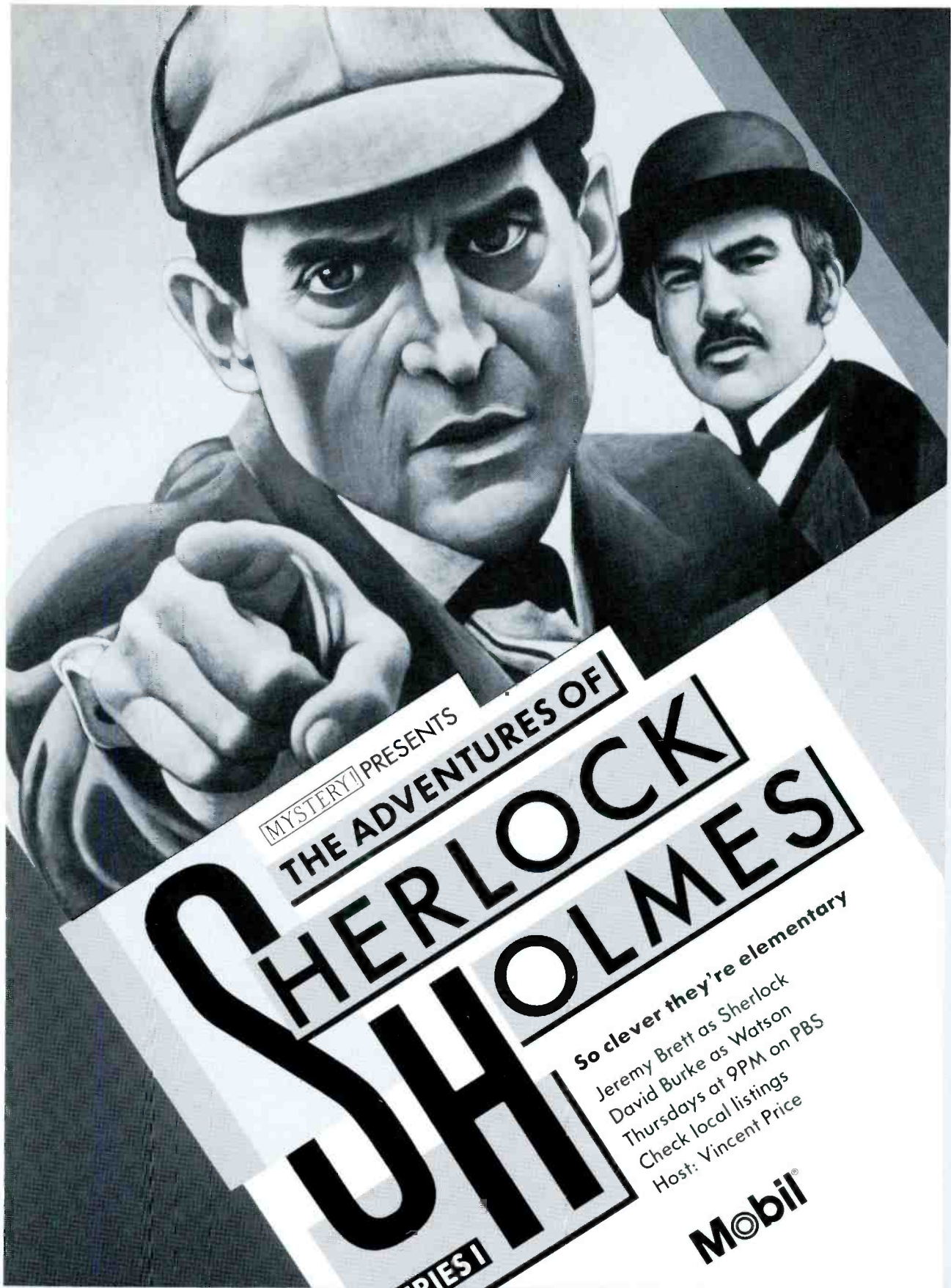
It is appropriate that we mark this 40th anniversary of democracy's victory in World War II by recalling abhorrent national socialism under the Nazi regime. With Hitler, everything was in the "service" of the state, especially communications media. While there are apparently those in this country who would like the chairman of the FCC to be this country's master of the airwaves—all in society's larger interest, of course—I am not one of them. Under our system—as I see it—government has no more power over what is seen or heard on television or radio than the citizen watching the screen or listening to the speaker. In this country there is no blind salute to Fowler or to President Reagan.

If there are those who would like a more activist government role in the media's output, I'd suggest they renew their passports. So long as I remain FCC chairman, the government will be a spectator—not a dictator. □

INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

From a Broadcasting magazine interview with Representative Timothy Wirth, chairman of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee. The interview appeared in the April 1 issue.

Why shouldn't we work out some kind of a way in which the Bolshoi Ballet could be broadcast in the United States and *Masterpiece Theatre* or its equivalent broadcast to the Soviet Union? Take radio, for example. We spend an enormous amount of money on the Voice of America and Radio Liberty. Why shouldn't we take some of the money that we spend there, on programming that is often of limited quality and substance, and put it into *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* and broadcast them around the world? It's great programming, and it tells people a great deal about the United States. If we're going to spend the public money, why not spend it in that kind of fashion? □



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