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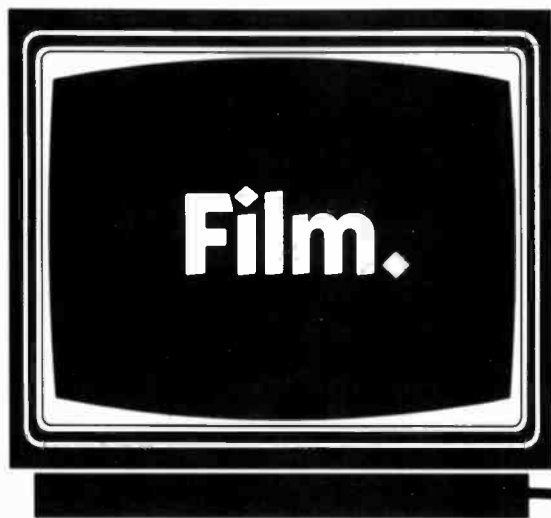


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Something's Happening

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abc

THOSE DAYTIME TALK SHOWS

What makes Donahue run? And what makes him and Oprah, Sally, Joan, and Geraldo so popular? Our correspondent spent lots of time sampling each of them. Here's her report on their strengths and limitations, their style and substance.

BY SALLY STEENLAND

Do you know the danger signals of a Romeo rip-off? Can you name men's three greatest sexual turn-offs? What are the warning signs of a big-amist? What should you do if your neighbors are abusing their children? How can you tell if you're constantly choosing rejection?

If you can't answer these questions, you haven't been watching enough daytime television. Specifically, you haven't been tuned into the syndicated talk shows.

Oprah, Geraldo, Donahue, Sally Jessy Raphael and Joan Rivers answer these questions and more. In fact, they treat a surprisingly broad range of topics, ranging from the mundane to the titillating to the truly shocking. One day Oprah discusses

decorating tips with interior designers. On her show a few days later, gold-diggers reveal their secrets for trapping millionaires. And in the same week, a guest describes two brothers whose hands were held over an open flame because they played in their father's tool box.

Each host has his or her own style. Sally is probably the most low-key, and Geraldo the most flamboyant. Donahue preaches, Oprah is everybody's best friend, and Joan is acidly funny. All five shows chase the same celebrities (especially those who've just written confessional books), and they dissect similar topics. Aside from handling similar issues, though, these shows share deeper commonalities. Their less obvious similarities stem, in part, from assumptions about the viewing audience, as well as assumptions about the nature of talk shows themselves.

Experts, Experts Everywhere

It seems that every talk show program comes equipped with its own expert. The experts vary from day to day, depending on the topic, but most often they are psychologists.

When child actress Drew Barrymore details her bout with drug addiction and her mother adds salient points on Sally Jessy Raphael, a psychologist from a treatment center appears with them, explaining the nature of addiction, and gives parents tips.

When Oprah hosts a show on love triangles in which the guests are infatuated with people who love someone else, a therapist explains why such relationships are unhealthy, how one can end them and build relationships that are rewarding.

Trans-sexuals are featured on one of Sally Jessy Raphael's programs. A therapist on the show tells the audience that, although the causes are unknown, the trans-sexual imperative is so powerful that nothing can stop such people from a sex change operation. On Donahue, a psychologist advises wives whose husbands are bigamists that the women are victims of low self-esteem, settling for crumbs when they should want the best.

Often the experts on talk shows are authors of current books. A psychologist/author on Oprah shares with viewers the four most important sexual secrets men keep from women, based on an extensive survey she conducted. On Joan Rivers, addicted housewives confess to cocaine and alcohol abuse, accompanied by an author/expert who explains female susceptibility to this ailment. "Gold-digging" women describe their methods on Oprah, accompanied by book

author/experts who explain why women want to marry rich men.

Sometimes the expert is a physician, sometimes a police officer; occasionally, he or she is a lawyer. In almost all cases, these guests are deferred to by host and audience alike. The experts seem an essential ingredient of the shows, serving as a village priest or wise school teacher. Their function is one of explanation and reassurance. Trans-sexuals are not so different from you or me; obscene telephone callers can get treatment.

Almost never is their authority questioned. A recent Joan Rivers show, however, broke this rule. The program featured women dissatisfied with their chest size, accompanied

A diet of talk shows convinces one that no matter what the problem, the solution is therapy.

by a plastic surgeon who explained breast augmentation and reduction surgery. He brought with him samples of the silicone gel packets he inserts in a woman's chest. The surgeon described the augmentation surgery as relatively simple and very safe.

Joan Rivers looked skeptical. Holding a gel packet, she asked, "Can this break?" Oh no, the doctor reassured her. Joan stuck her fingernail into the packet and it punctured, oozing gel all over her hands.

The nonplussed doctor claimed he'd never seen such a thing; he'd had patients in car accidents whose chests were smashed against the steering wheel; and still their gel bags held firm. Joan still looked skeptical, and went on to ask him about the dangers of scar tissue after such surgery and the difficulty of detecting breast cancer.

What seems remarkable after viewing a large number of talk shows is not that so many experts appear, or even that they are treated so deferentially. Rather, what is striking is the narrow occupational range from which they are selected. A diet of talk shows convinces one that no matter what the problem, the solution is therapy.

The scenario experts present goes like this: Troubled individual inflicts harm on self/others; troubled individual recognizes need for help; troubled individual gets help; individual is no longer troubled. It's an inspirational message, to be sure, embodying a strong sense of individualism, the optimistic belief that people can change for the better, and the sense that each one of us is in charge of our lives. What's missing from this equation, though, is an acknowledgement of the larger, outside world.

The Personal Is Not Political

One of the strongest tenets of feminism ("the personal is political") gets debunked daily on TV's talk shows. According to these shows, problems are individual in nature and so are their solutions.

The largest unit of belonging seems to be that of the family: one's children, parents, siblings. Patterns of abuse, addiction, dependency and low self-esteem stem from these family systems.

When Sally Jessy Raphael features white men who love black women, the inter-racial couples describe happy lives despite initial parental objections to their unions. Their greatest strength is their love for each other, they claim. The audience concurs. Love is blind, it's the individual you marry, they say; race shouldn't matter.

Sally introduces a black male social worker who serves as the show's

lightning rod. He claims blacks and whites shouldn't inter-marry; that because of racism the black family is in danger of extinction. Black families need to be strengthened, he says, not weakened by inter-racial marriages that inevitably aim for assimilation into white society.

When the black social worker speaks these words, it's as if he's shot a gun on the stage. The audience attacks him, as do the inter-racial couples. It's because he's challenged something fundamental, the belief in the supremacy of love. The black social worker asks one of the white husbands, "How do you feel about all black folk?" The question never gets answered.

"You must be a bitter man. I feel sorry for you. Why can't you stand to see people happy?" the social worker is asked. It is true his tone is abrasive, but no matter what the style, it's the message the audience rejects. They want to believe that love conquers all.

Lesbian mothers appear on Joan Rivers. These women, too, appear to live in a vacuum, untouched by forces from the outside world. The couples cheerfully claim that honesty and love are all their children need. Their babies will have two mothers who love them and, therefore, a father is an unnecessary extra.

The larger society seems irrelevant, unable to harm. What about homophobic teachers? Cruel playmates? Centuries of conventional norms and tradition? What will you do about all that, one wants to know. Again, love and communication are sufficient.

Only near the end of the lesbian mother segment is the discussion broadened. A woman appears who's broken up with her partner and is fighting for joint custody of their child. Because no laws exist to cover such situations, the woman has no rights and is barred from seeing the little girl who carries her last name

and whom she's financially supported for years. At that point, Joan Rivers and the guest expert lawyer

A staple of daytime talk shows is victimhood; that is, women who suffer because of male cruelty.

discuss the importance of the legal system to personal matters such as these.

When trans-sexuals (women who became men) are featured on Sally Jessy Raphael, the entire focus of the discussion revolves around the physical changes they underwent. For one hour, the guests answer questions about growing a mustache, becoming bald, changing clothes in a male gym, making love to women.

It's a narrow focus and the missed opportunities are legion. For example: Are the guests treated differently in the workplace now that they're men? Do they earn more money? Do they have a different sense of their own power? Do they feel certain pressures, expectations just because they're now male? Do they miss anything about no longer being female? Unfortunately, the show never explores these equally significant consequences of a gender change.

Perhaps nowhere is the political component more glaringly absent from discussions than it is in topics featuring female victims. A staple of daytime talk shows is victimhood; that is, women who suffer because of male cruelty. On program after program, women openly discuss their humiliations, naivete, dependence, desperation, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

"We're raising a generation of male junkies," Donahue declares after a woman whose husband drove her suicidal confesses she still loved him and would take him back.

Geraldo devotes a show to women who've been duped by crooked cupids. "I'm embarrassed I was so vulnerable," says a victim who loaned a man thousands of dollars and paid all his American Express bills before she discovered he was conning her.

"Aren't you humiliated?" Geraldo asks. The expert guest sociologist defends the women. "These men are charming and good-looking," she says. "It's easy to fall prey."

On Oprah, women appear whose husbands want divorces. In some cases, the husbands sit in the middle—rejected wife on one side, new girlfriend on the other. These men don't say much. They sit there, impassive, nondescript and ordinary, while their wives and girlfriends fight over them as if they were precious treasure. "He loves me," the girl friend says. The wife desperately pleads, "I want our marriage to work."

What's going on here? Why are the victims so lopsidedly female? Why do men and women in certain areas behave so differently? And why are all these matters reduced to individual crimes of the heart?

When a generalization is made, it is usually an expert guest therapist who makes it, and this is what she says. "Too many women suffer from low self-esteem. We need to feel good about ourselves."

Yes, but...individual therapy is not the total answer. Women need to do more than fix themselves. They need to understand and change the larger society. The influences of sexism, of bias, of preconceived notions about gender live in the larger realm of society, yet they penetrate the personal realm everyday. The two spheres are unavoidably intertwined. And yet, on talk shows, the personal realm is minutely dissected, while the public realm is for the most part, ignored.

Love, Love, Love

"If you're a frustrated woman tearing your hair out because your man just won't open up to you, pay close attention as men tell things they've never before admitted." The audience shrieks in anticipation as Oprah, with that teaser, introduces a show on men's sexual secrets.

Despite their daytime broadcasts, all the shows are quite explicit about sex. One male secret, a guest therapist on Oprah explains, is that men love oral sex. (Oprah snaps her fingers, looks into the camera and says, "Kids, change the channel; you shouldn't be listening to this.")

Women think of oral sex as yukky, the therapist continues, but men see their penis as a miniature version of themselves; if you receive oral sex, you are worshipping the essence of the man you love. He will feel accepted; it will revolutionize your sex life. A man in the studio audience agrees. Sex means nothing, he says, but oral sex signifies a commitment. It's another way of saying, honey, I love you.

On Valentines Day, Oprah offers a show on seduction tips. Viewers have mailed in home videos which are aired. In one, a wife demonstrates how she writes sexy notes to her husband in lipstick on the bathroom mirror and points out the microwave she keeps in the bedroom to heat body oil for his massages.

In another video, a nurse says that she goes on dates dressed in her uniform and gives men physicals as part of foreplay.

Celebrity guests reveal the most unusual places they've made love. An actress confesses: on a train. An actor says: in a restaurant, during hours.

Love, lust, romance and sex are steady fare on talk shows. The audience is overwhelmingly female,

and that's where the host's empathy lies. Men are the Other—alien, sought-after creatures whom we love but can't understand.

These love/sex segments have appeal. They're like inter-active soap operas, or a woman's magazine one can talk back to. The audience gives advice to guests on stage. You're too good for him, they say. It'll all work out. Get a new job and forget him.

Current Events And Practical Advice

In matters of the outside world, Donahue stands apart from the pack. His show has always handled societal issues as well as personal ones and despite tabloid pressure he still features a mix of the two.

Most recently, he interviewed Nelson Mandela via satellite from South Africa. Donahue also went to Flint, Michigan and hosted a two-part show with Michael Moore, director of *Roger and Me*, about the economic down-turn of that city. If viewers want to see a discussion about the savings and loan bail-out, chances are they'll have to tune in Donahue.

The other talk shows shy away from such political issues. In part, it's because producers don't think that's what their audience wants; in part, it's because they don't think such topics play to their host's strengths. It's also because some of the producers are not themselves interested in current events.

For whatever reasons, the Donahue show is about the only one that invites elected officials on the air. Many of the other shows believe that Congressional guests, in terms of audience interest and ratings, are the kiss of death.

In addition to matters of the heart, talk shows regularly feature discussions on practical topics and oc-

asionally use their forum as an opportunity to help individuals in need.

For example, Sally Jessy Raphael hosts a show in which the guests are terminally ill. They have cancer and need bone marrow transplants to live. A doctor explains the medical details; next to him sits a bone marrow donor with a boy whose life she saved. Next to him sits a widower whose wife wasn't as fortunate. Phone numbers are displayed on the screen; viewers are urged to help.

Donahue features Mike Ditka, Arthur Ashe and Larry King three men who've had heart attacks. They explain, in detail, their symptoms, treatment and recovery. A doctor, holding a model of the heart, describes its workings. The show offers a brochure that explains heart disease and its prevention.

On Joan Rivers, happy couples from three dating services tell how they found each other. The address and phone number of each service—one for handicapped people, one for the overweight, one that links people astrologically—are displayed on the screen.

On a graphic, disturbing show about child abuse, Oprah addresses the camera. She says to viewers, if you know child abuse is going on in your neighborhood or family and you don't do anything about it, you're just as bad. Pick up the phone and report it!

The Hosts

Most talk show producers claim that what distinguishes their show from its competitors is the personality and style of the host. It's not the issues that differentiate, they say; it's how those issues are presented.

The producers are right. Each host has carved out a style and developed a persona aimed at attracting au-

diences. Some of the styles, though, have become parodies.

Geraldo looks into the camera and intones, "Today's show: death by spe-

Geraldo asks leading questions full of rhetoric and builds crisis into his topics, so that "Romeo Rip-offs" and "The Terror of Amnesia" take on life-threatening dimension.

cial delivery—mailroom murder and mayhem." And then: "Are postal workers pushed to homicidal madness by the pressures of their job? Stay tuned."

Geraldo confessed last January that his show had strayed too far into deviant and kinky behavior. He promised to reform and return to his roots as an investigative reporter.

Even though his recent shows have been tamer than earlier ones about topless donut shops and human sacrifice, his demeanor remains exploitive and too heavy for his current programs. Geraldo asks leading questions full of rhetoric and builds crisis into his topics, so that "Romeo Rip-offs" and "The Terror of Amnesia" take on life-threatening dimension.

Geraldo also places himself squarely in the middle of his stories. In a show about death row, Geraldo says, "I tried to put myself in the place of those condemned to die by spending 24 hours on death row." A minicam records him being handcuffed and shackled; we see Geraldo in boxer shorts as he changes into prison garb.

On a show about physical fitness, Geraldo dons spandex and spends an hour in several different outfits as he demonstrates fitness machines and aerobic moves.

Geraldo is physically chummy with his female guests. On one show, he kneels on stage and rubs a guest's back. His face a few inches from her, he says, "I don't want to embarrass you, but you seem very, very strung out." The woman confesses she feels suicidal. Geraldo kisses her and says, "Tracy, we love you."

However, when male guests are similarly distraught, Geraldo keeps his distance. A young man whose life has been devastated by amnesia barely gets a pat on the back when he begins to cry.

If Geraldo gets the pseudo-serious award, Donahue wins two: one for righteous indignation and the other for speed as he sprints down the aisles during questions from the audience.

It's been said that Donahue is preachy, and he is; he's a preacher in the evangelical style. His voice and face are full of emotion. He seems frustrated when the audience isn't as worked up as he is. Like a preacher, Donahue bemoans America's failings and hypocrisy. Our educational system is in terrible shape, Donahue moans, head in hands. We tell you kids, "Say no to drugs," yet you see us drinking all the time. Is our society collapsing?

When the audience speaks up, Donahue races down the rows and across the aisles. It's as if he picks people on opposite sides of the room in order to create an atmosphere that's lively and fast-paced.

Oprah races up and down the aisles too, but she seems less frenetic than Donahue. Despite her glamour and high recognition, Oprah places herself right alongside ordinary viewers.

Don't think of me as a star, Oprah seems to say. I've overcome a lot of trouble in my life, and if I did it, so can you. When guests on her show describe the dark side of love, Oprah shakes her head and says, yes, I know, I've been there too. She chums around with her audience as if they're all good friends.

On a show about millionaires, Oprah says to a rich guest, you'd think differently about money if you couldn't pay the electric bill. By some magic, the fact that Oprah is herself a millionaire and one of the most powerful women in America seems irrelevant.

Sally Jessy Raphael is a host who's empathetic and non-sensational. She has a maternal quality which allows her to probe without seeming exploitive. Trust me, Sally seems to say; you're in safe hands.

Sally's producers claim that over half of the show's ideas come from viewer mail. Her producers seem proud of her non-glitzy qualities; they say Sally's like your favorite aunt or your next-door neighbor.

Joan Rivers has surprised many critics in her new role as a daytime host. Long known for her scathing jokes, Joan has been personable and generous on her talk show.

Her program is a hybrid: half celebrity interview, half topic discussion. Joan's producers keep the show light because they feel her reputation limits the issues she can tackle.

Joan's show is the newest and also the most vulnerable in terms of ratings. In March she was cancelled by WCBS, the New York City station that carried her show. When that happens, other large markets sometimes follow suit.

It is difficult to tabulate exact rankings for the syndicated talk shows since they're not carried by an equal number of markets, and ratings change from year to year. Also stations slot the programs at different time periods. Oprah still is a strong number one (and has been since her show entered the national arena). Donahue has been displaced by Geraldo, and Sally Jessy Raphael follows them.

Donahue's executive producer Pat McMillan believes that talk show topics are cyclical in appeal. She thinks that the days of tabloid TV

are coming to an end; that viewers are beginning to want more than entertainment and that they're once again becoming interested in social issues. If that is true, the Donahue show, which is the most politically oriented program of the five, may make a comeback.

For now, though, the conventional wisdom remains that emotion-driven topics that stress the personal are what viewers want. The outside world—of politics, economics and larger social forces—is deemed uninteresting and somewhat irrelevant to the lives of the guests and viewers.

The producers and hosts of these shows believe in their work. Some even call it a mission. They claim a close connection with their audience, whom they never treat in a condescending manner. In fact, these shows are noticeable for their lack of condescension toward ordinary people.

People who are heavy, plain-looking, without a persona—who act like themselves in front of the camera—have their day on Oprah and the rest. Such ordinary citizens—not celebrities, not especially articulate or outstanding men and women—are invisible in nearly every other inch of the television landscape. This ultimate democracy, where the unknown become celebrities for a day, may be part of TV talk shows' appeal.

The guests are as unfamous as people who appear on game shows; except, instead of winning prizes, they talk for an hour about their problems. Like game shows, talk shows are lucrative properties: cheap to produce, high in revenue. This easy economics, aside from any entertainment or public service value, may be why so many are on the air.

It's easy to make fun of talk shows; to criticize them for being exploitive and mindless. Indeed, a recent program devoted to men who had their

foreskins put back on is asking for both ridicule and scorn.

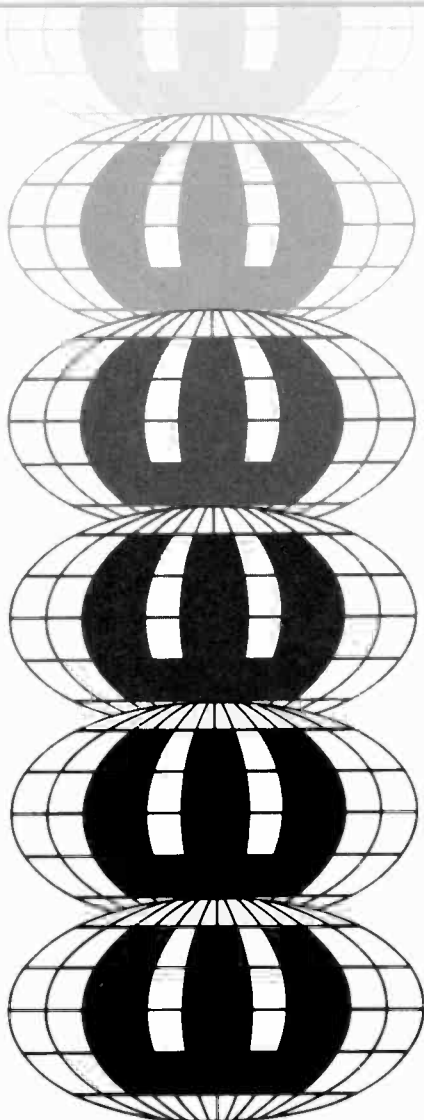
It's also easy to be disappointed in these programs. Twenty-five hours of airtime a week among the five shows; 1300 hours a year. What an opportunity to educate, to enlighten and inform. What an opportunity to be creative. What possibilities!

But critics also need to pay attention to the apparently strong appeal of these programs. They provide a sense of intimacy which is artificial but compelling; the opportunity to be compassionate to strangers and then forget about them.

They also allow viewers a voyeuristic peek into someone else's life. Voyeurism has universal appeal, whether those exposed are famous or not. And that's primarily what these shows do.

If a viewer has a serious problem, watching a talk show won't provide much assistance. Instead, it will help pass the day, diverting worry by the problems of those worse off. That's not high praise for a medium with so much potential, promise and responsibility; but given the mediocrity, mindlessness and distorted values of so much of TV, it's not the worst possible scenario either. ■

Sally Steenland is a freelance writer who specializes in media and women's issues. She is also a columnist for the magazine *Media & Values*.



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CHUCK DOLAN: THE RELUCTANT GATEKEEPER

TVQ's Special Correspondent, Arthur Unger, continues his "Primetime Prime Movers" series with this conversation with cable TV's Amazing "silent" entrepreneur, Charles F. Dolan. He's the seemingly easygoing powerhouse behind Cablevision, BRAVO, Sportschannel America, News/12 and Sky Cable.

BY ARTHUR UNGER

"Ted Turner on Valium" is the way a colleague once described 63-year-old maverick Charles F. Dolan, chairman and CEO of Cablevision Systems Corporation.

Utterly lacking in the little-boy bombast and self-promoting razzamatuzz which makes CNN's Ted Turner a media star, Chuck Dolan goes about his unobtrusive-way accumulating a fortune (now estimated to be anywhere between \$100 million and \$1 billion), starting new communications enterprises and expanding his already existing cable empire. He is probably cable TV's most innovative entrepreneur.

I wanted to talk to Dolan at his eight-building headquarters in an industrial park in Woodbury, Long Island, but his busy schedule brought him to New York one morning and he invited me to meet him instead at his club, the Metropolitan Club on New York's Fifth Avenue at 60th street. It is a cavernous turn-of-the-century chateau-like building, impressively furnished with enough leather chairs to denude a cattle ranch.

Sandy-haired Dolan arrived, uncharacteristically neatly attired in a business suit and tie (a requirement of this club) despite the description of his sartorial habits by one of his executives in *Channels* as "that nonchalant style of dress of the guy who looks like he just rolled out of bed." He has a kind of Ted Koppel-ish puppet-like appearance...but with



a better hairline. When I asked him why he belongs to the club since his main home and business are located on Long Island, he explained that he needs a New York base.

Who belongs to the club, I asked? "Well," this near-billionaire chuckled, "I guess it was formed originally for people who were excluded from the exclusive University Club."

It wasn't always easy for Dolan. Back in 1950 in Ohio, Chuck and his wife Helen started a syndicated sports newsreel for television.

"My wife and I edited the reel each week in our kitchen," he told me as he settled into his leather wing chair. "We pasted up the negative around the kitchen cabinets and then we would tape it together and write a script. Then we would go down and record it and go to the lab and they would make the prints after which we would drive the prints out to the airport and send them to stations."

Dolan smiled sadly as he admitted that they finally ran out of money. "I called up Telenews in New York and said 'Look, I have 20-some customers. I will trade you the customers for a job. They said 'Come on.' So we did."

By 1961 he was establishing the company which is now Manhattan Cable. In 1971 he founded Home Box Office. Then, in 1973 he organized Cablevision Systems Corporation which owns Cablevision of Long Island, now the largest system in the nation, serving over 525,000 subscribers, with additional systems serving more than one million more subscribers in eleven states.

In addition his Rainbow Program Enterprises owns the pay-cable entertainment channels American Movie Classics and BRAVO. His Sports-channel America is a seven-day-per-week sports-events channel. In 1986, Dolan's company launched News/12, Long Island, the nation's first 24-hour regional news service and he is busy starting or acquiring programming

services in other areas. In 1988, Cablevision joined NBC's CNBC in a venture which will create joint cable programming and offer pay-per-view packages of the 1992 Olympics. And if that isn't enough, he has announced plans to join with NBC, Hughes Communications and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation to launch a direct broadcast satellite service called SKYCABLE (already functioning in Europe), not to be confused with Murdoch's SKYTELEVISION which may offer as many as 108 channels to subscribers.

Soon to be launched is In Court, a 24-hour channel which will cover legal trials in courts all over the country.

Dolan was upfront in the news recently when he was involved in a dispute with the Madison Square Garden Network about whether or not the service should be carried on basic rather than as pay-cable. He was accused of running a dangerous monopoly which favored his own sports channels over MSG. That accusation seems to have hurt Dolan since he is so determined to change the cable business to prevent what he considers dangerous monopolistic practices.

Throughout the conversation, Dolan kept coming back to a thesis which seems overwhelmingly important to him: what is mainly wrong with the cable industry today is the fact that systems operators like himself are forced to become gatekeepers, having to choose who will have access to their limited channels.

But, Dolan is a reluctant gatekeeper. "As cable operators we decide who has access to the home market and who doesn't. And that's not acceptable."

His solution? An expanded variety of avenues—pay-per-view, advertising-supported basic service, specialized subscription channels so that cable subscribers can choose

exactly what they want to order from an almost limitless menu of programming.

If cable has its own William Paley, sedate Dolan much more than flamboyant Ted Turner, can lay claim to the identity. Like CBS pioneer Paley, Charles Francis Dolan possesses long-range vision, short-term foresight, programming ingenuity, entrepreneurial acumen—and enough quiet self-assurance to act with calculated abandon on his beliefs.

Despite his charming, mild-mannered politeness, it is hard to imagine that any entrepreneur in the competitive cable business can accumulate millions and a wide-ranging empire of channels and systems without a certain amount of tough aggressiveness. Associates with whom I talked stressed that this is a determined individual who knows what he wants and pushes everybody around him to help him accomplish his aims. The laid-back easygoing personality is only a veneer, they insisted. So, I asked him an impossible question: "Are you a closet shark?"

He was embarrassed by the question and embarrassed himself with a convoluted evasive answer which ended with: "I don't know."

It is perhaps no accident, however, that if this "reluctant gatekeeper" manages to shed that gatekeeping role and open the gates to hundreds of new channels, he stands to make even more enormous profits from the flood of programming which will result.

Following is a transcript, slightly shortened, of our conversation. The sequence of some of the questions and answers has been changed since the chronology and the subject matter jumped back and forth. But the answers are all verbatim.

UNGER: *You have said that in 1995, cable television will be unrecognizable because there are so many changes going on. Are there specific things that will be changing? Or just the overall picture?*

DOLAN: Well, the greatest single change and the one that I think will have the most ramifications is the channel capacity which is growing. And what we seem to be headed towards is a time when the idea of channel scarcity will be a negligible factor in the economics of video. We have always had channel scarcity with broadcast and when cable came along its great impetus was in solving the channel scarcity problem that existed with broadcast. And when we did that, we did it, of course, in stages. The market would have three channels and cable would come in and it would provide twelve. And then later, we got into the mid-band and the superband and it went up to 26, and then 36, and now it's way up to 50s, 70s...in Boston, we have 104.

As we move away from channel scarcity, then what moves in are all of the entrepreneurs with programming activities, identifying audiences for particular kinds of services and attempting to launch those services. The result of all of that, netting out after all the failures, is that the service that is being offered by television to the home becomes more diverse, more profound, more important.

Cable was hailed at the outset as being the solution to the channel scarcity problem. Now, we find ourselves in cable being denounced as the gatekeepers because we now have a new channel scarcity problem. And what seems to have happened is that demand has overtaken supply again because we opened up the channels. We've created more programming opportunities and people came in and filled those programming opportunities to the point where there are

more people seeking channel capacity than we have channels. Thus we are the gatekeepers. As cable operators, we decide who has access to the home market and who doesn't. And that's not acceptable.

UNGER: *When you say not acceptable, do you mean not acceptable to you? Not acceptable to the general public?*

DOLAN: Socially not acceptable. Print is the ideal in the sense that if you have a concept for a magazine or a newspaper, you are not going to be prevented from acting on that idea because printing presses or newsprint are available to you. It is the economics of your idea that is the only barrier that you have to cross. If the idea is well enough conceived and there is an audience for what you want to present—a readership—and you do the job well enough, then you have a success. In video, unless you can convince the gatekeeper that your idea is one that ought to be tried, then you don't have the opportunity to try.

UNGER: *You live on Long Island. Why?*

DOLAN: The house that we could afford when we moved here from Ohio was a house on Long Island, a split level. So we moved to Massapequa. We were in the movie distribution business and the idea of cable television as a way of getting motion picture products to the television screen was something we tried in Manhattan. As we became involved in that, the concept of being able to do a multi-channel service in the suburbs was really very enticing. We started in Manhattan because that's where they had a reception problem, but the dream was always to do it in the suburbs. So, we applied for the franchises on Long Island in the mid-sixties. There was practically no opposition. There was nobody else who wanted them. Cable television then

was a medium for reception—solving reception problems—and we didn't have any reception problems on Long Island. But what we did have, we thought, was a wonderful market for programming that wasn't provided by broadcast. So, we were granted the franchises there in 1967.

But then, the FCC changed the rules and said that you couldn't bring in distant signals. So, then we couldn't start the cable system because we didn't have the product. But we still thought we had a wonderful market if only we had the product.

We were going to get started by bringing in television stations from other cities by microwave. But when the rules said you couldn't, that put us back on the problem. Then meanwhile, we were progressing with the Manhattan system and we were introducing product. We got the Madison Square Garden events and then we began to run movies after a huge struggle here with the movie theaters.

Then, the idea developed in Manhattan, "well, let's put all of this together into an optional product, so that the people who are paying \$6.00 for cable, if they want a really fine cable service, we can provide them with motion pictures and sports that we can't afford to provide for the \$6.00." And that was the beginning of Home Box Office.

We ran out of money before we had HBO really established. But we got it far enough so that when we came back to Long Island and started the cable system, our principal product was HBO. And that made the system work.

UNGER: *Was it called "basic" cable then?*

DOLAN: No, it was just cable. Because there weren't two kinds of service, only one. That's a history that is not well understood and it has a lot to do with today.

UNGER: *Let me get back a little more to the personal aspect. You said before that the reason that you were on Long Island was because that's what you could afford. So you came into New York from Ohio, not a rich man.... Were you an entrepreneur even then?*

DOLAN: Well, in Ohio I had a little sports news reel that I put out once a week and syndicated to television stations from Ohio. It was "The Game of the Week."

UNGER: *How did you get into that? Were you a journalist?*

DOLAN: No. But I was with radio stations before that and somehow the idea of syndication fascinated me as television was just then coming into being. That's in 1950, 1951 and television didn't have much product. So there was a great need for product. I thought I saw a niche opportunity in producing a weekly sports reel.

UNGER: *Will there be a role left for the independent broadcaster in your new scheme of things? Will he have to find a new reason for being as radio had to do when television came along? Do you envisage what the future of the independent broadcaster might be?*

DOLAN: The broadcasters in an area generally do well because there are a limited number of them and they are able to divide the audience among themselves. When a new technology begins to serve the area and it eliminates that scarcity or reduces the scarcity and now more services can be provided over many more channels, then the broadcaster obviously needs to find a function other than being the provider of a scarce facility.

The independents need now to find a new niche. They need to address an audience more effectively than their new rival does. They have to

move more out of the hardware into the software area.

UNGER: *You have said that the role of the cable system will be as "electronic publisher." By that, do you mean "programmer" basically?*

DOLAN: A cable operator should not think of himself in our view as being a cable operator. The cable is meaningless. Cable is just another name for greater channel capacity. Many operators are already concentrating—and they all should be doing it—on providing a very comprehensive service to the market in which they are franchised. That service should do everything in its power to meet the need of that community.

UNGER: *But you have also said that you don't feel that you should be the gatekeeper—so, the system operator is going to provide that service and not be a mere gatekeeper; he really has to be a programmer.*

DOLAN: He may indeed need to be that. Again, the analogy is a newspaper. Anybody can start a daily newspaper out on Long Island. Newsday is dominant in the marketplace because they know Long Island, and they are providing a wonderful service that meets the editorial needs that the Island is demonstrating.

The cable operator really needs to think in those same terms to the extent that there is a perceived need for program services in his community. He should be doing everything he possibly can to provide that service and he should always keep channel capacity ahead of supply so that whatever is new has the opportunity to reach that marketplace. He should never be in a position where he is damming it up. There never should be people who would like to reach that marketplace but can't because he doesn't have enough channels to allow them into that marketplace. To my mind, that's electronic publishing.

UNGER: *Do you feel that basic cable is an outmoded category?*

DOLAN: It is beginning to be. It isn't outmoded as long as the cable operator hasn't deployed the equipment necessary to give the subscriber more choice. As it is now, the only way from a mechanical and an economic point of view that you can run most cable systems is to have the subscriber buy an entry-level service and then provide options beyond it. So, we have basic cable and the optional service.

UNGER: *Do you envision the day when basic cable will be a service that includes all available cable services that a cable operator may be offering for, let's say \$35 or \$50?*

DOLAN: No, I don't think so. I think we are going to progress away from that, because it won't be desirable and it won't be feasible. Any more than when you go into a bookstore, you don't buy all the books. Or you go to a magazine stand, you don't buy all the magazines. What you want to provide the subscriber is an enormous choice, so that he can put together for his home what really appeals to interest that home.

UNGER: *By 1995, do you think a new subscriber to cable may be given a menu and asked to check off what he wants and pay a fee for the seven or eight services that he likes?*

DOLAN: That is one way, but I'm sure it will be more varied than that. The menu will include rival packages. There will be alternatives to what we call basic now. Somebody will be trying to persuade you to accept one package as opposed to another package. Just like newspapers are really packages.

The *New York Times* is a package of enormous diversity and so is the *Daily News* and the *Post*. Those are rival packages. Each one is trying to enlist you as a reader or as a subscriber. In the same sense, on cable

there will be a cluster of services which will have a particular identity and will cover a spectrum of interests. And then there will be another one, and then another one.

Beyond that, you will have the opportunity to buy the channels individually. And then beyond that, you will have the pay-per-view opportunity. And then, there will also be channels that are free, just as broadcast is today free.

UNGER: *Do you envision more than one operator in an area? Do you envision competition among the operators for subscribers?*

DOLAN: What I think will happen is that there will eventually be so much channel capacity, that the competition won't be between providers of channels.

I think there will be multiple sources of channel capacity. I think there will be multiple wire sources. The telephone company, ultimately will be a provider of channel capacity as well as the cable company. The real competition will be now totally editorial that is, *programming*.

I see Cablevision evolving into a service, where people would think of it as being a particular selection of programs, packages, etc. and that's a service that they will buy because they want it; they like it. They know it is the most economic service for them to buy. They will not be buying it because it is the only one that reaches their home. The idea that a cable system will maintain its dominance in the marketplace because it has the only channel capacity won't survive the decade.

UNGER: *Do you feel that we're in for a period of more government regulation of cable?*

DOLAN: Yes. The approaches that are being made now lack clarity. So much is based on this concept of cable as being "basic" cable and the alarm is that the operators are charg-

ing too much for basic cable. I think before they can address that, the situation will have begun to change. And also, they have become very confused, it seems to me, when they try to define basic cable.

How are we going to regulate a service that consists of various program products that come from multiple sources without going back to the sources and regulating content and price and so on?

UNGER: *Many broadcasters are annoyed at the fact that there are so few restrictions on cable whereas they labored long with government regulation. Do you think that cable has managed to escape that "yoke"?*

DOLAN: No I think that's always evolving. In cable we have the same complaint.

We're franchised at the local level and we are required to invest the capital needed to create our media, whereas the broadcaster was given a license to use a particular frequency and without cost. After we were franchised, which is permission to use the streets, we still had to create the plant over which our services would be delivered

For the privilege of using the streets, unlike the broadcaster, we were required to pay a franchise fee. We still pay it. And often at multiple levels—municipal and state. And then, on top of that, all of our franchises specify that certain channels will be reserved for access, other forms of public service. We are frequently given other specific assignments.

UNGER: *That's on the local level, though.*

DOLAN: On the local level. But it's still a requirement and those persist today. Just as a broadcaster was mandated public service as being the price that he was required to pay for his franchise, that's the price that we are required to pay for ours. It will be

obsoleted by the new technology as channel capacity becomes more abundant. The city will have less reason to require things like this of anybody.

UNGER: *But in the case of broadcasters, there is a limit to the spectrum which cannot be expanded, so that it was necessary to make the use of the spectrum very selective.*

DOLAN: They had the advantage of channel scarcity which gave them an economic headstart. And they paid for that. I don't think it was a very big price to be required to meet some public-service criteria.

UNGER: *But haven't there been positive advantages which cable has been given, which broadcasters feel make for an unfair competitive situation?*

DOLAN: I don't think so. There are advantages in the technology. We have multiple channels, and the broadcaster has a single channel. Is there an advantage in that? Yes. But that's progress. Is there an unfair disparity in the terms of the conditions under which he operates as opposed to the terms of the conditions under which the broadcaster operates?

Well, the broadcaster is in the business of disseminating a signal. He broadcasts it. The Supreme Court said: "That's not a performance, it's a retransmission. It is part of the antenna function." Whatever unfairness might have existed was more than compensated for by the copyright rule. What the Court gave us, Congress took away with copyright royalty. To the point, today, that the rebroadcast of distance signals has become almost unimportant to the industry. And the local signals—that's such a foolish stand-off. Of course, the broadcaster wants his local signals carried by the cable operator. Of course, the cable operator wants to carry the local signals. And the public shouldn't be required be-

cause of intra-industry differences, to need to equip his home with both a wire and an antenna. It is a convenience to the public.

UNGER: *How about the carriage of public broadcasting signals which may or may not get on basic cable depending upon the decision of the system operator?*

DOLAN: I don't think that's an issue. I believe that the record is that the industry carries all local stations on basic. You can't carry a local broadcast signal except on basic. So, I don't believe anybody is complaining that the local signals are not carried on basic.

UNGER: *I think there's a fear, though, among some subscribers that if there's a shortage of channels, the first to go would be the second or third of the local PBS stations.*

DOLAN: I think that fear is stimulated by broadcasters when they're seeking some particular legislation which would improve their position as to cable. But there is no experience which shows that to be a problem. That has been pretty well surveyed and demonstrated.

UNGER: *So, what do you think cable owes to the public?*

DOLAN: It's not just a matter of "owing." It is the opportunity that the cable operator has, and if he doesn't take advantage of it, he will be supplanted. Somebody else will take his place and do it. So, it isn't as though he is as he is perceived to be, a monopoly that is going to dominate the situation and therefore he has obligations to the public. I think he's much more vulnerable than that. But, however, you approach it, what he should do is move with the technology and provide a program service through his medium to the community that is as comprehensive as it can possibly be. He has an obligation to continue capital expenditures in

order to achieve that. He must always think in terms of the programming need in the community and what he is doing to meet that need and he should stay ahead of it.

UNGER: *How about costs? Do you think he has the obligation to keep the costs of the services down? Do you think there might be some problem if costs increase greatly to the consumer—some demand to regulate a ceiling on cable?*

DOLAN: I think that is unreal. When we talk price in cable we are talking about the price of programming services, not the price of a monolithic, static service of a kind. That's the problem with this whole "basic" definition.

Yes, the prices need to be market-wise because if they are not, the public won't buy and cable will suffer its own natural fate. So, to the extent that it is possible, the public should be given a choice so that even within one operator's offerings, there are competitive services competitively priced with one another. But they should get to that as quickly as possible. The public should not be required to pay a price for a service that it doesn't want as a condition of having cable. That is what has evolved in our system that is really objectionable. And I'm amazed that the regulators who are looking at the industry, don't focus on that.

UNGER: *What will you be doing about the 1992 Olympics? What will you be offering?*

DOLAN: Well, this goes back to multiple channels. The problem with the Olympics has been that the networks cover it on a single channel. So, they go to the Olympic events and there are multiple competitions simultaneously. And the network attempts—through an anchor desk—to move you from one to the other, catching the highlights. There are so

many simultaneous competitions, even with that approach, that they don't get to many of them. They don't go to the equestrian event for example because few people care about the event.

The 1992 Barcelona idea is to provide three full-time channels covering the Olympics, so that when we go to a particular event, we stay with it from beginning to end and the subscriber can see what is happening at a particular time, just as if he were in Barcelona.

UNGER: *So, in a way he can create his own menu.*

DOLAN: He can move back and forth.

UNGER: *Now, how much will it cost him to have all three Olympic channels?*

DOLAN: It hasn't been settled on but the figure that we have discussed is for the three-week period somewhere between \$100 and \$150. We've talked also about the possibility that the channels would be categorized. One channel might be the American team only; another channel might be team events; another channel might be individual events. And according to the subscribers interests, he could take just one of the three channels for a lesser amount. And then there is yet the discussion in progress that the channels could be purchased even on a daily basis, just as pay-per-view is now.

UNGER: *Meantime, simultaneously, NBC will be covering in its own way...*

DOLAN: As they have done in the past, and neither one of us needs to pay any attention to what the other is doing. The way the rights were purchased, we both share in the upside or the downside of either activity. If the network is very successful, then our Cablevision shares in NBC's profits in the network display of the Olympics, just as the network shares

in the success of the cable. So, we set it up that way so there would be no internal tension. We are both responsible for the losses of the other.

UNGER: *Just what is the extent of your NBC connection? Is NBC into cable or is cable into NBC?*

DOLAN: Well, we're both equal owners of each other's cable program properties. We own half of CNBC and they own half of SPORTSCHANNEL AMERICA and all the individual sports channels on News 12. We jointly share the Olympics and we have other ventures which are on the drawing board in which we will be 50/50 partners. The idea in the alliance is that they relate to our cable background, and we relate to their broadcast background. They've had much more experience than we have in producing programming. We're newcomers to that. And we, perhaps, have more experience than they in cable.

UNGER: *Do you envision yourself as being more active as a broadcaster? After all, Turner tried to take over a CBS. Is control of NBC in your plans?*

DOLAN: No. I don't think either of us thinks in those terms. I don't think GE is ambitious to own Cablevision, but we both do share the idea that the NBC network and Cablevision are both becoming more divorced from our hardware roots, that it is less important that they have Channel 4 in New York and less important that we have cable on Long Island. What is becoming more important is the product that we are offering to the American home, however it may be delivered. The best demonstration of that is our joint interest in SKY-CABLE...NBC and Rupert Murdoch and Hughes and ourselves have jointly agreed to put up this high-powered satellite in 1993 to provide a paid program service to the American home.

UNGER: *Will the future relationship between cable and network change?*

DOLAN: At the risk of being repetitive, I think everything returns to this channel capacity issue. The network is a single-channel service and cable in its essence is a multiple channel service. What we foresee is that there will be an abundance of channels, and therefore, there will more opportunity to provide programming services to the home. I don't think NBC wants to remain with the single-channel approach anymore than we want to remain with what we're doing today.

UNGER: *Will there be no more single-channel networks in the future?*

DOLAN: I think the programming service will become more and more specialized. But that doesn't mean that the function of network programming today, serving a mass market, will be eliminated. You still need more expensive entertainment programming. You need a mass audience. And the broadcast network is the most efficient provider of mass audience that there is, so that function may not at all erode. But it is far from being the only function in television. There will be many, many others and it is that opportunity that interests both NBC and Cablevision.

UNGER: *A changing relationship between cable and syndication?*

DOLAN: Well, the syndicator today generally makes an exclusive contract with a broadcaster in an area for the television exposure of his product and that has led to all of the controversies about distant signals. There is no reason why the cable operator can't compete with the broadcaster for the license to exhibit copyrighted works in an area. And that indeed, has begun to happen. In upstate New York with the ATC systems, they have organized what is effectively an independent station that is all cable and they are buying

syndicated product. As that happens, the need for the importation of distant signals is diminished and also cable provides a stronger competitive presence in the marketplace and the audience has more choice — more access to the product. But if that continues to develop as a pattern, it certainly would change the patterns of syndications as they exist today.

UNGER: *How about cable and news?*

DOLAN: We are certainly intrigued with news. Local beats national.

If our experience on Long Island is any indication, that's something the public wants. We believe that the opportunity to provide a 24-hour local news service in an area may be an important niche; that a News/12 service on Long Island really is an entity unto itself. There may be other regional opportunities like that throughout the country. And when they are developed, they will add a lot of importance to the mix of video products provided to the home.

UNGER: *Just a couple of reactions to things in cable. HBO?*

DOLAN: Enormously proud of it. I think they've done a wonderful job at HBO. It is a magnificent service. More than any other service, perhaps, it has been the locomotive for cable's growth in the last ten years. A lot of people have bought cable to receive HBO and I cannot think of anything more they could do with that service than what they are doing.

UNGER: *How about CNN?*

DOLAN: Terrific. Ted Turner deserves all the credit in the world. He began on a shoestring. He has produced a worldwide news service. I admire it. I envy it. It is continuing to emerge. Ted is a fearless and imaginative entrepreneur.

UNGER: *ESPN?*

DOLAN: Well, there we have a broadcaster involved in cable and that service has developed wonderfully. But we quarrel a bit with ESPN and that's because of the quality of their service. They fear change. They don't want to be out there, taking marketplace risks. They want to embed themselves in a cable practice which is out of the past and must change. And they are putting themselves in the way of that change and they could be hurt by that and so could the rest of us. So I would hope for ESPN that they would develop more confidence in themselves.

UNGER: *C-Span?*

DOLAN: C-Span is great. It is lower-profile service. Some people are disdainful, but it is programmed well and imaginatively. There is rich content. I think it is an important service.

UNGER: *X-rated or restricted Channels—like the Playboy Channel.*

DOLAN: Definitely should be part of the mix.

UNGER: *How about Public Access?*

DOLAN: Public Access fundamentally means that the public should have opportunity to address itself. The individual should be able to reach the public with a message. I think there is very weak definition of that. The democracy of access is confused. When we say "Access", and you ask different people to define Access, they come up with very different concepts of what it is. Does Access mean that anybody has the right to use the channel for any purpose or does it mean that it has a First Amendment connotation, that somebody who wants to address the public should have the opportunity to do it. But so much happens in the name of Access that is dubious. I think the fundamental problem with Access is the weakness of definition as to what it is.

UNGER: *Do you think PBS made a mistake in not going into cable?*

DOLAN: That was an economic judgment. I think the opportunity for PBS to go into cable will increase. They haven't missed the boat. There will be more opportunity. PBS now provides a wonderful product. They need to discover other audience opportunities and how to use cable. The public should have a direct opportunity to support PBS and cable might indeed furnish that.

UNGER: *Wouldn't it compete directly with your BRAVO?*

DOLAN: It might, but also there might be ways that PBS and BRAVO could complement one another or even share the same mission.

UNGER: *Do you think that the position of BRAVO is weakening these days?*

DOLAN: There's more competition for BRAVO than there was, to be sure. But we are up to 4 million subscribers now. BRAVO is a pay service which might have been a mistake. It probably should have been introduced as a basic service. We started it in the early 80s, but BRAVO's future will be of its own making, if it maintains its original mission. It has its own identity, which is really one of chance-taking, being adventurous, scheduling international films and performing-arts events that the audience is unlikely to see on PBS or A&E. I think it makes a contribution with that.

UNGER: *Do you envisage a time when pay-per-view will take over cable programming? For instance, Nureyev, Barishnikov, Pavorotti, and every major star in a Night of 100 Stars where people would be asked to pay \$20 or even \$50. One performance could make millions of dollars.*

DOLAN: Yes. I agree with everything except the idea that it would take

over from something else. Pay-per-view is another marketing approach and it will be very useful for the kinds of presentation that you describe and we will see much more of it. And it will be wonderful because it will be enhanced by the new techniques such as High Performance TV, digital sound and multi-channel presentation. Many more people will want to take advantage of the opportunity to go to the marketplace in the pay-per-view format. As more do, the variety of attractions available on pay-for-view would be great.

In a sense, it will be like going from a small town to a large town with entertainment and variety. If you live in a very small community, you might have a single theater and an occasional legitimate stage presentation. If you come to a large city where there is much more economic support for such presentations, there is great variety as we have in New York and in London. As pay-per-view emerges, that economic support will create a Broadway Upper West End so to speak on television, and everybody will be able to avail themselves of it. Where they live will make no difference.

UNGER: *Do you foresee maybe an early marriage of pay-per-view and HDTV?*

DOLAN: Oh, yes, That will be one of the earliest applications of HDTV. There is an eagerness in the industry to utilize that medium. But, we're not ready for it yet. We don't have the television sets out there. The debate continues about format and so forth.

UNGER: *Perhaps it will start with the major theatrical screenings?*

DOLAN: It could. An event like the Metropolitan Opera in HDTV would be wonderful. The grandeur of what is presented on that stage certainly lends itself to HDTV. But so does a hockey game. A hockey game on HDTV solves the problem of "where's the puck?"

UNGER: *You've been in the business for around 40 years. Has cable progressed as much as you thought it would?*

DOLAN: Generally, it has progressed more than I ever anticipated. We were all bemused by the blue-sky promises of telecommunications of the early 70s which were encouraged during the franchising era. But the reality of cable has emerged wonderfully and has more than substituted for the some of the wild ambitions. Without being speculative and imaginative, it is certainly possible now to foresee an evolution for cable without asking cable to do more than continue along the lines that it is now functioning. A future that is really wonderful...

UNGER: *So you envision the future as perfecting what you already have. Or do you see revolutionary changes?*

DOLAN: More perfecting what we already have. The industry that we will have by the end of this decade will be a very greatly refined version of what we have now.

UNGER: *What do you see as the most exciting new things happening in cable?*

DOLAN: Again, the increase in channel capacity is the fundamental. And then, I would move next to the improvement of the quality of the picture and improvement in the quality of the sound—and changes in the way that these services are marketed for the home through the deployment of far more sophisticated home terminals.

UNGER: *Do you perceive any technology supplanting cable? Some new technology coming in?*

DOLAN: Definitely. Again, if cable is defined as being coaxial cable, it certainly will be supplanted by fiber. The architecture of cable will change. When we say "cable" today, we usually mean addressable or pro-

grammable services, and that will change. The systems will be fully encrypted.

Meaning every channel will be coded. And when that happens, there is endless versatility in the way that you can market the channels. Again, this takes us away from "basic."

UNGER: *I'm not sure I understand. Every channel will be coded—you mean, scrambled?*

DOLAN: Scrambled, or some other system of security, so that each channel can be provided to the home or not provided, as the home wishes. Let's talk about SKYCABLE which has 108 channels. Well, why do we need that? What do you put on all of those channels? We heard those questions in 1980. We heard them in 1970. People have difficulty anticipating what the entrepreneurial programming people will do once they are given access to the whole market. Their enterprise, their imagination in identifying service possibilities, is enormous. If we have 50 services in the cable industry today, how many will we have five years from now? Will it be 60? Will it be 100? Or 180?

Why can't cable be a 200/300-channel service?

And then there is pay-per-view. In addition to channels that are dedicated to specific interests, you have the ability to focus on particular events, not only in entertainment, but in information and, beyond that, the whole possibility of using this system for education. All of that is bound to emerge.

Another factor, which is even more difficult to isolate now, is the Fax machine in conjunction with cable. It could be a very important new connection.

UNGER: *How would you combine those two?*

DOLAN: Well, there's a whole concept of broadcast Fax, which is be-

ginning to take root. We have *The New York Times* producing a Fax edition and the *Wall Street Journal*. Fax machines are going to become less and less costly. Fax machines can be addressed in the same way that our converters can be addressed. There is this wonderful capacity to move back and forth between text and video with the text coming from a computer and the video coming from a totally different source.

You could be watching a news program and decide you wanted more information on the story, or you wanted a full range of sports scores, or whatever, and you punch that into your remote unit and receive a printout. Thus, a news service can provide not only its ongoing presentation on the screen, but also periodic hard copy during the day if you want the current world bulletins or some other aspect of the news. There's hardly anything that is presented on cable which you could not conceive of some extension in a form of print. If the two work through the same apparatus, it again becomes part of a total service to the home, putting the individual in the home in a position to pursue his particular interests more and more narrowly.

UNGER: *Do you think of cable as being basically entertainment or information?*

DOLAN: If I had to make a prediction as to which of the functions that we know of today is likely to be the most important at a point in the future, I think that it will be education if for no other than an economic reason. People today will spend \$15,000 or \$20,000 a year for an undergraduate education. They go to class four years and graduate in that period. But if you were trying to be a productive individual in a specific discipline, if you want your education to be ongoing and don't want it to stop in the formal periods that we have now, then it could be that among the

television set, the Fax machine and the computer you have an instrument for education in the home that would permit anybody to stay abreast in any discipline.

UNGER: *When we started talking about the importance of the educational aspect, I saw a spark in your eyes that I really didn't see when we were talking about entertainment. I have a feeling that education is the part that inspires you.*

DOLAN: Well, it is certainly the most exciting because it is the most useful and it would have the greatest future importance. It would put the value of what we are doing beyond question. And everybody would join in that enthusiasm. If the ideas that we are talking about are real, there won't be any skeptics. Everybody will be for that and everybody will be supportive. And won't it be wonderful, if you want to change society, you can't possibly think of a better way of doing it.

UNGER: *How is it that somebody as seemingly laid back and relaxed as you are, can accumulate a \$1 billion fortune so rapidly? Obviously in this business you've got to be aggressive to get as far as you have gotten. Are you a closet shark?*

DOLAN: I don't know. I think you become involved with a particular concept and the more you see the possibility of that concept becoming real, the more anxious you are for it and the more impatient you are with anything that deviates from that or wastes time or dissipates resources. You're motivated by whatever works. There's a wonderful thrill in that. And when something functions, you want something more to function.

You do wonder about yourself a little bit because at one point you never needed to ask yourself why you're doing it. You know you're doing it because you have to pay for the mortgage and the children needed to go

to college, and you needed the dollars. Then, you get to a point where all the children have been to college and the mortgages are all paid and you find yourself, if anything, working harder, more involved, more tense, more apprehensive, more eager. And so that question you asked—are you a closet shark—does come up in your mind. I don't know a satisfactory answer.

UNGER: *You pass on whether you are a closet shark or not?*

DOLAN: Absolutely.

UNGER: *Your children are all grown and out of the house?*

DOLAN: They are grown and they are more or less out of the house. They are all out of college. Two are married and there are three grandchildren. One is about to be married. They are all doing well.

UNGER: *And the only child around the house these days is cable?*

DOLAN: Yes, you could say that. That's an interesting way of putting it. Helen is involved. She works with the School of the Holy Child. She's helping them find a new headmaster at this point. She's deeply involved in that. And I'm on the board at Fairfield University in Connecticut—two of our children went there.

UNGER: *In all the clips I read about you, there is so little about you on a personal level. Is that because you try to avoid the personality aspect?*

DOLAN: Well, it's not that important.

UNGER: *I've learned that you have a house and boat in Florida; that you have six children; that you're Fortune 400. That's about all I know. Is that all you want known about yourself?*

DOLAN: Unlike Ted Turner, I haven't won the America's Cup with my boat. It's just a boat...

UNGER: *Do you still have a house on Long Island?*

DOLAN: Oh, yes. In Oyster Bay.

UNGER: *Are you still married to the same woman?*

DOLAN: Right.

UNGER: *Is she still working the business itself anymore?*

DOLAN: She's still very involved with it. She reads everything that is written. She reads all of the trade papers. We go to the conventions together and we will split up between panels. She'll go to one and I'll go to another. And then she makes notes and while we're riding back in the airplane together, she tells me everything they said at that panel. Helen knows people in the industry very well. So, although not officially in it, she's pretty knowledgeable.

UNGER: *Do you consider yourself a contented person?*

DOLAN: Yes. If I weren't, I would have no reason not to be. Really, things have been marvelous. We have enjoyed more success than we ever anticipated. We have never really controlled our destiny completely yet things tend to work. Some things don't but most do. We have had the wonderful privilege of being involved in the introduction of a new technology. I don't know what I would rather be doing that what we are doing.

UNGER: *What are you proudest of?*

DOLAN: Well, I'm proud of the company. I think it's a strong organization and is contributing a lot and is one likely to grow with the potential of our industry. I do believe strongly in moving to a software basis and away from hardware. And to the extent that we have accomplished that, I guess, if you want me to say that I'm proud of something, I would be proud of that. Technology is wonderful, but it just can never be your reason for being.

UNGER: *Ted Turner seems to have changed political direction in the*

past year. He's so involved in the environment and international affairs. Five years ago, I could not have envisioned him moving in that direction. Are you moving in that direction?

DOLAN: I lack Ted's scope. Ted has always been concerned about the environment and peace. The Goodwill Games started a long time ago. I think Ted was motivated more by the idea of east-west friendship than he was by profits. He never thought the Goodwill Games would ever make any money for him. Ted is a great personality. I think he has been an attractive image for the cable industry and has made a very positive impression for us, particularly in Washington. Certainly the services he has contributed makes him very valuable.

UNGER: *And how about Rupert Murdoch? Do you think he's likely to play an important role in American cable?*

DOLAN: He's played an important role in absolutely everything he's undertaken. He is a seasoned, experienced person, very courageous. He's analytic and for me, a fascinating associate. I enjoy working with him and have a lot to learn from him.

UNGER: *Was there any thought of involving Ted Turner in SKYCABLE?*

DOLAN: No, except that we hope that Ted will decide to put all of his services on SKYCABLE.

UNGER: *It would be interesting to have the three of you—Turner, Murdoch and Dolan—involved in the same project.*

DOLAN: I would love it. The politics of cable are complex at this point. Ted has many companies in the cable industry on his board and they themselves are involved in different satellite projects, so there's a complexity to that. But we do think that with SKYCABLE, we have a great group of partners what with NBC and all of its resources; Murdoch with his

and his specific experience with satellite; Hughes, with more operational experience with satellite communications than any other organization. We count Cablevision as very fortunate to be in this group.

UNGER: *How will SKYCABLE change the face of American cable from a consumer's point of view?*

DOLAN: I don't know that it will change the face of it. It will add something. We launch in late 1993. If we are there with 108 channels and we are able to program those channels well, by 1994, we will be able to mingle satellite reception and cable reception in the home, bring it through one box so the subscriber will be able to move from a wired channel to a satellite channel without knowing that he has done it. In the same way that in a telephone conversation today, you have no idea whether you're moving by satellite or by wire.

UNGER: *What will this cost the subscriber?*

DOLAN: It will add to the choice that he has from the service (I'm avoiding calling it cable) that he is receiving now. If he wants to take advantage of that expanded service by making choices in addition to those he already has, that will add to his costs.

UNGER: *So SKY will be on the menu and he can choose to subscribe if he wishes?*

DOLAN: Exactly. That's our concept of how it should work. In areas where there is no cable, then it provides everything, but where there is cable, it becomes an important supplement to what the system is already offering.

UNGER: *Will SKYCABLE do programming of its own?*

DOLAN: The people who are involved in it will be doing their own programming. NBC, Cablevision, Murdoch—there may be others. But

that is, perhaps, different from the venture doing its own programming. Our hope is that everybody else who is involved in programming will use SKYCABLE as a means of access in the home market.

UNGER: *Do you think there's a need for a kind of cable czar? Since there may be problems in the future on everything from pricing to program content, do you think at some point cable organizations will get together and say "We need somebody to help us to self-regulate to avoid government regulation? Just as the movie industry has done."*

DOLAN: I hope not. Any more than people involved in print need a czar for print. The more we proliferate the channels, the more programming there is, the more competition between services for the interest of the consumer, the less need there is for central administration. It is only when we go back into this gatekeeper situation and somebody is determining arbitrarily what will reach the public and what won't, then we'll have the stress.

UNGER: *Do you think that on the whole cable has performed a positive function for our society?*

DOLAN: Sure. There's much more it could do, of course. But what has been accomplished is marvellous. I think cable has been made a much more valuable instrument in the home of the television set than it was 10 years ago. In a span of 10 years, the landscape changed enormously. The next 10 years will see a even more changes. ■

For seventeen years, Arthur Unger served as Television Critic of *The Christian Science Monitor* where he won recognition as one of the nation's most influential critics. He is also known for his revealing interviews with entertainment and media personalities. He recently retired from the *Monitor* to devote his time to travel and travel writing. He is also serving as Special Correspondent for TVQ.

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Congratulations to all who have advanced the standards of excellence through the application of technology to the expression of ideas.

MADE FOR TELEVISION—MOVIES AT 25: A CRITICAL SURVEY

BY CLIFF ROTHMAN

Every year, The American Film Institute programs made-for-television movies right alongside feature films during its spring film festival. In the trenches of the entertainment industry, the made-for-TV-movie elicits reaction of another kind: snobbery. The much-maligned form is the stepchild of the film industry.

The hybrid form has now passed the twenty-five year mark since the first "official" made-for-television movie, *See How They Run*, was broadcast to the American public by NBC in prime time on September 9, 1984. It has not only survived a quarter century but evolved into a form with its own style, formula, conceits—and artistic apexes.

Last fall, the silver anniversary precipitated a flurry of salutes. The commemorations challenged my own simplistic dismissal of the form: Was I lumping all made-for-television movies together in the same tarpit, and dismissing the 5% art for the 90% hybrid-products manufactured to fill

time periods featuring new and improved namebrand stars?

Does the form deserve salute? Was the process capable of greatness, or were the good ones an accident? And lastly, but most provocatively, are they ever as great as the great movie-movies?

The bottom line: Are made-for-television films really an artform worthy of celebration?

I decided to do a mini-survey of authoritative sources for answers. I would canvass the most discriminating TV minds, on both sides of the fence: makers and evaluators. In addition, I thought a top-ten poll of personal favorites from the critics would shed some light on which TV movies were outstanding, and why.

The baker's dozen of critics who consented to participate were, not surprisingly, among the most respected in the nation. I gave them an opportunity to talk seriously about a subject whose flaws—and occasional virtue—they feel passionately about.

The noble thirteen: Tom Shales, *The Washington Post*; Bill Carter, *The New York Times*; Bill Henry, Associate Editor, *Time Magazine*;

Howard Rosenberg, *The Los Angeles Times*; Monica Collins, *USA Today*; Marc Gunther, *Detroit Free Press*; John Carman, *San Francisco Chronicle*; Eric Mink, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*; David Bianculli, *New York Post*; Marvin Kitman, *Newsday*; David Gritten, *L.A. Herald-Examiner*; Noel Holston, *The Minneapolis Star*; Dan Ruth, *Chicago Sun-Times*.

My criteria were similarly elitist when it came to television names. I wanted those artists whose work met the toughest audience—their peers. Those who responded to my query, for which I am grateful, were top names in the business: Actresses Mary Tyler Moore (*Heartsounds, First You Cry*), Carol Burnett (*Friendly Fire*), JoBeth Williams (*Adam*); writers Fay Kanin (*Heartsounds, Hustling*) and Bill Link (*The Execution of Private Slovik*); directors Glenn Jordan (*Promise*) and Nicholas Meyer (*The Day After*); and producer Robert Cooper (*The Simon Wiesenthal Story*).

Consensus when it came to the top-ten favorites was about on par with the Israeli Knesset, on every score. Critics had little unity on the most notable movies over the past twenty-five years; less so on the precise definitions of a television movie. Even the lineage was disputed.

When it came to the evaluative comments, both accompanying the entries and freestanding, there was more accord. Creators were near-consistent with critics: appreciation and disappointment co-mingled. Few saw unmitigated excellence. Most saw artistry compromised by commerce.

Still, the critical data yielded a majority favorite: *Friendly Fire* the 1979 Vietnam consciousness-raiser starring Carol Burnett, Ned Beatty and Sam Waterston, and directed by David Greene from a script by Fay Kanin. And the forum for the pros and cons of the made-for-TV-movie made for a lively debate:

JoBeth Williams raised the issue that television movies offer

more rounded roles than most features: "I don't see film roles for women that are as complex and challenging as those in TV movies."

Mary Tyler Moore said that the relatively new genre of exploitative TV film, based on sensationalist topical subjects, was debasing the medium as a whole: "I think it's a cheap way of getting an audience.

Even Carol Burnett, acknowledged that risklessness is a fact at the big three networks, a fate from which TV movies suffer along with episodics: "The weakness is that they tend to think that if it gets too deep, that Fred and Marge, that fictitious couple in the midwest, or wherever, aren't going to get it, and they'll tune out. And I think that's a mistake.

A network executive tastefully retorted to the constant accusations of censorship: "Too many people quite honestly think that what they consider creative freedom is the ability to say dirty words."

The greatest detractor of the form, ironically enough, was one of its most successful artists: Director Nicholas Meyer. "Any dramatic experience that is interrupted every five minutes by an underarm deodorant commercial," tossed off Meyer, who watched powerlessly as his record-breaking *The Day After* was amputated by a half hour in its second broadcast, "is not really viable as a dramatic experience."

The TV movies greatest defender was a critic, a Pulitzer Prize Winner and current Associate Editor of *Time Magazine*: "I would stack the landmarks of the TV/movie up against a list of Oscar winners any day," countered Bill Henry.

The Critics Top Eleven

Thirteen critics submitted their lists of favorites. Ten entries were suggested. A few reserved the right to offer fewer than ten, a statement on their general approval of the form.

Seventy-three movies in total were cited, which meant that every list was completely different from every other list. They meant different things to different people. A promising perspective.

Length was the first issue. How long do they have to be? I tried to suggest—loosely—that everyone try to adhere to what I thought was a standard configuration, a one-part, one-evening, two-hour format. But it became like trying to squeeze multi-shaped pegs into wrong slots.

Some critics asked why two-part, four hours movies should not be considered. Others thought that PBS-based 45-minute pieces were verifiable made-for-TV movies. Some said that two and three part TV-movies should qualify. I settled the issue on a single part TV/movie. (That closed the issue for top-ten favorites, though it in no way ended the valid issue: at what length does a movie stop being a movie and become a mini-series, which is in structure simply no longer a movie?)

The timeframe for the top-ten survey, offered as an accompaniment to the 25 year assessment, eventually brought another challenge: Genesis of the form. See *How They Run* has achieved a certain pop-level legitimacy as the "first movie of the week," since it was a network presentation in the fall of 1964 with an official made-for-TV label. But what about the kinescoped tele-plays from the mid-1950s, made during TV's "Golden Era"? Weren't they movies, and didn't they qualify as TV-movies? I was stumped.

My course of action: I let anybody include in their top-ten any particular work which they felt *absolutely* had to be included. The combining of information, I figured, would yield the unanimous favorites, which was the point of the exercise, anyway.

At this point in the history of the TV movie, an empirical survey is like building a house before the sizes of

materials is standardized for consistency: Materials from every country followed a different standard of measurement, and had to be fit together with a bit of stretch.

Eleven films in total reached that hallowed point: the votes of three critics or more. At that number they were consensus favorites. *Friendly Fire*, with seven out of a possible thirteen votes, was the most widely revered movie made for television. The 1979 Emmy-award-winner, a drama about a rural couple who harrowingly battle the government to get the truth about their son's death in Vietnam, was the sole made-for-TV to come readily to the minds of the critics. Its Vietnam-based theme was undoubtedly a factor:

"A real conscience raiser about Vietnam many years before *Platoon* was made," said Tom Shales. "Tremendous historical significance," noted *Time Magazine's* Bill Henry. Performances, the writing, the story construction all were praised: "A very, very well-told story, which didn't give any easy answers," said a typical response, from David Gritten of the (defunct) *L.A. Herald Examiner*.

Promise, a story of two brothers, played by James Garner and James Wood, directed by Glenn Jordan and written by Richard Friedenberg, was next with 6 votes. Critics consistently compared it—favorably—to the Oscar-winning feature *Rain Man*.

Playing for Time, the Auschwitz-based drama starring Vanessa Redgrave, received 5 votes. And with four votes each: The overhyped post-nuclear *The Day After* ("Everyone thought it was terrible, I thought it was moving," said Tom Shales); Stephen Spielberg's career-making truck suspenser *Duel* ("The single best thing I've ever seen on television," said David Bianculli); and the military ground-breaker, *The Execution of Private Slovik* from the legendary Levinson-Link writing team.

The following five films received 3 votes: *The Autobiography of Miss*

Jane Pittman, the TV movie most single-handedly responsible for legitimizing the genre in its early days, with Cicely Tyson in a career-making role as the fictional slave—"The best thing American TV has ever done, perhaps the most poignant and powerful single image that I can recollect, that single sip for mankind," said Bill Henry); *Love is Never Silent*, the award-winning groundbreaker about deafness; *Something About Amelia*, the much-publicized prime-time exposure of middle class incest, starring Ted Danson and Glen Close; *Special Bulletin*, the innovative docu-video style telling about nuclear confrontation; and *Too Far to Go*, a uniquely-bleak drama of a failing marriage, which starred Blythe Danner and Michael Moriarty.

Thirteen films were remembered by two critics: *Amber Waves*, *Attica*, *Brian's Song*, *Crisis at Central High*, *The Dollmaker*, *An Early Frost*, *Escape From Sobibor*, *Finnigan Begin Again*, *Gideon's Trumpet*, *Heart-sounds*, *Jericho Mile*, *Long Gone*, *Who Will Love My Children*.

That left 49 films with only a single champion. And that was a list of some fascinatingly diverse array of selections: originating from Britain and Canada, as well as the U.S., they ranged from 1950s kinescopes to *American Playhouse* productions, to 45 minute playlets.

Some Of The Critics' Passions:

- *The Ghost Writer (American Playhouse)*: the most vivid visualization of what the creative process of writing is like.
- *A Christmas Memory*: Geraldine Page is every bit as good as she was twenty years later in her Oscar-winning *The Trip to Bountiful*
- *Bang the Drum Slowly*: The very

best of the "Golden Age" pieces. Paul Newman has never been sweeter, more vulnerable or better.

- *Welcome Home Bobby*: The best piece of adolescent sexuality of any kind that I've ever seen on television.
- *Uncle Ed and Circumstance (Studio One)*: Jackie Gleason, who is one of television's true geniuses, was never better than in this part, playing the poor-soul kind of character.

If the lists themselves showed the range of fare of movies made strictly for television, the accompanying comments showed the bigger picture, critically: Excellence was almost never attributed to a film as a whole, but to one or other of an element in or about the film. Exceptional strong performances, avant-garde material, and still-taboo subjects, were factors most often cited for inclusion of the film as outstanding in some way.

A picture which emerged: The whole was rarely better than the sum of its parts. And, in fact, the whole was consistently viewed as inherently handicapped as a creation dependent on commercial sponsorship.

Made-For-TV-Movie: One Half of a Set of Jaws

"The TV-movie is one-half of a set of jaws," director Meyer noted, pausing dramatically before continuing his analogy. "It can raise an issue but it can't say anything about it." Meyer unswerving conviction that a TV film is virtually incapable of being excellent when sponsor-based was to a greater or lesser extent a unanimous position, by both creator and critic.

Negativity ranged from John Carman's "You're lucky if you can remember it the next morning" to critic

David Gritten's "It's a Madison Avenue artform" to Fay Kanin's "A lot of movies out there are like junk bonds." Censorship, network intrusion, propriety were all points on the same wheel: commercial sponsorship.

Chicago critic Dan Ruth lambasted the sequelitis: "Either it's disease-of-the-week or Nazi-of-the-week." And critic Marc Gunther: "So high concept, so quickly forgotten." And L.A.'s Gritten: "Contrived and artificial." Bill Carter summed it up: "So many TV movies have to be promotable topics, which makes them worthless. They're topics, not stories."

Censorship, of course, was the rallying theme. From Marc Gunther: "TV-movies tend to capitalize on controversy in a non-controversial way." Added Meyer, on his favorite subject: "Television, and TV movies, are censored by the network, censored by the sponsors, and censored by the fear of Jerry Falwell."

And refuting the pseudo-courageousness of the networks for programming provocative "issue" movies, Meyer pointed out: "They can come out against child abuse because there probably isn't a big pro-child abuse lobby. I think the major problem with American television is that it is hopelessly censored. American television is a medium that exists primarily to sell advertising."

Okay, TV movies are incapable of perfection, the state which can be achieved only by the most uncompromising artistic ventures, occasionally allowed within the feature end. What were the virtues of the made-for-TV-movie?

One big one: topicality. Writer Bill Link, who along with Dick Levinson wrote *That Certain Summer*, which broke ground in the early '70s in its then-candid look at homosexuality, talked about the edge that the tv-movie has: "It's closer to the cutting edge of what's going on in American

society. Problems affecting our society can be written and on the air in a very short period of time."

Fay Kanin talked about it in a different way, citing television as a more hospitable venue to certain domestic topics: "Most of us (writers) want to do TV movies," said the writer whose scripts have shown the grit of prostitution (*Hustling*) and Watergate Washington ("Friendly Fire"), "principally because we couldn't deal with subjects we were interested in on the big screen."

The latitude of length in the TV movie form was cause for much celebration, especially noted among the TV moviemakers. "It's a phenomenon, it's an event," said an enthusiastic JoBeth Williams. "There is nothing like it being done in features." Added Kanin: "It does better service to books, novels, or non-fiction works than trying to compress it into the ordinary two-hour big screen format."

And the TV films' complex female roles were mentioned by all the actresses. Says JoBeth Williams: "I find that for me personally I've been offered roles in TV that have been more challenging than many of the features that I'm offered. And I think that may be true for a lot of feature actresses." (Her favorite role? *Baby M*: "It was a real challenge to play a woman who people had very violent opinions about.")

Mary Tyler Moore commented: "Within the context of that abbreviated time frame, you have to reach the same level of excellence that you would strive for if you were making a feature. And that's very challenging to me." (Her favorite part: Mary Lincoln Todd. "I would dream about her, wake up with an idea or a thought. She was never very far from me.")

TV's intimate dimensions was another advantage, a phenomenon particularly important to the writers. Said Glenn Jordan, director of *Promise and Heartsounds*: "the canvas of a

TV-movie is smaller, but within that more limited scope you can make up for that in terms of depth of relationships, or the depth of an approach to a problem."

Notwithstanding the handicaps or the virtues, TV-movies versus movie-movies: How do they compare?

"I think most features aren't very good, and most TV movies aren't very good," says Bill Link. "It's roughly analogous." And Mary Tyler Moore: "When it's good it's good, and when it's awful it's dreadful." (You know that famous Mary Richards basso voice—her whole body lowers as her voice deepens while she emphasizes something.)

And as Meyer pragmatically points out: "It's hard to make a great anything."

Most critics, like Noel Holston, were disbelieving of the form's greatness: "If the best movies hit a ten, then the best TV-movies rarely go higher than a seven. And the ones that are good are good for their content rather than their cinematic qualities."

A few, like Marc Gunther, remained equivocal: "The best of TV-movies can be just as satisfying as movies," said the critic. Nonetheless, he didn't see the TV-movies "enduring like classics."

A very few were fans: "The films I listed can go in a video store for rent beside the Hollywood movies, and they would stand up quite well," says Carter. According to Bill Henry, if mini-series and stageplay adaptations were included, "TV offers more than the TV studios and the independent distributors do. The acting is as good, so is the writing. The primary difference is the size of the paycheck."

Major screen stars, it was pointed out by many, got significant career boosts from TV-movies: Glenn Close (*Too Far to Go*), Aidan Quinn (*Early Frost*), William Devane (*Missiles of October*), Mare Winnigham (*Amber*

Waves), William Hurt and Sissy Spacek (*Verna, USO Girl*).

Also noted repeatedly was the similarity between certain TV films and features, notably *Rain Man* and *Promise*, both stories of brothers and mental illness: "Even some of the less snooty film critics," Carman pointed out, "have acknowledged that *Promise* was better than the loosely similar *Rain Man*." And says critic Bianculli: "Everything you care about ends up on TV, and that's not always true about movies. The mere fact that *Rain Man* began as a TV movie is proof that you cannot make distinctions about the form any longer."

Prognostications? "More permissive language" and "some nudity" on the network horizon, according to Bill Link, to counter audience defection. But, for many, the erosion is irreversible. And the victor, the uncensored, uninterrupted world of pay television: TV movies' "great hope," according to David Gritten, who threw plaudits, along with many others, to HBO.

HBO's TV-movie president Robert Cooper understood his company's position: "I think HBO has an opportunity to do what Levinson and Link did 25 years ago, where they started with *That Certain Summer* and *My Sweet Charile*. We're unencumbered by the need for the good guys to win, and the bad guys to lose. Unencumbered by needing seven acts and commercial breaks. We don't have to be hot and sexy."

And it's just that—the heat of the sensationalist docudrama—which unleashes Mary Tyler Moore's passionate outrage: "I think it is reaching a new low in television moviemaking, when we can exploit dreadful sad situations like the Nussbaum-Steinberg story. I think it is a false step."

Glenn Jordan understands the pragmatic truth about television: "I wouldn't want to do it. And I wouldn't

want to see it. But somebody'll do it, and a lot of people will watch it."

And one of Burnett's ever-sanguine levelers, as a closer: "There's going to be a lot of dumb stuff that's going to go out on the airwaves, just as dumb as what comes out of the movies today. But once in a while, there will be a gem." ■

Cliff Rothman who lives in Los Angeles writes frequently about television and film for newspapers and magazines.

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STATE OF THE ARTS

A TVQ report card on American television's cultural programming in the 1980's, including cable, PBS and the commercial networks. How would you grade them?

BY BRIAN ROSE

During the final weeks of 1989 as the 80's closed down its act, readers, listeners and watchers were bombarded with end-of-the-decade features. Reporters and critics who cover theater, films, music, movies, television and the arts took advantage of the ritualistic tradition of looking back and assessing the major events of the past ten years.

Commentators examining what happened to American television during the 1980s certainly had a rich field to harvest. After three decades of security and economic well-being, ABC, NBC, and CBS suddenly found their very foundations threatened. Ownership of the three networks passed into new hands. A rival fourth network mounted a significant challenge to the prevailing commercial broadcast status quo. Network news operations were now expected to make a profit. And cable TV penetration jumped to almost 60% of the country, forcing network viewing levels down to 61%.

Although much was written on the turbulent developments in American broadcasting during the last decade, there was one area—the arts on television—which generally escaped attention. Hidden from view by a number of factors, cultural program-

ming nevertheless went through an unusually intriguing period during the 1980s. After more than twenty years of general disinterest by commercial broadcasters, the performing arts at the start of the decade suddenly became an attractive TV commodity. Networks and communication companies speculated that the very qualities that made ballet, theater, and opera programs so untenable on prime-time—small, elite audiences with highly sophisticated tastes—could now become valuable selling points in what appeared to be the wide-open world of cable TV.

Hoping that advertisers would respond to their unexpected interest in "quality," new cable networks were formed to tap the upscale viewers who, it was believed, were eager for different and discriminating fare. The most ambitious of these enterprises was CBS Cable, launched with extraordinary fanfare in October 1981.

In keeping with its parent network's carefully cultivated image of classiness, CBS Cable set sail with the greatest of expectations. The best TV arts producers were hired; the best talent was commissioned to create costly original programming; and the best parties and promotional efforts were arranged to woo potential sponsors and cable operators.

Despite its noble intentions, CBS was forced to pull the plug on this

electronic arts utopia less than a year later, after losing a reported \$50 million. Nevertheless, the dream of an all-cultural cable network lived on. The Entertainment Channel, funded in part by RCA, tried to avoid the problem of weak advertising support by looking to pay cable as a solution. It wasn't; the network folded after losses estimated at \$30 million.

Cablevision's BRAVO was more fortunate and continues to survive, primarily because of its more modest programming goals. Rather than strive for original domestic arts production, BRAVO has concentrated on a limited schedule loaded with foreign films and inexpensive imported attractions.

The most successful of the decade's cultural channels has proven to be the Arts and Entertainment network (A&E). Initially set up as a 3-hour per night, strictly performing-arts venture by ABC and Hearst, the network regrouped in the mid-1980s and changed its focus. Gone were the originally commissioned dance works and theater productions as well as a provocative affiliation with Joseph Papp. Instead, A&E expanded its schedule of imported performing arts fare to now include old and new documentaries, BBC comedies and dramas, off-network sitcoms, occasional original ventures and co-productions. Recognizing the disadvantages of elitism, A&E transformed itself into a smooth and efficient modern cable network, complete with mainstream programming, heavy promotion, and constant displays of its slick corporate logo (a logo that does its best to obscure what the "A" in A&E stands for).

A&E's success as a mostly middle-of-the-road entertainment service (with a slight British accent) underscores many of the problems and limitations cultural programming faced during the 1980s. Not surprisingly, the performing arts failed to offer anyone a pot of gold at the end of the

cable rainbow. Companies that should have known better, considering the dismal record of arts programs on the commercial networks, were caught up in the belief that what worked for magazines (highly targeted appeals directed at select, upscale audiences) would easily transfer to the far riskier and far more expensive enterprise of television.

Unfortunately, the audience for the performing arts, at least on TV, is simply too small to make a steady diet of theater, opera, and dance economically viable, particularly since attempts were being made to split this limited pool of viewers among several competing channels. By the mid-1980s, with cable's attempts to be a radical alternative largely abandoned, the solution for the cultural cable channels was clear—program with a more popular approach, or go the way of \$50 million dinosaurs like CBS Cable.

The initial excitement surrounding the cable culture networks at the beginning of the decade did lead television's chief purveyor of the performing arts to contemplate dramatic changes. In the early 1980s, PBS, always strapped for funds and facing an uncertain future in the harsh Reagan era, announced a rather unwieldy plan to start its own pay network, establishing a "grand alliance" for new programming with the country's leading arts centers, museums, and universities. For better or worse, nothing ever came of the idea, especially once such well-heeled competitors as CBS Cable and the Entertainment Channel disappeared from the scene.

In the years to follow, public broadcasting would continue to be the country's primary source for original TV arts production, but this position brought little reward or consolation. The Reagan administration kept up

its ruthless campaign to make the public network self-sufficient (or bankrupt). Of equal gravity was the economic downturn in the oil industry. With falling profits, the multi-national petroleum giants who served as the chief underwriters to PBS's cultural programming cut back severely on their "altruistic" media expenditures. Exxon pulled out completely, a move which caused great concern at series such as *Great Performances* and *Live from Lincoln Center* which had relied in large part on its support. Fortunately, both programs were able to find new sponsors.

The instability rocking PBS in the 1980s, while nothing new, did seem to promote a quality of conservatism in the network's arts programming, or at least an absence of bold initiatives. By the end of the decade, many of PBS's premiere cultural series had reached a comfortable middle age (in terms of the TV life cycle), and there were no new entries on the horizon to challenge or replace them. *Great Performances* entered its seventeenth season in the fall of 1989; *Live from Lincoln Center* entered its thirteenth. *American Playhouse* was now almost ten years old, and even the once plucky upstart, *Alive from Off-Center*, will be six years old in the summer of 1990.

This is not to say that these series had lost their ability to surprise or delight. *Great Performances* continued to present a lively menu of cultural offerings, ranging from new opera telecasts like *Nixon in China* and *The Turn of the Screw*, to music specials from around the world, to outstanding dance programs on choreographers like David Gordon, Antony Tudor, and Vaslav Nijinsky. The series' mission, as defined by executive producer Jac Venza, has always been to provide "a television home for the greatest artists of our time," and its close relationship with opera stars Luciano Pavarotti and

Placido Domingo, conductors Leonard Bernstein and the late Herbert von Karajan, and dancers Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolf Nureyev testify to how important star power has been to the program's extraordinary success.

Great Performances, however, has also been a home for less stellar arts events, especially in dance. The fifteen-year old, series-within-a-series, *Dance in America*, maintained its high standards of adapting ballet and modern dance to the demands of the small screen, even after some of its key creative lights (directors Merrill Brockway and Emile Ardolino) departed in the mid-1980s for other projects. Ironically, many of its programs on American dance companies were produced in association with foreign broadcasters, who, unlike PBS, were rich in government-funded production resources and eager for challenging material.

Although co-productions with European companies would increase throughout the decade on PBS, one area of the network's schedule remained a tribute to domestic television expertise. *Live from Lincoln Center* originally pioneered the techniques of live concert telecasting in the mid-1970s, making it possible for home audiences to share in the front-row excitement once reserved for wealthy ticketholders. During the 1980s, producer John Goberman and director Kirk Browning's skill in capturing the experience of a live arts event continued to grow, with the series now firmly established as the most important American TV showcase for the performing arts.

As a showcase, however, *Live from Lincoln Center* has tended to follow a traditional approach in terms of programming and performers. This is partially understandable, given the formal respectability of its Lincoln Center imprimatur. But

like *Great Performances*, the series often suffers from a bad case of superstar-itis, particularly of the Pavarotti strain.

Clearly, popular artists do attract comparatively large audiences, and this in turn insures corporate underwriters of the wisdom of their patronage. Yet the repeated emphasis on star power, and the corresponding reliance on the mainstream repertory, has its disadvantages, including a feeling of predictability and caution. *Live from Lincoln Center* has attempted to guard against this with a few off-the-beaten path programs, but in general the series employed a far too common PBS formula for cultural programming: the tried-and-the true, performed by the internationally celebrated and renowned.

Telecasts from the Metropolitan Opera have been a trifle more ambitious, usually offering at least one

The essential traditionalism of *Live from Lincoln Center* and the Metropolitan Opera telecasts was not mirrored in PBS' *American Playhouse*.

less well-known or infrequently mounted opera per year. (At the conclusion of the 1989-90 season, for example, the program undertook the awesome TV challenge of presenting Wagner's complete Ring cycle on four consecutive nights.) The nature of programs from the Met, however, underwent a change during the 1980s, as the series presented fewer and fewer live events in favor of pre-recorded broadcasts.

By the end of the decade, the telecasts changed their title from *Live*

from the Met to *The Metropolitan Opera Presents* to reflect this new emphasis on a tightly packaged, virtually intermission-free product. Interestingly, the Metropolitan continued to send out live telecasts, but they were now transmitted directly to Europe or Japan—countries where funding and interest in American operatic activities were presumably much greater.

The essential traditionalism of *Live from Lincoln Center* and the Metropolitan Opera telecasts was not mirrored in PBS's most enterprising new series of the 1980s—*American Playhouse*. Since its premiere in 1982, *American Playhouse* has televised close to 200 programs spanning an extraordinary range of material and formats. Like *Great Performances*, there were many distinguished theatrical adaptations, with the focus now centered exclusively on American playwrights. But the series also reached out to include both literary adaptations and a remarkable assortment of original programming, enlisting topflight stage and film talent as well as newcomers to dramatic moviemaking.

Under Executive Producer Lindsay Law and its creator and president David M. Davis, *American Playhouse* extended the sometimes narrow confines of PBS's cultural formats to embrace biographical mini-series, small-scale made-for-TV dramas, and probing portraits of ethnic life (similar to the kinds of works which once aired on the innovative series *Visions*). The series' willingness to experiment and its emphasis on American productions gave it a distinctive signature, particularly at a time when so much of arts programming depended, by necessity, on brandname attractions and less costly foreign imports.

American Playhouse's creativity also extended to the always problem-

atic area of production financing. Like most shows on PBS, the series was forced to rely on outside sources of funding in order to meet expenses. However, in a novel twist, Lindsay Law and David M. Davis linked up with a variety of organizations to set up a new, and potentially profitable, channel of distribution. Instead of relying on the usual low-income route of one or two network airings followed by sales to minor auxiliary markets (such as school rentals and videotape catalogs), several of *American Playhouse's* programs premiered first in movie theaters, often winning critical acclaim, as well as box-office revenue. Productions that employed this breakthrough pattern included *El Norte*, *Dim Sum*, *The Europeans*, *A Flash of Green*, *Smooth Talk*, *Testament*, *The Thin Blue Line* and *Stand and Deliver*. They all received distribution in movie theaters.

American Playhouse was not alone in expanding public television's cultural boundaries in the 1980s. After years of ignoring the activities of the musical, theatrical, and choreographic avant-garde, the network finally opened up the doors a crack with its anthology program, *Alive From Off Center*. Created by KCTA in Minneapolis, the program provided a lively tour through the world of contemporary dance, music, and video performance art.

Viewers were treated to works by most of the major artist/celebrities of the downtown scene, including Laurie Anderson, David Byrne, Eric Bogosian, Ann Magnuson, and Bill Irwin. Short pieces or excerpts were the order of the day, given the program's half-hour time limitations, but this feeling of choppiness seemed completely in keeping with the program's frisky posture. Thanks to stylish packaging and an engaging selection of material, *Alive From Off Center* proved that even the avant-garde could be successfully tamed for the comfortable environment of the PBS schedule.

With the exception of *Voices and Visions*, an unusual series of video essays on American poets, the remainder of public television's cultural programming during the 1980s seldom strayed from the haven of predictability. *American Masters* was a series of biographies that celebrated a wide range of American art-

The advent of the cable networks in the early 1980's not only increased competition for audiences, but also raised the price of once inexpensive high-quality material from overseas.

ists. Profiles included everyone from Aretha Franklin to Jasper Johns, Neil Simon, James Baldwin and Charlie Parker. *In Performance at the White House*, which began during the Carter administration, continued to present taped concerts attended by the current President and his staff. In keeping with the taste of the office holders during the 1980s, there was some broadening of artists and repertory on the series, as more Broadway and country music performers were added to the standard list of classical recitalists.

If the PBS arts schedule for the decade can occasionally be faulted for a lack of adventurousism, it's important to keep the network's pressing problems firmly in mind. Besieged on the one hand by the specter of funding cutbacks—from both governmental and corporate sources—PBS in addition faced ever-rising production and programming costs. The advent of the cable networks in the early 1980s not only increased competition for audiences, but also raised

the price of once inexpensive, high-quality material from overseas. Reliable purveyors such as the BBC, which had filled the network's culture schedule since its creation, now signed exclusive deals with the wealthier cable companies.

Still, there were some advantages to this new competitive climate. Cut off from traditional sources of low-cost programming, PBS adopted a more aggressive stance to its own domestic productions. As a result of America's new clout in the international cultural world, the network actively sought more co-production deals with foreign broadcasters such as ORF and Danmarks Radio, which provided the facilities and/or funding for programs featuring celebrated U.S. artists.

As PBS reached out to new sources for programming, its affiliates became noticeably less active as producers of local arts-oriented broadcasts. In previous decades, member stations had occasionally televised symphony concerts or other area cultural events as part of their special mandate to their communities. But rising budget costs and a less pressing sense of mission restricted these type of programs during the 1980s.

Rather than allocate funds for a one-shot local attraction, PBS stations relied increasingly on the major big ticket offerings provided by *Great Performances* and other network arts series as their sole cultural gestures. One of the few public broadcasters left willing to cover the artistic life of its community is New Jersey Public Television. Each week its ambitious magazine program *State of the Arts* explores opera, dance, theater, and literature throughout New Jersey, integrating performances, criticism, and analysis. The results are often fresh and stimulating, and offer a model of what local public television could be like.

With PBS now providing most of the cultural programming for its affiliates, its aggressive search for new production partners was also employed to a lesser degree by the cable networks. Both A&E and BRAVO developed several projects with overseas companies but by and large this usually meant financial underwriting, as opposed to any creative involvement or exchange. A&E's foreign co-production schedule, for example, consists primarily of BBC material, to which the network contributes a portion of production expenses.

A&E's involvement on the domestic front, however, has been much more auspicious. During the 1989-90 season, it joined forces with Nederlander Television and Film Productions and General Motors to produce *American Playwrights Theater*, a series of four one-act plays by Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatists. Modeled on the anthology programs of the 1950s, the program featured impressive casts (such as James Earl Jones, Jose Ferrer, and Jean Stapleton), distinguished writers (Marsha Norman, Eugene

Few places remained on ABC, CBS or NBC to regularly find the performing arts. The most dependable was CBS' imaginative magazine show *Sunday Morning*.

O'Neill, Paul Zindel, and Tennessee Williams), and some of the medium's best-known directors from TV's "Golden Age" (George Schaefer, Fielder Cook and Lela Swift).

Recently, A&E launched a 1990 weekly art magazine, co-produced with King World Productions (better known for *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*), designed to cover develop-

ments in culture (both popular and high) from all over the world. Whether the show will be an upscale version of *Entertainment Tonight* or a 1990s version of *Omnibus* remains to be seen. Former ABC newsman Av Westin has signed on as Executive Producer.

Although cultural programming appeared primarily on PBS and the cable networks during the 1980s, there were a handful of scattered sightings on the commercial broadcast networks. With the elimination of the Sunday morning religious programs such as *Look Up and Live* and *Lamp Unto My Feet*, which often presented special arts telecasts, few places remained on ABC, CBS, or NBC to regularly find the performing arts. The most dependable was CBS's imaginative magazine show *Sunday Morning*.

Every couple of weeks, the program featured lovingly-produced, extended profiles of a wide-range of artists. The show's cultural contributors Beverly Sills, and later flautist Eugenia Zuckerman and jazz pianist Billy Taylor, offered a unique perspective into the process of creativity that made their reports unusually compelling. In keeping with its distinctive approach to television, *Sunday Morning* pre-empted its regular features on one occasion to broadcast the historic concert return of Vladimir Horowitz to Moscow, presented in its entirety. Horowitz was also the subject of a long piece on *60 Minutes*, CBS's highly-rated news show which has frequently profiled colorful cultural superstars like Luciano Pavarotti and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

The chief venue for prime-time culture on the commercial networks throughout the decade has been CBS's annual Christmas-season telecast of *The Kennedy Center Honors*. Premiering in 1978, the program salutes the creative achievements of five living American artists, com-

plete with a packed ceremony at the Kennedy Center attended by the President, and short performances or profiles highlighting their work. Though the format is a bit stiff, and the ratings consistently low, CBS has stuck with this once-a-year event, perhaps as a vestige of the network's former Tiffany sheen. But—once a year!

Its commercial competitors, however, have felt no similar compulsions. During the past ten years, the only cultural attractions on ABC (other than a brief revival of *Omnibus* in 1980) consisted of two, one-act plays written by Harold Pinter, directed by Robert Altman and produced in France. The first, *The Dumbwaiter*, appeared in 1986 and starred Tom Conti and a wildly miscast John Travolta. The second, *The Room*, was televised a year later during the low sets-in-use Christmas holiday period and featured Linda Hunt, Donald Pleasence and Julian Sands.

NBC, which started the decade with the ambitious *Live from Studio 8H* (only to cancel the series one season later), was far too intent in its efforts to become the highest-rated network to concentrate on anything but the most crowd-pleasing or demographically appealing attractions. Still, when its number-one star Bill Cosby stood behind an arts-related project, somehow the enterprise made it to the air. Cosby's first effort was as an enthusiastic host for a telecast of the Dance Theater of Harlem's *Creole Giselle*, taped like so many of *Dance in America's* recent programs in Denmark.

Taking a more active role in his next production, he presided over *Bill Cosby Salutes Alvin Ailey*, a one-hour homage to the 30th anniversary of the Ailey Company which mixed dancing with liberal doses of clown-

ing-around from members of *The Cosby Show* cast. Sadly, NBC waited until after Alvin Ailey's death on December 1, 1989 to air the program (which had been taped more than a year before).

The neglect of cultural programming on the commercial networks during the 1980s was nothing new—after all, ABC, CBS, and NBC had done their best to deny the existence of the arts (except during the low-rated winter holidays) for the previous two decades. What was new in the 1980s was that, at least for a few years, some forces in television, outside of PBS, believed that theater, ballet, and opera could be utilized as potentially attractive products. Though the appeal of high-brow offerings on cable didn't last long, it did mirror a renewed sense of excitement surrounding the possibilities of television and the performing arts. Someday, perhaps, the cable networks will once again discover that despite comparatively small audiences, cultural programming has its own rewards, including viewer appreciation and a sense of pride and prestige in those who find the time to offer it. And they may eventually turn up some discriminating advertisers.

Even with the economic retrenchment of the mid-1980s, this was a fairly interesting decade for the arts on American TV, particularly for its problem-plagued champion, public television. PBS's audiences remained stable, despite the threat of cable competition. Its principal arts series continued to prosper, despite rising production costs and the cutoff of inexpensive programming from the BBC. Rather than lead the network to insolvency (or to the route of pay-TV), the addition of the more mainstream cultural cable channels A&E and BRAVO, if anything, established PBS's mandate as the chief producer

and outlet of ballet, opera, and theater.

True, public television as it enters the 1990s suffers from a sense of diminished expectations and growing conservatism. No one knows how the network will ultimately fare at the hands of the Bush administration and what philosophy its new executives intend to pursue. Nevertheless, PBS remains as American cultural programming's strongest advocate and promoter. The network's singular commitment to the performing arts, especially when compared to its less resolute competitors, offers a source of hope that for the foreseeable future, the arts and TV will still have one important place to call home. ■

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AT ITS BEST

"WEAVER WANDERLUST A WHAMMO!" — THE STORY OF *WIDE WIDE WORLD*.

BY RICHARD KROLIK

"The world stands out on either side, no wider than the heart is wide. Above the world is stretched the sky, no higher than the soul is high."

With those words of Edna St. Vincent Millay, followed by his signature, the upheld right hand and the single word "Peace," Dave Garroway signed off each program of a pioneering series, *Wide Wide World*. It ran on NBC for twenty alternate Sundays for three seasons between 1955 and 1958. It was ninety minutes on a Sunday afternoon, part travelog, part showbiz, part science and sports and whatever else its ingenious producers could assemble. It was the most ambitious technical undertaking of television's first decade. It garnered rave reviews, prestigious corporate sponsorship—General Motors—and better than respectable ratings. It splendidly fulfilled its premise and promise.

That premise and that promise sprung fullblown from the head of the Zeus of modern television, Sylvester L. "Pat" Weaver, then President of the National Broadcasting Company. It was the subject of one of his famed, far-reaching, erudite,

philosophical memos. *The Wide Wide World* memo was drafted in 1953 and circulated to NBC producers, writers and directors in 1954.

Previous printed musings had given birth to television's *Today*, *Tonight*, *Home*, *Your Show of Shows*, "spectaculars" as TV specials were then called—plus the Weaver principle of network control over program scheduling and content, supported by more than one advertiser, etc. etc. They are the legacy left by the still-active over-80 Mr. W, just honored (1990) by the National Association of Broadcasters, and about time.

The historic memo starts out, "We must have the show that gets the most talk in the coming season, that wins the Peabody award, that enables me to keep carrying the fight to the intellectuals who misunderstand our mass media development, and that can be profitably sold without affecting any of our present business."

Weaver always carried equal portions of idealism and realism in his kit bag. There's a story about his presentation of the idea of the *Today* show to the NBC Board: according to Charlie Andrews, Dave Garroway's producer/writer from Chicago days, who accompanied Dave and Pat Weaver to the board meeting, the

presentation bowled the directors over. Visions of "the communications center of the world," where everything worth knowing in the past 24 hours would be relayed to a hungry early-morning audience, got the board's eager endorsement.

Walking back to the office, Andrews congratulated Weaver on a spellbinding performance and asked where would this exciting "communications center of the world" be? "For the time being," Weaver explained, "in the Howdy Doody studio."

"*The Wide Wide World*," the memo went on—THE didn't survive—"is tailor-made to do a communications job in the country, to do a cultural job, to be a conversation piece in all American groups... and every call to sell this show can be made on customers not now using and not likely to use our medium, so that again we find a new source of revenue to support our growth and needs."

And then the eight-page memo proceeded ambitiously to catalogue what might be seen on the programs: "Split-screen a man skiing down Squaw Valley in California with a man riding a surfboard... the frogmen at the Hawk channel in Florida

Writers and producers receiving those sometimes mystic Weaver memos repaired either to their offices to Think or to Hurley's bar on Sixth Avenue.

and the riders on the Arizona plateau... "American Beauty" writes itself, for all have heard of, and all have not seen Niagara Falls, Yellowstone and Old Faithful, Death Valley and Mount Whitney, and depending on the season, the wonders of bloom-

ing dogwood, or yucca, or desert wildflowers. We will be at the Hollywood Bowl for a symphonic concert one Sunday, and at Carnegie Hall or certainly Tanglewood and Robin Hood Dell another.

"*The Wide Wide World*" admits it is not everyone's dish of tea Sunday after Sunday... but it is everyone's dish of tea during some of the Sundays, and a well-rounded, civilized, enlightened human of good enough fortune to have had advantages in cultural background and good enough fortune to have the advantages of natural, normal healthy appreciation of life outdoors, will enjoy most all of them."

As was his stimulating management style, Weaver circulated the memo and a few weeks later called his producers, directors and writers in to discuss it. (Writers and producers receiving these sometimes mystic Weaver memos repaired either to their offices to Think or to Hurley's bar on Sixth Avenue.)

Thomas Whiteside, researching what would become a 1954 two-part *New Yorker* profile on Weaver, sat in on the meeting. He quotes Weaver, after the contributions of some fifteen creative NBC types seemed to him either too elitist or too mundane: "I think I know what I want, but I'm not sure that you all do. I want a show that will give people a chance to go out of their homes to almost every part of our wide world that is America and participate in all of our activities—a show that people will say has enabled us to become more mature, more cultured, and more urbane, and that will be the conversation piece wherever people meet... fellows, don't you see that I'm trying to get something civilized?"

That brought on a hush. Finally, Worthington Miner, later to become a star producer of *Studio One* on CBS, summed it up: "Pat, isn't what you

are reaching for something like this—what would people best like to do on Sundays if they had the means and the time to travel about the country and see the best of what the country has, and wouldn't you like to give them the experience of doing just that, through television?"

That tied the bundle. Next thing anyone knew, a unit was being put together under the executive producership of one Barry Wood, a former singer on the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade* ("Any Bonds Today?") who had been doing various producing stints at NBC, including supervising experimental use of the new NBC color cameras on special events. Wood turned to directors he had worked with; for the job of tying it all together from central control room, he hired Dick Schneider, already a veteran of the *Today Show*.

Rather than start cold on a Sunday afternoon, it was decided to give the new idea prime time exposure, in an 8 o'clock Monday night ninety-minute prestige slot called *Producers Showcase*, sponsored by Ford and RCA. It was the end of their regular season—June 27, 1955. There was little to lose, and lots to gain.

That first show did it all: Dave Garroway perched on his trademark high stool in front of a revolving globe. Original, live, full orchestra music from another NBC studio... Garroway into camera:

"This show is called *Wide Wide World*. We've got live television cameras standing by at this moment in three countries...ten cities...to bring together on this one little screen the most pleasant goings-on we could find on this mild summer night. It's one of the most complicated shows that's ever been tried on live television, and because men and machines are fallible, we might miss a pickup or two, but it's going to be some fun in the trying. Let's try our three countries for a second to see if they're standing by...first we'll be

going to Mexico...Mexico's okay, because that is Mexico...now let's try Canada...and now we're in a place called Stratford...and of course the United States...that's Washington D.C...."

Then, there were segments from Denver; Salt Lake City; an Iowa farm; a jazz concert in Washington featuring Louis Armstrong and Woody Herman; Stratford, Ontario, where Tyrone Guthrie is presenting *Julius Caesar*; skiers in bathing suits on Mount Hood...

And off we went! In Mexico, where they stage a fiesta, we get a travelogue, lots of pretty shots and lots of Mexican music, until we see what we came for: the world-class Mexican film star/comedian, Cantinflas, doing his sendup of a bull fight from the Plaza del Toro in Tijuana.

As he takes his bows, "The castillos start to burn with great smoke and flash. The dancing on the platform gets wilder and we slowly pan up until once more we are looking at the hills of Mexico", and we cut to San Francisco for the pretty picture of the city by the bay in sunlight, which takes us to the top of the RCA building for New York at night, which sets up the first use of the poetic Millay stanza that will become Garroway's program-ender, "The world stands out on either side..."

Then, there were segments from Denver, Salt Lake City; an Iowa farm, a jazz concert in Washington featuring Louis Armstrong and Woody Herman; Stratford, Ontario, where

Tyrone Guthrie is presenting *Julius Caesar*, skiers in bathing suits on Mount Hood, Oregon... 32,000 miles of radio and telephone circuits in that primitive pre-satellite era, a dozen mobile units, a thousand technicians and forty cameras. As Ed Sullivan would have said, a rilly big shew!

And the reviews were raves. *Variety* headlined "Weaver Wanderlust a Whammo!" *The New York Times* said "Television took a major step foward," John Crosby in the *Herald-Trib* called it wonderful, and the *Columbus Dispatch* said "NBC really stretched its muscles, muscles it hadn't even used very much before and it was a grand sight. Keep it up, Mr. Weaver!"

Pat and Wood and a group of newly-hired producers did just that, starting in October under the banner of General Motors non-automobile divisions—Delco battery, AC Spark Plugs, Guide Lamp, United Motors parts. This time they claimed 41,000 miles of lines, 1800 technicians and 73 cameras. The title of this seasonal *Wide Wide World* spectacular told as much and as little as possible: *A Sunday in Autumn*.

Variety reviewed the program in its inimitable vernacular: "NBC's cameras and technicians again went hogwild in roaming the country, from Rockefeller Center in New York to the Grand Canyon, from underwater gymnastics at Florida's Weeki Wachee Springs and the Texas State Fair in Dallas to Lake Mead in Nevada and the harvest-time serenity of a Nebraska cornfield... a Sunday afternoon look-spreed that had the effect of leaving the viewer stunned by the magnitude of it all."

The San Diego Union compared it favorably to the pilot program: "This time there was a good deal more meat on the bones of the travelog, which is what the NBC president, Pat Weaver, must have had in mind

when he conceived the show in the first place."

How did they go about executing Weaver's conception? By that same wonderful planning and extemporizing and finger-crossing that characterized so many large endeavors, like *World War Two*.

Executive Producer Barry Wood hired a number of producers, usually five for a given season, meaning that each producer was charged with putting on the air four of the twenty shows per season. Writers were assigned, or requested; the writer and producer came up with the theme and the locations; when Wood approved the tentative proposal, the working group for that show took off around the country to survey the spots they had in mind.

In that group, in addition to the producer and the writer were the technical director, who had to translate woolly dreams into what would work; the unit manager, who had to keep the costs in line, and an invaluable outside member, the man from the telephone company, who told them whether or not they could get a signal out of this crazy place they'd picked.

The survey was made about six weeks in advance of the particular show they were working on. When they returned to New York, the business of writing the show, arranging for each of the remotes, assigning directors and correspondents and planning each origination began. It was a tight schedule that was supposed to go like clockwork.

Things happened.

Item: Producer Bob Bendick got a call from deepest Texas where field producer Evelyn Lifshultz was setting up a thriller spot with Indian boys who whirl around a pole with ropes around their ankles, barely grazing

the rocky ground with their heads. The only problem was that they refused to erect the pole unless we buried a dead chicken and a bottle of whisky. Do it, said Bendick.

Item: For a Christmas roundup show, the traditional mammoth banquet at the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec was to be heralded by a trumpeter. The costumed young man with his elongated trumpet, in medium closeup, raised the shiny instrument to his lips—the director cued him—he let out one sorry bleat and dropped out of the picture in a dead faint.

Item: The Governor General of the Bahamas, from tropical Bimini, and the Governor of Minnesota, from the St. Paul Winter Carnival, were to shake hands via split screen. The Governor-General couldn't understand why he was being asked to extend his hand and pump his arm up and down, but he was game, and so was the Minnesotan. The only problem was that the two pictures were out of sync, and it looked more like a grope than a handshake.

Item: For the start of a race between two massive sternwheelers on a river, two men with axes were set to cut the ropes holding them. The West Virginians who came every year to drink and holler and bet on the race evidently did their drinking and hollering and betting early, because the axe-wielders weren't allowed to wait for the extraneous television, and by the time the *Wide World* cameras opened up on the beginning of the race, it was well begun, and all the director could do was follow them down the river.

Item: One of the producers sought to augment his budget by inviting local businesses to contribute to the remote from their town. An emissary tried raising money in the restored frontier town of Virginia City,

Nevada. Unfortunately, a sometime resident of Virginia City was Lucius Beebe, the elegant columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune*. He fired off a letter to top management at General Motors, wondering why that company and RCA, the owner of NBC, found it necessary to hit up the local barber for a contribution to their television program. When Barry Wood came off the ceiling and stopped trembling, the practice was never heard of again.

There were very few budget restrictions, anyway. When Bendick wanted to originate a spot from the Hotel Nacional in Havana—pre-Castro—he had to bounce the signal up to a circling airplane, then down to Miami. Another remote came from a moving train on the Continental Divide, at least the signal came from the train until it passed by a too-solid mountain.

In *Wide World's* second year, 1956-57, just hopping from one place to another under a vague collect-all like *A Summer Afternoon* or "Heritage" wasn't enough, and serious themes began to emerge. Gerry Green was a *WWW* producer between the *Today* show and publication of his best-selling novel, *The Last Angry Man*. His favorite shows had ideas: one was "So Goes The Nation," on politics, and the other "The Creative Spirit."

Item: For the political show, they had Joseph C. Harsch, a highly-respected political analyst writing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, interviewing James Michael Curley, notorious Mayor of Boston, in front of the L Street Bathhouse that he'd built "for the poor." It was a Last Hurrah spot, and added greatly to the show—but it was included not for its intrinsic worth, but because Green and his associate producer Paul Cunningham went to Barry Wood and said, "You want to get a good review

from the *New York Times*? Put Joseph C. Harsch on. Jack Gould thinks Harsch is the great intellect of television." They created the spot, the review was great, and that's how things sometimes happen.

Item: On "The Creative Spirit," Green had master clarinetist Reginald Kell walk around an art gallery and improvise music that interpreted the paintings. On that show he also put a camera in the plane flown by a young Chuck Yaeger, to film breaking the sound barrier. Of course, when Yaeger zoomed through the barrier, the camera went out!

Item: A segment on America's greatest playwright, Eugene O'Neill, featured a scene from *The Iceman Cometh* from a New York stage. In it, Hickey gets the saloonkeeper, Harry Hope, to break his twenty-year hibernation by going out for a walk. He gets scared and comes running back in, shouting "Bejaysus, that car almost killed me!"

The script went to the sponsor General Motors which expressed horror at the idea of someone getting killed by a car—even an imaginary car—and killed the line. Green and the writer, Lou Salaman, went down on their knees to Barry Wood, but the line stayed killed.

He put a camera in the plane flown by a young Chuck Yaeger to film breaking the sound barrier. When Yaeger zoomed through the barrier, the camera went out!

Green, who went on to write many prestigious television programs including *Holocaust*, calls editing Eu-

gene O'Neill "the worst thing I've ever done in my life in television."

In the third and final season of WWW, 1957-58, several producers, writers, commentators and directors went on to other things. Dick Schneider, who performed the Herculean task of keeping all the segments and David Broekman's music and Garroway's narration together, moved up and out (and today directs the incredibly popular *Jeopardy*.)

The show went through changes, and its world became constricted. No longer was the emphasis on live remotes—if film would do the job, use film. More serious theme programs were done however; one on "The Law," one on doctors, one on teenagers. There were still spectaculars, like "Man Against the Mountains" and "Challenge of Space," but they were outrated by shows like "The Western," featuring Gary Cooper, John Wayne, John Ford, Walter Brennan, Chill Wills, Jim Arness and Jim Garner, "The Sound of Laughter" and "The Fabulous Infant—Television."

That show was filled with snippets of the performances of those first ten years of television. It's enough to bring on a severe case of terminal nostalgia: *Toscanini*, *Dragnet*, *Kukla*, *Fran and Ollie*, *Berle*, the *Roller Derby*, *Lassie*, *Bishop Sheen*, *Ernie Kovacs*, *George Gobel*, the *Mouseketeers*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, the *Army-McCarthy* hearings, the *Kefauver* crime hearings, *Little Rock*, *This Is Your Life*, *See It Now*, *Omnibus*... on and on.

And what of the promises of *Wide Wide World* in that original Weaver memo? It never got its Peabody, though Pat Weaver received one for "expanding the horizons of television" just before WWW went on the air. It was "profitably sold without affecting any of our present business" and it may well have gotten "the most talk in the coming season." Whether or not it enabled

him "to keep carrying the fight to the intellectuals who misunderstand our mass media development" is debatable.

"Pat Weaver combined great vision with great naivete because he felt he really could upgrade television and make it an educational and cultural instrument," says Gerald Green, 35 years later. "He was deceiving himself. That's not what it's become, — and never will. Pat had great vision and courage, but he really didn't know what he was fighting against."

But he did create an exciting weapon for that fight. *Wide Wide World* was a romantic, idealistic, patriotic idea. Its scripts were sometimes effusive, but always positive. As one observer put it, "The ideal *Wide Wide World* spot was the Mormon Tabernacle Choir at the lip of the Grand Canyon, exalting nature and man and God."

Garroway closed one show with these prophetic words: "In television's tomorrow, all the far places of men and all the races of mankind will cross your threshold, and the windows of understanding will be thrust wide open all over the wide wide world."

Peace. ■

Richard Krolik served on the production staff of *Wide Wide World* and with *Today* during its formative years. Next, he narrowed his focus from the global to the local, when he became program chief for the *Time-Life* broadcast division which once owned and operated TV stations. He later joined the staff of the Communications subcommittee of the House of Representatives.

QUOTE UNQUOTE

All-Time Prime-Time

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Monday: *Laugh-In, I Love Lucy, The Honeymooners, The Carol Burnett Show.*

Tuesday: *Bewitched, The Dick Van Dyke Show, The Golden Girls, The Jack Benny Show, Marcus Welby, M.D.*

Wednesday: *The Beverly Hillbillies, The Andy Griffith Show, Roseanne, Playhouse 90.*

Thursday: *The Cosby Show, Family Ties, Cheers, Barney Miller, L.A. Law.*

Friday: *The Colgate Comedy Hour* (hosts included Martin and Lewis, Abbott and Costello) alternating with *The Milton Berle Show*, followed by *Bonanza, Gunsmoke.*

Saturday: *All in the Family, MASH, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Your Show of Shows* (Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca).

Sunday: *60 Minutes, The Ed Sullivan Show* and a *Mystery Movie* rotation of *Columbo, Perry Mason, Magnum, P.I.* and *Murder, She Wrote.*"

—Rick Du Brow,
Los Angeles Times

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"REFLECTIONS OF THE WAY LIFE USED TO BE": TOUR OF DUTY, CHINA BEACH AND THE MEMORY OF THE SIXTIES

BY ALBERT AUSTER

In 1962 ABC-TV launched the first wave in what turned out to be a series of World War II dramas. The first two, *Combat* and *The Gallant Men* later joined by *The Rat Patrol* and *Twelve O'Clock High*, followed a similar premise. *Combat* traced the adventures of an American infantry platoon from D-Day to presumably the fall of Berlin, while *The Gallant Men* portrayed a troop of GI's fighting their way up the Italian boot.

Though *The Gallant Men* never got very far (it was cancelled after its first season), *Combat* remained on the air until August of 1967, by which time the platoon still hadn't broken out of Normandy. This date is somewhat ironic because when ABC and CBS decided to launch their first full scale dramatic assault on the Vietnam War, both *Tour of Duty* and *China Beach* choose 1967 as their fictional starting date. It appears nonetheless particularly fitting since they each exhibit significant similarities and departures from their World War II television counterparts.

Unfortunately for *Tour of Duty*, its first ratings battle experience was a kamikaze assault on *The Cosby Show*. A hasty retreat followed, but the show was able to regroup and eventually developed an audience in the shelter of a Saturday night time slot. And despite a consistent ranking in the bottom half of the ratings, the show is now in its third season.

Though there have been some changes in personnel and shifts in the story line since the first season, *Tour of Duty* has faithfully followed the fortunes of one platoon as it slogs through the rice paddies, jungles and villages of Vietnam. The platoon is led by a Jewish army-brat-turned-seasoned-combat-vet, Lieutenant Myron ("El Tee") Goldman. However, the heart and soul of the platoon is the tough lifer and father figure, Sergeant "Zeke" Anderson. And since this is Vietnam, the platoon is a veritable rainbow coalition manned by a volatile, impulsive inner city Black, Private Marcus Taylor (Miguel A. Nunez, Jr.); a mild-mannered sharecropper's son from the delta, Private (ultimately Sergeant) Marvin Johnson (Stan Foster); a Puerto Rican street

kid from the Bronx, Private Alberto Ruiz (Ramon Franco); and a Montana cowboy, Private Danny Percell (Tony Becker).

In addition, the platoon is often assisted by a dare devil helicopter pilot, Lieutenant Johnny McKay (Dan Gauthier), and this season a former hippie, anti-war protestor non-combatant medic, Doc Hock (John Dye), has been added to the roster.

After spending its first season in the boonies, the *Tour of Duty* crew was transferred to the Ton Son Nhut army base outside Saigon. Viewers who tuned in the show for the first time might have been forgiven if they thought *The Love Boat* had docked in Vietnam. Episodes featured Lieutenant Goldman's involvement with a journalist Alex Devlin (played by former soap star Kim Delaney), Private Taylor's courtship of a WAC lieutenant and the very real possibility of exchanging his tour of duty in Vietnam for one in the stockade at Fort Leavenworth. There was even a casualty in the battle of the sexes as the divorced Sergeant Anderson fell in love with a civilian army psychiatrist.

Although *Tour of Duty* displays a penchant for romance, the series clearly subscribes to the early sixties macho war film ethos. John Wayne and Audie Murphy wouldn't have any trouble recognizing last season's cliffhanger in which the "El Tee" and Sergeant Anderson called in the artillery on their position as they singlehandedly fought off a battalion of North Vietnamese regulars. Despite the *thirtysomething* male vulnerability and sensitivity appearing around the dial these days, in Vietnam, at least, men are still men.

Furthermore, viewers waiting for the revival of the TV western need look no farther than *Tour of Duty*, for there are enough references to "saddling up" and "Indian country" in the series to bring smiles to anyone with fond memories of the Ponderosa. In

fact, during one episode in which they were supposed to be winning the hearts and minds of the Montagnards, the platoon looks so much like Apaches or Navajos that one might be excused for mistaking an ex-Green Beret costumed in a headband and loincloth for the reincarnation of Jeff Chandler as Cochise.

On the other hand, *Tour of Duty's* debt to the war film and western genres haven't all been to its disadvantage. Though hardly a video version of the Pentagon Papers, its conventional structure has nonetheless allowed the show to depict a wide range of American problems in Vietnam. To its credit, the series has been particularly candid in its depiction of South Vietnamese corruption and venality, CIA duplicity, journalistic sensationalism, and rear echelon malfeasance.

Throwing off some of the restraints initially imposed by CBS standards and practices (these include the use of foul language and the depiction of drug use, atrocities and excessive violence), this season's episodes explored Private Percell's initiation into the nether world of drug addiction and Saigon deserters, as well as the coverup of the My-Lai-like massacre at Phu-An. After watching the series, even the most convinced hawk couldn't fail to see how the American military experience in Vietnam was an unparalleled combination of bungling and bravery.

Like *Tour of Duty* ABC-TV's much-lauded *China Beach* also owes something to old World War II movies (*So Proudly We Hail*, *Cry Havoc*). But since it is mainly about army doctors and nurses, it probably owes even more of a debt to popular TV shows like *M*A*S*H* and *St. Elsewhere*. *China Beach* may, in fact, actually answer a question once posed by gonzo-journalist Hunter Thompson,

who wondered whatever happened to the beautiful army nurse who led the charge of nurses rushing toward the medevac helicopter in the opening credits of *M*A*S*H*. The answer may be that she became *China Beach*'s nurse, Lieutenant Coleen McMurphy (played by Emmy award winner Dana Delaney).

McMurphy is one of a nucleus of eight or so continuing characters attached to *China Beach*, a part medical, part R&R station located somewhere near Danang. From the show's very first episodes, McMurphy seems to be perpetually on the verge of total burnout (the series' pilot concerned her decision to stay in Vietnam after her year's tour was up). But somehow she manages to pull back from the edge and draw sustenance against the death, wounding, and wanton destruction that surrounds her from the knowledge that she is needed.

The other denizens of *China Beach* include its nonpareil surgeon and resident golfer, Dr. Richard Richards (Robert Picardo); the enterprising K.C. (Marge Helgenberger) who'll sell anything to the GI's, most notably herself; the base commander and guardian of army tradition and discipline, Major Lila Garreau (Concetta Tomei); a sensitive Black mortician and graves registration clerk with the all-too-ironic name of Private Samuel Beckett (Michael Boatman); a GI with a mysterious past but the enviable job of *China Beach* lifeguard, Private "Boonie" Lanier (Brian Wimmer); a Black WAC, Private "Frankie" Bunson (Nancy Giles); and a taciturn, battle-hardened grunt nicknamed "Dodger" (Jeff Kober).

In addition, the series has played host to a succession of semi-regulars passing through *China Beach*. The most sorely missed will be the gregarious back-up singer Laurette Taylor (Chloe Webb), who came to

Vietnam because it was "wall-to-wall menorama" and left to make it in the big time as a single. Last season (1988-89) saw the armed forces TV correspondent Wayloo Marie Holmes (Meagan Gallagher), the somewhat spoiled, over-sexed daughter of a southern hawk congressman, try to shed her TV weather girl image with some hard news experience in Vietnam. And this season we've met the overweight, sensitive "Doughnut Dolly" (Red Cross worker) Holly (Ricki Lake).

Such a large cast invites obvious comparison with *Hill Street Blues*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *L.A. Law*. Like these series, *China Beach* successfully exploits the comic and dramatic potential inherent in the lives of its many characters. Unfortunately, it also suffers from imitating their tendency to create outrageous characters and situations. The Vietnam war was surreal enough without needing touches like a *China Beach* Prom (complete with tuxes and corsages), a white entertainer who insists he's Chuck Berry, and a bush platoon commanded by a dead water buffalo.

The series has been at its best when its been most understated. A case in point is the episode called "Vets," in which actual women veteran nurses, Red Cross workers and a few entertainers (as well as some men) recall their Vietnam War experiences. These interviews have been coupled with brief scenes from prior episodes that were either based upon or closely paralleled their experiences.

The lessons of the program are perhaps best expressed by an actual army nurse Lynda Van Devanter in her memoir of her year in Vietnam, *Home Before Morning*, published in 1983:

Mine were not neat stories. There was love, but no cute little love

stories; heroes, but no grand heroic war stories; winners, but you had to look hard to tell them from the losers. On our battlefields, there were no knights in shining armor rescuing damsels in distress. The stories, even the funny ones, were all dirty. They were rotten and they stank. The moments, good and bad, were permeated with the stench of death and napalm.

Although a realistic approach can often be found on *China Beach*, the series frequently chooses to concentrate on the more melodramatic themes of sex, love and death. Thus far, a considerable amount of time has been spent chronicling the on again/off again affair of McMurphy and a married helicopter pilot (and this season a French doctor and former Dien Bien Phu vet), the interracial romance of Beckett and the Vietnamese bar girl Mai (Elizabeth Lindsey), and the domestic trials and tribulations of Dr. Richards and his stateside wife, Beth. Nor does the series generally miss the opportunity of wringing the last little bit of pathos from the situation of the company mortician.

Even small ironic gestures such as his refusal to date any of the soldier's death as December 25th because "nobody dies on Christmas day" tend to get lost in the melancholy soliloquies he often delivers in his morgue.

The show's soap operatic qualities hardly square with the concerns expressed in co-executive producer and chief story consultant William Broyles Jr.'s widely acclaimed 1986 book, *Brother in Arms*. There, Broyles (a former Vietnam marine officer and *Newsweek* editor) tells of his post-war visits with one-time enemies as well as trips to the old battlefields in Vietnam. Of course, he also discusses the influence of sex, love and death, writing that "war was an initiation into the power of life and death...Most men who have been in

war, and most women who have been around it remember that never in their lives was their sexuality so palpable."

Nonetheless, the core of the book embodies the oft-repeated question of how such a primitive people could defeat a technological colossus like the U.S.A.'s Broyles says, "It didn't compute. In combat the North Vietnamese had seemed so motivated, as if history was riding on their shoulders. Tiny men no bigger than boys, they drove out a race of giants."

The answer became quickly apparent. In talks with his former adversaries, Broyles soon realized that they were fighting for "freedom and independence," for which no sacrifice was too great. But seldom in either *China Beach* (or *Tour of Duty*, for that matter) is there even the slightest hint of the crucial role played by history and ideology in the Vietnam conflict. Rather, a special effort seems to be made to bury these issues under all purpose cliches like "war is hell".

In practically any episode of *China Beach* or *Tour of Duty*, someone can always be counted on to shout "When is all this gonna end?" or "Has this war destroyed all your regard for life?" Hand in hand with this, both shows display a pervasive distrust for all ideological justifications of the war. Even *China Beach*'s patriotic Major Garreau is hard pressed to come up with a convincing answer to the question, "Why are we in Vietnam?"

All she seems able to do is fall back on the official line that "we have the historical mandate to defend against communist aggression." This attitude is also exemplified in a brief bit of dialogue between *Tour of Duty*'s Lieutenant Goldman and his top sergeant: the confused lieutenant says, "I don't know what it all

means," to which the sergeant dryly replies, "It don't mean nothin'."

The one place, however, where this cynicism doesn't extend is the role of the American GI. Each series extols the heroism, self-sacrifice, and stoicism of the average "grunt." Leading the list of virtues is his devotion to duty, with which neither personal antagonisms, bureaucratic harassment or fear of bodily harm is permitted to interfere. From McMurphy who routinely affirms it, to Sergeant Anderson who take quiet pride in it, to the hardbitten "Dodger" who risks delicate spinal surgery so he can get on with it, the Vietnam GI is portrayed as wanting only to "do my job."

Equally exalted in both *Tour of Duty* and *China Beach* is the male and female bonding that take place in wartime. Although frequently cited in the work of military historians, sociologists, and psychologists as well as in the novels, films and dramas about war, battlefield comradeship took on a special meaning in Vietnam. In the absence of any significant military victories, or even a convincing rationale for why we were there, it became the sole meaningful value in an otherwise meaningless situation.

The mood is set in the very beginning of *China Beach*, when the seemingly burned out McMurphy decides to extend her tour because she can't bear to leave her "family." Similarly, in one of the early episodes of *Tour of Duty*, Private Taylor, his year in Vietnam is up but torn between his loyalty to his buddies and his desire to go home, chooses to stay on. This feeling of comradeship is represented as so strong in fact that it transcends all class, racial and cultural lines. In the words of former Marine lieutenant and Vietnam war memoirist Phillip Caputo in his 1977 book *A Rumour of War*, a bond is formed that nothing "except death" can break.

The combination of a sense of duty and the feeling of comradeship also

serves as the basis for a critique of not so much the war as of the war lover: people who for whatever the reason—personal gratification or jingoism—exceed the limits of duty and put their own needs ahead of their buddies. Placing themselves and their comrades in jeopardy, these men and women were regarded as dangerous as the enemy and were to be equally feared and shunned.

Perhaps the most compelling example of disdain comes in an episode of *China Beach* called "All about E.E.V." Complete with references to old war movies like *From Here to Eternity* and *Patton*, the program concerns the arrival of the much-decorated war hero, Colonel Edward Vincent (Dennis Farina). Making a spectacular entrance by parachute, the colonel proceeds to turn the base topsy-turvy as he decides to organize a beach party to boost morale and makes successive passes at each of the camp's leading women characters.

Vincent receives his comeuppance at the hands of McMurphy. Trying to arouse her interest, he regales her with a bit of his philosophy, commenting seductively "War is never a disappointment. That's what's so wonderful about it. It raises the stakes, puts everything on a little edge. Desire becomes need. It's fun!" McMurphy, totally impervious to his charms, coldly dismisses this with the curt, "So that's what it's all about, having fun."

Unfortunately for audiences, the series' treatment of the war lover has been a lot more complex than any similar examination of the Vietnamese. In the first two seasons, the Vietnamese characters were confined to the all-to-familiar roles of pimps, prostitutes, corrupt officials and, of course, the dread "V.C." With the exception of rare moments, both series

have concentrated almost exclusively on the problems of the Americans in Vietnam.

This season, both series made promising starts at rectifying that. *China Beach*, for instance, presented a very good episode in which both McMurphy and K.C. were captured by Vietcong and McMurphy forced to perform an emergency medical operation on an important V.C. cadre. Likewise in *Tour of Duty* before she conveniently expired, Alex conducted an interview with a high-level Vietcong leader.

The common denominator in these episodes is their depiction of the courage, endurance and patriotism of the Vietcong. Indeed, the Vietcong are portrayed as essentially sincere nationalists fighting for the right of self-determination. And though this is hardly a distortion of the motivation of a great many Vietcong members and sympathizers, it does leave out the important issue of the intense Marxism-Leninism that was an equally compelling motivating force.

If both *China Beach* and *Tour of Duty* tend to approach the major issues surrounding the war rather gingerly, the same can't be said of their treatment of the sixties. As a matter of fact, if these shows can be honestly said to be about anything, it is the sixties. Unlike Emmy award-winning *The Wonder Years* or the now-cancelled *Almost Grown* and *Hometown*, which bathe the era and its controversies (civil rights, the counterculture) in the warm glow of nostalgia, the Vietnam series depict them as serious issues of contemporary relevance and not merely as part of some adolescent phase.

Besides using the obvious landmark of period pop songs as theme and background music (The Rolling Stones' "Paint it Black" (*Tour of Duty*) and the Supremes' "Reflections of the Way Life Used to Be" (*China Beach*), the shows also make constant reference to the counterculture (hippies,

anti-war activists) and the era's styles (miniskirts, boots). Most importantly, though, is the frequency with which both shows use the themes of racism and the increasing Black anger and militancy of the period.

The best example of this occurs in both series' episodes about GI reaction to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (which were, coincidentally, originally broadcast within a week of one another). They permit us to look beyond the Vietnam War to see just how crucial the events of the sixties were. They also offer a unique opportunity, primarily because of the similarity of their subject matter, to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the two network series.

In their handling of the death of Dr. King, both *China Beach* and *Tour of Duty* exhibit some striking parallels. For instance, both use clips of Dr. King's last speech in which he referred to the "Promised Land" (*China Beach* even entitled its episode "Promised Land", but *Tour of Duty* actually goes this one better by including footage of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's reaction to the news of King's murder (evoking memories of his and his brother's assassination). Furthermore, each series focuses on one major Black character as he attempts to cope with his feelings about the death of the civil rights leader as well as the anguish and rage of his fellow Black GIs.

The pivotal character in *China Beach*'s treatment of the King assassination is Private Beckett. The tragedy of Dr. King's murder complicates an already intense personal crisis in the life of the company mortician. It also coincides with Beckett's determination to stay in Vietnam with his beloved Mai even though his hitch is up. Just as he decides to cut ties with his home and past, he is brought

face to face with them again by the awakening of long-suppressed emotions about whites, racism and his commitment to the principles of non-violence as espoused by his revered minister father and the slain Black leader.

Beckett's devotion to those principles is severely tested when he finds himself thrust into the middle of a confrontation between a company of angry Blacks mourning Dr. King and some white, racist GI's whose scurrilous disrespect for their grief provokes a riot. Unable to fully identify with the practically mutinous Blacks and finding little comfort with either Mai or his friend McMurphy, Beckett takes refuge in his mortuary. But even this place provides little sanctuary from the turmoil when the Blacks threaten to lynch one of the whites whom they accuse of murdering one of their group. Beckett's refusal to permit the crime allows him to break out of his own personal cycle of grief and rage and accept the legacy of both his father and Dr. King.

Tour of Duty's episode about the King assassination differs from *China Beach's* in one major respect. Instead of focusing on one major character, it shares the spotlight between two; series regular Sergeant Zeke Anderson and a Black officer, Lieutenant Sherman Douglas (Randy Brooks). Douglas is a martinet whose by-the-book conduct is prompted by his own escape from ghetto poverty. But when he puts his personal code ahead of sensitivity to his men's grief, he finds those values seriously threatened.

Similarly, Sergeant Anderson has his belief in the color blindness of battle upset when he is detailed to escort home the body of a close friend, a heroic Black sergeant who gave his life to save those of his men. When he brings the body home, Anderson is met by incredulity (the family expected the escort to be a

Black man because of his last name) and then intense hostility from the sergeant's bitter brother, himself a Vietnam veteran.

Both stories nevertheless end on a note of reconciliation. After narrowly missing death by fragging, Douglas learns to let up on his men and, as a gesture of good will, joins them in a game of basketball. Anderson's crisis is also resolved when he makes an impassioned plea for racial understanding at the graveside of his friend, invoking Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" hope that men and women might be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

Such attention to one of the most important events of the sixties is hardly mere happenstance. Ironically, the series' reluctance to tackle head-on the major issues of the war permits the events of that decade to assume a greater role in the programs. Besides serving as convenient chronological touchstones, they emerge as the basis for episodes that provide additional opportunities for both drama and character development. In fact, the issues and events of the sixties attain a degree of significance at least equal to that of the war itself.

Further evidence can be gathered from the care and attention to detail the series' devote to presenting authentic GI reaction to events. When *Tour of Duty's* Private Johnson (usually the most level-headed of the Black GI's) hears about the assassination, he bares his fist and vows to "fix the first white guy I see." This incident recalls practically verbatim a portion of journalist Wallace Terry's 1984 oral history of Black Vietnam veterans, *Bloods*, in which a Black GI is quoted as saying that upon hearing that Dr. King was dead, "...my first inclination was to run out and punch the first white guy I saw."

Small details aside, the depiction of Black anger gives the programs a quality of verisimilitude that rock n' roll music, hair and clothing styles can hardly match. By refusing to ignore the always delicate issue of race relations and by not consigning them to the realm of nostalgia, they gain a measure of credibility that their cautious handling of other war-related issues denies them. This saves the series from intellectual triviality, emotional irrelevance or worse. They also turn the issues, events and personalities of the sixties into the very substance of what these dramas were about.

Other than serving as examples of how important the subject of the sixties has become to both series, the King episodes also illuminate their strengths and weaknesses. Though *Tour of Duty's* version might marginalize certain extreme Black opinion (the Black GI's at one point refer approvingly to the ideas of the Black Panthers and Malcolm X, only to have the subject just as quickly dropped), it still presents a compelling sense of the despair and chaos caused by the King assassination. This goes hand-in-hand with the series' overall tendency to be faithful to the hardships, terrors, camaraderies and fascination with battle.

Sadly, the desire to portray combat as honestly as possible might actually be something of the series' undoing. *Tour of Duty* often reduces characters and situations to one-dimensional stereotypes, invariably sacrificing subtlety and substance to its action/adventure conventions. The result is a program about one of the bloodiest, most disruptive wars in U.S. history that quite frequently seems rather bloodless dramatically and less about the Vietnam War than the experience of war.

If *Tour of Duty* errs too greatly on the side of reliance on formula, *China Beach's* problem is that its off-beat characters and situations often promise more than they deliver. A case in point is the King episode when the Black GI's establish a separate enclave they call "The Promised Land," as much as a gesture of defiance as a tribute to Dr. King's last speech (and perhaps even his final "poor people's campaign").

A symbol of Black separatism, this hits just the right note, as does the revolutionary rhetoric of one of the Black leaders, a non-com portentously named Rousseau. But despite an almost perfect pitch, any expectation that it might explore some of the roots and consequences of Black alienation are never fulfilled. As a result, both the audience and the truth are short-changed.

China Beach nonetheless possesses qualities that allow it to rise above such defects. Because the leading characters are mainly medical non-combatants, the show is able to take an unsparing look at the pain, suffering and sorrow of war. This anti-heroic outlook also extends to other aspects of the war and permits the series to examine issues that might otherwise have been ignored or treated superficially (prostitution, the black market). And though its unconventional elements often seemed contrived, they are at least inspired by the desire to leave the impression that the Vietnam War was somehow different from other American conflicts.

It is just this feature of being so different from previous U.S. wars that makes television's depiction of the Vietnam War such a special responsibility. Lest we forget, it was the superheated patriotism and heroics of the Hollywood war films of the forties, fifties and early sixties that contributed so greatly to the romantic and unrealistic ideas about war that many Americans carried with them

to Vietnam. As the most influential communications medium of our time, television has the potential for either duplicating those distortions or fashioning a newer, more honest image of war.

Ironically, it was the Hollywood war film that provided the impetus for bringing the Vietnam War to the home screen. Emboldened by the success of films like *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Good Morning Vietnam*, with their far from heroic depictions of the war, network execs and the producers of *Tour of Duty* and *China Beach* undertook the creation of regular series based upon the Vietnam War for television. One might hope that the recent success of Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*, with its hero's passage from super-patriotism to anti-war militancy, will have the same impact on the television series' willingness to tackle some of the harder political issues surrounding the war.

In his inaugural address, President Bush acknowledged the still-powerful hold that Vietnam has on the American imagination: "The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory." Nonetheless, that is precisely our fate if we attempt to evade or otherwise obscure the truth about Vietnam. Both *Tour of Duty* and *China Beach*, in their different ways and after initial hesitation, have made a start toward that kind of understanding. For television to do anything less would be to commit the final act of folly of the Vietnam War. ■

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IT HAPPENED IN PHILADELPHIA.

TV, the new medium at the '48 conventions, gave politicians the message that their world would never never be the same again.

BY SIDNEY L. JAMES

In his otherwise exhaustive and historically useful book, "FROM WHISTLE STOP TO SOUND BITE: *Four Decades of Politics and Television*," Sig Mickelson, an old friend and onetime *Time Inc.* colleague, writes that TV coverage of the 1952 political conventions was "television's first full effort at covering national politics." This is not correct. He is four years off the mark. The LIFE-NBC TV 13-hour-a-day coverage of the 1948 conventions in Philadelphia was the first and fullest as well.

Sig devotes about 50 words on his 175 pages to 1948. This is little less excusable than leaving Noah out of a thesis on great rain storms or Methuselah out of a discourse on old age, but it is a significant slight, nevertheless. The fact is that when the hot lights were turned off in 1948 and the cameras wheeled away, it was "Goodbye radio; hello television."

A new era had emerged from Philadelphia's steamy Municipal Auditorium. The dazzled politicians who participated in this particular quadrennial exercise in democracy knew that as sure as the next party conventions would be held in 1952, they had witnessed the death of radio politically and the birth of television. Their world would never be the

same. Nor would political campaigning. The story of 1948 deserves more than 50 words.

Radio was still the main carrier of mass communications in the nation in 1948 and it would again have been the star performer at the conventions that year if it had not been for Andrew Heiskell, the young, aggressive, promotion-minded publisher of LIFE. LIFE's editors were busy with their own plans for massive coverage of the events for the magazine with a large staff of photographers, writers and researchers when Heiskell had a conversation with Niles Trammell, president of NBC, RCA's wholly owned broadcasting network. Subsequently, after further talks with other NBC executives, including Sid Strotz, the new president of NBC television, an unusual but logical deal was finally cut.

The arrangement ideally fit the special resources and capabilities of the two companies. NBC would furnish cameras, cameramen, lighting equipment, engineers, technicians and a few radio personalities for gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Republican and Democratic conventions. Wisely assessing television's future, RCA had been manufacturing TV cameras at a great rate and NBC had more cameras on hand than it currently had use for.

Veteran newsreel cameramen who had seen the handwriting on the wall for their time-honored profession

were being trained to use them. LIFE, world-famed for its photojournalism, would have complete charge of and responsibility for the editorial content. Heiskell would be the boss with *TIME* and *LIFE* editorial staffers doing most of the reporting and on-camera interviewing. The venture would be called LIFE-NBC and there would be no commercials.

Some of this was a surprise to the then burgeoning TV industry but it all made good sense. NBC had always dealt in words and knew little about photojournalism. Then, too, in those days of governmental regulation, broadcasters were always skittish about the possibility of offending politicians who might seek bureaucratic revenge. Hence, it was assumed that any onus for complaints against the broadcasts would fall on the LIFE half of LIFE-NBC.

By the time Heiskell's negotiations were finished, the conventions were upon us. I say "us" because Heiskell had me detached from my job as LIFE's news editor to be director of programming for the project. I knew a great deal about pictures, news gathering and current politics, but very little about television. It was the Sunday evening before the Tuesday that our first broadcast was scheduled that I arrived in Philadelphia. Fortunately, I had picked up Ben Grauer, an NBC veteran who was to be one of our on-air personalities, in a *Time Inc.* limousine and I learned from him during the drive from New York some of the fundamentals that would be useful in my strange new assignment.

When we got to Philadelphia's Municipal Auditorium we were greeted by a clutch of NBC technicians setting up the control room in an area the size of a condominium kitchen just off the auditorium. A sign grandly identified it as the TELEVISION CONTROL CENTER. Two narrow spaces bore signs reserving them for TECHNICAL COORDINA-

TOR and PROGRAM COORDINATOR. Placed above them were five TV monitors, one each for NBC, CBS, ABC, DuMont and POOL.

The POOL was a consortium of the four TV networks, which would be responsible for a crew and cameras that would feed a picture of the speakers' platform available to all the networks at all times. The room bore little resemblance to modern control rooms with their vast mosaic walls of varicolored shimmering monitors, broad consoles with hundreds of buttons and toggles attended by hovering squads of attendants. By comparison it was more like Uncle Tom's cabin.

Modest though the setup was, it was not out of line with that of the infant television industry. In 1948 the TV network consisted of just seven stations. These were in New York, Schenectady, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and Richmond, Va. There were no more than 500,000 receiving sets, mostly on the eastern seaboard, with a scattering of receivers in larger cities that got programs from unconnected stations. In Los Angeles, for instance, there were only 26,000 receiving sets. All of the stations, network and unconnected, fed its pioneering constituents an exceedingly lean diet of daily programs with hours of mute and meaningless test patterns in between.

But the LIFE-NBC broadcasts that began on Tuesday and continued throughout the Republican and Democratic conventions were wildly beyond the scale of anything television had done before or even envisioned.

When the conventions were over we had used 17 cameras, 250 technicians, writers, reporters, researchers and on-camera personnel. We brought scores of politicians and dignitaries before the cameras for the first time. We took cameras to a dozen locations outside the Convention

Hall to cover special caucuses, important meetings, lunches and dinners. We broadcast a panel discussion between principals in New York, Philadelphia and Washington speaking to each other as though they were in the same room.

Perhaps our most impressive TV journalistic innovation was the coverage of President Truman's trip to Philadelphia to accept the nomination. I have not seen anything quite like it in all the years since. It started auspiciously in our Production Center when word came that Truman was preparing to come to Philadelphia by special train. The NBC Washington affiliate was asked to have a camera crew at the White House and another at Union Station along with reporters from our Washington news bureau.

The question then was, who would be in charge? After all, we were now imposing our new gadget on the president of the United States. We were all completely occupied at that time with surprise developments on the floor of the Convention Hall. Heiskell, the only one free at the moment, took the assignment and dashed to the airport. I had assigned my boss to a tough job! It had better be good, I thought.

Our historic saga began impressively with Truman and his wife and daughter leaving the White House in bright daylight and getting into their shiny limousine. The camera followed them down the arc of the driveway and onto Pennsylvania Avenue. A few minutes later another camera photographed them alighting at Union Station and strolling to their private car. The train pulled out almost immediately. The President, the first lady and daughter Margaret, were now on the observation platform waving. The camera held them in focus until they passed out of range. We then reported the train's progress from city to city along the

way with drawings by our staff artist.

Meanwhile, back at the Convention Hall, our cameras were focused on a series of unruly demonstrations by southern Democrats protesting against the party's civil rights platform plank. When the train reached Wilmington, Delaware, Matt Connolly of the president's staff, got off to telephone to find out if the ruckus had quieted down enough to bring the president in for his acceptance speech. It obviously had not.

Consequently the train was slowed to the pace of a crippled snail and it limped into Philadelphia after midnight where it was held on a siding. The president waited. Finally, when the fractious delegates took their seats, the president and his party detrained and boarded waiting limos. The sight of their headlights and the lights of a police motorcycle escort snaking through the darkness was a dramatic finale to the sequence that began before our cameras in the daylight of Washington hours earlier.

It was about 3 a.m. when President Truman addressed the groggy delegates. It had been a suspenseful day. LIFE-NBC and only LIFE-NBC had caught it all. Truman had made political history and LIFE-NBC had made television history.

Carleton Smith, NBC vice president and possessor of the nationally celebrated rich baritone voice that had introduced President Roosevelt for all of his historic fireside chats to the nation, then in charge of the NBC part of LIFE-NBC, was moved to say, "You guys did things we didn't even know were possible."

Memory brings up other items that are worthy of note:

- Nightly at midnight we held a story conference in a suite at the Bellevue-Stratford to plan our coverage for the next day. Our reporters, researchers, program and technical coordinators and cameramen took part. On the

basis of what we knew of the upcoming schedule we assigned specific times for interviews in Room 22 and coverage of meetings, conferences and other pertinent events outside the convention hall and made specific assignments of camera crews and on air reporters.

When we finished, about 1 a.m., we had roughed out a program in ten minute segments for the whole next day beginning at 8 a.m. A secretary was on hand to type it as we went along and it was distributed immediately. Rising events changed it throughout the day but we always had a fall back. CBS, NBC, ABC and DuMont were content to "ride the pool" most of the time, rarely cutting away, as we did frequently, to explain, interpret and supplement the proceedings in the hall, which all too often dealt with routine procedural matters.

- Because of lessons learned earlier at the Republican convention, we employed a theatrical makeup artist for the Democratic convention. When we had put the cruelly bright and hot television lights on Candidate Tom Dewey, whose beard showed even when he was freshly shaved, he looked like an urchin who had just crawled out of a coal mine. Clare Booth Luce's blonde beauty was washed out by the lights and she looked more like a frightened wraith than a congresswoman.

- We weren't sure how the Democrats would take to the indignity of being made up before facing the cameras and being swabbed off with cold cream afterwards. Speaker Sam Rayburn was one of our first tests. His pale, round face and head of hairless skin required a major makeup job. He took it like a trouper and went before the lights in "Room 22" which had become famous as our interview room. It was a windowless cubicle without air conditioning

and it became a sauna under the searing lights.

When Rayburn came out his neat suit was soggy through and through with his sweat. He didn't complain; he had made his television debut and he was obviously pleased. Similarly, dozens of other top politicians received their electronic baptism in 1948 and TV remains their medium of choice to this day.

- When a young Hubert Humphrey, jacketless, tieless, sleeves rolled up, collar open, took the podium to harangue the delegates about civil rights, southern delegations literally saw red. We had learned earlier that the Alabama delegation was going to walk out if Humphrey spoke. Bill Howland, *Time's* longtime Atlanta Bureau Chief, who was reputed to "cover the Southland like the dew," went to see the chairman of the delegation. His persuasion was: If you are going to walk out, why not do it before the LIFE-NBC cameras?

They were sure enough determined. When Humphrey finished they rose and, escorted by Howland and a researcher, marched out of the hall to Room 22 where a camera and lights were waiting. Their metal badges jangled noisily as they slammed them down one by one on a desk and marched out of the room. Some scooped radio and TV newscaster accused us of manufacturing the news—not so! We didn't see it that way. They wanted to make a statement and they made it on television for added emphasis and before a potential audience 25,000 times larger.

- The wide attention attracted by the LIFE-NBC broadcasts made the Television Control Center, modest though it was, a tourist attraction. Practically every delegate and galleryite, it seemed, wanted to see where all the excitement was coming from. They barged in uninvited and mar-

veled at what they saw, asking questions which NBC's engineers proudly answered.

- It had been the custom over the years for broadcasting bigwigs to bring their biggest advertisers to these conventions to show off the activities of their stars performing in their glassed-in radio control booths. NBC President Trammell arrived one evening with his select group and brought them straight to our Control Center. They watched, wide-eyed, as though they were looking into the future. They asked many questions.

Finally, apparently remembering his traditional obligation, he took his guests to the radio broadcast booth. They stood and stared for a while and then returned to our Control Center. The radio crews' initial patronizing attitude toward us TV interlopers turned cool. It was, as it turned out, their last political convention.

- Basically print journalists, we who directed the LIFE-NBC coverage were not fully aware of limitations imposed on TV by its heavy, cumbersome equipment and its need for special power sources. Consequently, we often innocently asked for the impossible and we were repeatedly amazed when NBC's Gung Ho engineers made the impossible seem routine. The resourcefulness of the chief engineer of NBC's Philadelphia station was awesome.

One afternoon one of our roving reporters learned that there was to be a press conference following a caucus on the 18th floor of the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. The engineer was asked how long it would take to get a camera and lights to the scene. He wasn't sure, but he set to work immediately. He pulled his power cables up the elevator shaft and his camera and lights were ready in just 17 minutes. LIFE-NBC had another scoop.

I was fascinated at all times by the response of my TIME-LIFE colleagues

to the novelty of television. They threw themselves into their assignments in the new medium with a gusto that even the cruelly long hours did not diminish. I finally concluded that this had something to do with our magazine's policy against bylines. Whereas they had spent years as nameless journalists, they now suddenly had recognizable and memorable names and faces and voices, too. It did wonders for their egos and their mile-high enthusiasm also infected Ben Grauer, Morgan Beatty and W.W. Chaplin, NBC radio commentators and the battalion of NBC technicians, who were entering a new and largely unknown new world.

- Except for Ben Grauer and Morgan Beatty, the other veteran NBC radio newscasters assigned to the TV venture were not very solidly grounded in current politics or widely acquainted with key political figures of the day. They were more or less products of the "rip and read" school. That is to say that they figuratively ripped bulletins from the AP, UP, INS tickers in their offices and read them over air with sufficient attention-getting excitement, but seldom did they delve very deeply into their subjects. Nevertheless, Camel cigarettes signed up John Cameron Swayze as a result of his exposure on LIFE-NBC and made him one of the first, if not THE first, prime time TV newscaster. His once-over-lightly 15-minute program, *Camel Caravan*, gained transitory fame of sorts through his nightly Gregorian chant: "HOPSCOTCHING THE WORLD FOR HEADLINES."

The big winners at the 1948 conventions were Truman, NBC, LIFE and RCA. The big loser, through no fault of its own, was radio. LIFE-NBC, with CBS, ABC and DuMont hopelessly playing catch up, made millions of Americans aware of this

revolutionary new mode of communications that would ultimately change the world, and in a shorter time than anyone could have imagined. The broadcasts themselves were news. Pundits, columnists, editorialists wrote about them.* LIFE promoted them vigorously with newspaper ads in the larger markets and window displays in large department stores. Bob Wolcott, one of LIFE's resourceful promoters, took the broadcasts beyond the reach of the four networks by airmailing kinescopes of the proceedings to non-affiliated stations for delayed broadcast.

One can't leave a discussion about political conventions past without looking forward to conventions to come and ask: How long will the media, print and electronic, tolerate the vast expenditure of money and manpower to cover an extended contrived event that is neither prime time news nor prime time entertainment? Since the standard bearers are now chosen long before the gavel brings the conventions to order, the delegates don't nominate, they merely confirm.

The platform, once constructed on the premises plank by plank with much pulling and hauling and

**In his nationally syndicated New York Herald Tribune column "RADIO AND TELEVISION" for June 23, 1948 John Crosby wrote: "Life and NBC, which have teamed up for the event—and Life seems to get top billing in this arrangement—easily ran off with the honors, both in programs and in a technical sense. The Life-NBC team seemed beautifully organized, knew where—with some exceptions—it was going from minute to minute and succeeded in luring a number of the more important people in front of its cameras. Its kinescope films—that is movies that were taken directly off a television receiver—were remarkably clear and edited. These edited films of the daytime activities were shown to the nighttime audience so skillfully that one might easily get the impression that he was seeing the actual convention."*

shouting and maneuvering in smoke-filled rooms, is now delivered prefabricated, not for debate, but for supine approval. The only remaining feature with news and theatrical value is the party candidate's acceptance speech, but even that has lost much of its suspense through pre-release of its most newsworthy paragraphs.

My first political convention was the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1940 when I was TIME-LIFE bureau chief there and strictly a print journalist. Roosevelt's nomination for his third term, history-making though it was, was perfunctory, but the big news was the choice Harry Truman as his running mate. I worked at more than a half dozen conventions after that, but for drama and excitement none equaled my last one, the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1968.

At the time I was a vice president of TIME INC. and had no editorial assignment. I was there, as my beribboned bronze badge attested, as an "honored guest" of the Democratic Party with full access to the floor.

The convention was fraught with dramatic promise even before the opening gavel. Scarcely a month before, Bobby Kennedy, a late entry in the primary, had upset political odds by winning the California primary. A California victory, the pundits had predicted, would make him a shoo-in for the nomination. But fate intervened. He had just finished a speech to his supporters on his victory night and was leaving the hall through a back door when he was gunned down by an assassin's bullet.

With Kennedy gone, Vice President Hubert Humphrey appeared to be party's likely choice when the delegates convened in the Stockyards amphitheater in an air of electric excitement. Across town, along Michigan Boulevard and the lakefront there was a different kind of excitement. Hordes of militant young

protesters against the war in Vietnam were converging from all over the country in accordance with a well-planned strategy. Their purpose was to defeat Hubert Humphrey, a member of the hated administration they accused of prolonging the war, and force the delegates to nominate a candidate with the will and platform to end the war.

Thousands strong, their plan was to picket the hotels along the boulevard and inside the Loop where delegates and candidates' headquarters were housed without letup until they got their way. The police tried to stop them but they could not match their numbers or their determination. The result was three days of pitched and running battles and bloody casualties.

The local TV stations gave clout-by clout coverage to the battles and delegates left their seats to watch it on TV sets placed around the convention hall. As the police fought a seemingly losing battle, keeping order in the hall was a mounting problem for the chairman. Bobby's supporters made a vain effort to get support for his younger brother Ted, but, even a year before Chappaquiddick, it was no sale. Senator Eugene McCarthy, who had campaigned against the war for a year got noisy support, but the harried delegates finally chose Hubert Humphrey, the very man the protesters were shedding blood to defeat.

The tension in the hall and the riotous sub plot being played out across town made the 1969 convention riveting theater, the like of which we will never see again.

The 1964 Republican convention in San Francisco, which nominated Barry Goldwater, has a special place in my mind, though I was thousands of miles away from it and had no professional interest in its progress or result. I was publisher of *Sports Illustrated* at the time and vacationing in Southern France. By pure coinci-

dence I ran into Chris Dunphy, who was also vacationing there.

Known as a long-time retainer of Joseph P. Kennedy, the "Founding Father," and go-for plenipotentiary without portfolio to his wealthy patron, Dunphy was a most interesting man. Without visible means of support, he moved with grace and wit in the best circles. He invited my wife and me to lunch two days hence with, as he put it, "Bill and Babe Paley," who were vacationing in Biarritz, a few miles north of San Jean de Luz, where we were staying.

On the morning of our lunch the *Paris Herald* carried a front page story about how the NBC team of Huntley and Brinkley had thoroughly skunked Walter Cronkite and CBS in ratings at the San Francisco convention. We met Chris at the Paleys' hotel and were directed to Cabana No. 1 where Paley and his handsome wife were waiting.

After the formal amenities, I asked Paley if he had seen the *Paris Herald* story. He had. I then asked him what he would do about it. Although he was standing, he seemed to rise a good six inches as he blurted, "I sent a cable to New York and I said, 'God-ammit this better not happen again.'"

His manner and tone gave his words the force of an imperial command. The subject was not mentioned again at lunch or the next day when he and Dunphy joined me for a round of golf and lunch at the Club de Chantico. I had not thought much about it until I returned to New York some ten days later.

I learned then that Cronkite had been yanked from his anchor mound like a sore-arm pitcher with the bases loaded and a promising rookie named Roger Mudd was brought in from the bull pen to replace him. It was the only glitch in Cronkite's brilliant career. I had indeed heard an imperial command in Cabana No. 1 at Biarritz.

Would I like to be director of the 1992 conventions? Thanks, but no thanks. Sparse new news and predictable theater do not three nights of prime time television make.

I would be short-changing media history if I did not record the dramatic denouement of the saga of the LIFE-NBC connection in which LIFE was so dominant in Philadelphia in 1948.

When the convention was gaveled to a close and the nominees and the delegates had departed we had a big party, complete with a jazz combo, to congratulate ourselves for success beyond our wildest dreams. But, alas, there was a lurking note of irony above the rhythmic sounds of joy that our ears did not pick up. Television grew and grew and grew and grew until, in December 1972, it was the death of LIFE. ■

Sidney L. James began his distinguished career in journalism in St. Louis, as a reporter on the *St. Louis Times* and the *Post-Dispatch*. Later, he held a number of top posts with the *Time-Life* organization, as assistant managing editor of LIFE, and then as founding managing editor and publisher of *Sports Illustrated*. While chairman of the board of WETA, Washington, D.C., he received a Peabody Award "in recognition of meritorious service in broadcasting."

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Cable-ready Kennedys

"Sunday's broadcast of *The Kennedys of Massachusetts* must be, by very unofficial count, the 1,960th TV movie or miniseries based on the lives of the Kennedy family. But that's what happens when you're America's royal family.

Why, that's almost enough footage to support an all-Kennedy network. We could call it the Kennedy Cable Network ("All Kennedys, All the Time") and offer programming like this:

■ 7 a.m. **GOOD MORNING KENNEDYS:** News and features. Today: Cliff Robertson ("PT 109") and William Devane ("The Missiles of October") compare notes on what it's like to play JFK.

■ 10 a.m. **THE KENNEDY MORNING MOVIE:** "The Ted Kennedy Jr. Story" (1986) starring Craig T. Nelson.

■ Noon: **WASHINGTON WEEK IN REVIEW:** Guest: Sen. Edward Kennedy, D. Mass.

■ 2 p.m. **THE KENNEDY AFTERNOON MOVIE:** "Kennedy" (1983), with Martin Sheen and Blair Brown as JFK and Jackie.

■ 4 p.m. **THE KENNEDY LATE AFTERNOON MOVIE:** "Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy" (1981) starring Jaclyn Smith.

■ 6 p.m. **NEWS:** Reports on Kennedy from around the globe. Anchor: Maria Shriver.

■ 7 p.m. **THE KENNEDYS & ME.** Host: Pierre Salinger.

■ 8 p.m. **THE KENNEDY CENTER HONORS.**

■ 10 p.m. **MONDAY NIGHT TOUCH FOOTBALL.** From Hyannisport.

■ Midnight. **THE KENNEDY MIDNIGHT MOVIE.** "Young Joe, The Forgotten Kennedy" (1977) starring Peter Strauss...."

—Marc Gunther,
Detroit Free Press

In this era
of high
technology,
it is especially
important
to remember
that talent
comes
from
people.

● CBS/
BROADCAST
GROUP

CBS Television Network
CBS Entertainment
CBS News
CBS Sports
CBS Television Stations
CBS Radio
CBS Operations and
Engineering



**WARNER BROS.
TELEVISION DISTRIBUTION**

THE FCC & THE FOWLER YEARS

BY ANDREW J. SCHWARTMAN

I.

For broadcasting, the Reagan/Fowler era (1981-1989) have not been The Wonder Years—except, perhaps, for the take-over artists, the bottom line brigade and the New Age speculators. They certainly have not been good years either for the viewing public, or for those inside and outside the industry who believe in public trusteeship of the airwaves.

Just like the housing policies of the 1980's, which created homelessness, not homes, and banking policies which devastated the savings and loan industry, so too has the Reaganite vision of broadcasting expected too much of the marketplace. Under Chairman Mark S. Fowler, and his protege/successor Dennis R. Patrick, the FCC actively encouraged a new breed of broadcasters to enter. Congress largely acquiesced, and as a result more and more owners and operators are concerned only with short-term profitability and today's ratings, not long term audience loyalty.

These people regard themselves primarily as investors rather than trustees of a scarce commodity, exchanging public service for free use of public property. Increasingly, up-through-the-ranks radio and TV man-

agers have been supplanted by MBA and accountant types with no prior interest in—or commitment to—public service.

To these eighties-style entrepreneurs, broadcasting is just another business. Apparently, the only difference they see between their FCC license and a hamburger franchise is that the one from McDonald's isn't free. Indeed, Ronald McDonald evidences a lot more interest in kids than most station managers.

For that matter, Ronald McDonald appears more concerned about kids than the FCC. It's hard to decide what is the most hypocritical of the FCC's actions and inactions of the last decade, but its treatment of children is my own candidate for the title. That's because this is one area where the FCC conceded that the marketplace does not work; since kids don't spend their own money, even Adam Smith told the FCC that they don't have a direct voice in the marketplace.

Even so, the FCC refused to require TV stations to carry programs which meet the *non-entertainment* needs of children. After a court ordered the Commission to consider children's needs as part of the license renewal process, the FCC has still insisted that applicants for new stations, and those seeking to buy existing stations, need not specifically promise to serve youngsters.

The blatancy of these easily understandable outrages may distract

attention from another group of deregulatory decisions which are at least as harmful over the long term. Although criticism of the FCC's programming actions is now widespread, there has been less discussion of the FCC's reduced regulation of broadcast ownership. While there are a few indications that the new Chairman, Alfred C. Sikes, will not follow the same course as his predecessors, much of the damage is already done.

Ownership, or "structural," regulation is far less onerous and intrusive than content oriented policies designed to achieve similar results. Rules about who may own what can be implemented flexibly, to address exceptional circumstances or unintended inequities. They are largely prophylactic in nature, stopping the creation of harmful ownership concentration before it can happen, thus enabling the FCC to devote its resources to avoiding problems, rather than to attempting to undo damage after the fact.

The FCC has repealed, modified and abandoned many of its ownership regulations. Some of these rules — not the subject of this article — directly control the number and location of an applicant's permissible ownership interests. (For example, no one can own more than 12 AM, 12 FM and 12 TV stations.) Others govern who can become an FCC licensee and how they must operate. It is these changes which have not received enough attention. The FCC's actions in these areas have greatly eroded licensee responsibility, endangering the stability of what has been the best system of broadcasting in the world.

This is no accident. Rather, it is the desired outcome of federal policy. Former FCC Chairman Mark S. Fowler (1981-87) and his successor Dennis Patrick (1987-89) profess pride

at the triumph of marketplace forces over government intervention. They regard programming produced in the absence of FCC policy guidelines as more nearly reflecting the true needs of the public, and more in keeping with the First Amendment dictate against government suppression of speech. But Fowler presumed much more perfection than the marketplace could ever produce. His victims are the demographically unattractive — those who are too young, too old, or too poor to express themselves through the purchase of advertised products and services.

Obviously, policies which maximize short-term revenues and minimize short-term costs can increase profitability, at least for a while. Under the trusteeship concept embodied in the Communications Act of 1934, these gains ought to be shared with the public. All too often, however, they are not being recycled into program service, but are diverted to debt service or exported for new station acquisitions in other markets.

News and public affairs are now viewed exclusively in terms of profitability, as many recently terminated news staffers can attest. (Recently, for example, the new owner of WHBQ-TV station in Memphis fired virtually its entire news department within days of taking over.) In many instances, especially in the case of radio and independent TV stations, local programming capability is scrapped entirely. In 1987, Washington, DC's WDCA-TV eliminated all local programming, and even fired the announcer who doubled as "Dracula" to introduce Saturday night horror films.

Apologists can point to the proliferation of syndicated programming and longer afternoon news blocks on network affiliated TV stations. But no one can seriously argue that there is really more news and information in these newer programs forms. To put subjectivity aside, this phenomenon

has little to do with the overall reduction in *local* services. Nor does it address the concern that, as fewer radio and TV stations originate programming, there is a reduction in the absolute number of different local editorial voices.

The same reduction of local service is taking place as radio syndication burgeons. Similarly, while the growth of cable is a welcome addition to diversity, most of the additional service it delivers is neither local nor news. Even this benefit is of no consequence to those who cannot or do not wish to subscribe to cable, and whose right to good service is supposedly guaranteed by the Communications Act.

Chairman Fowler took every opportunity to assail the operative philosophy of the Communications Act of 1934—trusteeship in exchange for a license. The basic bargain is this: broadcasters volunteer, and willingly compete, to be selected as licensees. In return for the monopoly right to use public property—the airwaves—they agree to use the airwaves responsibly, and to serve the public's needs as well as their own.

The system has worked reasonably well, especially since 1966, when Judge (and soon to be Chief Justice) Warren Burger confirmed that listeners have the legal right to participate in the FCC's license renewal process in his landmark decision involving station WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi.

Historically, the public interest standard was interpreted so as to favor local service delivered by locally oriented owner-operators. Broadcasting came to be known as a business where one could do well by doing well, trading public service for the protection of a monopoly license. The emphasis was on holding broadcasting properties for the long term, in a business which generated one of the very highest rates of returns on

capital investment in all of American industry.

It's been a good deal for two generations of broadcasters. But since 1981, the FCC has been engaged in a systematic effort to change the terms of this trade. The consequences are there to be seen and heard.

II.

Effective Content-Neutral Regulation Can Promote Diversity

Regulation does work. Perhaps the best example of the value of regulation to promote diversity can be found in the FCC's financial interest and syndication rules, as well as the integrally related prime time access rule. These policies prohibit the three major over-the-air networks from owning or controlling the syndication rights for reruns of prime time network series. They also effectively limit the networks from distributing more than three hours of prime time programming per night.

By early 1990, it had become apparent that major changes in these rules are imminent. The irony is that the impetus for this changed regulatory environment is the perceived need to assist Fox, the "fourth network." The Fox petition to the FCC which forced the FCC's reevaluation, underscores that *but for* these limitations on the three major networks, Fox never would have been able to get off the ground.

A few years ago, it was fashionable at least in some circles, to argue that the best economic regulation is no economic regulation. That was wrong then, and it's wrong now. The financial interest, syndication and prime time access rules are pro-competitive, content-neutral, and

self-enforcing. They directly addressed an anti-competitive environment and created the opportunity for new entrants into the market.

The adoption of these three interrelated rules in 1970 and the subsequent growth of a new and vibrant independent television station sector literally created the market for first-run syndicated TV programming, enabling new production companies to get started. As a result, networks are no longer the only available customers for program producers. Networks can no longer "warehouse" reruns of popular shows, keeping them away from competition.

By 1989, there were some 340 independent television stations, up from 71 in 1972. For all their shortcomings, these outlets greatly add to viewer choice. Their growth made non-network syndication a profitable option, so that there were more than 100 national syndicators in 1988, twice as many as there were in 1982.

These changes paved the way for creation of Fox, the "fourth network" which many policymakers had considered to be an impossibility. The bottom line is that Americans now get more programming on more stations from more different producers. The rules which made this possible enhance democratic values, and we're better off for them.

For some time now, the three networks have sought the repeal of these three rules, contending that if they were ever legitimate, they have long since done their job, and that changes in the broadcasting business have rendered the rules obsolete. I vehemently disagree with the view that the rules are no longer needed, but even if that were true, it does not undermine the overwhelming case for the validity of having adopted the rules in the first place. Simply stated, these rules did what they were intended to do.

III.

The Character Of Licensees

Under Mark Fowler, the FCC proclaimed that it no longer cared who becomes a licensee, much less what kind of programming they intend to carry. Its abject failure to review the personal and corporate character of applicants for broadcasting licenses is exemplified by its refusal to consider evidence of an applicant's prior violation of the law.

There is a parallel abandonment of duty in the programming area as well. The Commission routinely grants licenses based on an applicant's rote assurance that it "intends" to comply with its legal obligation to serve the public. No specifics of any kind are required. In practice, the FCC has often awarded licenses even when the applicant has failed to answer the application's programming question at all. A lawsuit challenging these practices is pending.

Under changes put in place in 1984, FCC policy was changed so that it would grant or renew a license automatically, without even holding a hearing. This held true regardless of evidence that the applicant has violated the law, except for matters which relate directly to broadcasting, or for a short list of felony convictions involving fraud upon the government. In fact, the FCC hasn't even wanted to know about this kind of misconduct. Its current forms do not ask about convictions outside of the narrow list of felonies it considers culpable. Mere indictment for one of the few major crimes the FCC does profess to care about need not be reported, and the Commission has no way to know of a pending trial.

No matter how egregious or indisputable, evidence of misconduct which is still in litigation, even for years, will not be explored under

present FCC practice. (For example, the FCC approved the sale of radio station WNCN-FM in a 1989 leveraged buyout, although the purchaser and one of its principals were facing trial for felony stock fraud. They were later convicted.)

The FCC's 1984 *Character Policy Statement* represents a major change in the Commission's historic approach. Rejecting a long line of judicial precedent, the Commission ruled that the character provisions of the Communications Act "do not of themselves require that the Commission make any inquiry into the character qualifications of broadcast applicants." It redefined the focus of its future inquiries to a "less value-laden" process.

The public depends on broadcasters for truthful and accurate news. Indeed, broadcasting long ago became the primary resource for voter information. The premise of the *Character Policy Statement* is that someone found guilty of shortweighting meat or mislabelling inferior products can nonetheless still be counted upon to comply with laws requiring equal time and maximum prices for political commercials. Put another way, the FCC has assumed that such people are no more likely than others to favor an advertiser's interest or to ignore issues of importance to an economically deprived segment of the community.

In blinding itself to the possibility, and even the probability, that a particular applicant may not be suitable for licensure, the FCC significantly contributes to attracting the wrong kind of licensee into broadcasting. The Commission overlooks the fact that there may well be many other violations of law which, under the circumstances, demonstrate a strong "proclivity" to ignore the interests of the public. For example, a willingness to mislead or defraud investors (as opposed to the government) can often have a strong bearing on an

applicant's suitability to be a licensee.

The Commission's handling of criminal misconduct is especially troublesome. Although the very same conduct can be a misdemeanor or a felony (or even no crime at all) depending on the jurisdiction, the FCC has adopted a presumption that persons convicted of misdemeanors, no matter how many, or how flagrant, still have a "proclivity...to deal truthfully with the Commission and to comply with [its] rules and policies."

Involuntary refugees from Wall Street are among the inmates of the Nation's federal prisons. It is not at all farfetched to hypothesize a newly retired young stock trader using the remains of his or her bankroll, and a jailhouse telephone, to purchase a broadcast property. Depending on the plea bargain, such a person may well not have been adjudicated guilty of a crime the Commission considers to be one of dishonesty. Misdemeanors — even scores of them — would not disqualify such Yuppie entrepreneurs from receiving an FCC license.

As a consequence of these modifications, the only evidence the FCC will consider is an official determination or conviction for violation of law. Consent decrees (the most common way of dealing with businesses caught redhanded by the FTC, SEC or state consumer agencies) don't count, no matter what admissions are made along the way. Nor do violent crimes; as far as the FCC is concerned, a convicted rapist and child abuser is free to apply for, and receive, a broadcast license which he may then use to run a station formatted to reach local teenagers.

The FCC doesn't think that someone who condones criminality is unsuited to be a trustee of the public's airwaves; even if a licensee is conclusively shown to have been aware that the station manager and

half the staff engaged in drug trafficking, the Commission will automatically renew the license.

The degree to which the FCC wants to blind itself to knowing about applicant character extends so far that the Commission has placed itself at odds with national drug abuse policy. In 1988, Congress forbade the award of "federal benefits" to all those convicted of "drug trafficking" and to many persons convicted of "drug possession." After a year of silence, and following the embarrassing disclosure that a convicted drug dealer was about to receive a Commission license applied for from a jail cell, the Commission modified its policy. But the FCC's public statement carefully avoided declaring that FCC licenses are "federal benefits" as defined in the 1988 law, and referred only to "drug trafficking," and not to "drug possession." And the Commission appeared to leave its condonation of all misdemeanors untouched.

On May 10, 1990, Chairman Sikes announced a mild strengthening of the 1984 policy changes, stating his opinion that "There is no scarcity of law-abiding citizens interested in being broadcast licensees." While this might have seemed self-evident just a few years ago, it marked a major change in agency perspective back towards sanity. Just what revisions Chairman Sikes makes, and how strongly they are enforced, will be an important test of his resolve.

IV.

Trafficking: TV Stations As Commodities

The Commission is just as unconcerned with what a licensee does with a station as it is about who can become a licensee. Until 1981, the FCC ordinarily declined to allow the sale of a broadcasting property for

three years after its acquisition. This "anti-trafficking" rule was never absolute, and waivers were frequently granted when applicants made a good case that application of the prohibition was inequitable or counterproductive to the audience's interests.

The FCC's repeal of this three year minimum holding period was undertaken with the expressly stated objective of letting the market define a broadcast station's "higher valued use." This is an auction concept, plain and simple. It is flatly contrary to the Congressionally dictated "public interest" concept, which recognizes that the market does *not* define the highest use, since many citizens and interest groups—children, for one example—lack market power. Moreover, even as an auction mechanism, the current system benefits the wrong party. If there were to be an auction, the profit should go to the public, not to the outgoing licensee.

The station trafficker is not seeking to act as a trustee. He—and under this system there are more he's and fewer she's than otherwise—is in broadcasting for short term profit. Audience loyalty is of minimal concern here. Innovation—anything that may take time to become profitable—is disfavored, and short-term solutions, such as cost cutting through eliminating local production and hyping ratings with promotional gimmicks, become essential to survival.

As broadcast prices have been driven up, smaller entrepreneurs with less access to Wall Street's capital markets, especially minorities, have been outbid. The local owner, heretofore a fixture in the community, is being replaced by blind investment pools which are accumulated through explicit commitments to sell within a given period, and not to hold properties. As the SEC filings make clear, these new owners are investors, not broadcasters.

The problem is exacerbated by the FCC's modification of its "attribution

rules" so as to disregard owners of up to 5% of a broadcaster's stock and "passive" ownership of up to 10% in calculating ownership. Certain trust holdings were similarly freed from ownership restrictions. At the same time, the FCC reduced the disclosure requirements necessary to enforce even the remaining ownership limits. The passive investment drawn by this change seeks cash flow and high short-term rates of return, not long term growth.

Not surprisingly, as the junk bond market has faltered, a number of these once high-fliers are struggling to stay off the ground. Westwood One (which was allowed to buy both the Mutual and NBC radio networks), Univision (the largest Spanish language programmer), and Gillette are among the imperiled companies. These and others may well survive, but their obligation to bond holders seems greater than their fealty to viewers, and the consequences will be there for all to see.

The Commission wrongly characterized the new entrants attracted by repeal of the 3 year rule as "station doctors" who are supposed to "infuse new capital and/or ideas into a failing station making it more responsive to a public." "Faith healers" praying at the altar of debt service would be a more apt description; people who slip into town in the dark of night, make a few promises, cast a few spells, and leave before the next sunup.

The anti-trafficking rule is a particularly well-honed tool to protect the public. It's good policy, because it is targeted at the abuses, but leaves room for legitimate exceptions. Anyone who can show that strict application would cause undue hardship or gross inequity could still obtain a waiver.

What is needed now is not a 3 year rule, but a 5 year rule. The logic behind the 3 year rule as adopted in 1962 was that 3 years was equal

to a license term. This was not mere coincidence — it was an important enforcement mechanism, guaranteeing that every broadcaster would have to face the hurdle of at least one license renewal before a sale could be effectuated. Renewal terms are now 5 years for TV and 7 for radio. A 3 year rule means that the quick buck artists can get in and out without ever having to face the scrutiny of the FCC.

V. Takeovers: The FCC Takes A Stand

There is a second important way in which the FCC has actively invited the entry of speculators seeking a quick buck by trading in broadcast licensees. Couched in a patina of neutrality, the FCC has adopted a policy which allows the misuse of so-called "STA's" for the purpose of facilitating hostile takeovers. Although the legality of this policy is highly suspect, a 1987 decision written by Judge Robert Bork restricting the procedures for challenge effectively immunized it from successful judicial challenge.

STA's were originally conceived as a mechanism to deal with emergencies, for example, to permit use of a temporary transmitter in the wake of a hurricane. Absent such special circumstances, the Communications Act requires the FCC to make an affirmative determination as to the fitness of a proposed purchaser of a broadcast property.

Under the new system, when a hostile takeover is proposed, the putative purchaser may apply to the FCC for the temporary transfer, via an STA, of the broadcasting license to a trustee (typically a recently retired public official with a clean image and good political connections). While the trustee operates the station, the purchaser applies for permanent FCC authorization.

This is hardly a neutral posture. Far from maintaining the *status quo*, it gives a decisive advantage to the challengers, and does so at the expense of the public. It immunizes the new purchasers from meaningful public scrutiny while the shareholders consider the takeover bid. Then, if the larger corporate transaction is approved, and the original licensee effectively ceases to exist, there is no alternative to approving the transfer, because there is no one else remaining to be the licensee.

The principles which motivate such takeovers simply do not relate to the legal obligations imposed upon public trustees. Shareholders are typically solicited on the basis of the alleged value of the underlying assets. The new licensees sometimes profess an active disinterest in operating the station, and base their financial restructuring upon the prompt resale of the newly acquired stations. Even when the purchaser does wish to keep the stations, their debt service obligations may well render them unable to provide effective service.

Although the underlying problems created by these transactions are hardly unprecedented, what is different is the way in which the FCC has immunized the *bona fides* of the deal from meaningful public scrutiny. The transactions are approved as being in the public interest because they are allegedly dictated by the marketplace. But what is driving them is not the marketplace of ideas, or even the marketplace for advertised products and services. Rather it is the marketplace of private finance, so the profits generated from speculation in the public's airwaves are reaped without regard to the needs of the public.

Inevitably, a number of deals have gone bad. (One of the most notable of these disasters was the takeover of Storer Communications, the judicial approval of which became the prece-

dent upon which the FCC has based its current policy.) However, unlike other LBO's whose primary victims are gullible bond holders (and, sometimes, hapless employees), when a broadcast deal goes sour, the first victim is the public interest.

The scenario is all too predictable. The brilliant cost-cutting mechanisms installed by new management don't perform as expected, especially in a weak economy. Interest payments, which in some cases skyrocket in the second or third year of a deal, skyrocket just as the advertising market gets weak.

All of a sudden, program service is sacrificed at the altar of debt service. Nervous program suppliers stop delivery. Often it takes months for the details to be resolved, during every which moment the public's injury is magnified. Amazingly enough, those who brought down the old system see this as healthy, the marketplace cleansing itself of inefficiency. But one person's inefficiency is another's public service commitment and, while the FCC is getting what it wants, the public is not.

VI.

Will The New FCC Be The Old FCC?

President Bush has now appointed four of the five sitting FCC Commissioners. There are some indications that the reconstituted membership, while undoubtedly conservative and insensitive to consumer perspectives, does not share the unyielding ideological drive of their predecessors.

One important bellwether is Chairman Sikes' publicly stated intention to abandon his predecessor's proposal to employ a lottery as a replacement for the current system of selecting among competing applicants. Under this proposal, the least qualified applicant offering the worst service would often have the same chance of selection as does the best applicant.

Historically, however, changes in the FCC's composition do not pre-empt major policy adjustments. One can only hope that the FCC's new membership will take its job seriously, and enforce the law as Congress wrote it, not as the Commission may wish that Congress would amend it. ■

V I E W P O I N T

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"It is in our national interest to keep this system healthy, to preserve the diverse voices and local journalism at all levels. We must be able to follow technology where it leads us but to control it at every point along that path. As long as the market place will support a multitude of local news outlets, we must maintain a regulatory regime that will allow them to flourish and be free."

—Joel Chaseman

—Gannett Center
for Media Studies seminar

Andrew J. Schwartzman is the Executive Director of Media Access Project, a non-profit public interest law firm which represents listeners and viewers before the FCC and the courts. MAP's clients include local and national civil rights, civil liberties, consumer, environmental and media reform groups. *National Journal* has identified him as one of "150 who make a difference in the Washington public policy arena."

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Review and Comment

BEYOND CONTROL: ABC and the Fate of the Networks

*By Huntington Williams
New York: Atheneum.*

BY BERT R. BRILLER

What is happening to American television in this new decade of the Nineties? A study of ABC's history provides insights into some of the coming trends, as well as into the factors that make for success and failure when the networks battle for ratings and advertising dollars.

The power that moves the communications industries is a struggle for power, and not only between companies. Internally, there are deadly conflicts for power in the executive suites. There is a constant tug-of-war between networks and affiliates. Broadcasters fight to reduce the influence of government—except when it may keep out other competitors such as the telephone companies.

There is skirmishing

between broadcasters and advertisers over the price of commercial time. The many separate elements that make up our diverse audience struggle to control or influence the content of the media, including pressure by women and minorities for more jobs in the industry and more of their voices and faces on the air.

Huntington Williams' book opens a small window on some of these power struggles. It has attracted attention because he has a doctorate from Oxford and worked for four years at ABC editing a house organ and writing speeches for the brass. The subtitle suggests that it will go beyond the facts of ABC's history to elucidate "the fate of the networks." It also serves up a lot of sexy gossip and juicy anecdotes, so much so that some individuals, who should be mentioned but aren't, consider being omitted their good fortune.

Williams seems to have started with a valid concept: to show the development of the three networks from privately or individually run companies into subordinated parts of mammoth corporate enterprises. But along the way he seems to have been seduced by the lure of gaining a large popular audience with bizarre



tales and anecdotes of sex, scandal, extravagant spending and fleeting celebrity. Because Williams' tenure at the network was confined to 1981-85 and his treatment of the earlier years is sketchy, I will include some of my observations when I covered ABC for *Variety* (1949-53) and after joining the network on March 1, 1953, shortly after the ABC-United Paramount Theaters merger was approved.

Government Actions

ABC's story begins with two demonstrations of governmental power. The first was U.S. concern over NBC's owning two radio networks, the Red and the Blue. The Federal Communications Commission decided in 1941 that it was "duopoly" for the RCA-owned company to have two networks and two stations in major cities. Therefore, the weaker Blue network was spun off by RCA's David Sarnoff, purchased for \$8,000,000 by Edward J. Noble, head of the Beech Nut-Life Saver company, and renamed ABC.

Despite its having started with weaker stations and poorer programs than its Red sister, the Blue radio network was moderately profitable—until the Television Age dawned. In 1947 ABC got licences for TV stations in New York, Chicago and Detroit, and by 1949 it also had stations on the air in Los Angeles and San Francisco. But in those days when the number of television sets was low and the cost of equipment high, the drain on ABC's capital hurt.

The second Federal intervention came because motion picture studio ownership of theaters was considered restraint of trade. As a result of a 1948 Supreme Court decision forcing studios to spin off their theaters, Paramount Pictures divested itself of its theater arm, which became an independent company, United Paramount Theaters, the largest theater chain in the country with over 700

movie houses. As it sold off some, UPT gained funds to buy into another business. Television looked like a good prospect, and in 1951 UPT agreed to merge with ABC.

The actual merger was delayed for 19 months with many hearings until the regulatory agencies gave their approval. The lengthy Washington hearings had resulted from fear that the merger might create a too-powerful ABC-UPT. However, CBS and NBC held the programming trumps. Despite the infusion of money, and the new shows ABC was able to buy—Danny Thomas, Ray Bolger and George Jessel were among the stars given their own series—the weak network's greatest handicap was its lack of stations. ABC had 14 affiliates, while NBC and CBS each had over 70.

Picture the difficulties of trying to sell a program to U.S. Steel or Alcoa, both of which were headquartered in Pittsburgh, when ABC did not have an outlet in that market. The problems were exacerbated by the fact that in the early days the coaxial cable that linked sections of the country could carry only one TV signal at a time. That meant that if most of the stations on a leg of the cable opted to carry NBC in that time period (which was most frequently the case), only the NBC program could be carried.

The problem was viciously circular. Inadequate coverage of the country led to ABC's low advertising revenue, which meant an inability to get strong programming, which led to an inability to attract affiliates. Later, when ABC finally had a somewhat competitive prime time schedule, I recall making a presentation to a station in Louisville, then a two-channel market, to woo it away from one of the senior networks.

ABC was willing to grant the station compensation far higher than its income from the other network. "But," the manager objected, "if we switch to ABC, what will we do for network

shows in the morning and afternoon? What can we put our spots around?"

Broadcast vs. Movies

The marriage of ABC and UPT did not start smoothly. An immediate open wound was caused by a struggle for managerial power. Was the broadcasting side of the company to be controlled by Robert E. Kintner, the former Washington columnist who ran ABC for Ed Noble, while the Goldenson team was kept "booking pictures and selling candy and popcorn"? Or were the movie people to be allowed a say in how the radio and television networks were run? The initial compromise was that four UPT men—Robert O'Brien, Robert Weitman, Earl Hudson and John Mitchell (the former Chicago station manager not to be confused with Screen Gems' John Mitchell)—were allowed into the ABC top echelon, provided they reported to Kintner.

In Chicago a particularly virulent situation occurred. ABC and UPT each had a TV station. UPT owned WBKB (named for the Balaban & Katz theaters) on Channel 4. ABC owned WENR on Channel 7. What caused the friction between the UPT and ABC factions was that one of the two stations had to be sold. Kintner insisted on selling Channel 4 (the CBS affiliate, which was making money) to CBS, and holding on to ABC's Channel 7 (which was in the red).

Even more significant was the conflict that arose as two staffs had to be compacted into one. Sterling (Red) Quinlan, who managed ABC's Chicago channel for 11 years, covers the period in his 1979 history *Inside ABC*, and also in his 1958 novel *The Merger*. This roman à clef chronicles the feuds and firings as two Chicago stations merge. One character declares, "Squeeze plays make old guys out of young guys," as Quinlan graphically depicts the blood letting that follows most mergers.

Quinlan is also insightful in showing the complex relationship between

networks and their owned stations, between the corporate HQ in New York and the local forces in the field. In 1964 Quinlan left as head of ABC's Chicago flagship, chiefly on the issue of its autonomy. He saw an owned station's freedom of operation as one of the qualities which distinguished the early ABC's policies from the other networks.

As head of American Broadcasting-Paramount Theaters, Leonard Goldenson was in a no-man's-land. Movie moguls labeled him a turncoat for deserting to the medium that could ruin them by siphoning off movie audiences. To studio chiefs, he'd reply that video could be a new medium to promote pictures and bring trailers into the living room. But in his broadcast units Goldenson's lieutenants weren't being allowed much power by Kintner.

Kintner was dynamic, crusty, a demanding CEO, "although tragically flawed, the most brilliant broadcaster of his time," says Don Durgin who worked with him at ABC and NBC.

I saw Kintner woo the Theatre Guild (and U.S. Steel) from another network, despite ABC's limited resources, by promising them two specials. Some of his executives feared him. When he was named head of ABC, he was the youngest network president. Only six years later, Kintner said ironically, he had become the senior of all the network chiefs. It's a job without tenure.

Red Ink and Discord

In a 1954 coup ABC won the rights to the NCAA football games which NBC had had for years. A theater man, Bob O'Brien, was named to head the sales effort, but General Motors which had sponsored football on NBC failed to buy it on ABC. A crisis erupted. Goldenson hurriedly called Kintner back from vacation, but Kintner also found sales resistance. In desperation, as season kickoff neared, the package was sold

at sacrifice prices — an estimated loss of \$1,800,000 — with the theater and broadcast factions blaming each other.

Goldenson was disturbed not only by the red ink but by the discord. He brought O'Brien back from ABC's offices on West 66 St. to the Paramount Theater Building at 1501 Broadway. That retreat was seen as a victory for ABC's old guard over the UPT vanguard.

The infighting continued through 1956. From the stress, Mitchell, whom Kintner dubbed a "Goldenson stooge," took ill. Weitman felt he'd had enough of a hassle and resigned. Having lost O'Brien, Weitman and Mitchell whom he had put into ABC, after sitting in on one of the 5 o'clock "happy hours" which frequently ended with Kintner scolding and embarrassing his execs, Goldenson decided three years was enough. He visited Noble at home and said he wanted to fire Kintner. Noble countered with the threat of a proxy war.

There were fireworks on the board, where ABC had only five directors and UPT the majority. But the proxy battle did not materialize. Kintner, having feelers from the other networks, advised Noble not to fight. He moved on to NBC, eventually rising to chairman and taking the highly successful *Disneyland* with him.

Bootstrap Strategy

When Goldenson got ABC under his wing, he put Oliver Treyz in charge of the television network. Treyz had been at the company before as head of sales development and director of the radio network, but had left to found the Television Bureau of Advertising. He returned to a network in third place. There was the threat ABC might even go under if the DuMont network (25%-owned by Paramount Pictures) beat it out. ABC was hobbled by lack of stations, lack of program hits, lack of ad revenue.

Seemingly, its only resource was its aggressiveness and flair.

Treyz was suited to the challenge. An ex-lieutenant, trim, crew-cut, exercising on a pogo-stick in his office while wrestling with a business problem, continually on the phone, he even pushed up the throttle from Kintner's hectic pace. He devoured research, emitted ideas like sparks.

Treyz's special contribution was the concept of using demographics as a prime selling tool. "Okay, we don't have the numbers to compete with CBS and NBC," he'd argue, "but we've got more of the prospective customers the advertisers want. Or we can offer them at a lower cost-per-thousand than they." He focused on "the age of acquisition," the 18-35-year olds.

A whiz in research, he could find a selling argument in even the bleakest statistics. Perhaps the ratings of Wednesday night fights are low, he'd say, but count the heavy beer drinkers in that audience — one-quarter of the men drink three-fourths of the beer. "If we've got a problem getting sponsors for Mickey Mouse," he'd say, "let's have a study on how many Mouse Club families switched from Pillsbury to Betty Crocker cake mixes, and find out how much franks and beans Mickey's audience buys."

Non-Stop Salesmanship

He used showmanship, too. Treyz inspired gala multi-screen presentations in the Waldorf-Astoria's grand ballroom each February to promote the network's progress and its new programs to the advertising community. With live stars and hoopla, the shows were staged on Wednesday mornings so he could trumpet the network's top rating score of the previous night — Tuesday, one of the first evenings ABC dominated.

Trying to get a renewal of the *Voice of Firestone* whose rating was at the bottom of the Nielsen chart, Treyz

had Sales Development determine that since the semi-classical program had gone on the air, some 940 other shows had been cancelled. Only 10 program "aces" such as *Ed Sullivan* and *Kraft Music Hall* had survived. He had us design a mock playing card for each of the ace shows. His presentation consisted of tossing 940 low cards—threes, fours and fives—on Firestone's conference table, and then spotlighting the 10 "aces." He concluded, "You can't cancel that unique Firestone ace!" Firestone renewed.

Unfortunately, when the program blocked plans for an action show, after its summer hiatus ABC decided to move *Voice* to a later slot. Firestone felt betrayed and yanked it and all advertising from ABC.

A maverick, Treyz gathered around him a group of bright, energetic, off-beat people. He thought of them as different instruments in his orchestra.

He might be inspired a day before Christmas with the idea that Lawrence Welk should do a New Year's Eve telecast. Immediately, sales, programming, station clearance, engineering and other departments would be galvanized to do the "impossible." His lean machine would get Welk on the air. "Ollie can't be on pills," a colleague said. "There are no pills that can keep a man so constantly high."

But his drive was his undoing. When a major ad agency failed to buy a big package for its client, Treyz went directly to the client's president (a college classmate). The agency, incensed at Treyz's going over its head, protested to Goldenson.

When Philip Morris bought a half-hour for a program, and a rival cigarette later ordered an hour including Morris's time, Treyz took the larger second order. "You didn't have a signed contract," he told the fuming Philip Morris people. They retorted, "We had your handshake," and did no business with ABC for years.

Things reached such a pass that *Variety* banner-headlined a piece, "But Ollie, You Said..." When he gave a presentation to Pillsbury, its agency pointedly had it tape-recorded.

In programming Treyz concentrated on action shows—westerns like *Sugarfoot*, *Cheyenne*, *Maverick*—and adventures like *'77 Sunset Strip*, *Hawaiian Eye* and *Surfside Six*. He was trying to build an audience fast, and action shows proved themselves more quickly than comedy. ABC's sales promotion theme was "The Action Network."

Treyz hired the relatively unknown James Aubrey as program chief. Aubrey operated on the principle that he who controls the program controls the sale—and the glory. He tried to keep information about upcoming shows from Sales and from Treyz, while Ollie couldn't keep away from programming or sales. For a time Aubrey expected to be named executive v.p. He wasn't, and after only 14 months left for CBS.

The next week I was with Treyz as Aubrey entered the lobby of Chicago's Ambassador East. They didn't meet, but Treyz said, "I'd hire him again. Never be afraid of having strong men, challengers, under you. You'll never succeed if you are."

Double Troubles

Treyz ran into trouble with the managers of ABC's owned stations and with Goldenson's long-time associate and financial aide, Si Siegel. As a budget expert, 30 years earlier Siegel had helped him: when Goldenson had joined Paramount. Impassive looking but sensitive, he kept tight control on the cash flow and balance sheet, and bridled when Treyz spent money without his approval. In many ways Siegel was a prototype of the hard-headed finance executives who today manage the media giants' bottom lines.

One hassle occurred because the owned stations had allowed Treyz to

invade station time for a Mattel Toys show, but only for 13 weeks. It was successful selling toys, but did not bring ABC much profit. Mattel wanted an extension. The stations argued that not only had Treyz promised to return the slot after 13 weeks, but they could make more selling it locally. Treyz replied that he was building an advertiser who would support the network in the future.

Goldenson backed Treyz, opting for future growth rather than immediate income. The station exec stormed out, declaring, "You may've won the battle, Ollie, but you'll lose the war."

Treyz often failed to consult with Siegel, arguing that he "would not report to a damn bookkeeper."

Even after Siegel was given the position of executive vice president, Treyz felt he could go directly to Goldenson. By the start of 1962 he had built ABC's share of all network revenues to a healthy 25%, had increased annual profits from \$4,000,000 to \$10,000,000, and had brought ABC even with NBC and CBS in urban markets where they all competed. But Treyz' alienation of Siegel, of the owned-station managers and key advertisers and agencies, and even some network associates, led Goldenson to fire him. A sales executive, Tom Moore, succeeded Treyz.

Wall Street Angles

Huntington Williams' *Beyond Control* chronicles the increasing participation by Wall Street in the affairs of media companies. Because profit ratios in broadcasting have traditionally been very high, the bulls and bears naturally keep an eye on the networks and stations. (Actually, it is their O&O stations rather than the networks that make big profits, although it all ends up in the same corporate balance sheet.)

In 1964, Norton Simon of Hunt Foods, which also owned almost 30% of the McCall Corporation, called

Goldenson proposing a merger. Goldenson turned down the Simonizing move, despite McCall's being a good media match. Instead, he contacted Larry Tisch (later to be the supposed "white knight" of CBS) to arrange a meeting with ITT's Harold Geneen.

The ABC-ITT marriage, which would have been the country's largest communications merger if it had gone through, was approved by both companies' boards in February 1966 and by their stockholders in April. But two days before the merger was to be implemented, the Justice Department filed two petitions challenging the FCC's approval. At hearings three reporters (including one from the *New York Times*) testified that ITT had attempted to influence coverage of the proposed merger. The implication was that if ITT had the gall to pressure the press, could it be trusted to keep its hands off the network's news departments?

The merger had been in the works for two years, but it was aborted. In those two years, ABC (which promised not to get loans elsewhere) had needed to mark time, while CBS and NBC moved ahead. Howard Hughes, who had indicated to ABC that he was ready to step in should the ITT wedding fail to take place, now made a tender offer for ABC.

Hughes' offer was rejected and some court battles ensued. Hughes could have taken over ABC, but when the FCC indicated that Hughes would have to appear personally at transfer hearings, the billionaire recluse cashed in his ABC shares.

Shortly after the ITT fiasco, Elton Rule, general manager of ABC's Los Angeles flagship, was brought east to head the network. He had not been chosen by Moore, who felt he lacked network experience, but Goldenson and Siegel were high on Rule and Moore accepted a move "up" to group vice president.

A "golden boy" with West Coast informality and sunny mien, tall and

athletic, Rule (who died this May) demonstrated strong leadership capabilities.

"He brought something new to the network," Williams writes, "the confidence, look, and feel of a winner." His appointment coincided with the retirement of Siegel, who had kept tight control of spending. In contrast, Rule believed that to make money one has to spend it.

In 1972 Rule was named president and chief operating officer. A good listener, he never posed as omniscient. He named an aide, I. Martin Pompadur, as head of non-broadcast operations, and Walter Schwartz as head of both the TV network and stations. Schwartz, however, had problems trying to coordinate the strong-willed executives under him. By 1974, Schwartz was reassigned, and Rule put the latter's deputy, Fred Pierce, in charge of ABC Television.

The Flow Of Power

The ebb and flow of power among Goldenson, Rule and Pierce and other executives is a fascinating story only partially told by Williams. Pierce had joined the network as a ratings clerk in its barebones offices above an A&P supermarket on Broadway. (His salary in 1956 was \$3,016. By 1978 it would be \$784,000). He soon became assistant to Julie Barnathan, then heading the research department. As "the numbers"—ratings, cost-per-thousand, audience composition and demographics—became of major importance, research exercised increasing influence, a trend also affecting Madison Avenue.

Pierce got his training with Barnathan, whose contributions to ABC Williams doesn't fully describe. Barnathan, in addition to later serving as head of affiliate relations, owned-and-operated stations and general manager of the network, went on to become president of engineering and operations.

Once on the executive floor, Pierce began wooing Fred Silverman, CBS's program chief, and brought him to ABC. Williams notes that in the two Freds there was a meeting of minds. "Pierce was the son of a taxicab driver from Brooklyn, Silverman that of a TV repairman in Queens."

As Barnathan recalled to me recently, "The two Freds made a great team—Pierce had two feet on the ground; Silverman was two feet in the air."

ABC programmer, Michael Eisner, today one of Hollywood's highest paid executives as head of Walt Disney, was fearful at Silverman's coming (Silverman had fired him at CBS). However, Silverman worked closely with Eisner, who was developing a new comedy at ABC, *Happy Days*. It became the season's hottest series. From it Eisner and Silverman spun off *Laverne and Shirley*, which they slotted immediately after it. Another hit of the 1975-1976 season was *Star-sky and Hutch*.

In 1976 Paramount's Barry Diller (now chairman of Fox Inc.) called Goldenson asking permission to hire Eisner as the studio's president. A couple of years earlier Goldenson had released Diller to join Paramount. He again agreed, giving ABC two programming alumni at Paramount, his former studio.

That fall Silverman launched *Charley's Angels*, one of the shows critics labeled "jiggle" or "tits and ass." Williams sensationally links the genre with "a raunchiness percolating through the company.... The network had turned into a vast horny Babylon, an excuse for on-the-job mating, and an oasis of promiscuity." He does add, "ABC was not unique in this casual corporate sex."

Silverman's strong point, says former ABC programmer Sy Amlen, was avoiding quick cancellations, and instead working tirelessly with producers to make them winners. Silverman's talent in promoting and cross-

promoting shows, and together with Pierce in scheduling them successfully, helped project the network into the Number one slot in the Seventies. However, Silverman wanted more sway and felt he couldn't get a big promotion with the group of lieutenants around Pierce. He did promise Pierce that if he left he would not work for another network.

Williams relates the story of Pierce's meeting with Beverlee Dean, a Hollywood psychic and would-be producer. Analyzing the handwriting of Pierce and his aide Tony Thermopoulos, she told Thermopoulos he'd become a president of ABC and told Pierce that Silverman would leave for NBC before his ABC contract expired. Pierce objected that Silverman would never defect.

Within weeks of Dean's secret augury, Silverman announced that he was moving to NBC with a presidential mantle. Pierce, feeling betrayed, benched Silverman until his contract ran out. Keeping major program decisions to himself, Pierce named Thermopoulos to succeed Silverman.

Later, when the hiring of the seer as a consultant was reported in the press and satirized by Johnny Carson, Pierce and Thermopoulos became the butt of trade jibes.

Pierce strengthened the network's position in prime time and daytime, including *Good Morning America* and Saturday's kiddie block. For a few years the network did well. Notable was its Olympics coverage with Roone Arledge's deft handling of sports backed up by Barnathan's innovative engineering skill. Arledge's takeover of news, while initially criticized for razzmatazz, has given ABC journalistic parity with the other networks. As the only person heading both news and sports, Williams comments, Arledge became "the virtual czar of live television."

The special place of sports in ABC's rise from being a poor third in a two-and-a-half network economy

should be mentioned. Not only did sports attract viewers, but it was something affiliates urged; it helped ABC overcome its weakness in station lineups. Monday night football was a bold, successful play. However, Pierce's \$575,000,000 outlay for major league baseball was a loser.

Spawning Producers

The season after Silverman left, Pierce and Thermopoulos tried to boost the morale of key Coast program people with new long-term contacts. A sweetener was a "back-end provision" whereby ABC promised to buy new pilots the programmers might develop after they left to be independent producers. Pierce hoped the deals would keep the creative people from joining Silverman at NBC and later give ABC the pick of pilots. In the end, the deals proved costly and provided little incentive for developers to stay, since the contracts bound ABC to set them up as independent producers.

Williams illuminates some of the misfires. One newly independent production team, Marcie Carsey and Tom Werner (who had run comedy and drama development for ABC), offered a program to Lew Erlicht, the new head of drama and comedy development. However, Erlicht had feuded with Carsey. The performer she offered as to star had had two previous flops and now was mostly doing standup comedy in Las Vegas and Jell-O spots.

Erlicht gave her a decisive rejection, Williams says, "without the normal courtesies." Carsey and Werner took the proposal to NBC, which ordered up a presentation tape. The series was the Bill Cosby show which became the phenomenal "locomotive" hit on NBC and later the highest-priced series in syndication.

In his review of ABC's programming history, Williams doesn't adequately cover the role of specials. In

the 1950's because of costs and clearance difficulties, ABC had few "spectaculars" (the term NBC's Pat Weaver invented), relying instead on building weekly viewing habits. Two decades later, sports events under Arledge and entertainment specials shepherded by Brandon Stoddard significantly boosted the network's rating average.

Some insiders feel that the network's decline in the Eighties was due in part to overreaching. They cite the massive *War and Remembrance* miniseries as a case in point. Stoddard was so intent on prestige, he agreed to novelist Herman Wouk's stipulation that spots for certain products not be permitted, e.g. deodorants. The resulting shortage of sponsors proved a financial headache.

Pierce is also said to have overreached, by holding the program reins too tightly and for scheduling *mucho macho* shows. Nicknamed "The Great Stone Face," Pierce favored shoot-'em-up action with screeching car chases, while short-changing comedy development. Demographically, once ABC had reached top ratings, he sought to take on CBS, with its older-audience strength. In making that try for a broader audience, ABC lost the younger families—its traditional power-base.

Political Snakepit

In a chapter titled "A Gathering of Wolves," Williams again suggests how executive suite politics sapped the company's strength. One instance was the proposed purchase of Macmillan, the publisher which also owned other blue-chip businesses, like Berlitz. ABC's board had approved the purchase, but other executives joined Pierce in queering the deal.

The reason: if the buyout took place, ABC would "become more corporate and less network, more Rule

and less Pierce," Williams notes. With Pierce pressing the need for large expenditures to get the Olympics and upgrade technical facilities, the deal was called off. Eight years later, Williams reports, British media baron Robert Maxwell bought Macmillan for \$2.7 billion, almost triple what ABC had agreed to pay.

Issues involving women at ABC are covered by Williams. He cites: (1) the larger number of women hired by Silverman as program executives; (2) the hiring of an anti-discrimination lawyer by a group of its newswomen in Washington to put corrective pressure on ABC News; (3) ABC News's eventually taking steps to put its house in order, promoting a half-dozen women, raising salaries and forming a management-sponsored council to monitor improvements; (4) the case of Jennifer Martin, an ABC business affairs attorney, who was discharged after blowing the whistle because she claimed money was being illegally siphoned off from Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood to Spelling/Goldberg. (Her case alleging "wrongful dismissal" was settled out of court and no indictments were ever filed.); and (5) Cecily Coleman's suit charging "sexual harassment, retaliation and defamation," settled for a reported \$500,000.

Stockholder relations head Jim Abernathy (for whom Williams worked) and who was a defendant in the Coleman suit, was also involved in a brouhaha in August 1984, when he was shown a draft by a First Boston stock analyst of a "buy" recommendation. The analyst "was basically inviting investors to buy ABC stock, on the premise that it would be taken over," Williams writes, adding that Abernathy "ought to have professed shock."

Later that month, Abernathy's secretary heard him on the phone with a State Street Research and Management stock portfolio manager. That Boston firm controlled the largest

block of ABC stock on the market. The secretary thought the men were discussing "how much the company would be worth if the network was broken up and resold in parts."

Her report was eventually given to Pierce, leading to Abernathy's resignation and being escorted out of the building by security guards. "Whether or not Abernathy was involved in a takeover conspiracy," Williams states, "the network could not have handled his firing more badly. ABC had signaled its weakness...and had inadvertently put the network into play on Wall Street."

Shortly afterwards, Williams recounts, a government decision profoundly influenced the course of events. The FCC decided to change the 7-7-7 rule limiting ownership of TV stations to seven. It would soon be possible for companies to own up to 12 stations. Tom Murphy of the Capital Cities station group called Goldenson and suggested his firm buy ABC. It would be a case of a small company with a headquarters staff of only 24 taking over a big outfit which had 400 on its corporate staff.

Still, the price was right. When Murphy had opened negotiations, ABC's stock was at 66¾. The price Goldenson got Cap Cities to pay was \$118. The takeover brought downsizing and economy in its wake. Almost 2,000 employees were dropped. And in the new investment climate, at CBS Tisch took over the corporate helm and General Electric took over RCA/NBC.

Financial Interest Battle

Another area of governmental influence covered by Williams is the financial interest and syndication rules. With the aim of fostering diverse sources of programming, the rules prevented the networks from owning shows (other than sports and news) and getting subsidiary income from them. Hollywood producers strongly

backed the rules, to keep the networks out of production. The networks fought them, as a barrier to increasing network income as their profits dipped, and as a handicap in competing against foreign companies.

In the 1983 battle over the rules, Williams says, President Reagan "neatly pulled the rug out from under" FCC Chairman Fowler, who wanted to drop the rules. Reagan, apparently to protect his movie friends, dashed the networks' hope of regulatory relief, Williams writes, and Hollywood "kept the network wolf from darkening its door."

Williams' story of ABC leaves out some important contributors and slights others. For instance, he fails to mention Jim Duffy, who headed the television network for 15 years. While Duffy eventually lost control over programming, other key areas such as sales and station relations were his responsibility.

Duffy sponsored conferences on children's TV and addressed television's public service concerns. Example: Project Literacy U.S., in which Cap Cities/ABC and PBS joined hands.

Beyond Whose Control?

Williams doesn't explain his book's title. Precisely what was "Beyond Control"? The egos who couldn't subordinate their ambition to team goals? Corporate raiders who couldn't be checked? Legislators and regulators who wanted to curb networks they perceived as Eastern liberal? Broadcasters who, in an era of deregulation, felt free to concentrate solely on this year's bottom line? Competition from cable, satellites, VCRs and other media spawned by new technology beyond over-the-air television's control? Or all of the above? Unfortunately, Williams seems more interested in personalities and anecdotes than in complex issues.

Williams repeatedly refers to Goldenson as a gambler. While Goldenson did get thrills at casinos, especially when ABC higher-ups attended off-site meetings, his business decisions were carefully and coolly calculated.

Goldenson helped bridge the often-warring worlds of film and television. Under his stewardship ABC was the first network to attract Disney and Warner Bros. The studio/network relationship was uneasy—like straddling two willful horses. That struggle for power between Hollywood and the networks will go on, however the financial interest and syndication rules are resolved.

Reviewing the history of ABC—and it would also be the case for CBS or NBC—one gets the sense that there is a deeper struggle taking place. It is the conflict over realizing television's wonderful possibilities. It is the conflict between staying within budget or experimenting, for example, with translating special latenight coverage of the Iran hostage crisis into Ted Koppel's *Nightline*. It is the conflict between playing it safe or scheduling a *Roots* on the Black experience and a *Day After* on atomic catastrophe. It is the conflict between abstracting audiences into cost-per-thousands impressions or considering them not only consumers but well-rounded citizens with diverse interests.

The Present Picture

In Spring 1990, ABC's ratings and stock were on the rise again with an infusion of showmanship. Enough for Howard Rosenberg, the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, to give the network kudos: "While fat first-place NBC counts its profits, and creaky third-place CBS counts its aches and pains, viewers should be counting their blessings as second-place ABC continues to move crisply forward with some of the boldest programs to be found on American TV."

One of the innovative new series is *Twin Peaks*, of which the *New York Times* said, "Nothing like it has ever been seen on network prime time."

Adding to its lineup of hits, such as *Roseanne* and *thirtysomething*, ABC's 1989-90 newcomers that drew audience or critical approval and added demographic strength in younger families included *The Wonder Years*, *Equal Justice*, *Doogie Howser, MD* and *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

It's significant that this daring-to-be-different philosophy helping revitalize the network, echoes earlier ABC strategies of "counterprogramming" and "fighting the virus of sameness," and is being implemented by a Capital Cities management which had long experience as station operators.

The network kept on course in news, with Peter Jennings emerging as the top-rated newscaster in the hotly-contested evening battle with Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw. Ted Koppel's *Nightline* and *Good Morning America* also were solid in their respective news niches.

ABC's history includes executives who were committed to the public interest as well as to the balance sheet. They knew that without a positive cash flow there was no hope of serving the public, but also that effective public service makes good business sense.

The numbers wizards and financial controllers will always have their place in the medium. But what television needs now is a swing toward quality, image, meaningfulness, innovation—new program concepts that will bring back some of the networks' lost audiences; new business approaches, like ABC's free magazine *Episodes*, based on its soap operas; and new public service efforts that go beyond spots and include communities, corporations and local and national media in their partnerships.

The cast of *Beyond Control* includes colorful individuals, do-ers

and darers. Williams' ends with a bow to ABC's "talented and deluded executives," whose delusion was that America could become "one nation, under God, united by TV."

The concept of uniting the nation is important, not only in crisis but in helping bring to the fore the many problems that demand attention right now. Unity does not mean losing sight of our people's tremendous diversity. And the importance of networks does not detract from the local station's value and responsibility to its community.

Back in 1958, a House committee concluded that through the network system "public service programming as well as popular entertainment is provided and simultaneous broadcast to a nationwide audience of events of national interest is made possible." The concept of a mass national audience is still vital.

If ABC's "delusion" is lost, if "the fate of the networks" is fragmentation, an essential resource will also be lost. ■

Bert Brilller covered ABC as reporter/critic for *Variety* (1949-53), was vice president at the network (1953-62) and kept up with its history as executive editor of the Television Information Office (1965-87).

HAPPY TALK:

By Fred Graham
New York: Norton

BY LAWRENCE GROSSMAN

For 15 years, during the heyday and then the decline of network news, at least at CBS, Fred Graham served as that network's legal correspondent, reporting Watergate, the Burger Supreme Court and the Pentagon Papers. Then, in 1987, Graham went all the way down market, leaving CBS News to become local anchor for a last-place ABC affiliate in his home town of Nashville, Tennessee.

Happy Talk is the charming, entertaining, anecdotal tale of Graham's high road and low road journey through television newsland. And quite a roller coaster ride it was, from top-of-the-heap at the "Tiffany Network," to frustration and disenchantment as Tiffany news turned into ratings grabbing "infotainment" K-Mart style, and then to bottom-of-the-barrel local happy talk in Nashville.

Graham's story is told with surprisingly good humor in view of his sad and ultimately disappointing professional and personal experience. He writes his book about the glory and idealism and then the corruption and decay of television news, in much the same style as a network or local TV newscast, that is as a sequence of amusing, self-contained stories. Like the typical television news report, the book is smooth and easy-to-take, but does not offer much in the way of thoughtful perspective or historical context.

Graham's perspective is highly personal and his explanations for what happened to television news tend to be simplistic—blaming the decline

and fall of a once great institution on greedy, callous owners and managers with no commitment to public service and no dedication to the high priesthood of serious journalism.

While there is plenty of personal blame to go around, the problems of network news in recent years have more complicated causes and deeper roots than Fred Graham suggests in "Happy Talk." News technology changed radically, making news footage, once a scarce commodity totally controlled by the network news organizations, now universally available to everyone—local stations, cable program services and syndicated series. Instant video tape, satellites, computers, direct dial phones and jet planes destroyed the network news oligopoly and put the news of the world in everyone's hands.

The explosion of television channels, adding independent stations and cable competition, changed the whole television picture. Government deregulation made public service broadcasting on commercial television and radio an anachronism. New owners, who came in the wake of deregulation, entered broadcasting without the expensive traditions and concerns for serving the public interest.

The national issues, which had galvanized and polarized audiences in the '60s and '70s—civil rights, the Cold War, women's rights, Vietnam, Watergate—have largely disappeared and the nation went to sleep, or focused on local and personal concerns rather than on Washington, D. C. And the network news divisions grew fat, sloppy and far too expensive; hardening of the arteries had set in. When news stars commandeer fleets of stretch limousines to cover the tragedy of San Francisco's earthquake, you know that the business has lost its youthful edge.

Fred Graham came to CBS News with exceptional credentials back in 1972, "...academic honors and scholarships at Yale and Vanderbilt, a law degree from Oxford on a Fulbright

scholarship, a tour of duty with the Marines, a good law practice, high level government service..." and a stint at *The New York Times*. On-the-air, he was about the only network correspondent who spoke with an unabashed, down-home southern drawl. Graham's book reflects his background and his local roots. It offers a civilized and appealing personal account of a career that parallels the incredibly fast rise and decline of television news.

Two decades ago it was fashionable to worry about what Theodore White called, "the primordial power" of television, to shape the public agenda, to challenge the presidency and, indeed, to throw presidents out of office. Today, people worry about the vulnerability of broadcast news to manipulation by the photo opportunities and soundbites of image experts, spin doctors, media managers and public relations hirelings.

In television today, coverage the ability to converge on an event and transmit pictures of the scene itself, has largely replaced reporting, the attempt to reconstruct, interpret and understand what is happening. The picture opportunity has replaced the word; television's pre-eminent journalists have become legends of the past. Their worldly experience, background knowledge, resident expertise and significant influence have, with some notable exceptions, been largely displaced by a new breed—the local and network anchors, who drop in for a few hours or a few days wherever a major news event is unfolding, and then move on to the scene of the next dramatic picture opportunity. In the game of "Show and Tell: the great power of television news now lies in the "show." Fred Graham's book tells us something of how it came to be that way.

Lawrence K. Grossman, a Senior Fellow at the Garnett Center for Media Studies, is a former President of NBC News, and a former President of PBS.

THE EVENING NEWS

By Arthur Hailey
New York: Doubleday

BY MARY ANN WATSON

There's a fat new Arthur Hailey novel out that people are reading in airports, on beaches, and during lunch breaks at the office.

It bears the author's trademark of setting a thrilling tale within a professional backdrop that he has researched exhaustively. In his other books Hailey tackled the auto industry, aviation, the healing arts, and the world of luxury lodging. This time the milieu is broadcast journalism—and like *Wheels*, *Airports*, *Strong Medicine* and *Hotel—The Evening News* has bestseller written all over it.

A great network with a rich history, CBA-TV, is acquired by a soulless conglomerate with the menacing name of Globanic Industries. And things start to go downhill for the dedicated men and women of the News Division.

When the network's star anchor, Crawford Sloane, wants some legitimate changes made in the evening newscast, he's warned by the beleaguered news president not to press the issue: "Nothing anymore is the way it used to be. Since the networks were bought out, everything's in flux."

Woven throughout Hailey's intricate plot of drug-financed terrorism and a TV network held hostage is a virtual seminar on the changing face of television news.

In the opening pages, CBA's finest news crew awaits flight connections in a busy cocktail lounge. A foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* also bides his time over libations and, after a round of double

scotches, the perennial antagonism between print and broadcast journalism surfaces with pointed bitterness.

"Listen you affluent son of a bitch," the newspaper guy says to the TV correspondent who reaches for his wallet to cover the tab. "Just because you pull down twice as much as I do for half the work is no reason to hand the print press charity... What your entire news department produces in a day would only fill half of our paper's pages."

"We take people where the news is so they can see it for themselves," retorts a middle-aged female producer who in earlier, more glamorous years appeared on-camera. "No newspaper in history ever did that."

But the *Timesman* parries with a haunting claim: "TV network news is dying. All you ever were was a headline service and now the local stations are taking over even that, using technology to bring in outside news themselves, picking off pieces of you like vultures at a carcass."

The story proceeds at a rapid clip with the characters confronting ethical dilemmas in the newsroom, reflecting on the history of the industry, or theorizing on its future at every turn. This results in occasional stilted dialogue, since it's simply not natural for people to expound so articulately their loftiest beliefs at the drop of a hat.

But this is a minor criticism. Hailey's style is slick and cinematic with short and varied scenes. The exposition of key information is skillfully layered, with readers never being told more than they need to know to keep the action accelerating.

A real-life headline in the trade press as this review is being written reads: "Big 3 news divisions ready for a new wave of cost cuts." The same hard push for austerity at CBA is a theme that propels *The Evening News*; the elimination of limos for the top dogs of the News Division is irksome, though not unreasonable. But

when Crawford Sloane's family is kidnapped by Peruvian revolutionaries, Globanic's cold-hearted directive to stay within the existing news budget to cover the extraordinary story is unconscionable.

Although the primary context of the novel focuses on the established broadcast networks, the encroachment of the maverick challenger, CNN, isn't overlooked. When a videotape of the anchorman's wife is released by her abductors, CNN breaks into a news program in progress and is first with the story. The other networks have too much to lose by disrupting their entertainment schedules. They only offer bulletins at commercial breaks and the promise of follow-up coverage on the next day's newscasts. A lean and mean operation like CNN, unburdened by astronomical star salaries, gets more bang for the buck.

Hailey's quest for authenticity results in countless entertaining details for the hip reader. CBA headquarters is called Stonehenge, the way CBS is known as Black Rock. The Saturday anchor, Teresa Toy, is clearly modelled after Connie Chung. And there's even a gentle jab at the rash of network insiders writing their memoirs for posterity. When a former night janitor tells how he became a videotape editor by being in the right place at the right time, a news producer says: "That's a lovely story. When I write my book someday, I'll use it."

But Hailey also perpetuates some flawed TV mythology. The two lead characters were young reporters in Vietnam. In developing the backstory, the author recounts Walter Cronkite's legendary declaration that the war could not be won. Hailey proffers the conventional wisdom that President Johnson believed Cronkite was influencing the public against the war—and, that television was the most important factor in undermining American resolve in Vietnam.

However, the fact is Cronkite was reflecting American public opinion far more than he was shaping it. Well before Tet and well before Vietnam was dubbed "The Living Room War," the majority of Americans felt it was a mistake to send troops to fight in Vietnam.

This fleeting references is evidence that popular misconceptions about the relationship between television and the Vietnam war are deeply ingrained in American culture. As of yet, authoritative scholarship has been unable to debunk the fallacy we want to believe. But insightful work, such as John E. Mueller's *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* and *Television Reporting of the Vietnam War; or Did Walter Cronkite Really Lose the War?*, by broadcast historian Lawrence W. Lichty and Ed Fouhy, former CBS bureau chief in Saigon, will we hope eventually overcome impressionistic reporting.

The *Evening News* reader gets to be a fly on the wall when the high muckety-mucks of CBA's parent company meet in a top secret session. They're worried about the major transformation in the way viewers interact with their television sets. The zapping and grazing made possible by remote controls and VCRs is diminishing advertising effectiveness. And more sophisticated techniques are needed to measure a shrinking audience. Over-the-air television, concludes one of the brilliant business minds, is approaching extinction.

The broadcast network's strategy for economic survival, the gathered executives are told, must include not only the acquisition of cable and satellite interests, but the pooling of resources with phone companies. The potential revenues from a combination phone/TV line using fiber-optic cable are enormous. Government restrictions, though, on such monopolistic expansion necessitate Globanic's continued large contribu-

tions to Political Action Committees. The book *The Best Congress Money Can Buy* is recommended reading for the group.

In his dedication Hailey thanks "my many friends in the media who trusted me with off-the-record information." Some of the confidential scoop must have been about who's sleeping with who. *The Evening News* is loaded with sex—cheap, meaningful, adventurous, fast and slow.

Three years ago *Television Quarterly* invited this reviewer to survey the novels written about the television industry. The books spanned the period from the advent of the medium up through the mid-1980s (vol. XXII, no. IV, 1987). The piece concluded:

The television industry is a rougher, more complicated, more pressured environment than ever before. The stakes keep getting higher. Corporate takeovers, mass firings, the bottom line climate, the competition of cable and home video, and controversial new ratings systems are bound to provide novelists with a bounty of fascinating storylines and characters.

There's always satisfaction in an accurate prediction. *The Evening News* is the first entry of the 90s and those that come after will have a hard act to follow. Like the earlier novels, many are bound to be written by those with an ax to grind instead of a good story to tell.

Readers involved in the creation or commerce of television are especially likely to enjoy Hailey's high-grade pulp. For them the book will be more than just a lively diversion—it will be a thinking entertainment.

Mary Ann Watson is the author of *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years*, published by Oxford University Press, and is currently working on a biography of David Susskind.

SUPER MEDIA: A Cultural Studies Approach

By Michael R. Real
Newbury Park, CA: Sage

BY LAWRENCE A. WENNER

Michael R. Real's *Super Media* is an important book at an important time in a field that is more and more coming to be known as "media studies." The many academic departments that have developed to study formally what Marshall McLuhan termed "media" have over the last ten years gone through some dramatic changes. These changes have to do with the kinds of questions being asked at the center of what is becoming a mature academic discipline.

Marshall McLuhan always seemed baffled by the questions communication researchers were asking in the decade that followed publication of his *Understanding Media* in 1964. McLuhan believed the "scientistic" communication science that was emerging at that time was remarkably wrongheaded. It was a period when social scientists tried to provide demonstrable evidence about media's micro-effects on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors by using experimental and survey research techniques.

Perhaps confronting media questions at a time when computers became a part of the "real science" research scene, combined with the view by many in traditional academia that the notion of a "media scientist" was oxymoronic, caused the emerging discipline to roll out empirical doormats to answer questions about media effects. The fledgling study of media thus gained some ini-

tial legitimacy in American higher education. However, the broad cultural brushstrokes that McLuhan concerned himself with—the medium being the message or the significance of a medium being hot versus cool—were out of sync with the statistical muscle flexing that was seen as multivariate analysis became fashionable in the 1970s.

Michael Real's *Super Media* hits at a time when the big question is back, and many in the field believe it is here to stay. The big question is back, but the banner has been changed from "McLuhanism" to "Cultural Studies."

Many who know of Real's work realize that he has been perhaps the key player in the emergence of the cultural studies tradition in American media research. Coming from a lineage of Canadian scholars as a student of James Carey (who studied under both McLuhan and his mentor Harold Adams Innis), Real's approach draws together these scholars' work with the British cultural studies foundations of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Real's "Americanization" of these approaches was first seen in his *Mass Mediated Culture*, and continues here in *Super Media*.

If McLuhan's book was about *Understanding Media*, Real's book is about "Understanding Super Media". If McLuhan's book was about how media was going to transform modern life, Real's book is about that transformed life some twenty-five years down the road and, perhaps more importantly, how one should go about studying it.

For Real, today's media from its mega-events to its most ordinary and mundane fare is "super". Media is super because of its prominence in daily life, something Real suggests is often overlooked or understated by theorists. Super media is also a neologism, reflective of common colossalisms like Super Bowls, Super Sundays, superstars, superpowers, and supersavings.

Real's book is written for the perceptive and concerned media consumer. There is little here that puts media institutions or media practitioners on pedestals; nor is there much here for the seat of the pants critic looking for sweeping generalizations about how media have worked us over. For Real,

The central question is, What kind of culture are we creating? For the individual, this means, What kind of personal values, lifestyle, and world view am I constructing through my communication? For the society it means, Are super media contributing everything they might to this task and celebration we call life? Cultural studies suggest tools for answering these questions

Real is interested in complex answers to how "all media" work together to create a popular culture. Real casts the academic perspective he is advocating, cultural studies as, *interdisciplinary*, ranging across the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities, rather than utilizing only one set of methods, concepts, and theories.

Indeed, it is only through the synthesis of a variety of approaches that Real's perspective can be drawn. For many, this "theoretical" aspect may be the most important part of the book.

Other readers may find the substance of some seven case studies that Real presents of media phenomena and practice to be the heart of the book. Readers will find Real's case studies of media coverage of presidential assassinations, the Academy Awards, the Olympic Games, the cold war, the phenomena of *The Bill Cosby Show*, and the role that gender of directors plays in film content to be perceptive and engaging.

The book's first two chapters address Real's assumptions about media, and define basic terms and concepts that guide the cultural stud-

ies approach. Chapter one begins with the McLuhaneque assumption that "Media serve as the central nervous system of modern society". In this first chapter, Real defines what is super about media. The signature idea poses that "We create our media and culture, and our media and culture create us".

Chapter one also provides a useful service in updating key ideas from McLuhan, Innis, Carey and others on the move from oral to print to electronic media and how the change from traditional to mass communication has necessitated that we think of ourselves differently. In laying groundwork for the case studies in the remainder of the book, Real closes this chapter by defining key terms in the communication process, and by reiterating the classic debates over high vs. low, mass vs. folk, and elite vs. popular culture.

While the first chapter sets the stage, Chapter two is the key element that makes this book important. Here, Real introduces cultural studies as a "metadiscipline," and provides an introductory case study of presidential assassinations to show how the approach may be applied.

Cultural studies is introduced by contrasting "behaviorism" and "criticism" as the two dominant modes of answering questions about media. Behaviorism, relying on the social science methods of the survey and experiment, is cast as "media centered," looking in a restricted way, "at direct media experience and outcomes individually, especially those that can be measured empirically".

Criticism, on the other hand, relies on social and artistic theories. In an expansive way, it looks at text and culture from the long view of history, aiming at a critical understanding of media content, its institutional origins and collective implications.

Real uses the treatment that presidential assassinations might receive

from the two approaches to illustrate their major differences. Behaviorism might seek to identify a pattern of social-psychological variables that would profile potential assassins, or how news about an assassination "chains" through society and changes attitudes or behaviors. Criticism would seek "above all to comprehend the meaning and implications of an assassination or its attempt". It works at a different level, with different tools to discover the social conflicts and historical understandings that lead to public interpretation of assassinations.

After drawing out key differences between behaviorism and criticism, and coming down firmly on the critical side, Real introduces the possibilities for "cultural studies" to bridge the gap in important ways.

In another chapter, Real presents a case study of the Academy Awards. Here we see how the cultural studies approach might be tailored to Lasswell's classic question of "who says what through which channel to whom with what effect?" The "real motives" of both the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the ABC Television Network are examined.

Publicity goals and advertising revenue are shown as goals monitored by a series of institutional gatekeepers. Real's ethnographic study of the telecast production process and director Marty Pasetta illustrates the "industrialization of culture" where no one individual retains control over larger market pressures.

In looking at "what is said," Real moves beyond a simple content analysis of program parts, to a look at the genre characteristics of the Oscar show as "ceremonial parade" A telling analysis shows how Oscar award-winning roles follow worn gender stereotyping.

Real presents tangible evidence that "the televised content of the Os-

car ceremony provides a positive valuation of celebrity, competition, tradition, ethnocentrism, regionalism, and nationalism". However, based on the results of an audience survey, Real finds a savvy awareness by over half of the viewers that the "Academy Awards are nothing more than a public relations event for the film industry". More telling may be Real's finding that, although two-thirds of the audience enjoys watching the telecast, only one-third actively looks forward to doing so.

While Real's analysis of the Academy Awards shows how empirical analysis can indeed be done and enriched by taking a larger cultural view, his structural and ritual case studies are more emblematic of the cultural studies starship. Two "structural" studies are presented, one of *The Bill Cosby Show's* recoding of ethnicity, and the other examining gender portrayal in top grossing films made by men and women directors.

Real analyzes what *Cosby* has done to redefine familiar stereotypes. Indeed, from within the normative frame that accepts the Horatio Alger myth, Real believes *Cosby* provides a successful "recoding" of blackness. *Cosby* features a strong father figure and nuclear family unit, and presents education leading to a responsible professional life with its attendant affluence and fiscal responsibility as desirable goals. Ultimately, however, Real finds *Cosby* "bound and gagged" with laudible goals that are constrained by the structural televisual necessities of embracing the dominant cultural logic, and failing "to address directly class and group conflict within American society".

In applying structuralist analysis to gender in film directing, Real illustrates other constraints that perpetuate cultural hegemony. Real reviews the small, but improving, stock of women both behind and in front of

the camera, before taking a close look at key differences in the telling of the tale in top grossing films directed by men and women.

In films directed by men, "roughly 5½ times as much screen time was allotted to men as to women", while in films directed by women there is little disparity. Real finds women directors more likely to let "women only" scenes play, portray women with discernable occupations, and empower women with leadership and instrumental rather than "sidekick" roles.

In moving on to "critical analysis," Real bends his emphasis beyond the structural character of media product to its more ideological component. In two chapters, Real focuses on how the cold war is played out in public media forums.

His first case study looks at what is termed "cold war-mindedness" in American film and television. Real builds a political economic argument that transnational media industries favor capitalism because it is the climate "in which it operates so successfully" and "opposes communism because that system would eliminate precisely the institutional arrangements, incentives and profits that direct the transnationals". Relying on this argument to explain the overt propagandistic messages in American World War II era films, Real suggests that modern films like *Rambo* and *Red Dawn* continue this ideological work by metaphorically reinforcing biases.

In a second critical analysis of media's functioning in the cold war, Real examines missives from both sides that were launched concerning the Olympic Games. He looks at United States, Soviet, and world press coverage of the 1980 U.S. boycott of the Moscow Olympics and the 1984 Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Games. In a fascinating analysis, Real shows Soviet and U.S. press

performances as largely "mirror images" of one another. The rhetorical themes emphasized by the two sides are found to be different, but parallel. In covering the rationale for the boycotts:

Each press tends to present the other side only in minimal quotations and then largely to criticize such comments than to accept them as explanations...the mass media acts to short-circuit rational considerations. Precious little effort is made to place oneself in the other's shoes and see the issue from the opposite perspective.

Real siphons from this case seven common myths that can work for either superpower's media offensive. Building from big myth that "we are good, they are bad," Real suggests that media on both sides perpetuate myths that there is a "monolithic conspiracy against us," that "the only appropriate response to foreign problems is military," and that "the public should defer to foreign policy decisions of authorities." It should come as no surprise that a central myth in Real's cold war analysis is that technology, essential to the power of both the military and the media, is an all important value.

Real's last case study also focuses on the Olympic Games and the functioning of myth, but turns the media event on its side to look at it as a "global mythic ritual" that transcends borders. For Real, the Olympic myths hold immense power to breed common social understandings, provide heroic models for imitation, mediate conflict, and make history intelligible.

Indeed, even in the context of turning the Olympics into a worldwide commodity, Real believes the televisual event serves important communal, informative, and interactive functions that contribute to international understanding. Still, Real suggests through his analyses, that much media coverage of the Olym-

pics falls far short of these lofty ideals. He finds the U.S. coverage, in particular, as an example of "nationalistic media gatekeeping" breeding ethnocentrism. In that the televisual Olympics focuses far more on certain "empowered" countries, on men's events over women's, and on the winning over the virtues of participation, Real sees the media coverage having a "disjunctive" rather than "conjunctive" unifying effect.

Michael Real's *Super Media* offers complex and important understandings of the workings of media on us. His arguments are convincing that super media pervade human culture, structure human experience, express social power, and celebrate social solidarity. Like McLuhan's *Understanding Media* before it, Real's *Super Media* challenges our assumptions about media.

Unlike McLuhan's book, *Super Media* is of our time, about common experiences and our "struggle for mastery over super media." McLuhan placed us in a new media world. Michael Real has taken us a step farther. He has provided us with some tools to understand super media and to dissect what parts of its mirror are distinctly clouded and harm our view of what we want to become. ■

Lawrence A. Wenner is Associate Dean of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Communication Arts at the University of San Francisco. His most recent book is *Media, Sports, and Society*.

BARBARA WALTERS: An Unauthorized Biography

By Jerry Oppenheimer
New York: St. Martin Press

BY ARTHUR UNGER

Surprise!
"Unauthorized biography" implies intimate revelations, maybe even sensational secrets. But Author Jerry Oppenheimer throws scandal mongers off balance. He starts out with a sterling evaluation of Barbara Walters, full of praise and near-adoration.

"No other woman," he declares, "has had a greater impact on broadcast news than Barbara Walters. It was her tenacious pioneering, her infinite drive, her unbridled determination and unabashed ambition to succeed in the male-dominated world of television that opened the door for today's newswomen: Diane Sawyer, Connie Chung, Mary Alice Williams, among others. It's doubtful that at any time in the foreseeable future will an interviewer-reporter come along who will reach the heights that Barbara Walters has attained. She has set a standard that few, if any, will ever match."

Then, he proceeds to try to demolish her in a book full of subtle put-downs amidst a facade of allegedly balanced perspective.

Tucked in among the gossipy facts about her nightclub-owning, philandering, debt-ridden father, her sometimes-hidden retarded sister, her cold and sparse love life there are a few facts about her rise to news superstardom through a combination of talent, drive, aggressiveness and downright professionalism.

But, if as Mr. Oppenheimer claims, he tried to compose an enlightening

"mosiac" of her life, he allowed garishly colored pieces of tile to distort what might have been a useful study of one of the most influential news personalities of the decade.

Despite a varied menu of bitchy trivia, hungry scandal gluttons are doomed to disappointment—Barbara Walters has lead a comparatively sedate private life, unmarred by wild indiscretions. Her professional life has been a helluva lot more exciting.

So, those readers expecting Rock Hudson/ Bette Davis/ Malcolm Forbes-type revelations must content themselves with such "sensational" items as Geraldo Rivera regretting that he "never got it on with Barbara."

As a matter of fact, the most interesting portions of the book are those that deal with Walters's ability to "get it on" with her profession. Although even there in the relating of her amazing progress in television news the emphasis is too much on piddling and picayune events like the fact that she used a secretary to take coats at a private party etc. rather than the major important aspects of her triumphant success in news-gathering and news and celebrity interviewing.

So what is there to learn in this biography?

- A People magazine writer feels that Barbara thinks the rules of journalism don't apply to her.
- An old date says Barbara is "very cold, tough, hard-driving, self-involved, egotistical."
- One of Barbara's best friends admits "I never heard Barbara use the word love."
- Another friend thinks that Barbara "chooses men who appear powerful but finally are not."
- News Executive Richard Salant once asked "Is she a journalist or is she Cher?"

• Otto Preminger gallantly sent Walters a dozen long-stemmed roses with the garter she lost while interviewing him.

Oppenheimer says he interviewed more than 400 people who knew Barbara at every stage of her life. While Walters did not talk to him herself, the author includes many clip-sheet quotes from her, gleaned from published interviews which are given a bewildering nod only in the Notes And Sources chapter at the end of the book, rather than foot-noted so readers may know the source as they read.

The book concludes what any news buff already knows: Barbara Walters is a woman possessed of varied personal virtues and weaknesses, alternating warmth with coldness, insensitivity with sensitivity. She is ambitious, determined, manipulative, calculating, competitive, glamorous herself and attracted to glamour and celebrity. But ultimately she is a capable craftsman, talented and thoroughly professional. In short, she is a fascinating complex human being.

So, what else is new?

I have interviewed Walters many times, reviewed many of her performances, maintained a solid professional relationship with her. In that capacity, I have seen many instances of the warm and caring side of Barbara Walters.

Two experiences, among many others, stand out in my memory. Once, while I was interviewing her for *The Christian Science Monitor*, she was interrupted by an urgent telephone call. It was from her mother, calling from Miami. I heard Barbara say "I'll be down as soon as possible." Then, she hung up and informed me that she would have to end the interview because of an urgent family matter.

She told me the reason when I agreed not to include it in the inter-

view. It seems her mother had to go into the hospital for minor surgery, and she did not know what to do about leaving behind Barbara's retarded sister.

"Of course we just can't dump her on a neighbor," Barbara explained. Barbara dropped her preparations for her special, cancelled promotional interviews and flew down to Miami to care for her sister.

On another occasion, when I returned to my room in the hospital after surgery, I found, waiting on my bed, a note from Barbara. It simply said: "Just to let you know that I am thinking of you."

Skeptics will say there was a strong element of calculation in her actions and they would probably be correct. After all, the chances were that I would survive to write many future reviews. But it would be hard to convince me that Barbara Walters is totally the cold, uncaring despot which so many in this book have portrayed her to be.

"Barbara Walters: An Unauthorized Biography" promises to be the story of a tough lady who made it in what was once a man's world. But it proves to be just a back-seat tease, filled with bitchy little items, envy-inspired critiques, with a few honest minor evaluations. If you are an absolute Barbara-ophile you'll want to read it just to add a few bits of trivia to your store of knowledge about this virago of a newswoman who has put her indelible personal stamp on the art of interviewing for television. ■

For 17 years Arthur Unger was television critic of *The Christian Science Monitor*. His conversation with Barbara Walters appeared in the last issue of TVQ.

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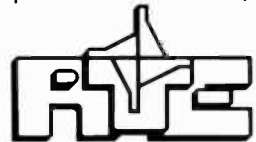
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