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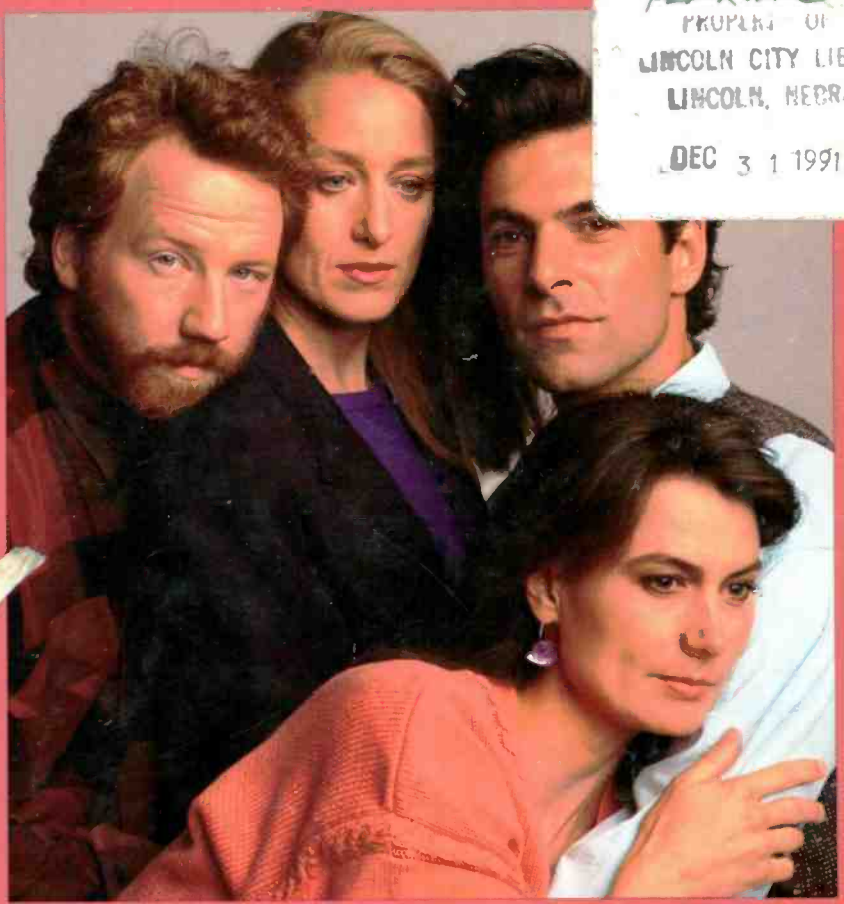

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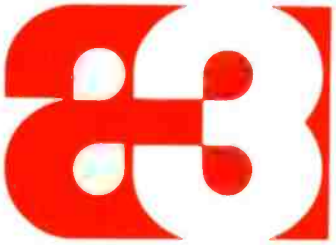

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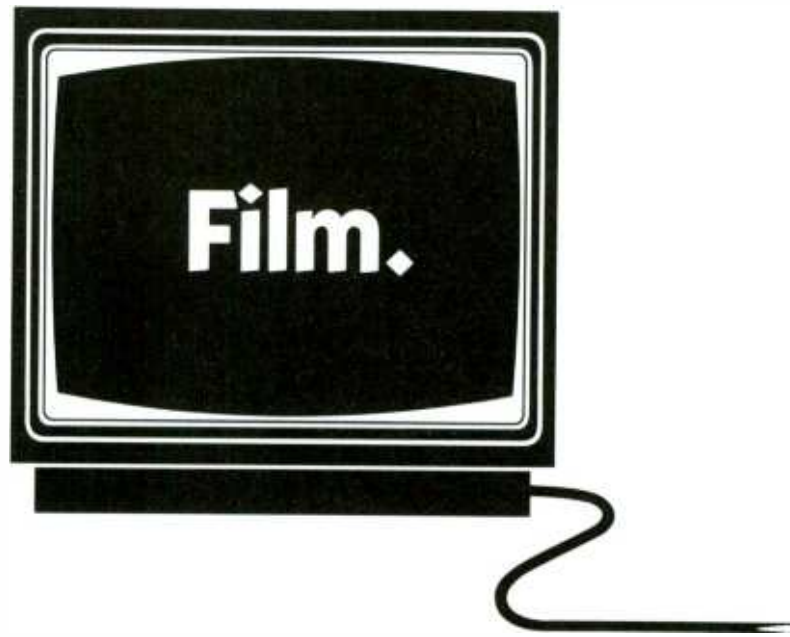

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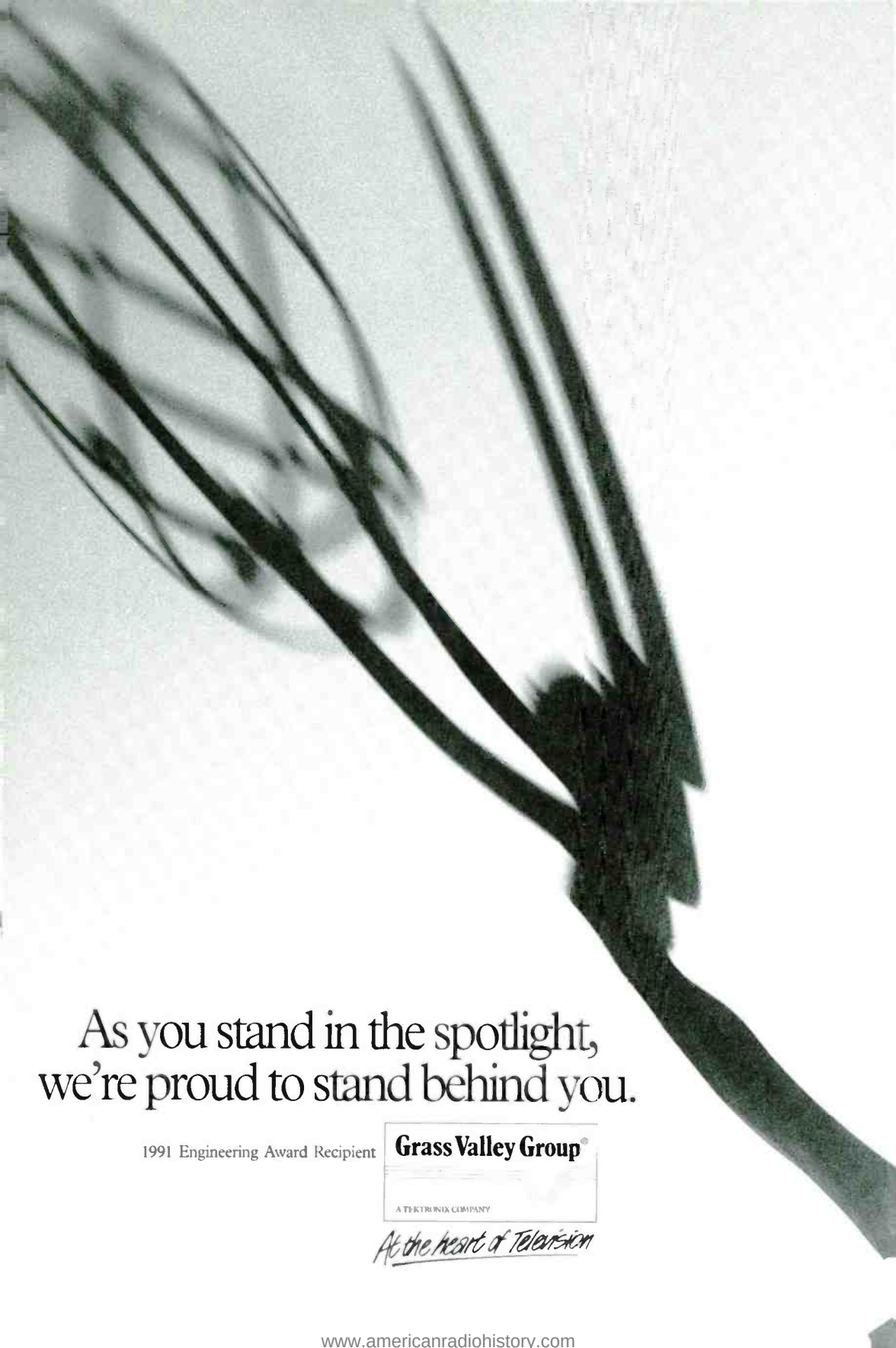

TELEVISION'S ADVENTURE IN CULTURE; THE STORY OF *OMNIBUS*

BY RICHARD KROLIK

Once upon a time, dear young disbeliever, on the big commercial television networks of the USA, there was a weekly 90-minute program that mixed in superior live drama, ballet, symphony, musical comedy, opera, operetta and intelligent historical and scientific film, all tied together by a novice, diffident Brit whose casual manner made Dave Garroway sound like a circus barker. It was fully sponsored, and lasted eight enlightening entertaining years.

If you're under 50, you may not know its name. The rest of us remember *Omnibus*.

Its debut was on Sunday, November 9, 1952, CBS-TV, 4:30-6 p.m. The lineup: Scenes from "The Mikado" with Martyn Green; "The Trial of Anne Boleyn," adapted by Maxwell Anderson from his own *Anne of the Thousand Days* with Rex Harrison and Lili Palmer; "The Bad Men" an original teleplay by William Saroyan; "The Witch Doctor" a short film on the Haitian voodoo dance, and "Camera Miracles," a documentary on the X-ray. A Cultural grabbag if there ever was one. Robert Saudek was the guiding spirit. William Spier was the producer, Andrew McCulloch directed. All three were already TV veterans.

Look at the reviews:

• Jack Gould of the *New York Times*, dean of TV critics, whose endorsement did for prestige what ratings did for sales: "Bravo! It is what television has needed for a long time. Rarely has there been one presentation so sweeping and so sensitive in its imaginative concept, so disdainful of video's traditional inhibitions and so gloriously triumphant in its execution."

• John Crosby, *NY Herald-Tribune*: "So refreshingly different in outline from the ordinary malarkey served up on TV that the man at home may very well mutter, 'Why isn't the rest of television like this?'"

• Jack O'Brian, *N.Y. Journal-American*: "This 90-minute exercise in intellectual small talk and big names might very nicely be the best television show ever produced."

• Ben Gross, *NY Daily News*: "At last, television has come of age."

• *Chicago News*: "*Omnibus* is a great television program."

• *Chicago Tribune*: "Something to look forward to on Sundays."

• *Variety*: "If there's such an animal as a perfect teleshow, Sunday's *Omnibus* could easily qualify."

Whew! Words a producer and a press agent would kill for. Whence came this phenomenon, with televi-

sion still in swaddling clothes? Not from the networks or the packagers — they were busy with lowest-denominator rating-getters . Not from the unborn public broadcasting; even individual "educational" stations were just a gleam in the eyes of a few universities. And certainly not from academia or the arts community — to them, admitting to owning a TV set was a disgrace. Walter Lippmann revered columnist/pundit, while thoughtfully bullish on TV's potential, admitted that the only times he'd seen TV was when he took out the cat at night and passed through the kitchen where the cook sat enthralled.

Here's whence: from a foundation, of all places. Brand new in 1951, the Ford Foundation was endowed with an impressive number of millions and the mission of making the world a little better by scattering them around. One of its target areas was the world of commercial broadcasting, the only kind of broadcasting there was in those days. To deal with it, they created the "Ford Foundation TV-Radio Workshop."

Hardly anyone knew quite where to go with this vaguely experimental name, but one Board member knew that television wasn't fulfilling its potential in terms of bringing to its audience the excitement of great drama, music, art, ballet, literature — in short, culture. That man was a legend in the advertising business, retired senior vice president of giant J. Walter Thompson, James Webb Young.

Jim Young must have had a short list of men and women with the imagination to dream up something new for television and radio, combined with the administrative ability to make it work. High on that list was the Vice President for Public Affairs at the American Broadcasting Company, one Robert Saudek, who had managed to snag three Peabody Awards for that small struggling network.

Young sought out Saudek for a leisurely exploratory lunch. To this day, Saudek can't recall what they talked about, perhaps not even television. But by the time coffee had been drained, Young offered Saudek the job of translating the aims of the F.F. TV-Radio Workshop into some kind of television programming that didn't currently exist.

What would he have to work with, Saudek asked. A million two hundred thousand dollars, Young answered. Not a million two per year, no special guarantee of time, no indication it would ever be renewed.

To Saudek, whose annual budget at ABC for documentaries or any kind of public affairs programs hovered around the $30,000 mark, the $1.2 million spoke louder than reservations about renewal and guarantees. It took him almost no time to say yes, despite ABC president Bob Kintner's offer to sweeten his take-home.

In the end, Kintner graciously press-released "The American Broadcasting Company naturally takes special pride and interest in the selection of Robert Saudek, one of its vice presidents, to put into practical effect the high aims financed by the Ford Foundation for its Television- Radio Workshop."

The subject of Kintner's special pride was then a 40-year-old cultured intellectual broadcaster from Pittsburgh, not necessarily an oxymoron. Son of a classical musician who served as music director for pioneer radio station KDKA, Saudek gravitated to broadcasting through a series of part-time announcing jobs while a Harvard undergraduate and a Duquesne University law school student. When the chance came to leave Pittsburgh for a job in New York with the old Blue Network, later ABC , he grabbed it and rose — with time out for WWII London duty with the Office of War Information — to a vice presidency.

Saudek's first "high aim" undertaking for this high-aim Ford Foundation broadcasting endeavor was a news-type project. The Sixth General Assembly of the United Nations was being held in Paris, to the total disinterest of the American television network news departments. Here was a significant world event which a neutral party could step in and deliver to the American people or at least that small sliver of the American public which owned television sets in 1951 and wanted to watch some sort of history theoretically being made.

So the Ford Foundation TV-Radio Workshop hired a camera crew in Paris, arranged to develop its footage on the slow plane flying back to New York where it would be edited overnight, engaged the services of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to narrate the half-hour production, and handed a free half-hour to NBC where it was dutifully scheduled for a brief run.

Scouring the world for news events not being covered by three enterprising networks didn't offer much long-term potential for the FFTRW. In fact, Bob Saudek wasn't really sure what did offer that potential. He knew that the vexatious time and subject constraints of fifties television weren't for him.

"I was thinking what the heck we could do," he said years later, "and I decided we had to do something really big ... I wanted something where we could put on all kinds of things.

"The world was too full of wonderful things, and television had very little on it that was wonderful.

"There were a lot of things I was interested in and didn't know much about. I thought maybe if I don't know about it, and I care about it, maybe we can make it interesting for other people."

All Saudek was firm about was that he wanted the show to be 90 minutes long, and he wanted it to be on Sunday afternoons, when families could watch together and when the big blockbuster primetime Ed Sullivans weren't competing.

After many months of talking and germinating, Jim Young asked what network Saudek would prefer to be on. CBS, he said. So a dinner was arranged at the Harvard Club with Frank Stanton and his two top aides, Messrs. Van Volkenburg, TV network president, and TV program VP Hubbell Robinson. The CBS trio listened to Saudek's dreams and conditions. Robinson said it won't get ratings, Van Volkenburg said it won't get sponsors. Stanton said nothing.

Next day, from San Francisco where he'd flown on CBS business, Frank Stanton called and said "OK, we'll go with it."

Now the leisurely talking and germinating days were over. There was a starting date in November, 1952, less than eight months away. And once that opening 90-minute program was over, there would be another in just seven days, another a week later, every week for a full half-year. There would be no permanent performing company, no stable of writers like the only other 90-minute weekly endeavor, *Your Show Of Shows*. The word "variety" was about to get a new, uptown meaning.

Number one priority was the host, compere, MC, guide — the man who would tie all the disparate elements together, an eclectic gentleman of taste, intelligence, and a broad range of interests. Saudek offered the job to a handsome, articulate fortyish English journalist, Alistair Cooke. Cooke, a correspondent in New York for the *Manchester Guardian* in London, had been in radio since 1934, and was well-known for his weekly "Letter From America" on BBC.

When interviewed for this article Cooke was asked if, in 1952, he had

found the prospect of emceeing a weekly hour-and-a-half television program "daunting," he admitted "there must have been signs of nerves — I tended to nod my head up and down. No critics noticed this."

As any viewer of PBS' *Masterpiece Theater* for the past twenty years can attest, his head has stayed steady ever since.

After the first season, Hubbell Robinson told Saudek that CBS felt Cooke was too highbrow, too British. On the other hand, they had a candidate, a fellow who was already on the air with a weekly program, and might bring a sponsor to *Omnibus* — Ronald Reagan.

Saudek resisted the temptation. Musing on his decision many years later, he said, "Just think — if I'd gone along with their idea, I could have been Secretary of State!"

"Highbrow" was a term to be avoided. Saudek protested that *Omnibus* would be "middlebrow," and Cooke characterized himself as "falling somewhere between Somerset Maugham and Milton Berle."

By the end of the second *Omnibus* season, the program had generated enough word of mouth to bring on the jokes. Henry Morgan, popular satirist, took aim:

"This is *Omnibus*, a cultural-type program for cultural-type people. Of course, originally I was British, and Americans couldn't find anyone in this country who was sufficiently cultural to run a cultural program of this type and this expensive, so they got little old cultured me."

There was some carping by the critics. Robert Lewis Shayon in *The Saturday Review* headed his column "Light Without Luster" and asked "Where were the new ideas, the bold thrusts, the untried concepts? They weren't (sic). There were only familiar names and beaten paths. The trouble with the 'something for everyone' concept is that it invariably adds up to 'too little of anything for anyone' ... an hour and a half of self liquidating tension."

But a *Saturday Review* reader responded: "Instead of spearing this new fish before it has a chance to mature, I suggest that critics applaud such ventures in concrete terms. A program like *Omnibus* is, to use a trite phrase, a new light on an otherwise dark horizon."

What were *Omnibus* viewers getting for their undivided attention for 90 minutes on Sunday afternoons, besides an urbane host? Drama, for one thing: original plays by Maxwell Anderson, William Saroyan, Tennessee Williams, William Inge, John Steinbeck, Jean Giraudoux, Budd Schulberg and adaptations of works by Shakespeare, Dickens, George Bernard Shaw, Hemingway, Moss Hart, James Thurber, Steven Vincent Benet. Musicals by George Gershwin, Gilbert and Sullivan, Gian-Carlo Menotti, George M. Cohan.

There were operas and ballets, ten commissioned especially for *Omnibus* in Paris. There was the first TV mini-series, "Mr. Lincoln, The Early Years" written by James Agee, filmed on location. There were short film documentaries produced by Oliver Jensen and Joseph Thorndike, between their editorial careers at *Life* and their founding *American Heritage*. And there were even shorter films that defy classification, some less than a minute in length.

Popular entertainers turned up on the allegedly elitist show, too. Jack Benny appeared in a television version of his movie, *The Horn Blows At Midnight*. Fred Allen came on, with his famous Allen's Alley characters, to promote his book. Tammy Grimes and Robert Morse cavorted in George M. Cohan's *45 Minutes From Broadway*. George C. Scott, Peter Ustinov, Christopher Plummer, Ethel Barrymore, Eartha Kitt, Benny Goodman, Yul Brynner, Helen Hayes, all

performed. And Perhaps most memorable of all, a series explaining classical music by a very young Leonard Bernstein.

Bob Saudek remembered: "Really, it was marvelous to reach out and have people respond as they did to go on that show." His long-time feature editor, Mary Ahern, put it more bluntly: "One of the great things about *Omnibus* is that it attracted so many talented people, because at that time television was considered the pits."

Alistair Cook believes the influence of "Omnibus" was wide-ranging, and greatly influenced the development of public television.

After the first season, the trade magazine *Printers Ink* devoted a major part of its July 3, 1953 issue to an examination of *Omnibus* — did it win an audience, was it a commercial success, and what's ahead? They found that it created a new Sunday afternoon audience, regularly beat the competition, and lived down its early threat of being too intellectual to appeal to a mass audience. It encouraged its five sponsors to stay in network television: AMF got 5,000 requests for a booklet and volunteered that "the whole show produced amazingly high conversion to sales." Greyhound got 15,000 inquiries. Remington Rand was pleasantly pleased by audience response. All said their commercials were liked, and all praised the policy of placing their commercials between segments rather than as interruptions.

Saudek tried to explain his unique programming philosophy: "We are less competitive than stimulative. People don't want to be uplifted — they want to be entertained intelligently. Our job is to encourage others to create an atmosphere of acceptance for better programming."

Did the *Omnibus* planners and producers succeed? A very large and difficult question to answer. Their peers gave *Omnibus* several Emmys, a Peabody and an Ohio State award, and all sorts of invented magazine awards came their way. The program played on all three networks; after four years on CBS, a newly-sold commercial half-hour would have interrupted its ninety minutes. Saudek was unwilling to be slotted around the weekend schedule, ABC wanted to give him prime time on Sunday night, so off to the smallest network he went. There, it took only a year of seeing too many shared-network stations — plus the move of Bob Kintner to NBC — for *Omnibus* to show up on NBC, where it lasted three more years. It expired in 1961.

When Elmo Roper was commissioned to conduct in-depth interviews of leading critics, broadcasters, advertisers and agencies, the results were "generally favorable," although they ranged from to "as good a contribution to the health of the American mind as all of the libraries and hospitals contributed by other foundations" and "the Ford Foundation found a way to breath vitality into the television medium" to "It's an expensive way of letting a bunch of intellectual screwballs do a lot of things and waste a lot of time that they shouldn't be bothered with."

Saudek had high hopes when the first show went on: That Sunday, he wrote in the *New York Times*, "*Omnibus* could perform a regenerative role in television. By giving public exposure to new program ideas it would become a fertile seedbed from which some of these ideas might be transplanted into their own time periods elsewhere in television."

Did their mix of cultural programming have an effect on television as we know it today? Consider these arguments:

We have *Sunday Morning* on CBS and *Sunday Today* on NBC, which may not present drama and music and dance and science and history the way *Omnibus* did, but which do report faithfully and entertainingly on those civilized essentials — and may just be the best programs on the air.

We have the whole panoply of public television programming. No less an authority than Ward Chamberlin, for twenty years head of WETA in Washington and a founder of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting says: "*Omnibus* showed that there was a real audience for cultural programming. Public broadcasting would be another way to get this kind of distinguished, serious programming on the air."

And we have cable channels attempting the kind of programming *Omnibus* pioneered.

After nearly forty years, how do the men who put it on the air feel? From Frank Stanton: "*Omnibus* was a distinguished series. A noble experiment. Saudek did a superb job."

Alistair Cooke believes the influence of *Omnibus* was wide-ranging, and greatly influenced the development of public television "in demonstrating by example, not by precept, the great range of subjects of public interest."

As for Robert Saudek himself, at age 80 he just retired from the Library of Congress in Washington where he had the imposing title, Chief of the Motion Picture, Television and Recorded Sound division. He had two careers between *Omnibus* and this one, years of producing cultural programs and then as founding president of the Museum of Broadcasting in New York.

Saudek ventures no opinion on whether his hopes for the ideas of *Omnibus* being a "fertile seedbed," to be transplanted elsewhere in television were realized. But he does express some satisfaction in looking back over four decades at the series' contributions:

"In its eight years and 254 hours of programming, *Omnibus* succeeded in attracting millions of Americans to the joys of music through the minds of Bernstein, Menuhin and Stokowski, of dance through Gene Kelly and Agnes de Mille, of drama through Orson Welles, Helen Hayes and Michael Redgrave, of painting through Kenneth Clark, of sports through Jack Dempsey; of flying through the Amelia Earhart story, of the Constitution through Joseph Welch, all in the witty presence of Alistair Cooke."

Which is not too indistinct a footprint in the sands of time and the half-century of television.

Omnibus was sui generis. Nothing quite like it has surfaced since, nearly forty years and uncounted millions of TV hours later. When we pull out that old chestnut, "Golden Age," we surely must include this Sunday afternoon delight.

Next time you're in Washington, stop in at the Library's Madison Building and make a date to screen one of the black-and-white *Omnibus* kinescopes, now on 3/4 inch tape. They're all there. You'll be amazed at how well they stand up, boom shadows and all. ■

Richard Krolik during the *Omnibus* era was on the production staff of other trail-blazing programs, including *Today* and *Wide Wide World*. Later, he was in charge of programming for the Time-Life broadcast division.

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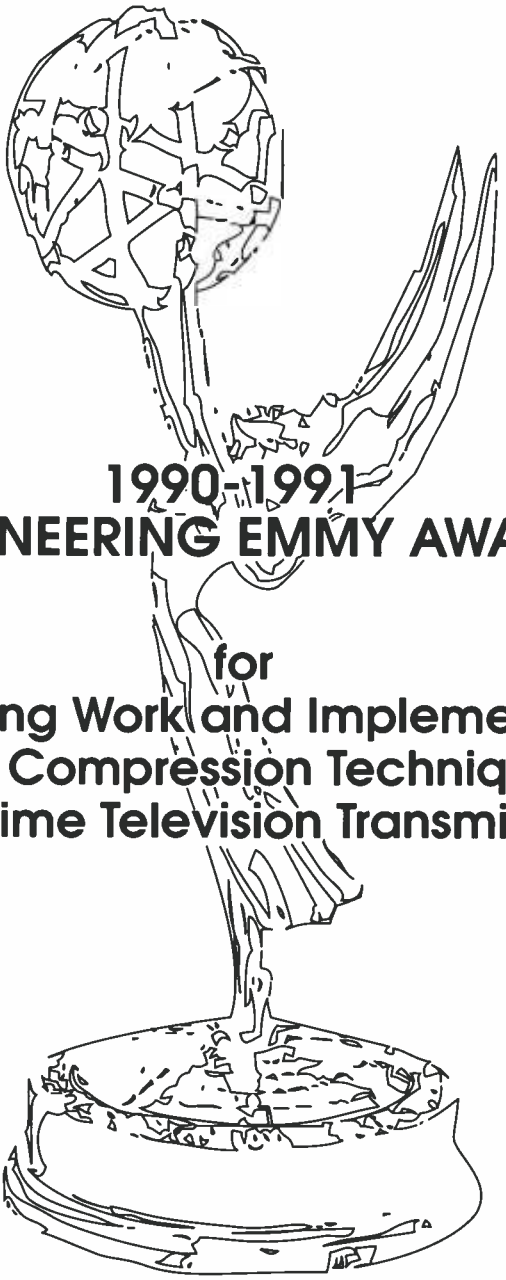

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THE COMPUTER TELEVISION MARRIAGE

BY PHILIP KIPPER

To listen to the promoters, equipment manufacturers and prognosticators the American television industry will in the not too distant future be investing billions of dollars to give the public High Definition Television. What will be gained by this step? The public will be able to view its favorite programs on a screen whose ratio of height to width is similar to a movie screen and whose clarity, depending on reception, is a few degrees better than today's television.

Not surprisingly, the only people who seem genuinely enthusiastic about HDTV are the makers of production equipment and television sets. For when the United States finally settles on a technical standard, the networks and television stations, if they decide to adopt the system, will have to replace virtually every camera, switcher, monitor and recorder. Every viewer who wants to pick up high definition images will have to buy a new television set. So far, groups of viewers have not risen as one to demand HDTV, nor have broadcasters for the matter.

Indeed, one has to wonder why HDTV attracts such attention and worry. Viewed from an evolutionary perspective current high definition systems have a good chance of turning out like those poor little hominid cousins of ours whose genetic branch came to a dead end eons ago. HDTV, though incorporating some new electronic gadgetry, is based on vacuum tube technology more than 50 years old.

But the most important defect of HDTV is that it doesn't make the medium any smarter. The billions of dollars that it will take to put HDTV into operation will make television more like the movies (another technology at an evolutionary dead end), but HDTV by itself won't create any remarkable change in the way viewers use television, nor will it significantly alter the kind of information they can extract from it.

The TV-Computer Collision

Another technology has arrived, however, that has already begun to change the way many viewers use and think about television. It is the product of what one computer industry executive has described as the "collision" between computers and television. A better word might be "synthesis", because as these two technological branches join there is no sense of grinding and crashing. Instead, there is an explosion of creative possibili-

ties, including the development of large flat display screens that have the potential to exceed HDTV in clarity.

The synthesis of computers and television has both technological and philosophical consequences. From a technical point of view, the computer gives the television set something it has always lacked — brains. The computer lets the viewer sort through stored video, audio and textual information and digest it in an order he or she chooses. The computer also presents the viewer with the opportunity to send messages to the source of programming to respond to content — or even to choose or shape it. As the television set becomes more technically like a computer, it also means that television transmission and display will be more digital than analog. Now a television picture is an electronic facsimile or analog of what the camera sees. But research organizations are already operating systems that can condense and convert such analog material into the digital signals a computer can read. Among other things, this development opens the possibility of computer enhancement and display on high definition monitors of video material originated with conventional television equipment.

From a philosophical point of view, the computer-television synthesis means that viewers will no longer be confined to a passive role. Sure, everyone shouts at the screen now and then or angrily changes channels or hits the off switch. But with computer-television the viewer will be able to choose and arrange the order and depth of a newscast, participate in a game show or call the shots in a football telecast. For the first time, in other words, viewers will be able to exert immediate and direct control over their television entertainment and informational experiences.

Some industry observers have called the computer-television synthesis "Smart-TV" or a similar evocative name. But such labeling is misleading because it suggests the existence of a single technical approach. In reality, experimenters and developers are proposing a variety of systems, each using a somewhat different formula to achieve the synthesis. Similarly, the term "interactive" has been used widely to describe how viewers experience computer-television. But what viewers are expected to do or how they are expected to respond can vary dramatically depending on which system is operating. Let's look more closely at a few of the key approaches to computer-television and also try to pinpoint what it means when viewing becomes interactive rather than passive.

The Informational Model

Imagine watching a television documentary or special report on an important public affairs subject. Ordinarily, all of the choices about the interviews to be included, how much time is spent on a given subject and whether information is presented in the form of narration or visuals has been predetermined by the producers. But this fixed relationship between viewer and information is about to change. Now by combining an ordinary home computer, a video monitor, a laser disc player and specially designed computer programs, viewers can create their own documentaries, choosing which video footage to view, which interviews to watch and what text to read.

The principle is the rather simple one known to every student who has had to find information in a library. You start with an overview of the subject and then start branching out to explore new levels of detail. But it is the synthesis between computers and television that now makes this process possible with video and audio.

Technically, the system requires a means of storing video and audio information, such as a laser disc, that allows quick, random access. It also requires a computer with a program that can control the disc and organize and display the branching pathways of information contained on it. Such a system is already being marketed by ABC News for educational use, with documentaries on the life of Martin Luther King, the Holy Land, and the 1988 presidential election.

Apple Inc. has also been among the leaders in developing this approach to computer-television. In one recent project the big computer company collaborated with WGBH of Boston to create an interactive version of *Nova*, the PBS science series. Among Apple's more ambitious efforts was a joint production with Lucasfilm that aimed to teach high school kids about genetic biology. The heart of the project was a feature-length dramatic film about the lives of the scientists who discovered the structure of the DNA molecule. As the students viewed the film, they could point to a character or object on the screen using a computer mouse and get further information. If they "clicked" the mouse on one of the main characters, for example, they could choose to read a brief biographical sketch or see an interview with the real person being portrayed.

Similar and equally remarkable productions have been completed in the last few years by the Bank Street College of Education in New York. These projects use a promising new technology called Digital Video Interactive (DVI), which is being developed at the David Sarnoff Research Center for Intel Corporation, the big computer chip manufacturer. DVI uses a computer to compress ordinary video signals into a digital form that can be stored on compact discs.

Without such compression the digital video material is so information dense that a laser disc, which holds up to an hour of analog video, can display only a few minutes of digital action. So why bother to turn analog video to digital? The answer is that in digital form the material can be displayed directly on a computer monitor where it can be easily controlled and manipulated by computer programs. In addition, digital information, which in reality is merely a series of numbers, is less subject to noise or distortion when transmitted. The Apple system described above uses analog video discs and displays the video on a conventional television monitor.

Among the Bank Street productions is one in which a viewer can take a tour of Mayan historical sites. By using a joystick controller, the viewer can gain a 360-degree view of the surroundings and decide which tomb to enter and what passageway to probe. The viewer can also explore a museum of Mayan artifacts.

Productions such as these are said to be interactive because viewers are presented with a series of choices that allow them to determine the order and range of the program content. In the most sophisticated productions each major program element, such as main character or significant object, can serve as a branching pathway to additional detail. Furthermore, as the viewer enters choices those choices may have consequences, either with respect to information that is subsequently presented or the action on the screen.

The informational model of computer-television, as you can tell from the examples cited here, has its origins in education. Using interactive video for instruction and training goes back at least 10 years to the advent of the laser video disc. But more recent developments suggest that in the not too distant future computer-television based on the informational model will be readily available for a wide range of entertainment and informational purposes.

Inventions like DVI and other methods of producing digital signals will one day be joined to optical fiber cable systems so that huge amounts of data can be distributed to the home computer-television receiver. When this happens one can envision daily news programs that on the surface look the same as today's broadcasts, but, using the branching pathways approach, viewers will be able to summon up from the computer's memory in-depth interviews or other material that today may end up as outtakes.

Entertainment programming will also change in an extraordinary way. The clue is in today's increasingly popular computer simulation games such as Hidden Agenda and SimCity in which the participant becomes involved with fictional, though highly realistic, situations. In SimCity, for example, the player is the mayor of a major city who must carry out political action as well as deal with crises such as natural disasters.

Today these games display fairly crude computer graphics and most information is supplied by text. But in the future when computer-television can receive and store large amounts of digital video, the degree of realism and possibilities for action and drama will be fantastic. One computer industry observer has described such productions as "interactive stories," where, unlike today's computer games or simulations, narrative will play as important a part as strategy or reflexes. Rather than merely observing dramatic stories as viewers do today, in the future they will be participants with a choice in the outcome.

The Game Model

One of the most popular diversions for children, and some adults, today is Nintendo, a game system that plugs into a television set. The player uses a control box to guide characters past threatening obstacles to some ultimate safe haven. The visual display and two-dimensional action of Nintendo are relatively primitive by today's computer graphics standards. Yet in many ways Nintendo and similar video games are the model for important developments that are now taking place in the world of computer-television.

Several well-financed companies are now test marketing systems that allow viewers to play along with broadcast quiz games, and which in the future will provide a wide range of entertainment possibilities, including the opportunity to match wits with your favorite football coach or baseball manager. The main element these systems have in common with games like Nintendo is that they offer players a limited range of game choices which must be entered into a special computer device. The similarities may stop there.

One of the most advanced of these systems is being tested in Sacramento, CA by its developer, Interactive Network, Inc. of Mountain View, CA. The system employs a control box roughly the size of a telephone answering machine. The box is a miniature computer that includes a small typewriter keyboard, tiny display screen, FM receiver for picking up game data, and modem for sending responses back through telephone lines.

Interactive Network has given the $350 box to test families who are using it to play along with popular television game shows like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*. When the host of the show asks a question a set of multiple choice answers is sent to players at home via an FM subcarrier frequency. Players have a few seconds to enter their answer, which is saved by the computer. At the end of the program, the player merely plugs a telephone line into the box and the responses are sent to a central computer for scoring. Winners

are identified by code number.

At the heart of this system is a patented timing device in the controller box that registers precisely when a question has been asked and when participants have entered their answers. This information is necessary to avoid cheating, a crucial issue when prizes are at stake.

One of the interesting aspects of the Interactive Network system is the way it defines interactivity, says Lawrence Taymore, president of Interactive Network Television, an affiliate of Interactive Network Inc. Taymore's company has produced the software and some of the television programming for the system. Taymore notes that *Jeopardy* and some other games are already available to home players via 900 telephone numbers. But these games have little to do with the television versions.

"That's one of the reasons we feel our system is interactive," Taymore says. "It's happening simultaneously with another medium. It's also happening simultaneously in other people's homes. You don't see those people, but you're competing with them."

Taymore believes that such interactive systems have a promising future and that television quiz games and similar activities will develop to match the technology. "This is the electronic parlor game of the 1990s except that your parlor is the global village."

Among the future possibilities are interactive football games where viewers can enter predictions about play calls and then win prizes based on their accuracy. Interactive Network Television is helping to develop an educational geography game with Boston's WGBH based on the popular computer game, "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?" The game will feature full-action video and players will use the computer-controller to enter choices in response to situations that will undoubtedly have much more in common with drama or mystery than game shows.

The Selection Model

One of the frustrations of watching a typical sports telecast is that directors often seem to become fixated on images that have little to do with the action — shots of the coach gnawing a towel or the pretty face in the third row. Several new systems now being marketed promise that in the near future viewers will be able to override the director by selecting their own shots.

Multiple signals for a single program are sent to the home television set and the viewer uses a selection device to choose what camera angle to watch. An organization called ACTV Inc. is testing one such system that will be available to viewers who subscribe to a special cable channel. Up to four shot possibilities are arrayed across the bottom of the screen. The viewer points a device that looks like an ordinary TV remote control at the set and pushes a button to "take" the preferred shot for display in the main screen area. Sports broadcasts may be a natural application of this system, but ACTV is also proposing to use it to allow viewers to select the endings of dramatic programs or, through a series of choices, to customize educational or training broadcasts.

The ACTV system has a lot in common with the informational model discussed earlier. But there are some key differences as well. Because the ACTV system uses conventional cable with its restricted ability to deliver electronic information, the number and type of choices available are limited. In addition, with the informational model the viewer makes decisions using a computer, which can store material for a potentially wider range of viewing alternatives.

Nonetheless, ACTV and similar

systems are a significant advance over ordinary television, where the viewer can only choose the channel and whether the set is on or off. In the future when fiber optic cable is serving American homes with its vast electronic carrying capacity, one can envision live broadcasts where viewers will be able to select from 10 or more camera angles and where extensive content choices are available too.

Some computer industry companies already seem to be positioning themselves for such a future. Radius Inc., a San Jose, CA. corporation that manufactures display monitors for Macintosh computers, has recently started selling a product called RadiusTV. It is a system that allows a viewer to watch a television program displayed in high resolution video while monitoring as many as 15 other channels. By entering key words the system will alert the viewer when a particular subject has been mentioned in a program and bring the appropriate channel to center screen. Though RadiusTV has many possible applications that go well beyond the selection of camera angles and content options, it provides a good example of what the future may hold for discerning television viewers who want to take control over their viewing experiences.

The Polling Model

The prototype for many of the so-called interactive services available to television viewers today was the Qube system that operated in Columbus, OH, from 1977 to 1984. Qube, a franchise of Warner-Amex, allowed cable subscribers to vote on talk show topics or to register their choices in opinion polls. The same cable that transmitted programming to the home was used to send responses back to the station.

The system failed financially because of the cost of the two-way cable technology. Audiences also lost interest after the novelty wore off.

Now, a number of organizations have revived the polling concept, though viewers register their opinions over the telephone rather than through a cable system. Recently, CNN has begun allowing viewers of its *Newsnight* program to use a special 900 number to vote for the stories they'd like to see. The Fox Network used a similar method so viewers could vote for the ending they preferred on the program, *Married with Children*.

Strictly speaking, such polling methods don't have much to do with the computer-television synthesis. The networks involved may use computers to register and tabulate audience responses, but viewers themselves don't directly manipulate information or make extensive choices about what they will be seeing. Yet the polling model stands to grow in significance as the computer-television synthesis progresses.

One can envision, for example, nightly polling on television newscasts where viewers enter their responses by using a computer keyboard. Not only will there be standard multiple choice responses, but viewers may even be able to enter longer open-ended opinions. A number of writers have already noted the potential danger of such instantaneous polling techniques. Election day polls, for example, might turn up results that could dissuade some voters from casting their ballots, thinking the election had already been decided.

But there are more benign applications of computer-television polling that might provide a significant service to the public and possess considerable entertainment value as well. For example, viewers might be asked to register their opinions on certain consumer products to assist future purchasers or be allowed to vote on the most valuable player of a

sporting event. Whatever the question, however, being able to register their opinions will, according to some industry observers, give viewers a new sense of participation, if not power.

But Will Viewers Buy It?

The computer-television models discussed here each make different demands on viewers, from executing complex choices about the order of content to simply registering an opinion by making a phone call. Some writers have objected that the options at the simpler end of the scale aren't really interactive at all because the level of participation is so limited. Yet others have proposed a broader definition of interactivity by saying that a system is interactive merely if it allows the viewer to transmit as well as receive information.

In the future, however, concern about such definitions may well be irrelevant. Viewers will be able to select any of the options described here from a single computer-television system. People will be so accustomed to making choices about content and shaping their own viewing experiences that the passive viewing of the sort practiced today will be unthinkable.

But here come the objections. Millions of people who own VCRs are so technologically illiterate that they can't program them ahead of time to record their favorite shows. Using an ordinary computer seems beyond the grasp of many. Why would such people be interested in computer-television where the array of options might be daunting?

The answer to this question is that viewing audiences are changing. Young people today are used to playing computer games that allow them direct influence over action on the screen. The increasing popularity of computer simulations also suggests that viewer involvement and choice will be important entertainment criteria in the future.

If these arguments are not persuasive, consider the economic potential of computer-television. One writer familiar with the younger generation of computer game players and the electronics industry has predicted that by the year 2000 interactive media will surpass motion pictures and conventional television in revenues. This is a message that apparently some in the broadcasting industry have heeded. As noted above, ABC has entered the field by marketing interactive documentary discs. One of the major investors in Interactive Network Inc. is NBC.

Of course, the market for ordinary programming will persist. One assumes that talented writers, directors and producers will continue to create good drama that will draw interest, even if audience members can't dabble in their own plot revisions. As producer Stephen J. Cannell told a *Today Show* interviewer not too long ago, there ought to be programs where, for artistic reasons if nothing else, the audience is prevented from changing content. One the other hand, won't it be fun to put yourself in the play, to decide what the plot line is and when the denouement arrives? More important, won't it be valuable to probe beneath the headlines of the newscast to gain access to in-depth interviews or other background information? The computer-television system of the future promises to offer these opportunities. In doing so it will revolutionize our media experiences. ■

Philip Kipper is Professor in the Broadcast Communication Arts Department at San Francisco State University. He has published a number of articles on television production and the effects of new technologies on the medium. He is editor of *Feedback*, a journal of the Broadcast Education Association.

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FROM RECEIVER TO REMOTE CONTROL: THE TV SET

Remember Dumont? Pilot? Philco?. . .
A stroll down video's memory lane with some old small-screen friends.

BY FRITZ JACOBI

Did you know that 27 television stations went on the air in the United States in 1928? Or that two years later a monthly magazine, *Television: The World's First Television Journal*, was published at 25¢ an issue? Or that DuMont invented a television set, the Duoscope, on which two different programs could be watched simultaneously?

All of this arcana I learned at a remarkable exhibition, "From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set," on view for two months last fall at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, in the heart of Manhattan's SoHo gallery district.

Not surprisingly, only one of those 27 TV stations survived the Depression (RCA's experimental W2XBS, over which David Sarnoff inaugurated American television at New York's 1939 World's Fair). The world's first television journal had long gone out of business. And DuMont's Duoscope, conceived in 1950, never went into mass production. But there were other, far more durable impressions left on me by this exhibition which, truth to tell, I really hadn't yearned to attend. But having been there — twice, in fact — I am exceedingly glad I went. It was something to see.

The brainchild of Matthew Geller, a 36-year-old independent producer/ director and media artist, the exhibition attracted streams of visitors and was copiously reviewed by the press. In his introduction to a book accompanying the show Geller noted that "there is a vast body of published writing and research on television, but almost all of it focuses on programming, technology, economics or the history of the television industry." The exhibit offered the first comprehensive study of the TV set, which, Geller observed, "is, for most intents and purposes, invisible."

And TV sets there were galore, more than 200 of them, dating from 1939 to the present. As Vince Aletti wrote in *The Village Voice*, "The old sets, arranged side by side throughout the

museum in a bug-eyed conga line, look like sci-fi fantasies or dangerously warped radios." The TVs ranged from the Pilot Radio Corporation's three-inch screen in a metal cabinet — the first set that sold for under $100 — to Philco's still-futuristic Predicta, sometimes called the "barber pole" model.

But the show was much more than a display of furniture. "My way of telling a story is associative and metaphoric, rather than linear or systematic," Geller said. "The exhibition relied on a set of carefully selected pieces of evidence to communicate the story." And that story, he maintains, is exploring the impact that television's physical presence has had on the American home, family, culture and community.

Courtesy of Thomson Consumer Electronics

The RCA TRK-12 television receiver as introduced in 1939 for $695.

Despite his claim that the introductory area provided the clue that the exhibition was going to be unpredictable — that it wasn't organized along chronological or historical lines — its impressionistic arrangement somehow helped to bolster a visitor's understanding of how the history of television unfolded.

The show featured seven period rooms designed to show how living areas have accommodated television. Each room had one or more working TVs, the vintage sets having been supplied by Zenith. And each room was keyed to a specific theme. For example, a 1950s kitchen explored "gender issues": how women were depicted on television, how television was marketed to women; a den depicted social movements of the 1960s; a children's room was filled with interactive video games and TV images from Walt Disney to Bart Simpson; a high-tech bachelor's bedroom touched on eroticism and television with references to Rob Lowe and "9 1/2 Weeks." On view over the working sets were some three hours of programming — brief excerpts from TV programs, documentaries, ads, theatrical and promotional films produced between 1928 and a few weeks before the exhibition opened in the fall of 1990.

At one end of the chronological scale was a room labeled "Life Before TV," containing a console radio, a manual typewriter from the 1930s, an old-fashioned stand-up telephone, a ticker tape and a Morse Code key. At the other end was an interactive video disc and screen on which visitors could change the composition of the story with a touch-screen.

"From Receiver to Remote Control" also encompassed a number of audience-participation projects. For instance, "Home Made TV," described as "a collectively generated video project on the nature and function of television," empowered visitors to borrow camcorders with which they made their own videotapes in the museum. Later they joined in a hands-on editing session with a professional video artist.

Another interactive project was "My First TV," a video recording booth in which 1,200 visitors told the story of their first television sets. Geller is interested in bringing together such narratives, which he will subsequently edit on tape.

In an "All Channels Room" visitors

Courtesy of Thomson Consumer Electronics

The large screen television for home was produced by the RCA Victor Division in 1945. It featured a built-in screen that measured 16 by 21 1/3 inches and sold for $395.

had remote control over the sound from a battery of 36 television sets simultaneously transmitting the picture from every station, cable and broadcast available in New York City. According to Geller, this room showed "how access to information through television has dramatically altered our sense of communication." He is interested in the relationship between sound and picture.

The New Museum

The " Sixties Pad" featuring a Zenith 21-inch chrome television set from the 1960s.

"TV never stops talking," he says, adding that by watching the 36 stations a viewer can begin to get a sense of the way stories are told on television. "For most of us the TV set is the only object in the home that we describe in terms usually reserved for people and pets," Geller pointed out. "A survey revealed our feelings for the set, when it was reported that the TV set was the only domestic object that many people said they would not give up for any amount of money. Inmates in a New York State maximum security prison were willing to dramatically modify their behavior when loss of their TV sets was the penalty for not following the rules".

Early in the exhibition was a sobering reminder of one of the grimier pages of American television history: a prominently displayed plaque with the names of 147 distinguished performers who had been listed in *Red Channels*. Geller was right to include

this ugly chapter from the mire of the McCarthy era in his show.

But the sets, the sets! Among the oldest was an RCA TRK 12 with a mirror in the lid, a top-of-the-line model which sold for $695 when it was introduced in 1939. That would be $6,655 in today's money, but even more remarkable, that was more than the 1939 U.S. per-capita income of $532! By the following year the price was reduced to $400. Even so, there were probably no more than 200 sets in all of the United States then, most of them owned by RCA executives in New York City. We all know that David Sarnoff was a visionary, but could he have possibly imagined that in 50 years the number of homes with one or more TVs in the U.S. alone, would exceed 90 million?

Clearly Matthew Geller was successful in achieving his goal of making one think about the effect of all this saturation on society. He was equally successful in showing that television has served as a catalyst, bringing about changes in the home and family. The TV set, he says, is the primary conveyor of contemporary story telling.

Wandering around this enormous array of old television sets was a real exercise in nostalgia. I was suddenly reminded of the milestones along my own route of collecting (seriatim) TVs. The first one, a 12-inch Admiral, as I recall, was mandatory because I had just gotten a job in the NBC press department and I had to see what I was writing about. The year was 1950, when network television was just beginning to burgeon.

I was "handling" *Your Show of Shows*, with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, and *Howdy Doody*, when producer Roger Muir decided to transform Princess Summerfall Winterspring from a puppet into a real, live girl (that was a publicity coup, but it's a whole other story). Two years later, during the Eisenhower presidential campaign, my two-year-old son, Mike, sat in front of the television set watching a news program and suddenly yelled, "I like Mike!"

We bought our first color set in 1969, when Julia Child started broadcasting in color. My wife had to see what happened to the roux when it changed colors in the pan. It was also the year Kenneth Clark brought *Civilization* to the tube, and we needed to see all those cathedrals in color, too.

My method of selecting a set was eminently scientific: at lunchtime one weekday I entered a store displaying two TV sets. One was running a game show. The other was running the contract scene from *A Night at the Opera*, when Groucho was explaining the "sanity clause" to Chico ("Come on, you know there's no Sanity Clause"). "I'll take that one," I said to the salesman. It was an RCA.

Today, as I watch a local news show on my 26-inch Sony and am subjected to more commercials than news, I sometimes think that I would be perfectly willing to drop the TV set out the window. However, I would get an argument from my wife, who has graduated from Julia Child to tennis. She gets incensed only when that extra commercial inserted after the odd-numbered game lops off the first serve of the next game. So I guess that this bears out Matthew Geller's thesis that the TV set has wrought changes in the home and family. Seriously, his comments are perceptive and his show was an eye-opener. ■

Fritz Jacobi was a member of the NBC Press Department in 1950, when *Howdy Doody*, Princess Summerfall Winterspring, Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca (to say nothing of Bob and Ray) were household names. Later, he held key positions with WNET-TV, Random House and the Columbia Business School. Recently, he organized his own corporate communications and editorial consulting service.

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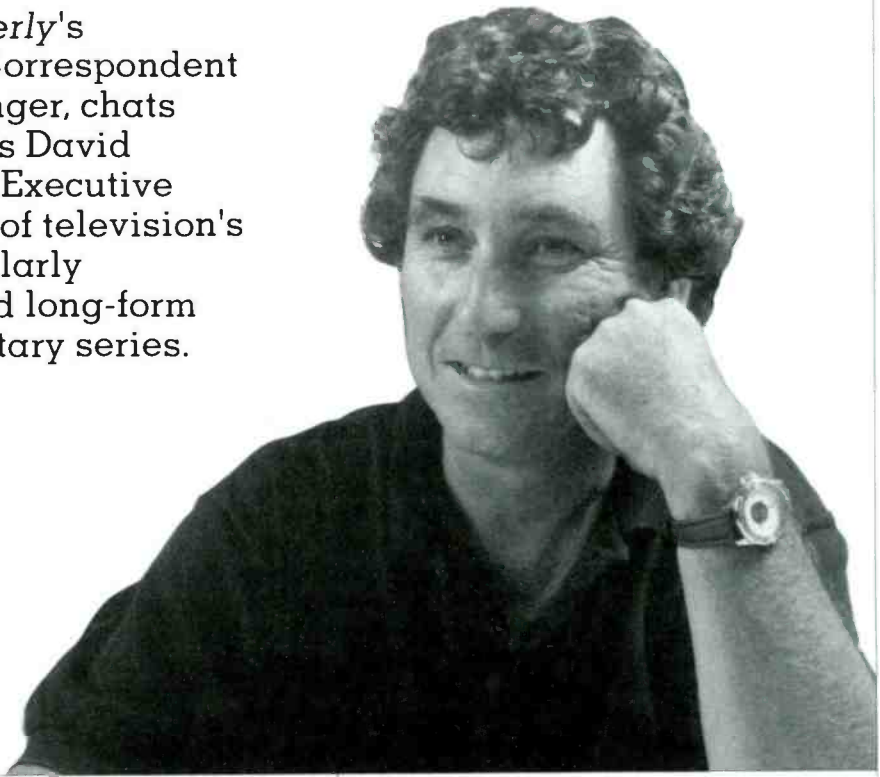
FRONTLINE'S DAVID FANNING: UPHOLDING THE DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

TV Quarterly's Special Correspondent Arthur Unger, chats with PBS's David Fanning, Executive Producer of television's only regularly scheduled long-form documentary series.



BY ARTHUR UNGER

Five 1990 Emmys for *Frontline*! That came as no surprise to television newspersons in the broadcast networks, cable and PBS. After all, this last surviving long-form documentary series had already won 13 Emmys since its start in 1983.

At the same time that network news divisions were abandoning their prime-time documentary series — *CBS Reports*, NBC *White Papers*, ABC *News Close-Ups* — PBS was determinedly providing new funding for *Frontline*, a series which allows its producers to take the time to follow complicated news stories as they unfold in order to bring depth and understanding to current events.

Says executive producer David Fanning as his series enters its tenth year: "In the course of more than 200 documentaries, we have consistently gathered a crowd of 5 to 7 million on Tuesday nights to experience the stories of our time, enter the process of our public and private lives, listen to the voices of our democracy. And most important, to enjoy the surprise of literate television."

If that sounds a bit pompous, well, David Fanning *is* a bit pompous — but he is also a charming, intelligent, articulate, cultured man with a knack for forcefully selling his ideas and his ideals. All of this comes through in his interviews as well as in his documentaries.

I first chatted with him in the New York City offices of PBS, at an oval walnut table in a glass-brick encircled room, where he had established his headquarters for the day. This native of South Africa, now an American citizen, lives in the Boston area to be near WGBH, from which *Frontline* originates. Casual in his blue golf shirt, Chino trousers and docker shoes this curly-brown-haired 35-year-old lives and looks the part of an Ivy-League Cape Codder.

He listens intently to questions, starts to answer hesitantly, circles a bit and finally emerges with what seems to be a precise if convoluted, answer. But there is no doubt of the sincerity, intensity and intellectual honesty of the responses

Some time later, we arranged to meet again in the Cambridge offices of *Frontline* at WGBH/Boston. It was the time of Hurricane David and I managed to get to WGBH. But Fanning called in from his house in Marblehead. "I'll make it in," he promised "but first I think I'd better get my boat out of the water." I released him from the committment in the interests of maritime safety, and instead toured the grey-carpeted WGBH offices. Fanning's modest office boasted a shelf full of Emmys, gold and silver Dupont-Columbia batons ... and stashed away was a white button-down shirt held in reserve for official photos.

Then, we met again in New York's new Hotel Macklowe where he hosted a press-luncheon to launch *Frontline*'s tenth season. In his dress-up dark blue suit and that white button-down shirt, he pitched just a bit too hard, preaching the value of the series to the already committed. When he realized he was being redundant he backtracked with a smile and commented that "After all, the real purpose of all this is to have a good, free lunch."

Frontline itself is not used to free lunches. It works hard for its triumphs and from the start has never hesitated to attack a topic that needed coverage.

According to Fanning in another of his charmingly portentous observations: "Literate television combines reporting that does not speak down to the viewer and filmmaking that avoids packaging news in the disposable, formulaic patter of standups and sound bites. It raises and addresses questions without skirting complexity."

Fanning's most provocative foray into controversial current affairs programming was *Death Of A Princess* produced for his previous series, World. The program, a partially-fictionalized dramatization about the alleged execution of a Saudi Arabia princess and her lover for committing adultery was opposed by the State department, Saudi Arabia and Mobil.

But Fanning did it and PBS aired it amidst the greatest furor over anything PBS had ever done. It eventually lead to Fanning being offered the *Frontline* series at WGBH, the PBS affiliate which has always been especially cordial to hard-hitting current affairs. (Remember the Vietnam series.)

Here are the Frontlines which won NATAS Emmys. Contents in most cases are self-explanatory: *Abortion Clinic, Living Below The Line, Cry, Ethiopia, Cry, The Mind of A murderer, Captive in El Salvador, A Class Divided, The Lifer And The Lady, Men Who Molest, Retreat From Beirut, Sue The Doctor?, Holy War, Holy Terror, Murder On The Rio San* Juan, In *Search Of The Marcos Millions.*

Frontline's 1990 winners were *High Crimes And Misdemeanors*, a Moyers report on the Reagan Administration's Iran Contra activities, *The Struggle*

For South Africa, and *Seven Days In Bensonhurst*. Last season's highlights included Hodding Carter's *The Arming of Iraq*, *The Mind of Hussein*, *Innocence Lost*, about the child abuse case in Edenton, N.C. and *The Election Held Hostage* which featured new evidence about the "October Surprise," the allegedly secret deals in the Reagan camp to hold back release of the hostages till after the election. Fanning says that *Frontline* was not able to find the smoking gun but he promises there will be more in the future if corroborating facts are uncovered.

Little wonder that the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* cited *Frontline* as "the most consistently important weekly hour on television, the crown jewel and standard-bearer for the mission of public television."

The current season, which started with *In The Shadows Of Sakharov*, and continued with *The Great American Bailout* about the savings and loan scandals, includes *My Doctor, My Lover*, about psychiatrist-patient relationships, *The War We Left Behind*, about how our war strategy in Iraq affected civilians, and *Don King, Unauthorized*. In the planning stage as we go to press is a three-parter on the state of American democracy based on William Greider's books.

Over and over again, in incessantly insistent variations David Fanning makes it clear that *Frontline* may well be the last stand for television documentaries. "The networks have all but abandoned the long-form documentary." he intones. "*Frontline* is the one place for the literate, concerned and thoughtful voice on television.

"But," he says fervently, "it is clearly not enough. There should be many more places on television for ideas and films to explore our society and our world."

He's correct, of course. But, while we wait patiently and perhaps futilely for the re-generation of the documentary on network television, serious followers of electronic coverage of current affairs can be grateful that we can mark time so gloriously with this PBS series which picks up where Murrow, and documentary producers like Fred Freed, Ted Yates, Irving Gitlin, Perry Wolff and Jay McMullin left off.

Following is a record of the conversations with David Fanning. There has been a bit of tightening and the chronology has been changed in some cases. But all answers are verbatim.

UNGER: *What do you do that is different from network documentaries?*

FANNING: We are occupying a territory between television journalism and print journalism. Our task is a tough one. We do stories that no one else is doing or we find ways to do other stories in new ways. I believe that there is a place in TV for literate pursuits, for complex ideas, done in such a way that can intrigue an audience. In competition with all of the sound and fury of TV, this audience is becoming less and less prepared to sit down and indulge in an hour devoted to one subject.

My great fear is that a lot of intelligent thinkers and journalists have abandoned TV and in some cases been abandoned by TV.

UNGER: *Where does* Frontline *fit in the overall documentary scheme of things?*

FANNING: Look at expanded news coverage. There's *Nightline* which does very well a particular form of immediate coverage. But a *Frontline* usually takes six to nine months to make. Then there is the news documentary in which you work from transcripts, interviews and correspondents and an editor who cuts pictures to fit the words. That can work for one minute or two on the evening news or even 10 or 11 minutes on a magazine show. Try to do it for 55 minutes and it doesn't work. We have really divided

documentaries — non-fiction television — into some very limited forms and we've never really allowed it to flourish much on television. I think that is a great pity because we do depend so much on television for storytelling and information. The grammar is fairly predictable if you think about it: There is the standard network documentary style documentary which is divided into interviews and voice-overs and some action, a correspondent occasionally and then the occasional verité documentary. There is relatively little exploration of directorial authorship in terms of the form, the media and the ways of telling stories.

UNGER: *What do you think you are accomplishing with* Frontline?
FANNING: *Frontline* is filling a very real void in that there is no sustained public affairs, long-form documentary series anywhere else on television. As a result, it has to carry a lot of freight, it has to fill a lot of different needs. *Frontline* is an investigative documentary series and a series of sociological and political analysis, a series that contains essays and authored programs, films. And it has to do all of that at the same time as it remains entertaining and attracts a substantial audience to justify the money it costs to make.

It needs to be there week in, week out with some sense of surprise. So that we are continually balancing all of those elements as we program it and as we decide on particular subjects over others and work with certain producers, correspondents, and authors. And yet we only go on the air 26 weeks of the year. We barely touch the ideas and the problems and the connections we need to grapple with in the society. We wish we had more space and more time to take on so many of the stories we have to turn aside. On the other hand, we look around and see so little competition for those ideas — no competing series. There is some part of television that tries — *P.O.V.* is an attempt in public television to gather some other independent films under an umbrella, but it's limited in its reach as well. *Frontline* represents a place on television where people grapple with ideas and analyze and investigate the society and its structures other than in bite-size segments on a magazine program somewhere on commercial television where there really isn't even the time or the form to sustain any kind of inquiry. Intellectuals, authors, people with ideas, people who grapple, think hard about our society, have in large part abandoned television because they don't see either a place for them to put forth those ideas or find any sustenance for the intellectual dialogue.

UNGER: *Who's responsible for this and why?*
FANNING: Well, it's a complex dynamic. On the one level, it has certainly been that demands of form and the cost of making the long-form documentary is often a slow and very painstaking task. Six or nine months sometimes to make and it's a very complex collaboration between a number of people. Television is essentially a disposable medium. It tosses out material into the air on a minute-by-minute basis that's essentially irredeemable once it's gone out there. It doesn't have much shelf life. A fairly carefully wrought piece of work may not seem to have justified in terms of audience and commercial value its cost. And so, it has declined in the networks because they didn't see enough return on it.

UNGER: *Do you think surveys about attention spans have contributed to the downfall of documentaries?*
FANNING: No doubt. Television attention span is changed. People's willingness to sit through a sustained inquiry seems to have declined. We, on the other hand, attract a particular

kind of audience which has a longer attention span.

UNGER: *You think that would account in part for the short CNN* Special Assignments *which are spotted throughout the schedule? Do you think that is an answer or a solution?*
FANNING: It's a new form but its scope is limited by its length. I think that most of the pieces they produced have been between 7 and 15 minutes long. That's no different from a magazine piece on *20/20* or *60 Minutes* or *Prime-Time Live*. And in the case of CNN, it's not in a dependable place either. It's not in a place you can tune into. You catch it by accident. I'm really after something which I think in large part hasn't existed a great deal. Public television has been the nurturer of the documentary form because commercial television defined it in very particular, very rigid terms and that was within the documentary stance: *CBS Reports* and *ABC Close-Up* and *NBC White Papers* . They were of a particular kind and they were, after all, broken up by commercials. There's a particular form to network documentaries that's broken by a commercial. The chapters must be self-contained. There's no necessity to make a connection — a fluid connection — between the story we left before the commercial and the one that we pick up. It's a particular kind of form that fits the medium driven in part by the bucks it has put into it.

Television documentaries have been in the hands of a sort of priesthood. And they are generally very smart, self-motivated, organized people called producers and who worked in television news departments.

But many of the well-known television documentaries were made by producers really, who are in a way kind of producer/director/writers and they are kind of a breed of their own. Not that many of them do all those three things well or brilliantly. They are not always the best writers in the world, but they are always the best directors. They know how to get good cameramen sometimes. Some of them are better at putting together a good crew than others. But they have controlled that form for a long time and they have limited its potential because they have been less ready to draw in authors, people who grapple with ideas, people who have thought hard about subjects.

UNGER: *You think that in the perspective of television history one of the major achievements of PBS may be that it saved the long-form documentary from extinction?*
FANNING: I think that's a fair comment. I think that it certainly held the form by the hand while it tottered along. I don't think it's in very good health at this point. I think there is some hope for it and I think the hope is coming from an unexpected place: new technology.

UNGER: *You mean the video technology that makes it less expensive, more convenient?*
FANNING: Smaller cameras and more accessible tools: Hi-8, Super VHS— these small cameras are now accessible and there is a potential suddenly to open up the form because I think we could bring the cost down radically. There is a great potential for this new video technology.

UNGER: *Let's go back to the producers — the priesthood. How do you differ from them?*
FANNING: Oh, I don't differ from them. I'm not a theorist about television. I will give you opinions about this but I don't think I have a self-contained theory or analysis of television. I'm a fairly practical person in the sense that I understood at a certain point that I was not the Boy Wonder Director, that I am curious about the world and that I enjoy ideas, but there are many people who are a

lot smarter than I about those ideas. I think what I function as is a kind of publisher/editor in the literary sense of a small house that takes great joy in publishing a group of authors and will encourage and look for some fresh ones each year. And that my job lies in encouraging them to do their best work. That gives me great satisfaction. I differ only from those other producers — the priesthood — in that I recognize that we should try to draw many fresh voices into television.

UNGER: *How did your connection with Bill Moyers take place?*
FANNING: Well, we've done just a few things together. We've known each other for years and we've talked about opportunities.

UNGER: *Moyers' great dream was to have a regularly scheduled documentary series, so in a way, you are accomplishing what despite, all the work he's doing, he's not managed to do.*
FANNING: What *Frontline* isn't is a vehicle for a single person's ideas. It isn't certainly a vehicle for my ideas. *Frontline* is a collective work. It is the work of a collaboration between a group of people who decide on the ideas and a group of producers who bring ideas to *Frontline*. I can't say strongly enough that *Frontline* isn't my vision. I'm not behind the curtain as in the Wizard of Oz? I'm not the wizard. I'm not calling the shots on *Frontline*. It's a very collegial atmosphere.

UNGER: *Have you considered a single voice as the narrator of* Frontline?
FANNING: *Frontline* would be different if it were a continuing series with a single reporter host as anchor. It would change the nature of the series.

UNGER: *But that was the case at one time — you used Jessica Savitch and Judy Woodruff at one time.*
FANNING: They were only ringmasters. They were the people outside the tent.

UNGER: *Well, why did you use them?*
FANNING: It was a television convention. We found it helpful. People would say, "Oh, yes, that program with Judy Woodruff ..." I think Judy herself admitted that there was a point where we all realized that the series was able to stand on its own.

UNGER: *Let me go back before we go forward. You were born in South Africa and you came to the U.S. as an exchange student ...*
FANNING: I was born in South Africa in 1946. I came to this country in 1964 never having seen television. There was no television in South Africa. I remember my very first contact with television was here in New York. I walked into the students' dormitory living-room and there was a television set in the corner with a black-and-white picture and a boxing match on it. It was the first time I'd seen television. I spent a year in America as a foreign student in AFS (American Field Service) as a high school student in Newport Beach, California living with an American family. A wonderful experience. And then I returned to South Africa, went to university, edited the student newspaper at the University of Capetown, went into journalism. I decided to set myself up as an independent producer with a little bit of money from a rather grand man in South Africa called Beyers Naude who was a great defrocked Dutch Reform minister who formed a multiracial, interracial group called the Christian Institute.

He gave me some money to make a film in Soweto about African churches. And so I invented this documentary — I'd never seen a documentary — and then a second film about the church and apartheid. It was an attempt to make a film in South Africa by South Africans about South Africa and the BBC correspondent to Johan-

nesburg saw it during the rough cut and suggested that I take it to London which I did. To the BBC. And that was really my ticket out, that excuse to go to London.

UNGER: *Were you looking for a ticket out?*
FANNING: Yes. I always assumed that I would leave South Africa, that it was a place too limited. There was a world out there to explore.

UNGER: *How about the racial policy?*
FANNING: I was deeply troubled by that. I realized the limits in South Africa for the kind of political film-making I was attracted to. By the way, film-making seemed like hardly a kind of pursuit for a grown-up. It was not something I imagined I could ever actually make a living at. I thought I'd end up perhaps going back to university as an English professor or something. But I was troubled being a part of that economy.

It would be easy for me to portray myself as a conscientious objector who left the country for hard political reasons. I had great disagreements with the government's policy. And as a young student journalist, I'd been involved in that kind of reporting and continued to do that but in the little documentaries that I made. But I was under no direct threat. I was a middle-class white in South Africa who could have stayed on. It was just too limiting in its horizons.

UNGER: *Do you feel an obligation now to do South African material?*
FANNING: I'm probably more cautious to not appear to be tilting the editorial content towards South Africa. So we will do every few years a South African piece and I hope it's a piece that is significant.

But I'm just careful about South African shows. Lots of projects come my way but I tend to give them a little short shrift for not wanting to appear to influence opinion. After all, I am an American now.

I wasn't happy in England. I found it was as full of lines of class and color in it's own way as South Africa had been. I didn't feel comfortable. I was surprised because my culture is towards England and I expected to be more at home there. So I came back to California in 1972 and found myself wondering what to do with my life. I walked into KOCE, a small public television station in Huntington Beach, CA. And the day I came to see the head of production he told me there were no jobs, but that he was very pleased to meet someone from the BBC. It so happened that a cameraman appeared in his doorway: "I have to go and shoot tomorrow morning and I don't have anyone to go with me to produce a segment for the local magazine show."

I turned around and said: "Well, I'll go with you for fun." He was going to shoot the swallows coming back to Capistrano. So the next morning at 5 o'clock I met him and he rather liked to have somebody around to tell him what to do. We went down and I found amongst the crowds gathered in the dawn, a man who had a crowd around him and it turns out to be the man who had written the song "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano." So we got him to croon a verse or two and we shot our little piece. I found myself in their editing room cutting it. So that was my way of maneuvering myself into public television. And actually, it was really the place where I learned my craft. Because they hired me eventually as a cinematographer/editor.

Together with a colleague who is now a Hollywood director doing very fine work, we were the two resident film makers and we each had access to the cameras and an editing room. We went out with a sound man and a camera truck, a jeep and we would shoot stories around Orange County. In the course of that, I would shoot segments for the local little news

magazine program and link them, so that we would do a series of eight- or ten-minute stories or seven- or eight-minute stories that ran over several weeks and then I would recut them and put them together as a half-hour documentary. So we were making, and cutting and shooting and directing and writing lots and lots of short pieces and in the course of it making documentaries for very little money. And it was four years of the most wonderful sort of self-taught school in the course of which I did a number of documentaries including persuading the BBC to co-produce a documentary.

I made a number of documentaries that made their way across into the network — into PBS — and were run nationally. And it was through one of those documentaries that I was asked to come and talk to WGBH. Then, as sort of a one-man band, I cut a program which was called *The Agony of Independence*. I then suggested to PBS that we do more of those kinds of programs — international stories about hot spots. I wrote a little proposal and as a result of that, I was invited by Peter McGee at WGBH to come and look at their proposal for a series called *World* and consider coming as executive producer. Well, I was quite amazed and not that interested because I thought an executive producer was somebody who basically put his name on the end of somebody else's work which I think is usually true.

It was only when I came to WGBH and discovered that WGBH is, in effect, in its national production, a series of small fiefdoms where executive producers have a strand of programs under them and a great deal of freedom. The great gift of WGBH is the power it has given its executive producers to make television free of any real pressures.

UNGER: *Didn't you work with* Panorama ?

FANNING: *Panorama* is the British ongoing investigative news documentary series. We did some co-productions with them, but *World* was launched in 1978 and over the course of the next four years, did some 50 films. The ones you may remember were films like *The Killing of Sadat* and *Death of a Princess*. There's a wonderful film called *Chachaji*, the story of Ved Mehta's blind Indian uncle in India.

UNGER: Death of a Princess *was the program which attracted the most attention to you, wasn't it?*

FANNING: It was an original. It came about as a result of the collaboration between Anthony Thomas who was one of the film makers that we had seen during that first year of screening films. We had done a number of films with him. Anthony came to me with this little smidgeon of information about a Saudi girl who'd allegedly been killed. We agreed to co-produce and to try to do a documentary and went around interviewing with tape recorders various people in the Middle East and in Europe about the circumstances of the girl's death.

We found out that there were many versions of her life and death and that there were some pieces that cross-referenced but a lot of it was people projecting their own ideas about the girl. And so when we sat down with these transcripts of the research interviews, we realized that we were never going to get them to agree to do a documentary interview. What lay in those transcripts was an extraordinary opportunity to edit the transcripts down and in one case, use the actual people who told them. It became a docudrama, the fictional version of a real journey of discovery.

UNGER: *But you have said that you don't do docudramas.*

FANNING: I don't any more. I mean for *Frontline*. I make a particular rule for *Frontline*, but I would be delighted

to do another docudrama elsewhere.

UNGER: *Wasn't it dangerous to do* Death of a Princess? *Weren't there threats against you?*
FANNING: Yes. It would now, in these days of *Satanic Verses,* be a dangerous thing to do.

UNGER: *Did that controversy help or hinder you in the new series?*
FANNING: Well, it may have helped me in some ways because I had some notoriety. We were doing something very serious in the film which was that we were accusing the king's brother of murder. That's why the Saudi Arabian government was so upset by it. What happened as a result of that to me personally was that I was invited to Hollywood. So I had my nine-month flirtation with Hollywood.

UNGER: *That was before* Frontline?
FANNING: Before *Frontline.* Eventually, I made a decision to come back to WGBH where they had given me the freedom to go off and pursue this will o' the wisp in Hollywood. So I came back very happy to do so and found myself settling into starting up *Frontline.*

UNGER: *Did WGBH have to contribute a great part of the funds?*
FANNING: The series is the creature of a consortium of five stations — WGBH (Boston), WNET (New York), KCTS (Seattle), WPBT (Miami) and WTVS (Detroit).

UNGER: *How did that come about?*
FANNING: It was a political necessity. It would not have been possible to push all the money through WGBH. And so, there was a necessity to get a wider range of stations that had input to the design of the series. And that consortium, which constitute a governing board, have the authority to hire and fire the executive producer and to set policy.

UNGER: *Do you have constant contact with them?*
FANNING: We meet four times a year. We inform them of films in production and ask for any suggestions they may have for upcoming programs.

UNGER: *Were there things that you were refused permission to go ahead with?*
FANNING: Never. I've never, ever had any interference with either the governing board or from WGBH in any way whatsoever. It's been extraordinary.

UNGER: *Do you think WGBH has become the major center that originates PBS programming these days? Has it taken over from say, WNET in New York?*
FANNING: Oh, there's a long history of competition , if you will, between WGBH and WNET for primacy in public television. But WNET produces very different sorts of works. WNET has had a longer record of doing dramatic work and series like *Nature* and *Great Performances.* There is at the heart of WGBH, a reverence for ideas and for the thoughtful examination of ideas. That's because people like Peter McGee, who is the head of national programming at WGBH, has that intellectual curiosity and I think it passes on down. It's a tradition. It is, as far as I am concerned, quite the best television station in the country to work in and to be a part of.

UNGER: *How is* Frontline *funded now?*
FANNING: Sometimes it's funded by PBS from the National Program Service. Then, there's the partnership between CPB and the public television stations.

UNGER: *Does that seem to be working?*
FANNING: Well, we're now for the first time dealing with a budget

directly from PBS. They have, in response to our request for an increase in order to handle the additional costs of more timely programs and more productions, turned down that increase and have forced us to hold level funding with the season ten coming up. So they're actually putting the squeeze on us. And they say that they do it regretfully, that they would like to put more money into *Frontline* because it is very important to them to maintain *Frontline*. But there's a definite squeeze that's going to affect the number of programs that we're doing and it will affect the program mix.

UNGER: *Just how does* Frontline *function? How many of the staff are producers? Freelancers?*
FANNING: It has a few producers on staff–two at the moment. The central staff is editorial and administrative, and a post-productive staff that packages, but the bulk of *Frontlines* are done by independent producers who produce on contract to us under a set of guidelines that are agreed on when we plan the contract which gives *Frontline* the editorial responsibility for the final program.

UNGER: *What percentage of your shows are purchased?*
FANNING: Very few. We will co-produce. We almost never buy programs already completed. *Frontline* has an editorial heart which is made up of myself and two senior producers and a series editor, an executive editor, Lou Wiley (a longtime colleague) who respond to the ideas that producers bring to us and there is a kind of cadre of producers as a small publishing house. We have authors who have done successful work who we support and who we continue to support year in and year out.

UNGER: *Do you find that many people come to you because there's really no place else to go?*
FANNING: Our problem is there are too many people. Parenthetically, I think networks in the future will probably be turning to independents more to produce documentaries. But what we do is work with a group of producers who have done successful work and who I think are the best documentary film makers in the country and who continue to do fine, fine work year in and year out. So we support those and every year we try to draw a few new people. In the course of the last nine years, we've had some 60 producers work on *Frontlines* at various times.
UNGER: What kind of a weekly audience do you have?
FANNING: We get about anything from 6 to 9 million people depending on how successful the *Frontline* is at drawing an audience.

UNGER: *Do you find that the lighter programs get the largest audience?*
FANNING: If we put sex, murder or death in the title, we're going to do well.

UNGER: *Do you feel that you have a mix which includes more popular-type programs?*
FANNING: Well, we definitely have to program the series on a week-to-week basis and find a mix of hard, investigative and sociological dramatic stories that makes a weekly surprise. Editing a weekly or monthly magazine is the closest parallel. When the magazine hits the news rack, you want to be surprised each week. *Election Held Hostage* was not a great ratings film. It was a serious piece of journalism and there will be others which don't necessarily get high audiences but we will do other films that we think are important. We must always remind the audience that *Frontline* is there and doing strong and powerful work.

UNGER: *Do you ever do anything that you feel is almost entirely for a popular audience demanding entertainment or titillation?*
FANNING: No! We never do some-

thing purely for entertainment. *Innocence Lost* is a very powerful and dramatic film about child abuse at a day-care center. But the heart of it is a profound question about these sorts of trials and about whether justice has been done. So it's got a tough edge to it. We will never spend the money that it takes to make a major documentary that doesn't carry the kind of freight in the end which deals with either important public policy or personal morality.

UNGER: *What is that amount of money?*
FANNING: We spend anything from $250,000 to $500,000 on a documentary.

UNGER: *What's been the most expensive that you've done?*
FANNING: We spent $700,000 on the big biography of Sacharov that opened the season. But that's unusual. We got some extra money from a co-production in Britain and we got some extra money out of public television by putting it in pledge week. But that's high.

UNGER: *How do you feel the upcoming elections will be covered? What changes would you make in the way they have been covered? Would you like to take part in the 1992 coverage?*
FANNING: Our contribution last time around was to do the biographies of Bush and Dukakis. It was a program that any network could have made and which was a major contribution to the campaign coverage. But we chose not to do the kind of coverage that is done on the networks — the horse race, in effect. Commercial television, because of its peculiar machinery of news, will cover the election in much the same way as it always has. But I think that what's bound to be missing is analysis of the state of the democracy and of voter participation because I think people feel disenfranchised. In fact, the gap between the governed and the governing has grown wider. So one of the things I hope we will contribute is two or three hours devoted to a major piece of reporting on the state of democracy.

UNGER: How about the debate format? Do you think that's out?
FANNING: I think it's become so rigid in its formal structure that it allows very little room for surprise. I'd encourage the idea of some free time to candidates. I think it would be important to have candidates given more time to expand on subjects. But I really miss the kind of "truth squad" that television could promise the people— to have a substantial group of journalists of all stripes digging continually behind the stories of money and coverage and campaign foibles to in effect, deconstruct the political jargon and to reassess for us continually the realities outside of the campaign. If we stay on the campaign trail with those candidates, we are by definition blinkered. And so, it requires a kind of alternative reporting about the country and about what matters.

UNGER: *Are the commercial networks likely to change?*
FANNING: I think they'd like to. I think there are a good and genuine people in the networks who would like to. But I think that the machinery is well-oiled and self-sustaining. But there are limitations to what any reporter, no matter how sharp, can do when he's continually on a bus and on a plane and caught up in the wake of the campaign. Plus having to only do it in a minute and a half or two minutes or every four minutes. They're limited in what they can do — and yet they're bound by their inherent competitiveness to all be doing the same things. Their reports are interchangeable. It seems so sad that we could not somehow harness the enormous power and money and production potential of the network news

divisions to scour the country in an election year.

UNGER: *Won't* Frontline *try to do so?*
FANNING: We'll try in our limited way. We will do three hours on democracy with William Greider. We will report on things like the Resolution Trust Corporation. Greider is the journalist who's writing a major book on democracy. We will look at the culture of Washington, the government that is for hire, the consultants, the lobbyists, the way in which government really works and we will look for the grass roots, we'll report on where democracy is trying to take power to itself in small corners of the country because people no longer trust in government, Washington or the State House to solve their problems.

UNGER: *Have you had many problems with demands for equal time?*
FANNING: No, we haven't actually. *Frontline* has been remarkably clear of any major lawsuits of any sort. Nothing of any consequence. The only real criticism comes from special interest groups, both and left and right.

UNGER: *How about the magazine format shows vs. the long form? Do you think that* 60 Minutes *and* 20/20 *and* Prime Time Live *are what the public wants or is it merely what the networks believe they want?*
FANNING: Well, I think they're kind of the meat and potatoes of television journalism these days and they will continue that way. *60 Minutes* is particularly successful because it's such a clever format and because executive producer Don Hewitt has these three or four popular slots in there. It's very convenient to be able to program a mixture of some hard journalism and celebrity profiles and exotic places. It's a brilliant format which will continue to work. Television often depends in large part on predictability, and I think on a kind of familiarity. *20/20* has some familiarity now. Barbara Walters is going to do a certain sort of thing and Hugh Downs is going to be a certain sort of presence. There is now a certain quality ascribed to *20/20*. *Prime Time Live* is still looking for its identity. But they will all continue — they have a very real use. But they always seem to be kind of creatures of compromise between the need to do the celebrity profile and their hard journalism which will never allow them to ever get themselves into a story that they have to sustain. *20/20* is the exception where they do turn a more important story sometimes into an hour — but it's very rare and it's kind of limited.

UNGER: *How about* 48 Hours?
FANNING: I think *48 Hours* is a very clever combination of technology, production techniques and a news department's resources but it has severe limitations because it is essentially a collage of pieces built around a single subject. It's an extended news program. It's very hard under the pressures of producing that program weekly and of also keeping a kind of vividness to it, a kind of news "hot" level or to ever draw an intellectual line through it that has the hand of an author.

UNGER: *How about the tabloid magazines? Do you think there's a permanent place for* Hard Copy, A Current Affair *and all the newer variations?*
FANNING: They're inevitable. They will continue to be part of television just as much as the tabloids have become a fact of life in American newspapers. I think they will remain. Both of those forms — the tabloid magazine shows and the serious magazine shows represent a kind of a problem in the end for television and television literacy. Magazine programs breed a kind of production quality which is very specific to itself, a kind of way of making television which, when you combine that with a

kind of dubious tabloid journalism, becomes a methodology that doesn't encourage producers, authors, writer/reporters and directors who understand what it is to seek out and grapple with the difficult ideas about society and the kind of challenges society faces.

The great tragedy, the thing that upsets me most in looking down the road of television is that I don't see a lot of people rising up out of the rest of television who are ready to take on those more complex issues, let alone find a place to do them in. Just the sheer intellectual discipline of it is not being encouraged at least today. You see, we're still reaping the benefits of *CBS Reports* and *ABC's Close-up* and some of those documentary strands. We still have those producers who learnt their craft in that kind of shop.

UNGER: *When you say "we," do you mean* Frontline?
FANNING: Yes. We still have those people around and available to us. I see footage that comes to us occasionally from producers who have learnt their craft in magazine television and I see something missing. The material is built on emotion and it fits a kind of smaller box, but it's not really concerned with intellectual connections and with seeking out grander ideas. It is hard to do subtle, intellectual work in television and it takes a careful balancing. It's a kind of house of cards to put interviews and sequences and pieces together with a line of narration and try to make something that's a solid idea. And I don't see a lot of people surfacing with those kind of skills.

UNGER: *Are you saying that we will soon see the end of the documentary?*
FANNING: Well, I don't see any place where it can flourish. If I came to this country now, almost 20 years later than I came, I wouldn't have many places to look to see the kind of examples that I would want to have for the sort of documentaries that I would think I would want to make. I would like to think that *Frontline* is such a place.

UNGER: *So, in a way,* Frontline *is the last stand.*
FANNING: *Frontline* is unexpectedly unique now. What is surprising to me now as I cross the Atlantic is to find that there is nothing quite like it in Britain either. In Britain, there are many, many documentaries and where indeed there is a kind of vital society of documentary film makers who make many forms and I think have a much more vigorous tradition than we do in this country. But when I go there now, I find that even there they're kind of devolved now into 14-minute long programs that are slice-of-life bits. There are arts documentaries, but there is nothing quite like the kind of major documentary of the week that we feel we do that not only tells a story and is full of human passion but also has a hard political story or even a hard sociological story at the heart of it. Our film on schizophrenia, a major piece of work, sits cheek by jowl with an investigation of the White House's conduct of the war. But I don't see anything quite like that anywhere else.

UNGER: *How about the talk shows? Like Oprah, Geraldo and Donahue?*
FANNING: I think they're terrific. I think they're great watching. They have essentially a tabloid air to them. But, I think it's an interesting form. It's so successful because it's quite a popular entertainment form that often just titillates. But in between times, I think they take on some good subjects. They err on the side of human passions.

UNGER: *Do you think that they are taking the place of serious discussions of current events on TV?*
FANNING: Television never did have any really serious discussions

on current events, did it? It's always been on Sunday morning or really not at all. Serious discussions have never really had a real place on television.

UNGER: *How about the dinner-hour news? So many people have access to the news during the day or CNN ...*
FANNING: They're clearly eroding, aren't they? And yet there needs to be a kind of news broadcast of record. A lot of people talk about whether or not we can sustain or whether or not the society is interested in having three of them. I suppose the question is: which of the three networks will first decide that it's evening newscast is expendable.

UNGER: *What would the ideal funding situation be for you?*
FANNING: With an annual budget of $11 million, we will be level funded three years down the road. We aren't looking for a corporate funder–we would instead like a foundation-based endowment. It's a dream to cushion ourselves against the future. In 1993 we will be facing problems.

In an ideal world, I'd have a workshop of Hi8 cameras with print journalists. It's like carrying an electronic pencil in your pocket. I would encourage a wider number of people to think about longer-form TV. As the technology becomes cheaper and access to the tools becomes easier there are many writers who should expand into the TV form. The Hi8 and camcorder have democratized TV production. I would encourage writers, too, to try to do things in the essay form. Too often somebody writes something on the word processor and gives it to an editor who cuts pictures to it. There's a very different process of writing for TV. The narration is only the glue that draws it together in the end.

UNGER: *If PBS told you to go ahead with election coverage without regard to funding, what would you do?*

FANNING: I would set up some sort of truth squad — hire a dozen of the best journalists to report on the issues and how they are being handled by the candidates. That could be done very simply with a roundtable of reporters to report on what they have observed first hand. Then, I would use the town-meeting format with all candidates making their pitch and the cameras thrown open to quotations. I would stay away from the campaign trail which is often what the networks cover exclusively.

UNGER: *How would you describe your own position?*
FANNING: I guess I am closest in function to a literary editor. Famous editor Maxwell Perkins would be the honored literary tradition that I aspire to.

UNGER: *I'm sure you'd hope to find your Tom Wolfe among the aspiring filmmakers...*
FANNING: I would hope that talented people would come along and I could help them do their work and encourage them to do more. That's my function on *Frontline*. I am not the Czar of Documentaries ... I'm half impressario, half psychologist.

UNGER: *So what's next for David Fanning?*
FANNING: I was courted heavily in this last year to go to a network. And so I thought hard about what I'd do and where I'd do it and looked at the opportunity to earn much more money and to have some access to a network's resources, perhaps to develop more long-form documentary and prime-time specials. At first I dismissed it, having sort of almost automatically learned to dismiss that. Then I engaged in some serious conversations and thought about it hard and made a choice to stay with WGBH and *Frontline* because of the extraordinary privilege it is to have access to the freedom of *Frontline* and

the kind of dialogue that takes place there every day. And the ability within that dialogue to make decisions — to encourage decisions.

I have this extraordinary opportunity which I am still amazed by and will always be grateful for, that I would lose immediately by going into the kind of environment in a network with competing egos and all of the limitations of network television and of corporate broadcasting.

UNGER: *How do you personally relieve the intensity?*
FANNING: I have recently found a private life for myself which gives me satisfaction.

UNGER: *What is that?*
FANNING: Well, I have two pursuits that I am involved in. One is that I go fishing — that's my place to meditate. The other one is that I paint. I have this very curious 19th-century pursuit which is that I paint portraits and still lifes. And I like that because there's something documentary about it I suppose.

UNGER: *This is an impossible question but I'll ask it anyway. If you were making a documentary about David Fanning, what would be the positive and negative thing that you'd search out?*
FANNING: Well, I think that the most positive character trait I have is my enthusiasm for ideas, a kind of encouragement of people and their ideas. I think some skill at being able to dissect the content and grammar of being a quick study on the content and the grammar of a documentary and being a useful editor. I think those are the things that I do best. Best of all, I'm a kind of cheerleader for other people's work. I get more credit for their work than I'm due and that's the negative. Consequently, I am a little lazy about pursuing areas that *Frontline* could be stretched into, where I think other people could be stretched. I think I'm a bit quixotic. As a consequence of being a bit of an intellectual dilettante. I find myself skipping across subjects and areas too quickly. Therefore, I surround myself with people who are the opposite of that and who are careful and thoughtful and who work more thoroughly with some of these subjects than I do. I try to compensate for that.

UNGER: *Which of these adjectives would best describe you? Happy?*
FANNING: Happy, yes.

UNGER: *Satisfied?*
FANNING: No, I'm never satisfied.

UNGER: *How about cheerful?*
FANNING: Yes.

UNGER: *Ambitious?*
FANNING: No.

UNGER: *Optimistic? Or pessimistic?*
FANNING: Yes. Optimistic.

UNGER: *Content?*
FANNING: No. There are other things I want to do. I love Italy. I go to Florence as often as I can in the summer to study with a painter in Florence. I am a great lover of the landscape and the food. If I had my druthers, I think I would probably be content to go back to Italy and spend my lifetime painting.

UNGER: *And eating?*
FANNING: Both painting and eating. In the company of good friends. What could be better? ■

In seventeen years of writing about television for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Arthur Unger has won national recognition as one of the medium's most influential critics. He is also known for his revealing interviews with TV, stage and film personalities.

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LETTER FROM THE UK: **FOGGY DAYS IN LONDON TOWN**

BY JOHN PUTNAM

LONDON

British broadcasting's long, clammy summer is over.

With 16 commercial TV franchises up for grabs via an unprecedented auction, the suspense ended October 15 amid tears and cheers as four licenses changed hands. Biggest loser was Thames Television, longtime holder of the London weekday franchise and anchor of the advertiser-supported ITV network. Another was TVS Entertainment, which covers the economically rich southern region of England and is parent of Hollywood program supplier MTM.

The new licenses run for ten years starting January 1, 1993. Thames, which had the capital franchise since 1968, is the producer of the *Benny Hill* comedy shows (a Don Taffner syndication hit in the U.S.) and the *World At War* documentary series narrated by Laurence Olivier, also *Rumpole of the Old Bailey* popular on PBS in the states. A specialist in high-rated sitcoms, several of which have been adapted by American networks, it was outbid by Carlton Communications, a conglomerated TV and video facilities concern whose holdings include Technicolor labs. Thames, which owns USA-based Reeves Communications Corp., intends to remain in business as a production house, and is said to be already talking deals here with the BBC.

Auction winners included Disney, a member of the Sunrise consortium that unseated TV-am for the national breakfast service franchise on the ITV channel. One of the losers was NBC, part of a rival group that also had bid for the morning franchise.

A key winner, though it was outbid by a single challenger, was Manchester-based Granada Television, oldest of the ITV stations, which presumably won on the basis of distinguished output. Its inventory ranges from *Brideshead Revisited* and *Jewel In The Crown*, to the weekly *World in Action* news documentaries and the long-running prime time serial *Coronation Street*.

The long summer ordeal began last May 15, deadline for tenders which drew a total of 40 bids — an unprecedented high-stakes crap shoot whose legislative basis was formulated by the ruling Conservative party then headed by Margaret Thatcher. The move had the support of most of the Tory press. But when the verdicts came out, even most of those same lackeys were as stunned — and appalled — as the broadcast establishment.

"The Great TV Auction Farce,"

headlined the *London Evening Standard*, a Tory cheerleader. Rupert Murdoch's once (but no longer) magisterial *Times of London* editorially declared the whole weird business a "fiasco," as did most other papers. At a press conference called to announce the bidding outcome, a wag drew limp laughs by remarking, "this is what happens when you let politicians interfere with the media."

As a method of awarding franchises, in fact, almost everyone now considers the auction principle a huge and ludicrous blunder. The Prime Minister, John Major, called it a "disaster" and promised there will be no repeat if he has anything to say about it the next time around.

The stunning loss of Thames Television franchise drew especially sharp criticism. Anthony Smith, president of Magdalen College, Oxford and a founding director of Channel 4 Television writing in the *Observer*, lamented " ... the destruction of Thames TV, probably the most creative and dedicated of our television companies, and a company which took it to be its duty to investigate (most notably in the programme *Death on the Rock*) the darker side of our politics."

The bizarre idea (which never occurred anywhere else) owed something to the proclaimed passion of the since-defrocked Thatcher to transform economically inefficient Britain into an "enterprise culture," a model of deregulated liberal economics. A model, in fact, to make Adam Smith wince. But it's hard to escape the conclusion that political spite also played a role in subjecting broadcasting, one of Britain's great glories, to so eccentric a method of choosing who gains access to the public's airwaves.

The belief in political retaliation as a factor attaches mainly to the ouster of Thames, which produced *Death on the Rock*, a famous documentary about a celebrated incident on the island of Gibraltar in which U.K. undercover agents shot and killed several unarmed and unresisting Irish Republican "terrorists." The program branded the agents, and by extension the government, as the real trigger-happy terrorists.

Thames stoutly denied charges of malice or corrupt journalistic practice and was subsequently exonerated by Lord Windlesham's commission of inquiry, but the station's backing for the documentary continued to rankle the Tory leadership. As the *Evening Standard* would come to note, "it was seen as the first nail in Thames's coffin."

The agent of auction upheaval was the Independent Television Commission, successor to the old Independent Broadcasting Authority as regulator of commercial radio and TV here. Precisely how the ITC reached its confusing decisions may never be known.

As mandated by parliament, the ITC's original task was simply, and even more astonishingly, to award licenses to the highest bidders, provided only that they could satisfy the commission as to financial requirements. But after much lobbying by incumbent licensees and others, the government was persuaded to add another proviso, this one requiring all bidders to meet a programming "quality threshold" test. For the industry, that was crucial (witness the sparing of Granada's hide); for the government, it was probably devised as a sop to square itself with anxious broadcasters and other critics of the auction game.

If we know nothing about the ITC's deliberations, we do at least know that the agency somehow contrived a certain political balance. If dumping Thames was sweet revenge for the Tories, the same fate for likewise outbid TV-am was not. For Thatcher, in fact, it was a dramatic embarrassment, in that the breakfast operation had been the apple of her eye ever

since it routed restrictive union practices (a great Thatcher bugaboo) and re-programmed itself into a populist hit at the BBC's expense. So distraught was Thatcher as the architect of the bidding system, that she sent TV-am's head a hand-written letter of abject apology, accepting responsibility for the station's ironic grief.

Though some safeguards are in place, one result of Conservative broadcast legislation is that the industry is now open to foreign ownership penetration. Besides Disney and NBC, other challenging consortia members included United Artists, Italy's Rizzoli publishing empire and Polygram, the Dutch-based international record giant. Though the actual foreign element is slight at the moment, Peat Marwick, the multinational accounting firm, believes foreign penetration will significantly increase in a few years. If true, what many Brits fear is cultural corruption as their dear little island becomes a staging post for all kinds of mid-Atlantic shlock. There are two sides to this, but they may be right to be worried.

There are other concerns. When the new license period starts in 1993, what's been known as ITV since the advent of commercial TV in the 1950s will become simply Channel Three. And along with that change, it will also get a solitary programming and scheduling czar, replacing the long-standing network committee system dominated by the five major stations. The concern, of course, is that it not only invests too much power in a single individual, but requires of that person the Solomonic wisdom to harmonize commercial imperatives with the public interest, convenience and necessity. Is there such a person? Could there possible be one?

Adding to this worry is an early and euphemistic Independent Television Commission promise to regulate with a "light touch." Draw your own inference as to what they could mean for performance standards in an age so acutely and often ruthlessly attuned to the bottom line.

Others also fear that the new commercial system, faced with the prospect of a fragmenting market and an uncertain advertising economy in the years ahead, will have nowhere to move but downscale, and that such a drift may well compel the public service standard-bearer BBC to follow suit, or at least to temper its devotion to principles, for the sake of retaining its audience share and its justification for continuing the annual license fee that funds it. The new Channel Three licensees have moved quickly to counter such speculation. Obviously, time will tell. But the concern is both real and ratio.

But the strongest concern stems from the suspicion, widely shared, that the new deregulated age engineered under Thatcher signals the beginning of the end for the BBC as the nation has known it since the seminal days of its first Director General, John Reith. There is already inspired talk of carving up the national broadcaster, and even of subjecting some of its two-channel airtime to commercialization.

John Major has said no way, yet who knows? But in any event, it isn't likely to happen before 1996 when the BBC's royal charter is up for renewal. One thing to keep in mind, though, is that the BBC has never been short of political enemies. Within Britain itself, it has always been more esteemed in the breach than in the observance. To put it another way, BBC-bashing has always been a great British sport even as the British have always been pleased to take bows for it.

In all this, of course, there are some implications for American TV and cable, and indeed for broadcasters around the globe, since Britain is second only to the U.S and a world supplier of TV programming. It's too soon, however, to say more

than that.

The benefits to independent TV producers have been over-stated by advocates — few as they may be — of the new setup. They claim that it opens the door wider to the indies; actually, they haven't gained much. A 1989 government decision decreed that all broadcasters, including the BBC, must allocate 25% of their air time to outside, independent producers. In fact, the Broadcasting Act of 1990 reaffirmed that directive.

The bidding system certainly was a hare-brained way to dispose of the public's airwaves. But consider other absurdities about it. Right up to that May 15 deadline for tenders, incumbent licensees couldn't be sure of a free ride, hence felt obliged to bid their notion of the franchise value (in some cases upwards of $50 million), not reducible or refundable in the event no rival bid materialized and which, moreover, is the sum they will have to pay annually to the treasury.

As it turned out, several incumbent licensees discovered they had been unopposed after all and must now be kicking themselves for not submitting the lowest possible bid, £1,000.

Another absurdity is that bidders were required to submit detailed financial (income and expenditure) projections for the full 10-year life of the franchise. You would need an infallible crystal ball to know what economic conditions will be like next month, never mind a year or five or 10 onward. And besides, how many companies outside of Japan even think, let alone plan, that far ahead?

And there's more to the upheaval confronting the old commercial broadcasting order. By 1993, Channel Four will be cut loose from its ownership by the terminal IBA. It will then have to sell its own advertising time instead of the present arrangement whereby it's funded by annual subsidies the IBA levies pro rata on the ITV stations as a quid pro quo for the stations' exclusive right to peddle spots on Channel Four. In short, it will be the end of the advertising monopoly enjoyed by ITV from its start.

Adventurous C4 has been dedicated from its beginning in the early 80s to alternative or niche programming, an admirable policy that has also cost it dearly in the ratings. The worry now is that once it becomes self-financing, it may feel compelled to slot more popular shows to make itself more advertiser-friendly.

Despite concerns the market won't be able to bear it, still more competition for the TV advertising dollar looms later in the decade from an independent new national network called Channel Five, details of which remain hazy at best. But the powers that be say it's still in the works.

The revolution under way also includes the multichannel British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) satellite operation controlled by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, and which also carries advertising. Its programming is populist (heavy on vintage American shows); if it can build on its currently modest household penetration (for which dishes are required), it will almost certainly feed fears of a downscale tilt. BSkyB, moreover, is beyond the reach of British regulators because it beams down from Astra, a satellite owned by continental investors.

BSkyB has been losing buckets of money for Murdoch, whose global media empire is up to here in debt. The outfit's managers are optimistic, but Murdoch & co., strapped as it is, may not be able to see it through. For U.K. terrestrial broadcasters facing a decade of stiff competition for dwindling advertising, their best hope is just that. ■

John Putnam is an American journalist resident in London who writes regularly about the media.

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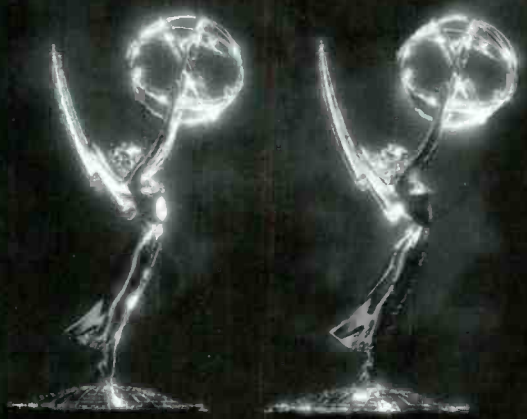

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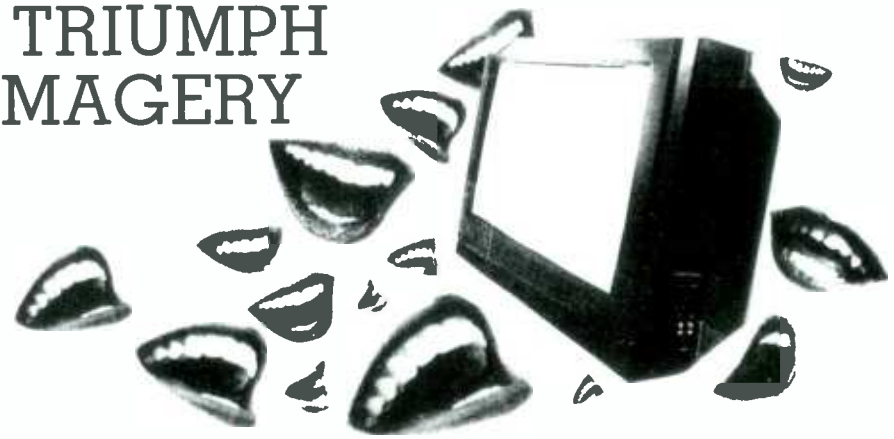

BY SIG MICKELSON

Editor's note: This article is excerpted from Sig Mickelson's book From Whistle Stop to Sound Bite: Four decades of Politics and Television; *Praeger, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, New York.*

This revealing history by a major figure in radio and television journalism is especially relevant as the nation approaches another presidential election, and the debate continues as to how broadcasting can best serve the democratic system. –RMP

When New York advertising agency executive Rosser Reeves strode into a private dining room at the 21 Club one night in the summer of 1952, a new era in political campaigning was about to get under way. It was to be an era that would see television rapidly becoming a dominant and frequently controversial influence for winning public support for political candidates. Reeves, a creative specialist at the Ted Bates Agency in New York, an agency noted for hard-sell tactics, arrived with storyboards in hand. He was there to convince members of the Eisenhower for President high command that they should launch a spot commercial campaign on television stations across the country. His aim was to urge the Eisenhower leadership to supplement their traditional campaign methods with a novel approach that had no precedent in presidential elections.

The audience for the Reeves presentation included Walter Williams, the chairman of the Citizens for Eisenhower organization; Sidney Weinberg, an investment banker and treasurer of the campaign organization; two more investment bankers, John Hay Whitney and Ogden White; Walter Thayer, one of Whitney's closest associates; and Robert Mullen, who had been the campaign's public relations advisor. By the time the dinner was over, Reeves had his go-ahead. It was not wholly unexpected. Whitney was the host. He had scheduled the dinner after talking at length with Reeves about the plan. Mullen says that Whitney had "stars in his eyes" as he introduced Reeves and his revolutionary approach to winning the election. His enthusiasm was apparently contagious. Support was unanimous. Once the go-ahead decision was reached, Whitney assumed the responsibility for obtaining the required funding. Reeves himself would write the commercials and oversee production.

In fact, Reeves was not the first

person to propose using television spot commercials. Four years earlier, in 1948, E.H. Little, chairman of the board of Colgate Palmolive, had asked the Ted Bates Agency, at which Reeves was an executive, to prepare a schedule of 60-second spots to support the Dewey campaign for the presidency. Some sample spots were produced, but Dewey rejected the proposal. His decision to reject the plan was supported by Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn, his agency of record.

Another Eisenhower enthusiast with a communications background, Alfred Hollender, also thought that the general's campaign should not overlook the possibility of developing a spot campaign. Hollender, an advertising executive who had served as a communications officer on Eisenhower's staff during the war, had approached both the general and his brother Milton before Reeves made his presentation at 21, urging them to consider the use of spots to support the coming campaign. Both had been sufficiently intrigued by the suggestion that by the time Reeves unwrapped his storyboards, a favorable climate had already been created.

While political commercials of 60 seconds or less had no precedent on television, spot radio commercials had been employed 16 years earlier in 1936, to support Alf Landon's campaign for the presidency. Advertising agencies had been involved in politics as early as 1916. The George H. Batten Company of Buffalo, New York, a predecessor of BBDO, had placed print advertising in Charles Evans Hughes's campaign for the presidency. Advertising and politics had thus established a nodding acquaintance prior to 1952 but no firm relationship. With the advent of television that would change abruptly.

The Eisenhower spots were simple and direct. Reeves, on a six-week leave from his duties at Ted Bates, wrote them himself, using previous Eisenhower speeches and newspaper articles about the campaign as his source material. The standard format called for an off-camera announcer to open with the line "Eisenhower answers the nation!" An "ordinary citizen" on camera would then ask a question. A typical one read, "Mr. Eisenhower, what about the high cost of living?" The answer from the general, "My wife, Mamie, worries about the same thing. I tell her it's our job to change that on November 4." This rather mild approach to highlighting campaign issues is a far cry from the "attack" and "image" commercials that came into vogue with the Johnson-Goldwater campaign only 12 years later and grew in volume and acerbity from election to election thereafter.

Both CBS and NBC were skittish about accepting the Eisenhower commercials for their owned and operated stations. The Bates Agency tried to place them but failed. Managements of both networks regarded them as undignified, excessively abbreviated, and only a caricature of the candidate's views. BBDO then took over the function from Bates and succeeded in convincing network management to accept the full schedule for their own stations. That step opened the gates to widespread acceptance.

Reeves and General Eisenhower collaborated on 50 one-minute commercials that were placed on stations across the country at a cost of $1.5 million — a substantial sum then, a pittance now. The Democrats were either too idealistic at the point to try their hand at commercial spots or were caught asleep at the switch. Late in the campaign they caught on to the impact of the Eisenhower announcements and produced a limited schedule of their own, but it was a matter of too little and too late. Their total bill by Election Day

amounted to only $77,000, a little more than 5 percent of the GOP expenditure.

It is ironic that the recommendation for the use of spot commercials did not come from one of the three agencies — BBDO, Young and Rubicam, and Kudner — that had been engaged to work on the Eisenhower campaign. Even though television was barely four years old, all three boasted extensive experience in both commercial production and political campaigning. It remains a mystery why none of them beat Rosser Reeves and Al Hollender to the punch. It may be that they too were squeamish about mixing techniques for inducing voters to cast ballots for political candidates. Or perhaps they just did not think of it. Campaign staffs were still thinking in traditional terms. Agencies, too, although they were experimenting with a new technology, were generally applying that new technology to traditional campaign procedures.

It is easier to understand how it would never occur to members of the Eisenhower high command to support their candidate with the same techniques used to sell soap and cereals. They were remarkably alert to television's capacity to win support from the general public. They had demonstrated their skills in organizing the successful drive for the Eisenhower nomination at the convention. They were able to achieve a fascinating mix of fresh faces, youth, interesting and forceful speeches, and effective media relations to win the nomination. There is not even a hint, though, that any member of the high command ever gave any consideration to "commercials." It is hard to visualize the haughty patrician Henry Cabot Lodge, the disiplined General Lucius Clay, or the Wall Street-oriented investment bankers pleading enthusiastically for "I like Ike" spots prior to their eye-opening contact with Rosser Reeves.

To most Americans, television was only a remote dream when Governor Dewey opened his campaign for the presidency in 1948. The Dewey organization engaged in some minimal experimentation with television, but the set count was so small that it was hardly worthwhile to undertake any major effort. Dewey's campaign for the New York governorship in 1950, however, was a different story. The half-million receivers in American homes two years earlier had grown to nearly 7 million. The largest concentration was in New York City, but the potential audience available in upstate New York had reached a level that made it an attractive target. Stations were on the air and attracting viewers in cities from Albany to Buffalo. Furthermore, it was possible by then to order up a network extending from New York City through the larger cities across the state all the way to Buffalo.

Dewey and his advisers, including his innovative press secretary, James Hagerty, saw a heavily concentrated television campaign as an opportunity well worth exploring. Ben Duffy, BBDO president, was an avid Dewey supporter and jumped at the chance to turn his staff loose on the melding of television and politics. Research showed a critical mass of television homes in New York state now large enough for television to play a significant role and BBDO was ready to mobilize its considerable talent to campaign for the governor's reelection.

The effort was a smashing success. It delivered clear evidence that the agency had the necessary expertise to play a significant part in the presidential election of 1952 if it were to be invited — which, as it turned out, almost did not happen. It had the experience needed to plan and produce speeches, interview programs, and man-in-the-street interview shows, and to schedule state-

ments by the governor with content attractive to news programs. Agency personnel were conversant enough with television to know how to schedule events and statements at a time and place where they would be most likely to attract camera crews. But there were no spot commercials on the agency's agenda, and apparently little or no thought given to them.

Some agencies had plunged more deeply into the medium than others, and as a result were better prepared to strike out into the thicket of political advertising. Both BBDO and Young and Rubicam were pioneers. They were industry leaders in both product advertising and program production.

Political campaigns historically had relied heavily on public relations and publicity experts for media contacts and, through media, reaching out to the public. Television, however, brought a new challenge, one that few political public relations experts had dealt with except on a perfunctory basis. The medium was far too complicated and the range of expertise required too varied to be assigned with any real hope of success to any single individual on the party payroll, to the staff of a candidate, or even to a public relations firm.

The advertising agency, on the other hand, was better equipped to deal with the wide range of campaign problems. Within its ranks it had the required talents not only to undertake producing and placing advertising but also to tackle general public relations and publicity assignments. It had leadership experienced in marketing, account executives to organize both advertising and public relations efforts, creative personnel including writers and graphic artists to prepare copy and layout, media experts to place advertising campaigns, and research departments to test their effectiveness. It short, the television-oriented advertising agency was able to mobilize a wealth of talent, many with extensive television experience. BBDO and Young and Rubicam were among the leaders who had ventured into the political arena. Their chief executive officers were political buffs. Both were strongly committed to Eisenhower, so strongly that they were eager to work on the 1952 campaign.

It was only logical that advertising agencies would fill a campaign void. The traditional campaign organizations had neither the time nor the talent to cope with the complications inevitably arising out of the fusion of picture, sound, and motion. The vision of the old-line publicity directors was too limited to think beyond press releases and facilitating coverage by media reporters. There were exceptions. Hagerty is one. Robert Humphreys, who directed publicity for the Republican National Committee in 1952, is another. But effective use of television demanded skills and experiences that the publicity directors and campaign directors had never had the time or opportunity to acquire.

On the other hand, the advertising agencies had stockpiled talent: account executives, producers, directors, writers, and graphic artists. They had experience in contracting for studios, facilities, cameramen, sound technicians, lighting directors, and makeup artists. Furthermore, they had media specialists to determine how and where best to place ads, and research departments to measure results. The better agencies also had personnel capable of bringing imagination and innovation to bear on planning campaigns to win elections. Even though their sphere was product candidate, it was close enough to attract political parties and candiates. In retrospect, it seems only logical that advertising agencies were pioneers in political campaigning on television. There was no one else available to do the job.

Rosser Reeves and his precedent-breaking spot commercial campaign for General Eisenhower made use of the agency virtually indispensable. Producing spots was complicated enough, but placing them on television stations required the expert services of sophisticated media departments to determine where the dollars spent would yield the most votes. As the use of spots skyrocketed in subsequent elections, pressures on media departments rose exponentially. The $1,577,000 spent on commercial spots by both presidential candidates in 1952 was a pittance compared with expenditures in subsequent elections. By 1972 the figure had multiplied by approximately 15 times, to $24.6 million. By 1984 the grand total of approximately $154 million was 100 times as high as in 1952.

Producing and placing television commercials was clearly not the only service advertising agencies performed for candidates. They were still concerned with print advertising, booking paid time for speeches, producing major campaign events for radio and television, and in some cases consulting on campaign strategy, but spots soon absorbed a major part of the effort.

Television news in the 1960s, at least at the network level, was still seriously trying to inform without going overboard with showmanship. News programs at the local level, however, were beginning to show signs of softening as television homes increased to near a saturation level and dollars poured into the medium in a gushing torrent. Prospects for a bonanza of profit were so promising and competition for the big payoff so fierce that a high-minded approach would almost inevitably succumb to compromise. The infant industry of 1952 had become a mature adult in little more than a decade and the rules of the game were changing. More stations, more television homes, more dollars, and more competition for both ratings and dollars put an increasing premium on the search for surefire, crowd-pleasing ingredients. The journalistic standards that had prevailed through the first decade were in danger of eroding.

By 1960 a new phenomenon was beginning to appear on the campaign scene, the political consultant. Political consultants were old hat in California. The Whitaker and Baxter firm had been operating since the middle 1930s. California's old-time progressivism had led to liberal use of the initiative as a process for passing legislation by popular vote, thus bypassing or overruling the legislature. All-out, high-cost campaigns for or against initiatives became commonplace. Since party organizations were only peripherally involved, if at all, citizen groups and committees were formed to support or oppose the initiatives. In many instances major corporations had large stakes in the outcome of the voting and were willing to pour vast sums into the campaigns to protect their interests. Masses of dollars were available to win over voters.

But both supporters and opponents of the propositions on the ballot needed leadership, direction, ideas, and implementation. Clem Whitaker and Leona Baxter saw an opportunity and moved in. They established a firm in San Francisco to advise on strategy, produce and place advertising, handle media relations, organize events, and do anything else required to win approval for or to defeat an initiative. They created a structure that would be a model for scores of consultant firms that would be formed later, many of them as a direct result of the capability of television to persuade voters and of the increasing willingness of news directors to accept outside aid uncritically.

Southern California did not lag far behind the San Francisco Bay area. Murray Chotiner, a Los Angeles

lawyer with an avid interest in politics, became a consultant to Richard Nixon. Chotiner had worked with Nixon on campaigns for both the House and Senate, and was a key member of the Nixon for Vice-President team in 1952. In that role he played a significant part in planning for the celebrated "Checkers" speech. Later the Spencer Roberts firm in Los Angeles established a national reputation for representing a broad range of candidates.

By 1964, producers of political spots for TV had discovered that the best route to the voter's reflexes is through his emotions, prejudices.

The senior partner in a Springfield, Massachusetts, political consultant firm became a key advisor to John F. Kennedy in 1960. Lawrence F. O'Brien who had been in partnership with Joseph Napolitan in a combination real estate and public relations firm, had worked on a number of campaigns in western Massachusetts. In the late 1950s he joined an inner group of advisors supporting John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign for the presidency. After the election he became postmaster general and later chairman of the Democratic National Committee. His partner continued as a political consultant representing Democratic candidates, including Hubert Humphrey in 1968.

By 1964, producers of political spots for television, both agency personnel and independents, had discovered that the best route to the voter's reflexes is not through his capability to reason but through his emotions, prejudices, and lingering responses to previous experiences. By the end of the 1950s, critics had begun to note that television was brilliantly effective in delivering images and symbols but was frequently striking out when it tried to convey information. The viewer was retaining the picture but quickly forgetting the facts. The impression remained, but the accompanying information was lost. Marshall McLuhan was observing that the "medium is the message." The planners and producers of spot commercials were discovering the importance of the image and the symbol. They were coming to the conclusion that it was futile to try to persuade by delivering facts and appeals to reason. They began to apply new theories to persuasion by television, depending on images rather than facts to convey messages designed to win voter support. This trend created a made-to-order opening for consultants.

Before the 1964 campaign got under way, consultants were beginning to carve out a niche for themselves. Television, they argued, posed problems that only specialists in media manipulation were adept at solving. Advertising agency staffs could boast of high competence in producing commercials, but as political campaign advisers they frequently came up short. They were skilled at selling products but not necessarily effective at manipulating ideas. Political advertising called for winning over minds to ideas, not creating impulses to buy products.

One of the best of the specialists was Tony Schwartz, a master at using symbolism and imagery on the television screen to win points without hard sell. Schwartz had unlocked the secret of molding the viewer's attitudes by appealing not to his intellect

but to his emotions and prejudices. He reflected Marshall McLuhan in his description of his approach to the art of producing political commercials. His aim, he said, was to achieve "voter resonance." In so doing, his objective was to appeal to the voter's vast storehouse of attitudes, prejudices, and previous experiences, and to rekindle the many miscellaneous bits of information stored in the recesses of his mind, bits that could be useful in establishing a favorable response to an idea or a candidate or an unfavorable response to an opponent. The function of the political spot producer, in this view, is to penetrate directly to those dormant attitudes and stimulate them to action. The effective spot commercial, in Schwartz's view, should be the stimulus that "taps the resonance" of the individual voter.

Two commercials supporting the Lyndon Johnson candidacy in 1964, both products of Schwartz's fertile imagination, were so strong in their play on emotions that they were withdrawn after one showing. Johnson's opponent, Barry Goldwater, had spoken somewhat recklessly about using nuclear weapons. He had once suggested that the use of the atomic bomb in South Vietnam might hasten the end of the war. Many potential voters had learned of the senator's comments through the heavy play they received in the media, and were deeply concerned.

The first of the questionable spots showed a small girl plucking petals from a daisy. As she plucked the last petal, a nuclear bomb exploded in the background. The implication was so clear that no explanation was necessary. The message was clearly "Vote for Johnson to avoid electing a president who would be careless with the bomb."

The second was more explicit. It showed a small girl happily licking an ice cream cone. A soft and gentle woman's voice explained off camera that people used to explode atomic bombs in the air. The fallout from the bombs, she explained, made some children die. She went on to say that there was a treaty being considered that would prevent all testing in the air. It would confine it to underground sites, but a man who now wants to be president of the United States voted against the treaty when it was up for consideration in the Senate. She identified him as Senator Barry Goldwater. The clicking of a Geiger counter as it detected radiation was faded in at a low level and built to a crescendo as an off-camera voice urged. "Vote for President Johnson on November 3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home."

The Hubert Humphrey campaign four years later used the same technique. One spot opened with a title card with the question "Agnew for Vice President?" A picture of Agnew remained on the screen for almost the full 60 seconds while an off-camera voice laughed uproariously. The tag line read, "It would be funny if it weren't so serious."

By the middle 1960s, advertising agency executives began to have second thoughts about signing on for political campaigns. Many agencies serving political accounts were becoming disenchanted with the uncertain and sporadic nature of campaign advertising. They were disturbed by the negative character of many of the commercials they saw and thought it demeaning to product advertising. Some expressed concern that voters were getting too much hard sell and not enough information on which to make informed decisions. Others argued that you cannot furnish the voters with the facts and background information required to make informed decisions about candidates for public office in 30 seconds or 60 seconds. It may be possible to sell cereals in so short a time, but candi-

dates and ideas are quite different.

Agencies, however, had other and more persuasive reasons for getting out of the political business. A political campaign requires a prodigious amount of effort concentrated over a relatively short period of time. It devours much of the agency's most creative talent and occupies the valuable time of senior executives. In so doing it robs year-round clients of the talent and services for which they have contracted. An advertising agency is unlike a firehouse. It cannot afford to hire firemen to sit in their quarters and play cribbage while waiting for the alarm to ring. One way to stack personnel for a short-term campaign is to rob the existing account groups. In that event long-term clients are short changed. The alternative is to hire from the outside for the political account, but campaign organizations are unlikely to show much enthusiasm for a makeshift account group, especially after selecting the agency in question for its record and reputation. It was fun for Ben Duffy and Sig Larmon in 1952 to turn their talented staffs loose on the Eisenhower campaign. It gave them a chance to participate in a campaign that they regarded as vital to the national interest. The staff disruption was far less burdensome in later years as the industry matured and competition became fierce.

By the 1960s the thrill of innovation was gone. The challenge was not nearly as attractive. What in 1952 had been innovative was now becoming old hat. The Nixon campaign in 1972 found a stopgap solution. A number of executives from a variety of agencies took leaves of absence and joined to form an ad hoc group to handle the campaign. This prevented major disruption at any one agency but left lesser personnel gaps at a number of agencies.

At this point the Whitaker and Baxter model began to look increasingly like the wave of the future. A full-time, year-round political consulting agency, serving a variety of candidates and causes, some of them outside the United States, would be able to retain at least the nucleus of a full staff on a year-round basis. Many of the consultant firms that were springing up like weeds in a garden were able to deliver political advertising services as well as strategy guidance, thus reducing the need for an advertising agency. And they had another advantage. The old-line advertising agencies could conceive and produce spot commercials but were much less expert at creating situations and events that would encourage new coverage. They could deliver the paid spots but had little experience in the art of getting free exposure. They lacked the talent and experience necessary to anticipate what news directors were looking for. Their skills ran to preparing advertising for "paid media," not to dramatizing the character of their candidate and his views in such a way as to get "free media" exposure on the daily television news broadcasts.

The political consulting agency, whose main thrust extended as much to public relations as to regular advertising, could in some part duplicate the agency's efforts in paid media, but it had also sharpened its skills in creating situations and events that television stations and networks would find difficult to overlook. The free media exposure frequently yielded more valuable results to the candidate than paid commercials. Free media and paid media, harnessed in tandem, made a powerful team. Imaginatively staged free media events, masquerading as hard news, were a boon to the news director. He had a chance to send his crews out to cover ready-made stories that had visual appeal, human interest, political significance, and controversy, and could be delivered without taxing his staff's imagination. If it all worked well, the consultant would get

his payoff. He would have succeeded in implanting in voter's minds the image he had designed, and he had done so without paying for the time.

It is important to note though that the television station or network created the environment that the consultant exploited. The broadcaster had established a pattern for news broadcasts and for the items that would fit into them. The consultant delivered material to fit the specifications.

Public relations practitioners and press agents in the 1950s had actively pushed tips, suggestions for items to cover, offers of help in arranging coverage, and reams of press releases. But their efforts were simplistic, light-years removed from the highly sophisticated efforts of the new breed of political consultants. The efforts were straightforward. The motive was favorable mention on a news broadcast or an invitation to appear on a discussion program. The term "free media" implied a service infinitely more complex. It implied an effort to create an irresistible setting for a news story that would implant a favorable response in the viewer's mind. Planning for free media required imagination, a clear view of objectives, a sense of drama, an eye for physical setting, and an understanding of how the human thought process works. It involved coordination with other aspects of the campaign so it could become one facet in a multipronged attack.

Television was not ready for so refined an approach in the 1950s, and the media specialists were not yet ready to deliver it. Prior to 1964, network news was limited to 15 minutes nightly and shorter segments on the morning programs, a relatively limited target for an aggressive free media merchant. Local stations were expanding their news operations rapidly, but the 15-minute early evening program was still the norm rather than the 90-minute and even 120-minute programs that became popular in the late 1960s, following the networks' expansion to the 30-minute format. Until the advent of the longer news program, there was hardly enough time available on the air for the consultant to make a viable business out of aiming at the small target.

By the late 1960s, however, television news was an irresistible target. National television receiver penetration was reaching a near saturation level, and during the winter season the combined early evening network news programs were reaching nearly half the television homes in the nation every night. Local stations were expanding their time for news, adding to staff, and reaching rating levels in their local communities frequently exceeding those of the network programs. They were often less sophisticated than their network counterparts, and consequently less likely to be skeptical of suggestions from outsiders and less inclined to apply traditional journalistic standards. They were more apt to cover uncritically an event that the network might consider too soft or too biased for consideration.

It was the perfect setup for the smart consultant. No longer would he have to rely solely on sending press releases to the media and hope that they would get some response. He could begin to control all his candidate's activities so as to eliminate any possibility of error, avoid negative impressions, and get the most favorable media response. In the 1972 campaign Richard Nixon virtually never appeared except in the most rigidly controlled situations. He obtained favorable exposure by participating in events that television news felt must be covered. Cameras and microphones, however, never got close enough to pick up any slip of the tongue or awkward movement. The

camera was able to record only the moments that the consultants had planned in advance. And, in view of the importance of the event, there really was no alternative for the news organization than to be present and hope that some morsel of real news might escape the tight controls. The consultant exploited the journalistic principle that what the president did was news, no matter if it was simply riding down a Philadelphia street in an armored car out of sight of television cameras.

Shortly after the conclusion of the 1972 campaign, I was asked to write a chapter for a book in which I was to relate my reaction following intensive observation of television coverage. The most striking aspect to me was the futility of Senator George McGovern's efforts to come to grips with an opponent who remained under tight wraps from nomination to election, his every move carefully controlled by his handlers. I wrote then, "The president was as carefully shielded from the political hustle-bustle as if he were flying throughout the campaign in a hermetically sealed space capsule. The environment was carefully controlled. The course was set by skillfully programmed computer technology." The practice of encasing the candidate in an air-tight cocoon did not stop after 1972. The art of candidate packaging has been developing constantly ever since.

The controls that shield a candidate from unwanted exposure can also be turned to arranging for desired display under the most favorable circumstances. There was hardly a public appearance by either major party candidate in the 1988 presidential election that was not planned in the minutest detail. Careful attention was given to selecting meaningful and pictorially interesting backdrops for the planned message. George Bush rode a launch through Boston Harbor to condemn Michael Dukakis's lack of commitment to conservation. A few days later he almost literally wrapped himself in the American flag as he visited a flag factory in Philadelphia. That was the backdrop selected to underscore his complaint that Dukakis had vetoed a bill that would have required Massachusetts schoolchildren to recite the pledge of allegiance at the opening of the school day.

Dukakis, in turn, will not soon be forgotten as he was pictured, looking awkward and uncomfortable, riding in a tank and wearing the uniform of a tank driver. His purpose was to illustrate his commitment to national defense. His advisers also flew him almost all the way across the country to find an appropriate setting where he would be able to demonstrate his concern for the environment. They selected fire-ravaged Yellowstone National Park.

The stage settings were selected to create the most striking and effective backdrops for emphasizing the "line of the day," another phrase in the new lexicon of the image makers, one that reflects the effort of consultants to coordinate and simplify each day's campaign effort. Coordinating the line of the day with the proper stage setting is one of the creative functions of the practitioners of the art of political consulting. The line of the day need not to be backed up by clear reasoning and exhaustive evidence. The objective is to win the voter's support not by a preponderance of evidence and sound argument but by eliciting favorable emotional response.

Television news is more susceptible to this kind of image making and symbols promotion than it was three decades ago. Gordon Van Sauter, when he was president of the CBS News division during the middle 1980s, encouraged his reporters and producers to look for memorable "moments" to spice up his news

broadcasts. Memorable "moments" — many of them can be "sound bites" — are precisely what the image makers try to deliver, and they have acquired considerable skill in creating them. They have probed for and uncovered the soft spots in television news organizations, using the benefit of several experiences and of methods forged out of trial and error. Television news has generally been a soft target. The dollar stakes have grown so high, the competition so fierce, the hours to fill so expanded, that the station news director and assignment editor are constantly looking for attractive material. The quadrennial national election is so important to the national welfare that no news organization can afford to take it lightly. If the only access to the candidate is through an event the consultant has arranged, the editor has only a limited option to reject it, and virtually none if the event is staged with enough imagination to make it a "must carry" item.

The onrush of new broadcast technology has also had a profound effect on easing the problems of the consultant. Portable electronic cameras with accompanying videotape recording have liberated the consultant from planning all appearances within the drab confines of a studio. Microwave transmission and use of the satellite make coverage of a press conference on a launch in Boston Harbor almost as easy as a studio appearance. The consultant can now plan his backdrops within a geographical range almost as wide as his imagination, with the knowledge that the event covered can be seen within minutes anywhere in the nation.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on free media, paid media is still on a steep upward climb in dollar volume. In a spot commercial the candidate and his managers have total control over the content of the message and its manner of presentation. But free media offer significant advantages in addition to limiting the strain on the campaign budget. The free media item reaches the public in a serious, news-oriented environment, not during a break in a sitcom or a cops-and-robbers drama.

A news program offers the ideal environment for a brief sound bite incorporating the line of the day or the theme of the day. It can be attractive to the television assignment editor because it comes disguised as a "photo op" (photo opportunity) in a carefully selected stage setting with an appropriate backdrop. Coverage demands no imagination on the part of the television crew. It has been stage-managed by the consultant. The lexicon of the image campaign reveals the extent to which the campaign has become dominated by media specialists whose main target is television, specifically television news programs.

There is not much room, if any, for interpretation or explanation regarding serious issues, or for questioning the candidate on the logic behind his positions. The brief time allotted to the sound bite does not permit it. There is little evidence that news directors, whether on the local or the network level, prefer greater length. They seemed dedicated to the notion that the viewer's attention span is short and a great variety of items must be covered. Long, serious expository pieces justifying complex positions don't grab audiences — not unless the item reeks with human interest.

This desire for brevity spares the candidate the burden of having to support a generalization with facts and explanation. He can make his point and keep it colorful, simple, and brief. There is no point, current political campaign theory goes, in wasting time and money on factual and argumentative approaches to issues, particularly if the medium lends itself better to a more subtle approach based on imagery and symbolism. Tony Schwartz demonstrated the

wisdom of that theory with his Lyndon Johnson spots in 1964. Even though they were withdrawn after one showing, they had a lingering effect and may have influenced the outcome of the election.

The homogenization process has not been limited to hard news broadcasts. The first presidential "joint appearances" involving Richard Nixon and John Kennedy were not true debates in a strict use of that word. They did, however, provide for opening statements of eight minutes each in the first and last of the confrontations, and each candidate was allowed an additional 3 minutes and 20 seconds for summations. That contrasts with the two-minute and one-minute segments allowed for the candidates to answer reporters' questions in the 1988 joint appearances featuring George Bush and Michael Dukakis. If the candidate did not wish to do so, there was no compulsion for him to answer the question. He could wander off in any direction he chose, responding with vacuous homilies or irrelevant puffery. Little provision was made for follow-up questions from the reporters. The League of Women Voters was so disillusioned by the format prescribed by the candidates that it withdrew from sponsorship of the second debate.

It is almost impossible to find an outlet on commercial television programs that allows for more depth than the sound bite provides.

The debate format, however, gave gainful employment to another relatively recent addition to the roster of political campaign experts, the "spin doctors." The candidates were barely able to get off the platform before their respective spin doctors were pleading with media personnel to give their accounts of the event a "spin" favorable to their candidate. In the event of a major blunder by a candidate, the spin doctors would immediately begin a process of "damage control." And the clichés roll on.

It is not only the clichés that are new. The whole process had been remodeled since 1952. It is almost impossible to find an outlet on commercial television news programs that allows for much more depth than the sound bite provides. The exceptions are in public television and in C-SPAN on Cable, and some of the network long-form news interview and discussion shows. If the viewer regularly desires more than the fleeting impression he gets from the sound bite, he has little alternative than to go to the Public Broadcasting Service of C-SPAN. Many of commercial television's news programs have permitted themselves to succumb to the service provided by the consultants and the candidates they represent. It is not a matter of covering or not covering the story or event set up by the consultant. Coverage is frequently unavoidable. A presidential candidate is news whether he is riding a launch across Boston Harbor or a tank on a military base. Accepting the item uncritically, and without adequate explanation and interpretation, is the point at which the voters are badly served.

The pursuit by networks and stations alike of high ratings and the dollars that go along with high viewership created the opening for the consultants and their teams of specialists. The consultants created opportunities for recording attractive

sound bites and memorable moments that in turn delivered viewers. They were newsworthy enough and had a sufficient audience appeal that it was easy to use them. The candidates, who want more than anything to get elected, team up with their consultants, and the result is the triumph of imagery over facts, of symbols over character, and of show business over rational argumentation. It remains to be seen whether irreparable damage has been done to the electoral system, whether television has lived up to its early promise or contributed to the collapse of the process of electing candidates qualified to make a democratic system work. Specifically, would the trivialization of the presidential campaign have occurred if there had been no television? Or, conversely, was television a contributor to the degrading process? ■

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GOOD SPORTS?

BY RICHARD G. CARTER

The night before last April's George Foreman-Evander Holyfield pay-per-view heavyweight championship fight, a sports reader on a local television station in New York unabashedly picked Big George to knock-out Holyfield in three rounds. Well, everyone knows what happened.

However, this same sports reader, known for his embarrassing, on-air boosterism of ex-champ Mike Tyson, had heretofore bad-mouthed Foreman's four-year comeback odyssey. So why the eleventh hour turnabout?

When asked by the news anchor for his pick to win the fight, the sports reader reacted like the subject of a man-on-the-street interview. Instead of offering viewers some expert insight into an event that had assumed mammoth public proportions, he went with the flow, got ga-ga-eyed, and ended up with the egg on his face.

And by predicting an easy KO for the loquacious, 42-year-old fighting preacher — also a former title-holder — over the mild-mannered, 28-year-old current king of the hill, the sports reader committed the cardinal sin of his profession. He believed the hype.

But the performance of this particular "tape head" — a tabloid term in New York for the handful of men who make a handsome living showing taped sports highlights on local TV news — is par for the sports course on many TV news programs in many cities.

You know how it is. As 11 p.m. approaches, all you want before hitting the sack is scores of some of the important college basketball games, details of a big fight or first reactions of a pro football coach who's just been fired. Doesn't seem like much to ask, right?

But when your local TV news finally gets around to the sports, all you get are scores of local and regional games, a two-sentence recitation of who won the fight and nary a word about the sacked coach, even though you heard he was going to hold a news conference to vent his spleen.

Even more distressing, is the amateurish presentation of the sports news by so many of the so-called professional readers (or do you prefer to call them "sportscasters"?). Tape heads predictably present "highlights" of hockey fights rather than nifty plays and a succession of basketball slam-dunks rather than neat, point-producing passes and pretty shots. Occasionally, these normally desk-bound guys test the uncharted waters of one-on-one taped interviews of a football or baseball star. Inevitably, they serve-up embar-

rassing softballs of fawning hero-worship instead of probing inquiries requiring journalistic curiosity, integrity and skill.

Then it's over, and the sports reader throws it back to the anchor who, on some stations, always feels compelled to offer his or her views on the sports mulligan stew just served. As if anyone watching cares diddly about what the news anchor thinks about baseball. Ho-hum.

Now I don't expect a full-fledged exposition in three or four minutes of everything significant that happened that day in the wide world of sports, and why. But along with millions of other American TV viewers, I have the right to expect a greater degree of expertise and knowledgeable commentary than I can get schmoozing during coffee breaks at the office or talking sports in a bar after work.

For sake of argument, here are a few other things about the local guys I could just as easily do without:

- Referring to athletes by their first names as if everyone in the viewing audience knows that Larry is Bird, or that Rickey is Henderson or that Fernando is Valenzuela.
- The annoying habit of showing taped baseball "highlights" that invariably add up to home runs. This means all you see is an outfielder running and looking up because the airborne, tiny white ball is all but invisible on the screen.
- Forgetting that sports are national in scope and fans like to know what's going on everywhere, not just on home turf.
- Leading with baseball scores in July, football scores in November, basketball scores in February and hockey fights in March instead of the top sports of the day, regardless.
- Burdening up with humorless humor while doing their thing. All this does is use more precious seconds of air time and, let's face it, comedians most of them are not.

Yet, when a situation begs for the light touch they usually blow it. Like this summer, when a WCBS-TV sports reader deadpanned an intro of a hilarious tape in which the subject of an interview — protesting that he'd had enough — attacked the mike-wielding questioner. As I rolled on the floor laughing, the sports reader never cracked a smile and threw it back to the anchor man. Wow!

It's bad enough during live coverage that tennis fans, for example, must put up with motor-mouth talkers and replays that step on the action, and boxing buffs are forced to listen to uninformed analysis of trumped-up experts such as the judge at Holyfield-Foreman (she kept calling him Hollyfield) and insisted the seventh round was the greatest in the history of boxing.

And team sports nuts must suffer through boring crowd shots when the camera should be on the field or the sidelines; irrelevant comments about an athlete's community involvement or a co-worker's birthday or that his wife had a baby; endless use of jargon (square-outs, posting-up, etc.) that casual viewers can't fathom; calling pros whose last name is Johnson by their initials (DJ, KJ, JJ), and insulting black viewers by idiotic references to close games as "white knucklers."

But why must we get stuck with local no-nothing sports readers gushing sweet nothings at us at 6 and 11 p.m. when all we want are the facts? This is cruel and unusual punishment.

Granted, there are a few sports-readers-casters-analysts out there — including some not that well-known— who can tell a lead-right from a counter-right, know it's unnecessary to call that peculiar scoring play in football a "2-point safety"; and that, except for rare spurts of real action, televised baseball and golf are as dull as watching paint dry.

Three that come to mind are ESPN's redoubtable Al Bernstein — far and away the most enjoyable, knowledgeable boxing analyst extant — who truly seems to enjoy what he's doing; ex-Kentucky basketball whiz Jack (Goose) Givens, who distinguished himself last spring on TNT as a pro hoops color man, and Marion Boykin, a young fellow whose weekly show for boxing purists on Manhattan Cable TV in New York is a must if, like me, you love the sweet science. Boykin is a true diamond in the rough.

But this trio constitutes an exception to the rule. The problem with most of the losers out there — especially on the local side — is they can't write. Their on-air copy is dull and trite. There's not a potential Red Smith in the bunch.

Why? Well, most of the ex-jocks who can speak the King's English are doing color commentary on the networks. Pros like Frank Gifford of ABC and Pat Summerall and John Madden of CBS are a pleasure to hear. And even though many of the others are an abomination — a plague on the houses of millions of rabid viewers of TV sports — what normally is left to local news are what you call your basic broadcasters or former newspaper scribes out to make some decent dough. And it shows.

Some network should bring back WNBC New York's Sal Marchiano, formerly of ESPN boxing, to do it again. He really told it like it was — even to the point of properly pillorying a bad referee in a post-fight interview for misfeasance, malfeasance and nonfeasance in the ring. Sal's a winner, acerbic as he may be to some.

On the other hand, ABC's boxing honchos should give Dan Dierdorf the deep-six. The big guy is as ignorant about the fight game as were Phyllis George and Jayne Kennedy about pro football when they did *The NFL Today* on CBS. Dierdorf should stick to *Monday Night Football*, something about he which knows a lot. Although he'll never be a Don Meredith — my all-time favorite TV football analyst — neither will the overrated Al Michaels ever be a Howard Cosell. So there.

Yet, most of the network play-by-play and color commentators on live events are head and shoulders — figuratively and literally — above the local sports readers, those infamous "tape heads." Maybe it's because there's nothing like experience in or close to the sport to prepare you for describing the action or even showing taped highlights.

Now don't get me wrong. The network guys have been saying dumb things for years. Like this June, after Mexican golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez wedged to within six feet on the 18th hole, ESPN's Bob Murphy asked: "Does Chi Chi's ball spin in English?" And back when Bryant Gumbel was doing pro football results on NBC, he insulted countless Green Bay Packer and Tampa Bay Buc fans by describing their tie game this way: "They deserve each other."

Or, a few years ago in the mother of all TV sports faux pas on Monday Night Football, when the redoubtable Cosell put his foot in his mouth with the infamous "Little monkey" comment in describing the quick moves of a black Washington Redskins kick returner. He later clarified or apologized — I forgot which — but the damage was done.

But speaking locally, perhaps the problem is so many are not only non-athletes, they're just too cutesy for words. You know, they may be small but they're slow, and how some of them got their jobs, I'll never know. Let's all go to the videotape. Together. ■

Richard G. Carter, who loves television and sports, is a former columnist for the *New York Daily News*.

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COMSAT Video Enterprises

THE "ORDINARY HEARTBREAKS" OF *THIRTYSOMETHING*: POST-MORTEM ON A MEMORABLE SERIES

BY ALBERT AUSTER

In *Hope Against Hope*, Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir of life during the Stalinist terror, the wife of poet Osip Mendelstam wrote: "To think we could have had an ordinary family life with its bickering, broken hearts and divorce suits! ... What wouldn't we have given for such ordinary heartbreaks."

Spared by history from the kind of totalitarian regime that tortured, exiled and murdered the Mandelstams' generation, "ordinary heartbreaks" form the basis of much of American popular culture. These common disasters were also the sum and substance of ABC's *thirtysomething*, a controversial series that was a source of continuous debate from its debut in the fall of 1987 to its cancellation in the spring of 1991.

The Emmy award winning series was created by two youthful but veteran TV writer/producers Edward Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz (*Family* and the 1983 Emmy award winning TV movie *Special Bulletin*), and was about the day-to-day struggles of a group of young, white middle class professionals living in Philadelphia. The group consisted of two married couples, Michael and Hope Steadman (Ken Olin and Mel Harris) and Elliot Weston and his wife Nancy (Timothy Busfield and Patricia Wettig), whose husbands were at first business partners in a small advertising agency and then a creative team at a large agency; Michael's cousin Melissa (Melanie Mayron), a photographer; and Michael and Hope's best friends, Ellyn Warren (Polly Draper), a high level city official, and, until he died in an episode in the series last season, Gary Shepherd (Peter Horton), a college professor.

The portrayal of the everyday experiences of this group was alternatively condemned as whiny, self involved, taking itself too seriously, and lacking in any kind of idealism. Indeed during the series first season Daniel Ruth in the *Chicago Sun Times* commented that *thirtysomething* told the story of "the heartbreak of rotten Brie, the trauma of finding a baby sitter, the embarrassment of breaking a shoelace on one's Reeboks and the special anguish of having one's infant crying in a restaurant."

Although it certainly merited some of these criticisms (Hope's comment to Michael in the series pilot that he did "this incredibly brave thing" by working comes to mind), happily the show's dialogue didn't always suffer from such promiscuous yuckiness. In fact in the same episode, the writers were self conscious enough to have the very same courageous Michael remark, "God, I hate people who talk

like this — I know we're lucky."

This kind of self consciousness was actually one of the series major charms. It extended from collective memories of late fifties and sixties television — in the first episode, Michael came home and announced, "June, I'm home," to which Hope responded, "I'm here, Ward "— to the impact of psychoanalysis — Gary tells his former lover Melissa, a veteran psychoanalyst, that "if you were anymore in touch with your feelings, you'd be guilty of molesting them."

There were also epiphanies that ranged from the tiny — Michael's "houses with kids are always sticky" — to the grandiose like Gary's "life is just a pale imitation of high school... You can't wait to become an adult so you won't have to endure this anymore. Yet the horrible truth is it stays the same."

The series' biggest attraction, however, was its realistic depiction of those "ordinary heartbreaks" for which Mandelstam yearned, and its most powerful themes concerned the traumas of raising children, the stresses of running a business or having a career, and — most of all — the ambiguity and frailty of relationships. In the words of David Friedman in *New York Newsday*, "the drama grows out of everyday life no matter now banal."

This remark is not unlike the comment attributed to Paddy Chayevsky about the ability of "Golden Age" TV drama to reveal the "marvelous world of the ordinary," an idea that was virtually co-opted by thirtysomething creator Edward Zwick, who said that the show worked under a "mandate of smallness, worlds of incremental change."

It looked at elements of life that had been long considered the exclusive province of TV melodrama (primarily the soaps) and presented them without their easy moral assurance. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of thirtysomething was its acceptance of ambiguity as part of life. In the words of thirtysomething's co-creator Marshall Herskovitz, " Ambiguity and ambivalence are as much a part of life as resolution."

Actually, ambiguity was crucial to the series and set in apart from some of the other yuppie shows on TV. For example, the characters in *L.A. Law*, a trailblazer for shows of this type, deal with many of the same issues such as managing relationships, career versus personal life, idealism confronting the demands of the real world. But it fails to definitively resolve the moral, ethical, and personal questions it raises, its major characters rarely seemed tormented by the same kind of anguish that constantly beset the characters of *thirtysomething*.

The ambiguity and ambivalence and the moral/emotional discomfort it caused the characters of *thirtysomething* was in point of fact the real basis for the whining that so many of the show's detractors found so abhorrent. In this case, however, the whining was instructive since it illuminated the connection between the show and the convulsive changes that shook American culture in the sixties — consequences we still live with.

This connection hadn't gone entirely unnoticed by critics. Landon Y. Jones, author of *Great Expectations*, a comprehensive study of the post-war generation, remarked that "there's something nostalgic about the attitudes of the *thirtysomething* people — they're like World War I veterans, like they've been through a war together.

Figuring out the exact historical moment which held the *thirtysomething* bunch so in thrall wasn't hard to do. Enough clues were strewn about in enough episodes to make it clear that it was the late sixties and early seventies. This meant that the shows characters were old enough to have

experienced the tail end of the anti-war movement, student demonstrations of one sort or another and, most significant of all, the heyday of the counterculture.

One needn't have looked too far for evidence of this: Gary's long hair; Michael's imagined trial by a 60's tribunal which denounced him as a "dupe of the imperialist yuppie elite"; Ellyn's secret "Mellow Yellow" tattoo, and her remark upon meeting Hope and her daughter in a playground that "it feels weird to be in a park without tear gas around."

What's more important, however, are not references elliptical or otherwise, but the way that *thirtysomething* confronted questions involving love, work and relationships prompted by that decade. As a matter of fact, by examining the changes wrought in those spheres, *thirtysomething* ventured into areas where TV drama seldom cared to go. And in considering them the series provided us with some clues as to how they had become assimilated into American culture.

The issue that best symbolized this was *thirtysomething*'s connection to modern feminism, a relationship that may to some extent explain its popularity among the 43% of women between the ages of 18-34 who were the backbone of the programs audience, and perhaps prevented it from being cancelled even earlier than it was (and might even result in its revival either for a few more episodes or on cable).

Any connection to feminism might at first glance seem obscure, especially in view of what might be referred to as the program's "Hope problem." Hope Murdoch Steadman throughout most of the series (in the series very last episode she finally took an independent stand) was Michael's beautiful, supportive, practically perfect wife. What certainly disturbed some feminists was that Hope had given up what was a potentially promising career as a magazine writer and editor to stay home and raise a family. Equally upsetting was that she was able to do it without mussing a hair or ever missing a lunch appointment with a friend.

Needless to say, Hope was the woman in the series that most feminists loved to hate. For example, in England where the show is very popular, Suzanne Moore in *The Guardian* wrote that "everyone I know hates Hope with the kind of passion usually saved for child molesters. In fact, unbeknown to the uninitiated, hating Hope is one of the main pleasures of the programme."

Certainly, *thirtysomething's* feminist credentials might have been questioned because of its celebration of woman as wife and mother. However, leading feminists such as Betty Friedan have written about the negative impact which criticism of the choice has had upon women, estranging many who might otherwise be sympathetic to the movement and its goals. Referring to the "family as the New Feminist Frontier," Friedan in her book *The Second Stage* also argued that feminist emphasis on a business or professional career over that of raising a family alienated many women from an important part of their "personhood" which is both nurturing and emotional.

Although the character of Hope might have damaged the show's credibility among some feminists, there remains the fact that the women of the series set its emotional tone. As for the male characters, for most of the series Elliot and Gary were alternately portrayed as suffering from terminal jerkdom and a Peter Pan complex, whereas Michael was so compulsively responsible that his behavior frequently bordered on the neurotic.

Hope, Nancy, Ellyn and Melissa with their need to discuss their feel-

ings as well as their disclosure of the most intimate details of their lives, provided the series most consistently interesting emotional models. Although their revelations weren't even a pale immitation of the 60's "New Left" credo that the personal is political, their conversations represent the kind of talk that was typical of the women's consciousness-raising groups that emerged from the sixties. As a result, though they were no less confused than anyone else by the fluid boundaries of love, work, and family that exist in today's society, these women seemed at least to have some means at their disposal for coping with it.

This isn't meant to imply that the women always manage to do the right thing. A look at the series two single women, Ellyn and Melissa, provided plenty of reason for supposing just the opposite. For instance, Ellyn, whose flakey, giggly exterior somehow belied her image as a super-efficient city administrator, managed to screw up one affair after another.

In contrast to Ellyn, and especially to Hope, there was Melissa. The very same English critic who hated Hope so much wrote that, "Melissa can do no wrong. Everyone loves Melissa." (so much so that there is even talk of a half hour spin off series). Initially depicted as Michael's pitiful cousin, with low self esteem, an overprotective Jewish family, and a tyrannical biological clock, as the series progresses Melissa turned into a woman whose photography was beginning to gain widespread recognition and a sense of self worth that saw her assert herself more and more. In addition, Melissa got to wear wacky clothes, live in a loft, hang out with Carly Simon and become the confidante of a famous TV sitcom star.

The only thing that seemed to mar Melissa's happiness were the scars of her affair with that epitome of sixties castaways, Gary. When Gary died in a tragic automobile accident in the final episode, Melissa was devastated.

If Melissa seemed to carry around a little cloud labeled "Gary" the tendency when describing Nancy was to begin with the almost Dickensian epithet "poor little". Nancy went through a separation and then reconciliation with the infantile Elliot, and just when she seemed to have emerged from her cocoon and written and illustrated a successful children's book, she came down with ovarian cancer. Such was the audience impact of her disease that whenever *thirtysomething* programmed an episode about Nancy its ratings jumped. As a matter of fact for a short time, the question of "Will Nancy die?" became something of a national obsession.

Needless to say, Nancy's finally licking the big C albeit a cause for celebration for all concerned, was not necessarily the point. What was of equal import was the emotional alienation Nancy experienced because none of the programs leading characters knew how to deal with her. She had become the modern version of a "leper" (one friend was even afraid to touch her). Even the cancer counseling group which she joined didn't help her.

Here is the one issue that finally defies the techniques of consciousness-raising and therapy. It also challenged another legacy of the sixties — the almost hermetically-sealed communalism that existed among the thirtysomething characters. At one extreme, this communalism took the form of the constant and unrealistic unannounced dropping in that went on among the characters, which at one point had Nancy complaining that "don't you think we know too much about each other, anyway?"

Unfortunately, neither consciousness-raising nor communalism was of much use to Nancy in dealing with

her errant cells, the nausea of chemotherapy, or the terror of abandoning her young children. Faced with her existential predicament, the show reminds us of the limitations of so many assumptions of the sixties.

This cautious approach to the legacies of the sixties is not meant to imply a rejection, rather it presents them in a manner that is refreshingly free of either uncritical enthusiasm or Tory disdain. Perhaps the best evidences of this (and another example of the series' approach to the impact of the cultural changes of recent decades) were the series' male characters and their attitudes toward work and domesticity.

The most formidable challenge the men faced was fitting into the family. Obviously, this didn't just mean a more equitable way of sharing domestic work. It also involved understanding that the traditional definitions of masculinity were no longer applicable, that home was no longer merely a man's haven in a heartless world, and that parenting was the constant juggling of guilt and good intentions.

Of all the male characters on *thirtysomething*, Michael Steadman probably came closest to fitting the new mold. Michael reveled in the role of breadwinner, was passionately monogamous, sensitive and responsive (with some lapses) to his wife, child and family, a loyal friend, and a creative hardworking executive. As far as marriage and family were concerned, Michael summed up his feelings, saying, "I like it. I know I groan and complain, but yeah, my life feels complete in a way it never did before."

Nevertheless, there was an undercurrent of anxiety in this. While for the most part Hope seemed content with her maternal role, Michael frequently (despite all his "you do the best you can with what you've got" hauteur) appeared at times to be almost overwhelmed with the enormity of his responsibilities. Indeed, he had moments when the strain of maturity seemed too much, when giving up his dreams to start at guard for the Philadelphia 76ers, to become a great writer, to have a successful ad agency, appeared to be too heavy a price to pay for domesticity.

Most of these feelings came out, however, in fantasy or jokey moments with his friend Gary or his partner Elliot. In those moments, Michael came closest to fulfilling the definition of the "man in America" once proposed by a character in John Updike's novel *The Coup* as "nothing but a failed boy."

Although this boy/man paradox fit Michael, it had even greater resonance in the lives of Gary and Elliot. Despite the fact that by the end of *thirtysomething's* third season both of them had made something of a separate peace with domesticity, through the series' first two seasons they demonstrated a greater degree of restlessness and even rejection of it then Michael ever dreamed of.

Their discontent was to a large extent reflected in Gary's early fear of commitment and Elliot's separation from Nancy. High on the list of causes, is of course sex. In both cases, the terrors and tensions of marital sex resulted in a flight from domestic life. Gary's initial fear of commitment and monogamy was best symbolized in an episode in which he had the Hitchcockian fantasy that the very attractive and highly compatible woman with whom he was having a passionate affair was trying to kill him. For Elliot, his increasing marital unhappiness was summed up in Nancy's comment that "he thinks I'm not interested in sex. He thinks I don't take care of his needs."

Sex by itself was hardly the sole source of resentment and dissatisfaction felt by Gary, Elliot, and sometimes even Michael. Their disenchantment went even deeper. It was as if they felt that married life owed

them something more than kids and mortgages, something in Elliot's case that sounded suspiciously like the need for permanent romantic passion.

Similarly, Gary, wasn't able to give up his illusions. Despite living with and eventually marrying the feisty community activist Susanah (Patricia Kalember), Gary still clung to the image of himself as a bohemian. For example, out shopping with Hope for his upcoming child he was at once astounded and appalled by the enormous variety of baby articles they find, exclaiming: "when did a natural act become such a secular religion?"

Domesticity and its discontents weren't thirtysomething's sole response to the cultural changes since the sixties. It also made an effort to deal with the issue of work.

Ironically, it was this image of Gary as a sixties free spirit that made his death less jarring than might have been expected. Indeed like Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon and so many other sixties icons, one almost expected Gary to die young.

While there is nothing particularly new in what is commonly referred to as "growing up", there is actually something very refreshing and possibly even endearing in the way the *thirtysomething* males approach it. Because so much attention was previously paid to their generation by the social scientists and essayists of the sixties and by the politicians and hucksters of the seventies and eighties, was it any wonder that Elliot, Gary and Michael felt that there was something special about themselves, and that their encounters with domesticity, childrearing, and relationships would somehow be different from those of the past?

Domesticity and its discontents weren't, however, thirtysomething's sole response to the cultural changes since the sixties. Throughout the program's history, it also made an effort to deal with the issue of work. Nevertheless, it wasn't until the series third (89-90) and fourth seasons (90-91) that a somewhat more realistic concept of work and the workplace began to take shape on the show. Before that, the depiction of work ranged from the idyllic to the mildly utopian.

The most glaring example of this was the range of autonomy initially granted its major characters. Besides Michael and Elliot, who owned their own small ad agency, there was Gary an academic, and Hope, Nancy and Melissa who were alternatively free-lance or part-time editors, writers, illustrators, and photographers. Their work was therefore relatively free of the normal accountability and time constraints that are the lot of the average worker, even highly paid professionals.

Oddly enough, this very privileged work situation was even extended to include Ellyn. Although she was supposed to be a highly-placed and competent municipal official, her work life seemed free of any kind of interference. For that matter, none of the pressures that a woman city official might face, such as a municipal budget crisis, problems of minorities, the hint of sexual harassment, seeing a less qualified male get a coveted job or assignment, ever seemed to complicate Ellyn's life.

This preference for the life of the free-lancer, the small entrepreneur, and the progressive world of academia and local government, also owed a lot to the legacy of the sixties.

For that generation, work that was "doing your own thing" (writer, photographer, illustrator), small entrepreneur (hippie capitalist), or pro-social (teaching, social work) was infinitely preferable to the choices of the seventies and eighties, with their emphasis on corporate cultures, finance, MBA's and law degrees.

Although the creators and writers of *thirtysomething* never gave much evidence they had even a clue as to what constituted academic life or the rough and tumble of the freelancer's career, there was one area where they did make important strides. This was in the work life of Michael and Elliot after their small ad agency failed, and they joined the DAA agency and encountered the CEO-from-hell, Miles Drentell (David Clennon).

The episodes that heralded that change were those about Michael and Elliot's bankruptcy. These programs (among the series' most highly rated before the Nancy cancer episodes) took it out of the realm of advertising as merely waiting for inspiration to hit and then going out and collecting your Clio, into the real world of corporate cannibalism.

Watching Michael and Elliot's business collapse was to see the nightmare side of the American dream, although without some of the messier details. Except for unemployment, neither is ever in danger of losing their homes or going eternally into debt. Seeing them scramble for bank loans and then turning against one another, however, was to realize that Chapter 11 writes more than finis to a business, and is potentially the end of relationships and possibly even hope.

Hope actually was what Michael and Elliot seemed metaphorically to have abandoned when they entered the corporate hell of DAA. By no means your Dantesque vision of torment, DAA had all the perks of corporate life, from first class travel, to elegant secretaries who moved about on catlike feet, to a devil in an Armani suit, Miles Drentell.

In one sense Miles was perhaps the most brilliant creation of a businessman television has seen in a long time. No crude good ole boy like J.R. Ewing or frosted haired patriarch like *Dynasty's* Blake Carrington, both of whose notions of corporate power were limited to the vow "I'll destroy you," Miles could ruin you with the arch of his eyebrow; his idea of a command was a Zen-like aphorism from the apocryphal "Nishuru on the Art of Management."

Miles' Mephisto-phelean dimensions, however, had a tendency to overwhelm the verisimilitude about work that *thirtysomething's* creators had so studiously injected into the series. Initially and by their own admission rather ignorant of advertising, the series' creators did their homework at Chiat, Day, Mojo and other agencies, and it showed in episodes such as Michael and Elliot's concept of "retrosnacking". This was an idea they cooked up to revive a lagging brand of candy by appealing to consumers of their generation who ate it during their childhood.

Suddenly, the series' advertising episodes enjoyed new vitality with stories such as Michael and Elliot being pitted against a creative director who demands heavy statistical research from his subordinates. Of course, Michael and Elliot's seat-of-the-pants intuitive style won out because the director was merely using his desire for statistics as a blind for burn out.

Unfortunately, the series' realistic depiction of the advertising world was increasingly subordinated to the struggle between Michael and Miles. That battle reached epic proportions in one of the last of the series episodes, which took place in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Michael, increasingly despondent over the death of Gary, Elliot's departure for L.A., and stretched to the limits by his job as DAA's creative director, is

suddenly confronted by a moral/political dilemma.

Although the problem was ostensibly about a client's demand for the cancellation of an ad campaign featuring an actor who had appeared at an anti-war rally, the episode echoed with other issues. One one level, it was a critique of the hyper-patriotism that held America in its grip in the wake of the Gulf War; a situation which caused Michael to comment on the fear he felt when he heard, "rich white guys sitting around talking about a 'New World Order'."

The creators of "thirtysomething" found a way to document and, at the same time, dramatize some of the important cultural changes of our era.

On another level, in Michael's argument to the client to let the ad campaign stand because the actor was just exercising his constitutional rights, there were echoes of another war. Indeed there was a sense that his impassioned plea was not merely a defense of dissent in the Gulf War but of protest over the war that Michael's generation will forever refer to as "The War" — the Vietnam War.

The episode also drove a stake through the heart of American advertising. This occurred when Miles, increasingly frustrated by Michael's continued independence determined once and for all to enlighten him about the true nature and role of advertising. In almost Orwellian terms he explained that its purpose was to "calm and reassure. We embrace people with the message that we're all in this together. That our leaders are infallible, and that there is nothing absolutely nothing wrong."

Not only was this Miles at his cynical best, he was also at his most demonic. Miles' fire and brimstone message finally revealed his true nature, just as his reference to the "covenant" that existed between himself and Michael shed light on the Faustian side of their relationship.

Despite this lapse into a yuppie version of *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, these episodes still provided a good look at the Darwinian side of American capitalism. They also featured a closer inspection of the world of work and corporate life than had hitherto been the case in most television series. As a result, *thirtysomething* went a long way toward escaping the almost hermetically sealed world of its first seasons and towards realizing the sixties' shibboleth that there is no private life that is not part of a larger public world.

This did not imply that by the end of its fourth season *thirtysomething* had suddenly become a series that presented richly textured stories dealing with burning social issues. Although there was an episode on homelessness in its final season, and an indirect foray at dealing with the issue of AIDS, the series never succeeded in creating a credible continuing black character beside the brief turns of Michael and Elliot's buppie colleague at DAA, Mark Harriton (Richard Cummings, Jr.) or Rosie (Lynne Thigpen), Susanah's assistant at the Race Street Project.

Homosexual characters did not fare any better. Indeed the series never seemed to recover from the uproar caused by an episode in which two male characters were shown in bed together. By the same token, in all its time on the air we never got any sense from the series, which was supposed

POSTSCRIPT

For some time, despite the editor of *Television Quarterly's* urging, I resisted writing a postscript to my article on *thirtysomething*. Perhaps it was because I believed so many of the rumors about *thirtysomething* not being truly dead. That it might, for instance, be resurrected as a short flight series which tied up all the loose ends, or that a made for TV movie would do the same, or that NBC would negotiate for the rights and produce a few more episodes. Whether or not that does happen, I now believe is beside the point.

Does it really matter if Hope and Michael stayed together, Nancy's cancer remained in remission, Elliot made it big in Hollywood, Ellyn and Billy had any kids, or if Melissa finally found Mr. Right? The fact is that perhaps a definitive ending to *thirtysomething* wasn't really necessary. For example, although you might be curious, is it really necessary to know what happened to Nora after she slammed the door in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*? Indeed one only looks forward with dread to the upcoming sequel to *Gone With the Wind*. And I, for one, frankly don't give a damn, if Rhett found the peace he was searching for in Charleston, or if Scarlett finally got him back.

All of which leads me to believe that *thirtysomething's* ending was right for it after all. From its very beginnings the series' producers laid claim to fact that the show was a small slice of life, filled with much of life's ambiguities. Therefore, its only fitting that the series ended with so many loose ends. Life usually does also! It's only from television that we've come to demand such absolute closure. As a matter of fact it may have been *thirtysomething's* final legacy to leave us with the thought that television like life is really messy.

– *Albert Auster*

to be set in Philadelphia, of a city that was virtually bankrupt and riven with racial tensions.

This notwithstanding, *thirtysomething* created its own unique version of a community of difficulties. While they might generally seem small by comparison to the large issues of racism, poverty, crime, and the destruction of the environment, the series nonetheless reminded us of the importance of the issues of love and work, and how they probably reveal as much about ourselves and our times as the larger issues.

It was this aspect of *thirtysomething* — so long excoriated or ignored — that actually constituted its most exciting and compelling ingredient. Operating almost like social historians who wanted to convince us that it's not battles, laws, or military and political heroes that are the most significant things in history, the creators of *thirtysomething* found a way to document and, at the same time, dramatize some of the important cultural changes of our era.

These seismic shifts left the characters on *thirtysomething* like the survivors on *Gilligans Island*. But unlike those earlier farcical characters, the *thirtysomething* folks didn't have a real world to come back to, only the memory of one. That memory was, however, particularly challenging since it recalled a time when many of the old assumptions about relationships were rejected and young people worked to reshape institutions like work and the family. As a result, the struggles on *thirtysome-*

thing took on less the character of a group of over-self-conscious , over-articulate, over-achieving yuppies beset by the problems faced by anyone past puberty, and more of the nature of a group of over-self-conscious, over-articulate, over-achieving people trying to attain some sort of stability in the world of rapid change where the old values have been discredited and the new ones were in the process of being born.

It was this layer of sixties-bred consciousness beneath the realities of eighties and nineties' that made the series a video version of Pentimento. For anyone looking at the influence of contemporary feminism on relationships and family life, on men's flight from intimacy and their embrace of parenthood, or the high wire balancing act between integrity, creativity, and survival that face us all in the world of modern American business, *thirtysomething* was virtually the chronicle of the way were were, and who we are now.

As it turned out, the world that the poetic Mandelstam described as one made up of "bickering, broken hearts and divorce suits," was not as free from terrors as she imagined. As a matter of fact, the "ordinary heartbreaks" of *thirtysomething* went a long way toward providing insight into the human heart as well as an era. If anything, the lesson of *thirtysomething* was that real tragedy is not measured by the historical or political weight of the experience, but, to quote T.S. Eliot, to "have the experience but miss the meaning." As such, *thirtysomething* will really be missed.■

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SIDELIGHTS

On the Beach

"Last month [Robert A.] Iger, [President of ABC Entertainment] vacationed in Hawaii. He was about to leave his hotel for a day of snorkeling when he passed through the lobby, carrying his snorkeling equipment in a bag prominently market ABC.

A woman in the lobby saw the ABC logo and stopped him. She was irate, he said.

As Mr. Iger told the story: "She said: 'Do you work for ABC? Please tell me who I can write to about canceling thirtysomething. *They've ruined my life on Tuesday nights. What kind of jerk would make a decision like that?'"*

Responded Mr. Iger, "This is your lucky day." He got another earful later in the month, about canceling China Beach. *"I picked up the phone," Mr. Iger said, "and my mother says, 'Robert, what can you be thinking?'"*

– New York Times

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THE A TO Z OF CORPORATE TELEVISION

Close-up of a different kind of TV world where business uses television to reach special audiences.

BY HOWARD GROSS

Garbage is hardly the stuff of successful television. Pizza, for that matter, seems a flimsy concept on which to hang an entire TV network. But garbage and pizza and a host of other seemingly prosaic subjects are just the stuff of successful television, despite occasionally immoderate budgets, extremely limited runs and audiences that sometimes number no more than a dozen. It's a different kind of television.

All this is business as usual in the arcane realm of corporate television. Whether a videotaped prospectus on waste management for a select group of Wall Street investors, or a weekly series of programs for Domino's Pizza franchisees, here is a medium for, by and about corporate America.

Variously known as corporate video, private television and business TV, "It runs the gamut from training to marketing to the full-range of in-house communications," says Deborah Moore, Director of Communications for the International Television Association, whose 12,000 members include writers, producers, directors and managers from around the world. While many work for governments, schools, the military and non-profit organizations, most are corporate employees or contractors.

Not surprisingly, since more than 800,000 American companies use videotape or television as means of communication. In 1990, according to Hope Reports Inc., a media research firm in Rochester, New York, their aggregate spending on video and television equipment, programs, production and post production services was $5 billion. With that money, corporate television producers turned out more product than their broadcast and cable counterparts combined.

Still, despite the numbers of dollars and programs, corporate television remains relatively obscure, even to those in related fields. One reason is that it's presentations are not public events. They represent private interests, sometimes shrouded in secrecy. Companies often use the medium to preview products and services; to analyze current conditions; and to present the news — good or bad — to employees and shareholders.

Even those programs open to public scrutiny have one dramatic drawback: their message is business. It is not that corporate television cannot be entertaining. Some of it is. But that is not its raison d'etre. It's principal objectives usually are to keep their special audiences informed, inspired and increasingly up-to-date in developing their talents and skills.

For the most part, they are the same goals that date as far back as the turn-of-the century, when some businesses relied on silent movies to market products and services. By World War II, film became the dominant medium, especially for the military. But many companies also discovered the power of show business. Auto makers often spiced dealer exhibits with live entertainment, buying rights to Broadway shows and hiring writers, arrangers and choreographers to revise the works to their own specifications.

Like film, musical pageants prevailed in the fifties and early sixties. By the middle of the decade however, a new act burst onto the scene: multi-image. Gravity-feed slide projectors and fast sequencing carousels quickly upstaged antiquated flip charts and film strips. Enhancements like dissolve units, multi-image programmers and multi-channel audio transformed simple slide shows into sight and sound extravaganzas. By 1973, corporations were creating more than 200 million slides annually.

That year, Sony Corporation introduced the 3/4 inch videocassette. These U-Matics had been designed for the home market, but because they were expensive and hard to handle, they fared poorly. Yet the consumer's loss was industry's gain.

Corporations quickly adapted to the advantages of video. Programs produced on videocassette could be duplicated and distributed more cost-effectively than could film or slides. The advent of smaller, portable cameras and editing systems also meant that companies could escape the restraints of the studio and move their productions directly into offices and factories. Throughout the 1970s, the number of corporate video and television facilities increased from fewer than 300 to more than 3,000 as corporate video expenditures more than quadrupled.

Technology was a driving force in the 1980s as well, and continues to be so in this decade. Developments in satellites, high definition television, digital video and interactive multimedia, that have yet to make their way into broadcast or cable, are essential to corporate television operations.

With computers as basic as a Macintosh or Amiga, a producer can write scripts, budget productions, create storyboards and keep track of production schedules.

Unencumbered by strict quality standards and constantly pushed to the bottom line, corporate producers have made the most of economical innovations. "Corporations are redefining video," say Douglas Brush, executive vice president of the New York-based marketing research firm D/J Brush Associates. "What was once just a variation of television is now defined in terms of other technologies, particularly the computer."

Indeed, with computers as basic as a Macintosh or Amiga, producers can write scripts, budget productions, create storyboards and keep track of production schedules and locations all on the same machine. With a few added components, they can also edit the tape and add an array of graphics and visual effects that are barely distinguishable from systems costing five to ten times as much.

Just as the means of production are being transformed, so is distribution.

Business television is a term coined in the mid-eighties by Dr. Kathleen Hansell, president of KJH Communications in Atlanta, to describe private television networks that transmit programs almost exclusively by satellite. Though similar to traditional television networks, business TV differs in two significant respects: its audiences are especially targeted, and they can talk back.

Five years ago, JC Penney was the only retail company to own and operate such a network. Since then, it has been joined by Dayton Hudson, Domino's Pizza, Jiffy Lube, K Mart, May Company, Sears and Wal-Mart. Each of the Big Three auto makers, plus Toyota, regularly transmit training and information programs to employees and dealers throughout the country. And Federal Express produces and distributes a daily five-minute report for its couriers on weather and route conditions.

To date, more than 75 companies, educational institutions, government agencies and non-profit organizations manage networks that link them with workers, students, customers and constituents at remote sites around the world. Those unable to establish their own systems rely on outside broadcaster and special independent networks which provide programs for industry-wide subscribers. Among the largest, Texas-based Wescott Communication's Automotive Satellite Network transmits eight hours of daily programming on sales and management training to 4,000 car dealers nationwide. Wescott also broadcasts a 24-hour Law Enforcement Television Network and Fire and Emergency Television Network.

While much of the programming is pre-recorded, the singular advantage of satellite networks is their capacity to transmit live, two-way television. Until recently, such interactivity was limited to telephone questions and answers, much like daytime talk shows. But computerized systems, says Dr. Hansell, allow viewers to respond throughout the program: "Let's say I'm doing training. As I ask questions, viewers push buttons for yes or no. The information is input into a computer which reports back to the presenter. With my software, I can determine whether people are listening or not. It's an important addition to a broadcast because it provides for a lot more feedback."

Effective feedback however, requires an audience willing to interact with the new technologies, and that is the other force driving the success of corporate television: a generation of managers, employees and professionals weaned on media, and as comfortable turning dials as turning pages. Unlike their seniors who remember a world without TV, they are as literate in sounds and images as in the printed word, and as often as not, they prefer to do business that way.

"These days, executives are much more fastidious about presentation and persona," says Jack Hilton, whose New York-based consulting firm, Jack Hilton Inc., has advised and instructed the nation's top management in the use of television since 1975. "They are more willing to mix it up with the press, as well as share information on the inside." Many of Hilton's earlier clients had no great appetite for this type of activity. "Now," he adds, "there is no reluctance whatsoever."

But while videotape and television have been technolgies of preference for the past two decades, they will be necessities, at least, until the next century. "There's no doubt that there is a correlation between the increased use of television," says Hilton, "and the fact that 20 or 25 percent of the American workforce is either illiterate or functionally illiterate."

Little wonder then that video is replacing print as the primary corporate communications tool, as more new workers come from the Sesame

Street and MTV generation. Not only do they read less, but, according to a study by the Times Mirror Center for People and the Press, they know less and care less about the world around them than any generation in the past fifty years. This, at a time when they must continuously add to their body of knowledge to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

The American Society of Training and Development estimates that 50 million workers will require training in the 1990s to equip them with skills needed to handle their jobs. Thirty-seven millions more workers will also require entry-level training annually. The cost to American business: $90 billion a year.

Much of that money is already finding its way into corporate television. Of all programs produced in 1990, reports the research firm of Frank N. Magid Associates, 38 percent was for training. Fastfood companies, for example, regularly produce and distribute programs on topics ranging from how to slice vegetable to how to organize a successful franchise. In the computer industry, users of visual training literally run the gamut from A (Apple) to Z (Zenith). And as corporations increase their outlays for training and retraining, the use of television technologies should expand accordingly.

Video is replacing print as the primary corporate communications tool, as more new workers come from the Sesame Street and MTV generation.

Yet even though the corporate television industry is already growing better than 15 percent annually, it has not been immune to economic realities, and many companies have had to learn how to do more with less.

Since 1980, says Hope Reports' president Thomas Hope, while expenditures and productions have increased, the number of corporate production centers has actually declined, with the average size of TV staffs falling from 14 to nine. "Television operations have taken more of a beating than other corporate media," Hope says, "because of the expense."

One result has been a growing dependence on outside contractors, many of whom were once full-time employees. Since the mid-eighties, the number of independent producers and free-lancers has jumped more that 50 percent. As companies have downsized, a lot of corporate media people have lost their jobs and gone into business for themselves.

They are not alone. Increasingly, broadcasters too, are uncovering opportunities in the corporate sector. "If you are unemployed and want to continue a career in television, you go where the work is," advises Jack Hilton. "Corporations can certainly compete in terms of salary, compensation and benefits."

But unemployment is not a prerequisite for work in corporate television. Many, like Hilton, who also produces for both public and commercial broadcasting, find they can successfully straddle both sides of the fence: "If you do something for broadcast television and your work is intermittent, how do you continue to pay the staff and keep the lights on between projects? There can be an ongoing flow of revenue from the corporate TV area."

It is possible that by the end of the century, the distinction between corporate television and broadcasting or cable may blur further. Owners of private networks are already considering advertising, and several are closely monitoring Whittle Communi-

cation's Channel One as a prototype for business. Conversely, although NBC scrapped its Business Video division several years ago, Capital Cities/ABC's Lifetime Network devotes more than 12 hours of its Sunday schedule specifically to the medical profession; and ESPN is the host channel for BizNet, a programming subsidiary of the United States Chamber of Commerce.

Just as important, corporate television may also lose its identity within the company. "I don't think it will exist in a separate context," says Douglas Brush, who believes television operations will become less distinct from other functions. As equipment gets smaller, less expensive and easier to operate, "end-users will dictate where and when it is used, and how they will use it. Then companies won't need technical specialists anymore. What they will really need will be communicators."

In all probability, corporate communication in the 1990s will be more about messages and concepts that technologies and technique. Television producers will still need to understand the capacity of their tools; and as companies "globalize," more and more programs will be created beyond the walls of offices–even beyond national borders. Today, the average corporate television budget is close to $300,000, though many are in the millions, and "and our crews are as likely to be in the rain forests of Venezuela," says Hilton, "as in the streets of New York"

Corporate television professionals, however, are not in the television business. They are in the businesses of finance, manufacturing or government, among others, and they are often called on to be trainers, managers, marketers and salespeople as well as producers. What's more, while their audiences are relatively small and select, they are also more diverse. By the end of this decade, 85 percent of all new entrants into the workforce will be women, minorities and immigrants, and they will bring with them very different cultures and values.

Consequently, if producers are to productively assume their numerous roles, and effectively reach their various audiences, they must do so through the most practical means of communications. That will not always be television. If fact, the medium is not longer the message, and as messages change, so will the ways they are delivered. In the future, sounds, images, printed words, even the personal touch, will be integrated within a single presentation.; Technically, the computer will make that possible. But it will still be the responsibility of the corporate communicator to make it successful. ■

Howard Gross is a communications consultant specializing in corporate and organizational communication. He was an assistant professor and Coordinator of Journalism at Hofstra University. He has also produced news and public affairs programming for radio. and broadcast and cable television.

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REVIEW AND COMMENT

THE CHAIRMAN AND HIS CEO'S

In All His Glory,
The Life of William S. Paley

By Sally Bedell Smith
Simon and Schuster: New York

BY LAWRENCE LAURENT

The late Dr. A. William Bluem of Syracuse University was the Founding Editor of the *Television Quarterly* and he had his own, unique sense of humor. For example, after one of the typically long, argumentative and loud meetings of the Editorial Board of the *Television Quarterly* over what articles should be rejected, which ones accepted and which ones returned for additional work, Dr. Bluem liked to have a few belts of Jack Daniel's famous Tennessee sipping whiskey. It usually took about three drinks for the Bluem sense of humor to kick in. That's when he would say to me, "Let's get a cab and go uptown."

We would hail a taxi ride uptown to that world symbol of elegance, Tiffany's jewelry store. Dr. Bluem would enter, pick out the most dignified, imposing salesman and introduce himself: "I am Dr. A. William Bluem of Syracuse University and I am doing a special study." Here, he would take out a notebook and fountain pen. "Sir," continued Bluem, "the question is: 'Does Tiffany's consider itself the CBS of the jewelry business'?"

The story came to mind while I was reading Sally Bedell Smith's exhaustive biography of William S. Paley, the longtime head of the Columbia Broadcasting System (and its many subsidiaries). He was not the founder of CBS, anymore that David Sarnoff was the founder of the National Broadcasting Company or Sol Taishoff was the founder of *Broadcasting* magazine. Apparently, if one outlives his contemporaries, he can appropriate any grand title of his choosing. The network that Mr. Paley purchased had been started by Arthur Judson. NBC was a subsidiary of RCA, which was the creation of Owen D. Young, one of the guiding executives of General Electric. *Broadcasting* magazine was the brainchild of the late Martin Codel, who hired the energetic young Taishoff on the recommendation of David Lawrence, then the publisher of *U.S. Daily*. In time Taishoff, Sarnoff and Paley each would become a "founder," if for no reason other than few were around who might wish to dispute their right to the title.

Not only does rank have its privileges, but as Elia Kazan noted in his superb autobiography, *A Life*, "history belongs to the last guy at the typewriter."

Sally Bedell Smith has been at the typewriter for *TV Guide* and, later for the *New York Times*, covering the television beat. She has not had good luck with her subjects; not for that matter, have the subjects of her two television books had much good luck, either. She wrote a fine book, *Up The Tube*, on Fred Silverman when he was the President of NBC, but in the lag between writing and editing and the publication of the book, Mr. Silverman lost his job at NBC and was replaced by Grant Tinker. Then came Ms. Smith's new book on Paley and before its official publication date, Mr. Paley died at the age of 86. So, if you learn that Sally Bedell Smith is starting work on a book about you, walk, run and drive with the greatest of care.

In All His Glory fits into the relatively new school of biography, a kind of oral history, which tells us in great detail just what Mr. Paley's friends, employees, competitors and a few relatives were willing to say about him to a persistent reporter, armed with a tape recorder. Robert Caro has practiced this sort of thing with great success to produce valuable books, one on Robert Moses and the first two of four projected volumes on President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Traditional historians have great reservations about this technique, since human beings have fallible recollections and because no two people ever remember the same happenings in quite the same way. Still, in fairness to Ms. Smith and to Mr. Caro, in these days of public relations practitioners who create, correct and polish the written record to a point where all semblance of truth is destroyed, the modern student of history simply has to look to other, more reliable, or at least less controlled, sources of biographical material, like the oral.

The problem is particularly acute at CBS, since as early as 1929 Mr. Paley hired the services of Edward Bernays, one of the pioneers of image polishing in the arcane new art of public relations. Mr. Paley, we are told, was pleased to have sufficient importance to need someone "to tell you what to do and what not to do." This Paley-Bernays association probably explains why Mr. Paley's network became identified with the skills with which its executives would play "The Word Game." The CBS folks made and enforced the rules. They wrote the definitions and forced them upon journalists and politicians on any topics that really mattered to CBS.

The "Word Game" could be found in other areas, too. CBS had been fortunate to have the superb graphics — the CBS Eye, for example — and an understanding that people listened to — and later, watched — performing stars and programs. Being first in the ratings and first in advertising revenue, and being staffed by slender young men in dark suits, somehow translated into CBS' being the "Tiffany of Networks." As the aforementioned Dr. Bluem enjoyed pointing out, Tiffany's didn't carry a single product that could be purchased for $4 per thousand homes. Reality, as Bernays preached, was not so important as perception; truth didn't really matter. If the public preferred falsity, give it to them.

Later, CBS hired the company headed by the legendary public relations counselor, Ivy Lee, and by the 1960s had many in-house vice presidents who could write Paley's speeches, polish his image, and bedevil sassy journalists with new versions of the word game.

Besides, William S. Paley had those traits that made a public relations man's job easy. Mr. Paley always looked his part of the idealized, successful businessman. He was reasonably handsome and wore with

distinction the expensive, tailored suits from Savile Row in London. He possessed a pleasant, distinctive speaking voice, and used his incredible energy for a mixture of a very long run of social and commercial success.

And, yes, he liked women. And, yes, indeed, women liked him. He married two beautiful women and, as Sally Bedell Smith is determined to prove, he had lots of mistresses, many one-night stands and even occasional sex with beautiful casual acquaintances. He was, however, more than circumspect in these affairs and only rarely did the foul breath of scandal touch his elegantly tailored image. Besides, he was a product of the Roaring Twenties, when he came into his full majority, and he was really in show business, where such things are not only tolerated, but expected.

The very least that can be said about William S. Paley is that he outlived the others who pioneered network broadcasting in the United States. He had, especially in the earlier years, an understanding of what a majority of the broadcast audience wanted and, perhaps needed: Entertainment, diversion, a low-level-of-involvement kind of programming that allowed them to listen while performing other work. Oh, he did a share of "cultural" programming, always a bit self-consciously and self-congratulatorily.

In radio days, news was usually the cheapest form of programming. It had nothing like the soaring costs of television news today. Still, Mr. Paley was justifiably proud of the news organization that he created, the newsmen that he pampered and the worldwide fame that they achieved. Until the late 1980s, excellence in broadcast news was always measured against CBS.

He had an acute understanding of just how much the citizens of the United States are driven by the Protestant Ethic, a set of self-imposed rules, holding that idleness equates with wickedness and that pleasure for its own sake is dangerously close to sin. News programming, however, is considered to be different from wicked old entertainment. News provides socially useful information. It is good in and of itself, since a member of the audience is supposed to take no pleasure from it.

In other ways the many self-promoting books about CBS that started in the late 1980s and continue into early 1990s, provide some valuable lessons in broadcast history. These have been mostly angry books, written by men and women whose careers have been ended at CBS. The executives usually have written about the lack of support at the top, while the underlings complain bitterly about the recently developed dominating role of the network's favorite anchorman.

Ms. Smith isn't angry and she provides good motivation for young William S. Paley's falling in love with radio broadcasting, first, as a way of getting out of his father's tobacco business in Philadelphia and, second, as a way of establishing himself in New York City. He paid $503,000, mostly from his inheritance, for 50.3% of the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System on September 14, 1928. It was as good an investment as one could have made.

Paley benefited almost at once from the personal limitations and character flaws of his chief rival, David Sarnoff, who became head of the Radio Corp. of America, which included the National Broadcasting Company, which had two radio networks, designated at "Red" and "Blue". Sarnoff, if one is to believe the validity of his "Radio Music Box" memorandum of 1922, saw broadcasting as a way to sell receiving sets. In the famous "Memo", he extolled broadcasting's future content as lectures, concerts and other great music; the stuff of culture. Sarnoff's own cultural back-

ground was meager, but his highly developed, self-exaggerated accomplishments produced a self-image that enabled him to love all things beautiful.

For some reason, Ms. Smith persists in spreading further the myth that Sarnoff had leapt to national prominence in 1912 when as a radio operator he picked up the signals from the stricken transatlantic superliner, the HMS Titanic. The story is false. It has been demolished by former NBC Vice President Kenneth Bilby in his book, *The General* published in 1988.

For all his success as a visionary, Sarnoff's place in broadcast history, for the most part, belongs on the technical or engineering side of the business. He was not very good at programming for the radio, or, later, the television audience.

In this programming competition it was never really a contest. True, Paley hated the term "showman" and usually didn't even want to be associated with something called "show business." But beneath the top hat, the white tie and tails and the winning smile of a fine salesman beat the heart of a showman.

For at least 40 years, from the 1930s into the 1970s, Paley had a magic touch with programming and public taste. He enjoyed the companionship of performers, understood their insecurities and had a rare appreciation of what the mass majority of the audience preferred. In the 1950s and 1960s, the top ten Nielsen programs usually consisted of eight or nine CBS programs and one or two from his competitors. No one ever argues seriously that his statement, "Programming is the heart of broadcasting," was false.

So, one is left to conclude that upon Paley's arrival in Manhattan, from the very beginning, Sarnoff was overmatched and at least in the business of commercial broadcast programming didn't provide much of a competitor for Paley.

In time, Paley's CBS would brag that "Broadcasting is our only business," while his main competition over at NBC had to worry about all sorts of manufacturing, marketing and industrial problems. As a result, in the 1930s and '40s, CBS could move quickly, unbothered by the burdens of competing corporate conflicts.

Sarnoff, the very serious, cultured executive, didn't really like comedians, no matter how popular they were with the NBC Radio audiences. Paley cultivated them. Jack Benny once told me in a 1968 interview, what he thought was his real reason for having left his longtime home at NBC Radio to go to CBS. Others had explained that Benny did it because he could incorporate himself and pay the Federal government a capital gains tax of 50% on earnings instead of the top personal income rate of 90%. That said, Benny was minor consideration: The real reason was that "Bill Paley invited me to his home for dinner. Sarnoff never even invited me to his office for a cup of coffee."

We tend now to forget just how hard the young radio business had to struggle for respectability. At least the first 20 years were concentrated on demonstrating to advertisers that radio actually did attract people and really did sell goods and services in a very cost-effective way. Into this fight came a handsome, articulate, mid-American from Ohio with a Ph.D. degree from Ohio State University. Possibly, no Land Grant University doctorate was ever used to achieve more sales. CBS hired Dr. Frank Nicholas Stanton and in him got a bargain second only in size to Paley's purchase of the network itself.

Stanton is truly a remarkable man. He took broadcasting from its nose-counting pre-occupation to in-depth research, beginning — in meaningful

terms — with the questionnaire he wrote on the back of an envelope to start researchers to questioning the public after the *War of the Worlds* broadcast of Orson Welles and his Mercury Players on Halloween Night, 1938. The data that was collected went to Dr. Hadley Cantril at Princeton and eventually into hard cover publication, a long distance from the listenership surveys conducted by Crossley using postal cards.

As Ms. Smith now recounts, Stanton was sometimes embarrassed at the way CBS promotion material used his doctorate as ethical proof to back up its research claims. Still, holders of Ph.D degrees were rare outside of academia in the 1930s.

Stanton's academic credentials were almost a bonus. In a life filled with work and almost totally devoid of frivolity, he had acquired some astonishing skills. As a high school student, he did the art work and design for the windows of a major department store. He came to know typography, layout design and graphics by being the editor of a prize-winning college yearbook. He was an expert photographer, who taught his college football coaches the value of football game films. He had also studied and became quite expert in such fields as architecture, opinion polling, economics and psychology.

If money had been available after he received his bachelor's degree, Frank Stanton would have gone to medical school. Instead, he accepted support for graduate school at Ohio State, did research on how an individual received information and published a doctoral dissertation that caught the fancy of CBS Radio Vice President Paul Kesten. A job offer from CBS in New York followed and Frank Stanton's brilliance was soon noticed by other top executives.

Typically, when he was invited out to Paley's Long Island estate and offered the job of network president, he responded: "But, Mr. Paley, you don't know me." Paley offered him time to make a decision and then kept him dangling for months. Testing. Always testing. It was the best appointment that Paley ever made. Stanton provided the organization with the kindly discipline that had been missing.

He was also smart enough to know that truly creative employees need some space in which to create. He, for example, studiously avoided programming decisions. That was Mr. Paley's strongest skill. In a brief period of time, Stanton developed another important skill — he knew precisely how much he could do in Mr. Paley's presence as well as what to do in his frequent absences, which grew longer as Mr. Paley grew older.

Besides all that, Stanton made himself into the most effective witness that broadcasting has ever put before a Congressional committee. I know this first hand, for I covered his appearances before committees in the House and Senate over a 30 year period, and I never saw his equal. Eventually, I came to understand, as a reporter comes to understand such things, that the effectiveness of Stanton on the witness stand was neither an accident, nor a skill with which he had been born.

As a witness, he was the soul of reasonable helpfulness, slow to offend and unlikely to take offense unnecessarily. He would say "Our problem" instead of "CBS's problem" or "What we need to do," instead of "what you need to do."

His grasp of detail was truly amazing. He would, in response to a question, rattle off the CBS prime time schedule for each night of the week; or list, in detail, the number of, say, daytime dramatic serials; or go through the practices on each CBS-TV network quiz program. He never lost his temper, unless losing his temper would be helpful to CBS. Even then, he would apologize after making an

angry point, and return to his composure and reasonable helpfulness.

In New York, he could be found at his desk, seven days a week. On Saturdays and Sundays, he would bring his dog in with him. No detail was too small. No problem was too big.

For all of these reasons (and some that I cannot know) many persons date the decline of CBS with the forced retirement of Frank Stanton when he reached his 65th birthday in 1973. Mr. Paley said he was only enforcing rules that Frank Stanton had written. Of course, Mr. Paley was an exception to all rules. In time, about eight years later, Mr. Paley finally began to grasp the great value of the unique character and exceptional executive skills of Dr. Stanton.

As Mr. Paley's troubles mounted, from the attempted takeover by Ted Turner to the slights Mr. Paley thought he was receiving from the newest CBS CEOs, Dr. Stanton became the man sought out, consulted and heeded. By then, Mr. Paley had examined a parade of other chief executives, drawn from the very top of corporate America; all were found lacking by Mr. Paley, before he finally grasped just what the rare gifts, discipline and dedication of a Frank Stanton had meant for him and for his complex corporation. By then, it was too late.

Stanton never looked better than when he was compared with the unfortunate men who followed him into the job of being number two to Mr. Paley's number one at CBS. Each of those persons came to know that Mr. Paley was a world class needler and second guesser. In the finest days of CBS-TV, I once tried to get the gifted, highly competent Dr. Charles Steinberg, Vice President of Press Information, to give me a hard commitment on the make-up of a prime time fall schedule.

Dr. Steinberg wouldn't budge and when I asked why, he responded: "Because the Chairman can turn on a dime."

He could, too, with his last minute revival of the canceled *Gunsmoke* series and his completely unexpected refusal to allow a situation comedy about the Wiere Brothers into the prime time schedule. But as Mr. Paley aged, as his attention span lessened, and his memory became overloaded, he could drive any Chief Executive Officer to angered distraction. He expected to pass on major decisions, but he took the responsibility for nothing.

Mr. Paley did not make mistakes. If mistakes were made, someone had failed to inform him, had failed to give him needed details. Someone else took the blame and neither the needling or the second guessing ever stopped. The younger executives, in particular, came to detest meetings with Mr. Paley and his insistence that they had failed to keep him informed. Worse, no amount of hard evidence to the contrary would be tolerated. The Chairman, you see, just didn't make errors.

First, John Schneider, a lifer at CBS, was groomed to replace Stanton. But Paley found him "too breezy" and drove him to request a return to his old job as head of the CBS-TV network. Next, there was Charles (Chick) Ireland, fresh from triumphs at ITT. He never "got on top of CBS" and could not understand why "those people at CBS Records" weren't able to tell him — in advance — "which recordings were going to be hits and which would be losers?"

Whatever chance Ireland, a tough, hard-working ex-Marine and Yale-trained lawyer, might have had at CBS was ruined when the CBS Board turned down his first acquisition, an $80 million deal to acquire Josten's, a highly successful maker of high school and college class rings. Ireland thought the company fit quite nicely with the CBS textbook publishing division. But the CBS Board

claimed that Josten's did not seem "classy enough," according to Ms. Smith's book. She adds that Paley had double-crossed Ireland, arranging for board members to turn down the deal. This contempt for acquisition of the highly profitable Josten's, in the judgment of many, was one more example of the CBS attitude that valued style more than substance.

Ireland, who had been hired in October 1971, died in June of the following year of a heart attack. His replacement was Arthur Taylor, age 37 years, executive vice president of the International Paper Company, former investment banker at prestigious First Boston and holder of degrees in Renaissance History and American Economic History from Brown University. Sally Bedell Smith does her best to present Taylor as "the son of a telephone worker," who had "survived the bullies of Rahway, New Jersey, who took a dim view of his clarinet playing, feeble athletic ability, and studious dedication."

Frank Stanton's job at CBS — by this time, he was a figure head vice chairman — was terminated. Mr. Paley reneged on the terms already set for his retirement, says Ms. Smith. She claims that Mr. Paley was being petty, haggling over "something like $20,000 a year for a company that was making nearly $200 million a year in pre-tax profits."

Mr. Paley thought that he was set for the remainder of his life with Arthur Taylor running the CBS empire. Included among Taylor's talents was a knowledge of Hebrew and a deep understanding of Icelandic poetry. He also fit what was called the "CBS type," in that he was tall, handsome, and quickly became accustomed to the expensive perks that went with the top job. Yet, all of Arthur Taylor's degrees, financial acumen, youth, easy ways, good looks or authoritative manner, still didn't prevent his making at least three king-sized mistakes.

First, he thought that Mr. Paley really meant for him to have the final word on everything at CBS. He was wrong. Paley had no intention of giving up his power. Second, Taylor whipped the free-wheeling, free spending programming people into line with much stricter accounting methods. This was wise in accounting terms and destructive to creative forces. Third, he came up with a lofty concept, called "Viewing Time" or the "Family Viewing Hour," which was a noble concept, prohibiting programs with sex or violence before 9 p.m.

That policy placed the two strongest lead-in programs that CBS had — *All in the Family* and *Kojak* — into the later time periods, where the audiences are smaller. The policy did wonders for ABC-TV, with its juvenile situation comedies that fit quite nicely into the evening lead-off positions and helped ABC the rest of the night. The CBS ratings lead, rock steady for almost 20 years, disappeared.

Ms. Smith's book does give Arthur Taylor credit for pushing CBS into hiring and training more women and minorities. Wall Street responded to his leadership as CBS profits jumped from $83 million in 1972 to $123 million in 1975, and he managed to uncover several mergers that would have been good for CBS if Paley hadn't decided to turn all of them down. Taylor decided that Paley "really didn't want acquisitions. He wanted the diversions he got from a deal."

The CBS Board members had found Taylor could be pompous and overbearing. His wearing of a homburg hat, which is quite common among bankers, was mocked by network executives, who called him "King Arthur" behind his back.

Still, writes Ms. Smith, when Mr. Paley turned on Taylor in 1976, the CBS "ratings free-fall played only a small part." She thinks that Mr. Paley objected mostly to Arthur Taylor's

behaving as though he were William S. Paley. On October 13, one hour before a board meeting, Taylor was called to Mr. Paley's office where two other board members were present.

Said Mr. Paley: "We want your resignation" and no recital of Mr. Paley's recent praise or soaring CBS profits made any difference. Taylor departed with over $2 million in settlement pay, severance pay and stock. With Rockefeller money he tried to establish a pay channel on cable, "Entertainment", which lasted but briefly before being merged into the ABC-owned A&E ad-supported channel. Later, Taylor settled in as dean of Fordham University's Graduate Business School.

After Taylor, Mr. Paley reached into the CBS Books division for John Backe, the head of Holt, Rinehart and Winston. He got the title of top man, but Mr. Paley told a friend: "I don't care what the title is as long as he knows I am in charge." Backe was given the title of CEO in the spring of 1977 and was fired in May, 1980.

During Backe's term of office, the decision had to be made on whether to keep Dan Rather, the CBS Newsman, who wanted to succeed Walter Cronkite as anchor of the evening news and who was being courted by NBC News. CBS News President Bill Leonard asked for a meeting with Wyman, TV network President Gene Jankowski and Mr. Paley. Leonard had already met with Rather's agent and came to the meeting with the news that he had already agreed to pay Dan Rather $2.2 million a year for ten years.

Reports Ms. Smith "... Backe and Paley were flabbergasted. Backe called the amount 'obscene, indecent and irresponsible' and announced his opposition. Paley recalled that Rather's deal would be bigger than the one that had brought Jack Benny to CBS in the 1940s. Haggling went on for over an hour, until Jankowski wrote on a small note pad: '1 point = $5 million' and slipped the paper to Mr. Paley. After reading the note, a shocked Mr. Paley asked, 'Is this true, Gene?' and heard the response, 'Absolutely, Mr. Chairman.'"

Paley left the decision up to Backe, who said,"It seems we don't have much choice." Paley responded: "It's been my experience in life that some of the cheapest things turn out to be the most expensive and some of the most expensive things turn out, in the long run, to be the cheapest." With that, Paley left the room. Rather got his contract.

But that still didn't help Backe. While Robert Daly made program decisions that moved CBS back into first place, Paley's faith in Backe steadily diminished and he began looking for a replacement. Daly, flatly, turned down the job and went off to head TV production for Warner Bros. Paley tried to hire Michael Eisner, who didn't care for Mr. Paley's vagueness about the job. Then Mr. Paley found his shining white knight in Thomas P. Wyman, the kind of person central casting would have sent over if you asked for an actor to play a Chief Operating Officer.

He was tall, handsome, educated at Andover and Amherst, where he was captain of the golf team. He had lived abroad, been a vice president of the Nestle Company, and put in ten years in Boston as a senior vice president of Polaroid Corporation before becoming vice chairman of the Pillsbury Company in Minneapolis. Again, Paley had picked someone without any experience in broadcasting.

Paley started pursuing Wyman while John Backe was still on the job, claiming, "I'm the chairman and I can do anything I want."

When the matter went for a decision to the CBS Board, Backe discovered that he had made a mistake in not cultivating the members of the Board

of Directors. He asked for a vote of confidence and, instead, was asked for his resignation. Wyman, dealing from strength, insisted upon being made the Chief Executive Officer, which was supposed to push Mr. Paley, at 80, into a well-deserved retirement. But, he could no more let go of the organization he had built than he could stop breathing.

Next, Ted Turner tried to buy CBS and the network's saviour was Lawrence Tisch, who took over with 24.9% of the stock and began selling off its assets.

Mr. Paley, from the 1930s through the sixties was considered to have a "golden touch" for programming in radio *and* TV, until age removed him from the public he once understood — and until that public changed because of a long, unpopular war, and became spoiled by the longest period of unbroken prosperity in American history.

However, in the very early years of television, Paley often waited. He let RCA do most of the pioneering , although CBS did have its own experimental station run by essayist Gilbert Seldes, which kept broadcasting throughout World War II.

Paley had won a Colonel's commission in the Army and had gone to London to join Supreme Headquarters of the Allies (SHAEF) under General Dwight D. Eisenhower. While in London, Paley and the charismatic correspondent, Edward R. Murrow, became close personal friends. Paley lived in luxury at a London Hotel and cut a very wide swath through London society. He even made Murrow the Vice President of CBS News after World War II, a job that Murrow didn't want, wasn't good at, and didn't like at all. When a gasoline sponsor offered big money for a nightly news program with Murrow, he gave up trying to be an executive and went back to broadcasting.

Still, that friendship was sorely tested by Murrow's insistence on making speeches demanding a higher standard for broadcasting and his willingness to produce, with Fred W. Friendly, television documentaries that ruffled right-wing politicians and disturbed the conservative men who operated the TV stations affiliated with CBS. Paley, reluctantly and kindly, chipped away at Murrow's hours on the air. The weekly *See It Now* became an occasional program in longer form and eventually, Murrow was asked to take a sabbatical leave from which he never returned.

Bill Leonard, who spent all his working life at CBS News, claims that Murrow's problem was simply a dislike for commercial, advertiser-supported, broadcasting. Murrow, himself, after he took over the United States Information Agency, told me that broadcasting's advertising time had become too expensive to afford the strong views of a committed broadcaster.

He did one of his studied "bits" — the long, deep drag on his unfiltered Camel cigarette, staring off into space, his brow furrowed. He blew out the smoke, squinted at me and said, "No national problem means a thing, until it starts to make you itch."

Itching was not something that William S. Paley cared to do.

Within a year after that conversation in the sparsely furnished house of Ed and Janet Murrow in Northwest Washington, Murrow was dead of lung cancer. In his declining days, the Murrows moved to Southern California. Mr. Paley visited with Murrow and both enjoyed recalling their happier days in broadcasting. In the CBS News coverage that followed Mr. Murrow's death, no mention was made of how the network had pushed him out. Some CBS correspondents continue to insist that Murrow left of his own accord, but if he did, Mr. Murrow didn't know it.

The famous Paley "touch" deserted him late in life, as it usually deserts anyone who loses his knowledge and understanding of the mainstream of the society in which he lives. Here was a man who would sit at an elegant meal at the Ground Floor, a chic restaurant in the new "Black Rock" CBS Building and wonder why are there so few customers? A companion had to remind him of a great change in American leisure habits that Mr. Paley had helped to effect; that the people who used to go out to dinner were at home watching television. They were watching the programs that Mr. Paley had approved. Here was a man who had never been inside a super-market until he was taken in the late 1970s to visit one by an aide.

And yet this same man could listen to the score of *My Fair Lady* and offer to take the entire investment burden for the whole show. The investment paid off handsomely. But he is also accused of having disliked a preview of *Fiddler on the Roof*, because the musical (which is still running somewhere, today to enthusiastic audiences) was "too Jewish."

Radio programming had taught Mr. Paley that the network with the best, most popular situation comedies, usually leads the national ratings. No one ever surpassed him in finding, selecting, shaping and scheduling situation comedies. He also had fine taste, which would find its way into his schedules.

CBS Radio had the *Mercury Playhouse* with Orson Welles and the *CBS Radio Workshop* with the finest documentary writing in radio history by the likes of Norman Corwin. He understood the limited appeal of classical music, but scheduled it, anyway, against NBC's most popular comedy programs.

Omnibus found its first home in the CBS Sunday afternoon TV schedule. *Playhouse 90*, of course, is nearly always cited among TV's finest efforts, but there were also the visits to Carnegie Hall, later to the Lincoln Center, and, always, the stirring television documentaries that marked television news at CBS. Nor should one forget the theatrical hits that were brought directly to CBS-TV by Westinghouse, using Hollywood stars, or the overall excellence of the *Studio One* hourlong dramatic series on Monday nights.

The splendid sitcoms provided money to pay the bills and the stockholders, but Paley's obvious love for drama was ever-present in TV's first 25 years.

Yet, as this book shows us, this is the same William S. Paley who once turned over his TV network to James T. Aubrey who had nothing but contempt for the average taste of the American people and tried to prove in hundreds of ways that he was right.

Here too, is a William S. Paley, who enthusiastically promoted quiz show producer Louis G. Cowan (*Quiz Kids, The $64,000 Question*), to network president and then turned on him in a flash after the quiz show scandal erupted in 1959. Mr. Paley didn't care that Cowan had sold all his financial interest in the quiz shows when he left them and, consequently, could hardly be blamed for the rigging that took place. He didn't care, either, that Mr. Cowan was ill with phlebitis, a painful circulatory ailment, when the crisis came. Cowan was forced to resign.

And finally, Mr. Paley was defeated by the plethora of competing channels that came from the spread of non-network TV stations and the plentitude of cable channels. The network affiliates had the world pretty much to themselves for a period that begins in the 1940 and runs into the 70s.

Yes, I am aware that all 70-plus cable services don't win accumulated ratings equal to those of one network. Yes, I am aware that the Independent

stations rarely get to double digit ratings. But, I am also aware of the changing nature of the network audience. For more than 25 years, a passing grade for renewal of a network program was a 15 rating and a 30 share. By the middle 1980s, a network was happily renewing a program with a 12 rating and a 20 share. You can expect those passing grades to get even lower, unless some new exciting forms of programming are discovered; something along the lines of programs such as the first *Lucy* series, or the landmark *Laugh-In* or something equal to CBS' schedule busting *All in the Family* or *60 Minutes*.

I have tried in reviewing Sally Bedell Smith's exhaustive and excellent work on William S. Paley to give credit for a marvelous amassing of information. Ms. Smith must be credited with providing a splendid chronology of American broadcasting.

In appreciating Ms. Smith's understanding of the institution that Mr. Paley shaped, in explaining the innovations he brought to broadcasting, and evaluating his long term impact, this book is a rousing success. What I missed was the all-too-human William S. Paley, and I closed the book still pondering such questions as: Why should this son of a cigarmaker, of only routine upper-income education, without discernible gifts of persuasion, be the person who is most important in broadcasting history? What's missing is the man of such extraordinary dimensions that he could help create and lead what is now a multi-billion dollar industry?

Perhaps the time has been too short to measure the effects of this remarkable man. Perhaps we shall not have definitive answers to those questions in our own time.

One of my major regrets about this book is that Ms. Smith is unable to understand the great personal charm of William Paley. I covered him in Congressional testimony in Washington, chatted with him at industry affairs in Washington and came to understand the wit, often self-deprecatory, the broad knowledge from reading and travel, and the assurance that follows personal and corporate success.

The successes, the pioneering, the bold strokes of his middle years shouldn't completely overpower the final years in which Mr. Paley, like King Lear, raged against the elements and what he conceived to be conspiracies against him. Yes, he stayed too long at the party, insisted upon lordly prerogatives to the end, but — please remember — not one of his successors ever matched his victories, his dominance of broadcasting.

In any case, *In All His Glory* will stand for a long time as the definitive work on Mr. Paley as well as a perceptive contribution to broadcasting history. Thomas Babington Macaulay once wrote that history is nothing more than the lives of great men. He reinforced his argument by adding: "Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here." In this sense, Ms. Smith has made a major contribution to a future generation's understanding of American broadcasting in the mid-years of the twentieth century.

Finally, one is left to wonder just how much Mr. Paley, himself, believed in the viability of the organization he had created. Remember, in the beginning, he owned over 50% of the radio network he bought in 1929.

For all the diversity into pianos, guitars, organs, toys and new information storage techniques and movies, CBS still made nearly all of its profits from the broadcasting and entertainment business. Yet, when Mr. Paley died, he owned only 7% of the CBS stock. He had sold large blocks of his own stock and diversified his investment portfolio. Smart

man. Is it possible that William S. Paley, pioneer and onetime possessor of the golden touch, knew before any of the rest of us that the wonder days were over? ■

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THE GOLDENSON STORY

Beating The Odds

By Leonard H. Goldenson
with Marvin J. Wolf
Charles Scribner's Sons: New York

BY BERT R. BRILLER

This is an account of how ABC "beat the odds," although it doesn't live up to its subtitle as the "untold story" behind the company's rise. The former chairman of ABC Paramount relates how he moved from the movie business and theaters into the broadcasting and other media/entertainment businesses his corporation acquired. The patriarch of ABC had a pivotal position from which to see and wrestle with the contradictions that faced those industries in transition — film production vs. distribution, television vs. radio, networks vs. stations, news vs. entertainment, broadcasting vs. cable, profits vs. public service.

My perspective is conditioned in part by my own experiences, as an ABC executive who at times met with Goldenson, traveled with him and saw him at work and on the tennis court. "Beating the Odds" is apt, not only because as the fourth network in a two-and-a-half-network environment ABC was a long-shot, but because it suggests Goldenson's penchant for poker and willingness to bet on a dark horse or an unknown without a track record.

The book's format is unusual in that Goldenson's reminiscences are heavily interspersed with the recollections of others — friends, relatives, business associates, suppliers, etc. About one third of the text comes from these sources, which include investors such as Warren Buffet; Hollywood stalwarts such as

Roy Huggins, Michael Eisner, Barry Diller, Marcey Carsey, Bill Orr, Aaron Spelling, Dan Melnick; news people like Roone Arledge, Peter Jennings, Barbara Walters, Elmer Lower; also former ABC executives including Ollie Treyz, Fred Pierce, Elton Rule, Brandon Stoddard, Tom Moore, Fred Silverman, Don Coyle, Martin Starger; plus stars such as Bob Hope, and a host of others.

These inserts of oral history provide colorful anecdotes, although the mirrors of memory are sometimes cloudy and not the checked information one looks for in definitive texts such as Eric Barnouw's histories. But these guest contributors do catch the spirit. One such piece is from Dr. Arthur Epstein, Goldenson's dentist. As the dentist tells it, one morning in the mid-50's, while working on Goldenson's teeth he complained about the movies on TV and said he could get some better ones, since Bob Benjamin, another patient, was J. Arthur Rank's American lawyer.

The dentist didn't know how much Rank would ask, because there had been no sales, and Goldenson offered $1,500,000 for the package. This was in 1955, a time when the major American studios were still keeping their films off the small screen. Avoiding mention of ABC, Dr. Epstein told Benjamin an unnamed company would pay only $1,000,000 for the features. Benjamin countered by asking $2,000,000. The dentist suggested a compromise at $1,500,000 — the figure Goldenson had agreed to.

Both parties were satisfied, although Benjamin later said that had he known the buyer was ABC he would have doubled the price. Goldenson adds that he had been under the impression the film people had paid Epstein's commission — and only in 1988 while researching the book did he learn it was ABC that paid the dentist $150,000 for the morning's non-dental work.

I can add that, as an ABC sales development executive at the time, I was told to see Dr. Epstein and put together a package, picking 115 titles from a roster of 150. I dropped into the dentist's office at 1501 Broadway, above New York's Paramount Theater, but his nurse told me the doctor would meet me in his film office down the hall.

Under posters of Japanese movies he distributed to art theater, Dr. Epstein gave me promotional sheets on some of the Rank pictures, but he had only a list of titles on the majority. Fortunately, one of my assistants was a Brit who had seen some and was familiar with the actors. While it was easy to choose the few gems like *The Red Shoes* and *Henry V*, we were able to select others like *The Belles of St. Trinian's* and Alec Guiness comedies which might also attract an American audience. We divided the features into three groups, one for Sunday evening, another for a Monday-through-Friday *Afternoon Film Festival*, and a third which could play both daytime and prime time.

As Goldenson observes, the features were on a higher level than the product Hollywood was releasing to television. The series' success was very limited, however, in part because British films had not yet won a mass audience here.

The story points up the flexibility the young ABC-TV network had under Goldenson's leadership, and the looseness, offbeat concepts and lack of bureaucratic formality with which that lean and hungry company operated.

A Far-Out Idea

Another example of the unconventional is Goldenson's and Roy Huggins' recounting of how that memorable program *The Fugitive* got on the air.

Huggins developed the concept of a series with a hero who is fleeing justice because he has been falsely accused and found guilty of killing his wife. Huggins recalls that every person he discussed the premise with, including his friends and his agent, hated the idea.

Then one day he was called by ABC programmer Dan Melnick who said Goldenson wanted to meet with him. Huggins, who had produced the successful *Cheyenne* and *Maverick* for ABC, had just been fired from Fox and decided to leave TV for a year at graduate school. He said that although he liked Goldenson he was determined to do graduate school.

Melnick persisted, and Huggins said he would see Goldenson, but only to tell him this idea that everyone hated. "I warn you," he told Melnick, "you'll be in deeper shit with Leonard for bringing me in to tell this story than by saying 'Roy doesn't want to meet with you.'"

At the meeting in the Beverly Hills Hotel, ABC President Tom Moore walked out on Huggins' recital and another key executive called it "un-American, a slap in the face of American justice."

Goldenson, however, was enthusiastic and bought the idea. To his disappointment, Huggins was still set on going to graduate school at UCLA and refused to produce the series. In his place Huggins was asked to get Quinn Martin as producer. *The Fugitive*, which was launched in 1963, ran successfully through 1967.

90-Minute Movies

Adept at developing offbeat ideas, Huggins questioned the custom of producing two-hour-long films for television. "Why couldn't we do a 70-minute feature that would run from 8:30 to 10 PM?" he suggested to Universal, but it turned down the concept. He then offered it to NBC which rejected it, as did CBS programmers Fred Silverman and Mike Dann.

Variety's Dave Kaufman called and said he'd heard a rumor about Huggins developing a show called "Movie of the Week." Huggins told him his plans and next day *Variety* front-paged a story about Huggins' "Movie of the Week."

The article brought a call from ABC programmer Leonard Goldberg, who invited Huggins to present the idea to his department. They said they'd get back to Huggins. Nothing seemed to be happening for three months, when a story in *Variety* reported that ABC was going to do a 90-minute "Movie of the Week" series.

Irate, Huggins immediately called Goldberg, who told him the series was too big for one person and the network decided to do it itself. Goldberg added that ABC planned to do 26 of the 90-minuters and offered Huggins the chance to do eight.

Huggins, however, insisted on getting the whole package and talked about suing ABC. His lawyer counseled against a suit, because he'd lose: "Since the whole concept was printed in *Variety*, it's now in the public domain. Anybody can use it." Huggins writes he now feels he should have accepted the bid do do eight.

Innovative Personnel

Another note on ABC's unconventional personnel policies is given by Marcy Carsey, co-packager of *The Bill Cosby Show* and other hits. In 1974, she recalls, "I was thirty, female and pregnant, and you didn't go to NBC in those days if you were thirty, female and pregnant. Especially pregnant.

"ABC was exactly the place I wanted to be because it had a very scrappy image. They made jokes

about ABC. One was, 'The reason nobody could find Patty Hearst was that she was on ABC at eight o'clock Friday night.'

"But if you were in the TV production industry at the time, you also knew that ABC was full of wonderful people. It had the smartest and brightest and the best, and it only had to be a matter of time before ABC came to the top."

Interviewed by Michael Eisner, then in ABC's program department, Carsey told him she was three months pregnant and perhaps they should talk again after her child was born. But Eisner said, "Why would we wait? ... I'm having a baby, too. Is this a factor? Why are we talking about this?"

Accent On Youth

Back in the Fifties, a young Dan Melnick, just out of the Army, was hired by ABC program chief Bob Lewine after meeting ABC president Bob Kintner at a party. But by the time Melnick showed up for work, Kintner had been ousted from ABC and moved to NBC. A few days later Lewine followed him to the senior network. Understandably, Melnick felt his tenure at ABC was iffy and asked for a meeting with Goldenson.

When Melnick called him "Mr. Goldenson," the ABC chairman stopped him and said, "Mr. Goldenson was my father. I'm Leonard." He went on to tell him he'd checked Melnick's background and said, "I'd like to believe that if I had been in Bob Lewine's and Bob Kintner's place, I would have been smart enough to hire you. Please stay."

One factor in Goldenson's desire to keep Melnick was the company's emphasis on youth. This stemmed from a marketing concept developed by Ollie Treyz as president of the network during the 1950s. Treyz's approach was to have the network concentrate on winning the younger family viewers — not only because they were more willing to sample new programs, but also because they were the consumers most sought after by the advertisers of mass-consumption products.

The informality Melnick found in Goldenson was one of the strong points of his leadership. I found it in my first meeting with him. I had written the draft of a presentation for advertisers to be given at the Waldorf-Astoria Ballroom and was unveiling it to Treyz when Goldenson buzzed him on the intercom. Ollie invited Goldenson in to hear the plan. Goldenson informally sat atop a bookcase and made it extremely easy for me to go over the pitch without tensing up in front the The Big Boss.

The Sharks Threaten

The free-wheeling personal Goldenson style is evident in his recollections of the "sharks," the corporate raiders who saw broadcast properties turn into highly lucrative investments and who wanted in. One of the early threats came from Norton Simon, whose holdings included McCall Publishing and Hunt Foods. Simon felt that having an interest in ABC would help promote Hunt Foods.

One strategy to frustrate Simon's efforts was to eliminate cumulative voting, which could have given the Simon forces a place on the board of directors. Another was to tell Simon's representatives that should they buy ABC there was no guarantee the FCC would transfer the licenses of ABC's owned stations to Simon. However, Simon continued to acquire ABC stock.

Another takeover threat/opportunity came from Harold Geneen and ITT, with Larry Tisch of Loew's setting up the meeting. The giant ITT eventually offered $85 a share

for ABC, far above its market price. The boards of both companies approved the merger. The FCC held hearings and narrowly approved the merger.

But, as Goldenson observes, "bureaucrats are by nature territorial animals" and the Justice Department got into the act, resulting in further FCC hearings and an antitrust court case.

Because the proceedings dragged on so long, to the point of triggering an escape clause, it was while Goldenson was vacationing at his friend Larry Tisch's new resort hotel when a phone call informed him that ITT had backed out of the wedding. "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry," Goldenson says, as he relayed the news on the tennis court to Gerry Tsai, who had first suggested the ITT merger and to Tisch, who had set up the first meeting with Geneen.

Later that New Year's Day of 1968 Geneen phoned to make it official. The parting was not angry and Goldenson writes, "We get along well even today." He adds that it was only later that he learned ITT had helped foment a coup in Chile and was also involved in corporate bribery. Had ABC become part of ITT, Goldenson notes, ABC News's "credibility would have been zero."

The next suitor was Howard Hughes who six months later made a tender offer, the same day that ABC went into registration on a new debt offer and so could not make any additional statement. Goldenson recounts the difficulties of ABC's position. Eventually, ABC hit on the strategy of taking advantage of Hughes' reclusivity. ABC's court maneuvers to get a public hearing on the basis that a tender offer would involve a transfer of station licenses resulted in Hughes' being asked to testify publicly. Within hours, counsel for the man who shunned contact with the outside world called to withdraw the tender offer.

Worrisome Friends

Goldenson's personal touch in fighting takeovers is evidenced in his friendship with Loew's chief Larry Tisch. When the latter filed notice with the SEC that he held 6.5% of ABC stock — more than ABC management had — and continued to accumulate its shares, Goldenson met with Tisch. Tisch claimed he had acquired the stock merely as an investment, but Goldenson replied that it made him nervous. With a little prodding, Tisch got rid of most of the stock — at a profit.

Another friend of Goldenson, Lew Wasserman of MCA, pressed several times to effect an MCA/ABC merger, but Goldenson resisted firmly. He pointed out that the network legally could not become a partner of anyone who produced television shows, as MCA does. Goldenson speculates that since Wasserman "got his pal Ronald Reagan to keep the Financial Interest and Syndication rules in effect, then he [thought he] could also get him to scrap the rules when it served Wasserman's interest."

Yet another potential raid was discovered in 1984 when the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Bass brothers had accumulated enough ABC stock to take over the company. The Texas billionaires controlled the Disney company, which ABC had given much help, and whose CEO was ABC alumnus Michael Eisner. Goldenson called Eisner who called the eldest Bass brother, Sidney, to say that a takeover would not be in keeping with the friendly relations the two companies had had.

A few days later Robert Bass, who had been acting on his own, called on the ABC chairman to say he did not want to jeopardize the Disney/ABC relationship and agreed to sell off their ABC stock. Michael Mallardi, an ABC financial officer, explains that Goldenson's persuasiveness stems from his status as industry pioneer,

"which accords him a lot of admiration, deference, and respect."

The Right Knight

However, the merger moves continued with friendly offers from Gannett, Coca-Cola and Pepsico. Looking for a more suitable partner, Goldenson came up with IBM. While Goldenson waited to hear from Big Blue, Tom Murphy of Capital Cities suggested the merger that finally went through. As Goldenson and Murphy relate, a major element in the signing of the deal was getting the participation of Warren Buffet, of Berkshire-Hathaway, and one of America's wealthiest men. Owning 18 percent of ABC stock, he gave an irrevocable eleven-year proxy on it to Cap Cities' Murphy and Dan Burke.

Reviewing the "End Game," Goldenson points up some of the dangers of recent trends in broadcasting and investing. One he calls "the Reagan Era's deregulatory frenzy." The other is the leveraged buyout which often involved the sale of junk bonds. The ability to speculate with other people's money, rather than requiring investors to put up considerable amounts of their own capital, he feels, reduced the element of prudence.

While Goldenson's laid-back manner presented him as softer than CBS's Paley or RCA's Sarnoff, he stood up to those corporate chieftains who dominated broadcasting earlier. One incident I recall took place in the mid-fifties when Bob Kintner was deposed as ABC president and moved to NBC. Kintner soon wooed several ABC executives to NBC. Goldenson phoned General Sarnoff and warned him that broadcasting differed from other businesses and if the raiding did not stop he would blow the whistle at the FCC.

Where does Goldenson rank as a shaper of the industry, compared with Sarnoff and Paley? The founders of RCA/NBC and CBS came on the broadcast scene much earlier and consequently made greater contributions to television's first decades. The General's achievements were primarily in technology; Paley will be remembered most for his impact on TV news.

But from his coming to ABC in 1953, Goldenson built a network and a corporation which was able to draw up even with his firmly established and well-heeled competition — and occasionally to pass them in one area or another, including programming. He was especially successful in using sports and youth-oriented entertainment to attract mass audiences, to win over stations to a network that when it started was missing many key TV markets, and eventually to gain parity in advertising revenue. Struggling against such giants as Sarnoff and Paley, Goldenson deserves kudos.

He merits praise for this book, too, despite its patchwork quality. Its focus is on people, from family and friends to members of his board, and he lets many of them speak with their own voice. All in all, it's a reasonable, relatively modest self-portrait of the man as Corporate Chief. Although he had a heart attack in 1971, Goldenson kept it secret to prevent corporate raiders from capitalizing on the fact. He took up oil painting, studying with a distinguished artist, Alton Tobey. His works are considerably better than typical Sunday painters', have strong subject matter and in technique have moved beyond realism.

Perhaps the most important contribution Goldenson made to ABC was the cross-fertilization that came from a movie background. This went beyond an understanding of mass audience taste. His association with studio chiefs brought important insights. I recall an executive committee meeting in the 1950's where he pointed out that the Hollywood moguls couldn't see ABC shows on cable. ABC lawyers explained that they hadn't gotten CATV rights. Gold-

enson shot back, "If Jack Warner can see NBC and CBS on the cable, we should be there too."

What can the networks do to slow erosion of their audiences, Goldenson recently was asked while promoting the book on *Good Morning, America*. Stop playing it safe with programming, he urged. Their big need, he said, is "Guts!"

His career suggests that today's new climate needs more leaders with some of Goldenson's characteristics — broad knowledge of the varied aspects of the industry, deep personal dedication to the medium's future, and a willingness to gamble on the new and untried. And, perhaps above all, the conviction that television is a people business, that it is not the newest technology, nor the latest financial wrinkle in the deal, but the creative involvement of the people on the screen and behind the cameras that is needed for the medium to reach its full potential. ■

Bert Briller was Vice President of Sales Development in the formative years of ABC television. Earlier he was a reporter/critic for *Variety* and recently executive editor of the Television Information Office. He is completing a book on media.

JFK AND THE TUBE

The Expanding Vista, AmericanTelevision in the Kennedy Years

By Mary Ann Watson
New York: Oxford University Press

BY EVERETTE E. DENNIS

This is a refreshing entry into the recent literature of television because it is not a critical lament about the current state of the industry, a romantic insider's tale, or a dreary examination of regulatory policy.

Media scholar Mary Ann Watson instead focused her attention on the many facets of television in the short period of the Kennedy presidency and has produced an important and readable book. Going well beyond the cliche that Kennedy was the first television president (which is not technically true, of course), she traces through rigorous research the Kennedy-television alliance. We see close up how candidate Kennedy and President Kennedy used the medium to gain power, then to govern. We also see Kennedy's interest in regulating the medium, especially with regard to program content and quality.

In a volume that presents a coherent picture of the television industry in these seminal years, the reader gets insight both on what Les Brown called "the business behind the box," and its interactive dance with government regulators. In the present era of deregulation, it is worth revisiting a period when most of the public thought that regulation of electronic media in the public interest was a good thing.

Especially useful here is an exceptionally well-textured look at the role

of Newton N. Minow, JFK's FCC chairman and a lightning rod for a government-industry-public interface with medium. The link between Minow, a Kennedy lieutenant in his FCC role, and the President's vision for the medium is fascinating, as is a detailed review of "The Vast Wasteland" speech of 1961, which so defined long-term expectations for television. The role that the speech played, the reaction of industry, and Minow's own creative management of the resulting process, is in itself a great story worth knowing. Much of it is told here, I believe, for the first time, as the author probes new sources, both through extensive personal interviews with insiders as well as the written record.

Just how the new medium, under the watchful eye of an activist administration, which in the end had little direct impact on the medium's fortunes, enhanced cultural democracy, became an instrument for the civil rights movement, helped launch the space program, pioneered documentaries, communicated with children, and developed a responsible system for advertising, is all here. While giving the greatest attention to commercial television, the book also treats public television's early promise and performance as well as the coming of communication satellites. As television was defining itself in terms of programming, it was benefiting from new technologies, while being guided by purposeful regulators who did try valiantly to define, for that time at least, the public interest. The book is especially strong on the personalities behind the box, as well as those who lent their visage to its public face. The network moguls, entertainment geniuses, news visionaries and others are all part of the action.

There are also many gems that point out the wisdom and far sightedness of industry people and regulators. There is a clear sense of how government, technology and markets helped and hindered the development of television, for example. One particularly prophetic gem is contained in a 1963 farewell speech by Newton Minow in which he urged what was then called educational television to do a great course in American history with a series on the Civil War.

Mary Ann Watson's book is an exceptional piece of scholarship that adds significantly to the literature of the field because of its weighty scholarship, which is gracefully presented in a highly-readable form.

This book is a model for other broadcast historians who have yet to treat many important developments in the history of a medium that has greatly defined the modern era.

Not all periods are as seminal as the vital slice of history that is dissected and examined in this book, but they are worth examining in a fashion where the profit motive, technology, regulation and other factors are seen coherently from the perspective of a fair-minded scholar.

This is a book that belongs on the bookshelf of every television executive and television critic. Scholars will find that it offers a useful roadmap, while the general reader also gets valuable intelligence. ■

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TELLING IT LIKE IT AIN'T

Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media

By Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon
Lyle Stuart: New York

BY JOHN L. HESS

If we can believe the polls, Americans tuned in on the evening news on January 17 largely in favor of peace, and went to bed heavily in favor of war. The shallowness and volatility that that implies is characteristic of a TV audience, and this would become, as many observers have noted, a TV war, a miniseries produced by the Pentagon with a P.R. staff of more than 3,000 and a cast of more than half a million (The enemy, mostly invisible, did not count). As for the audience, a study found that the more people watched TV, the less they knew about the issues of the war — but 81 percent could name the missile that downed the Scud.

A similar survey a year earlier had found that only 9 percent of American adults could identify the Chief Justice of the United States, but 54 percent could name the judge in the TV show *The People's Court*.

This tribute to our prime source of information is noted in *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media*, by Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon. This troubling, one-sided but I think painstakingly accurate, book would have served the correspondents who covered the Gulf War rather better than the gas masks that they carried and sometimes wore on camera. It would certainly have helped viewers at home to filter the emissions.

The war was great infotainment because casualties were, as a CBS man at the Pentagon exclaimed, "shockingly light." This echoed what John Chancellor remarked after President Bush's war rehearsal in Panama: "We lose numbers like that in large training exercises." He was referring of course, as *Unreliable Sources* points out, to *our* casualties. *Theirs* we never counted, and never saw. We did see our coffins coming home, and in one unforgettable moment they shared a split screen with a triumphant President. Peter Jennings apologized publicly for that, and it could not happen again.

In the Gulf War there were no TV cameras or journalists at Dover, no battlefront scenes of dead or wounded. Indeed, the most piteous footage from our side showed a doomed cormorant, erroneously described as a victim of an oil slick deliberately loosed by Saddam Hussein — which had not yet reached the Saudi shore. (Did it ever? The slick vanished from the screen when the war ended.)

Deliberately deprived of access to real news (by both sides, to be sure, but the Iraqis were as far behind in news management as they were in combat management), our news editors would swallow anything, from the babies dumped out of incubators to what Gen. Walter Boomer has boasted was the Pentagon's "great disinformation campaign" — the myth of Iraq's military might, its crack troops and its almost-ready nuclear bomb.

The Iraqis did mount one small incursion, at Khafji, where 11 Marines were killed by friendly fire. We got the news a day late because, as Bob Zelnick of ABC explained from the Pentagon, the brass did not want to take the play away from the President's State of the Union address. Only the hopelessly naive or uninformed still believe that censorship is about military security — although on my own screen I saw a Yank "journalist" at one of those "live" briefings that we got in lieu of war coverage, apologize to a Saudi general for those

miscreants present who had posed indiscreet questions.

As the French say, there are no indiscreet questions, only indiscreet answers. Some indiscreet (that is, good) reporters broke loose from their custodians: an AP man got into Khafji and saw Americans in combat, when the briefers were saying that only our worthy Arab allies were fighting there, and John Balzar of the *Los Angeles Times* saw copter gunship tapes showing Iraqis "like ghostly sheep ... bewildered and terrified ... literally blown to bits." His pool was then effectively isolated for the duration, and we never saw tapes like that at home.

There has been much grumbling in the news trade about the pool system, the censorship that would change copy about a pilot's mood from "giddy" to "proud", the occasional seizure of tapes and even arrests of nonconforming reporters. A number of journals and journalists filed suit against the controls, and leaders of the mainstream media have complained to the Pentagon, but as this book recalls, it was they who invited and welcomed the pool system. This agreement following the total news blackout at Grenada, where the four reporters who got ashore before the invasion had been taken to an aircraft carrier and held incommunicado. In Panama, the pool was held back, then confined to base, then spoonfed a mush of features like Noriega's stash of cocaine that turned out to be tortilla flour.

The authors of *Unreliable Sources* quote I.F. Stone: "Every government is run by liars, and nothing they say should be believed." What they demonstrate is that the media believe damned near everything the authorities say — or present it without reservation, which amounts to the same thing. Lee and Solomon, freelance journalists and media critics, review a number of the psy-war fables of the recent past: the White Paper on El Salvador, Qadhafi's phantom hit squads, the Yellow Rain on Indochina (which turned out to be bee droppings), the MIG hoax that spoiled coverage of the 1984 elections, the crimes and falsehoods involved in Iran/contra and its cover-up. Official investigators and pundits alike agreed that the country did not want, or need, another Watergate.

What is troubling here is the degree to which the media went along. Those epics of truth-telling that are our glory or our shame, depending upon one's viewpoint — like My-lai, Watergate, the Pentagon Papers — were the belated work of a few journalists, working against odds. More typically, the media plays ball. As *Unreliable Sources* recalls, Ronald Reagan's communications chief, David Gergen, said the Teflon was on the media, rather than on his boss, and Michael Deaver agreed that he'd gotten "the most generous treatment by the press of any President in the postwar era."

Bush has done no worse. From the day after Saddam took Kuwait, the networks mobilized their Rolodexes and called up reserves of retired brass and other experts. In a process well documented by *Unreliable Sources*, well-informed Americans who favored restraint were rarely seen or heard; when peaceniks took to the streets, they were either ignored or granted brief spots, usually balanced by shots of pro-war demonstrators, however few they might be.

Most of the media's troops in the field were visibly confused. A few disgraced our trade by calling M.P.'s to expel British and French colleagues and seize their tapes. Others broke away for some solid reporting. Peter Arnett took vicious heat for doing his job. Jon Alpert, a longtime stringer for NBC, took some horrible footage of "collateral damage" in Basra. I have seen it, but at a private screening; NBC turned it down, and laid Alpert off.

So we were spared the shocking sights. That made the war a nice

wholesome show for the family; when it stopped being fun, the networks in effect removed it from prime time. The media troops were called home, leaving a few serious types to dig in the rubble for a few shards of the truth, which as ever will come too late to be of much use.

Lee and Solomon here try to persuade the audience to be skeptical. They pretty well document their case that the media generally cover the news from the optic of the owners, and in attacking all the networks, including PBS, and the major print journals, they take no prisoners. But an appended interview with Jeff Cohen, head of FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy in Media), makes the encouraging point that most journalists mean well and can be persuaded by conscience and by members of the audience to do well.

A foreword by Ed Asner expresses the fear that the Lou Grants of our trade — the tough, pure, tell-it-like-it-is journalists — may be a dying breed, along with principled owners like Mrs. Pynchon.

I am not sure that they ever were numerous, nor that local ownership was necessarily more benign than today's conglomerates. A rather different concern is often sounded by the poohbahs of the industry, that we are in peril of losing our credibility. Well, do we really want an audience that believes all that it's told?

Unreliable Sources, on the contrary, sets out to give the reader a strong dose of that quality that is essential to good journalism: skepticism. So, with case studies on every page, it examines the ownership of the industry and its influence; how the government shapes the news; how the news has been misreported on many fronts and, finally, what the authors think we all ought to do about it, plus useful lists of sources and alternate resources at the end. ■

John L. Hess, is a commentator on the media, and a former *New York Times* correspondent.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF TV INDUSTRY

Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television

Second Revised Edition
by Erik Barnouw
Oxford University Press: New York

One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV

by J. Fred MacDonald
Pantheon Books: New York

BY TOM MASCARO

The best of our history is more than just a chronicle of noteworthy events. It tells a story that immerses the reader in critical moments — a vivid tale that makes us feel contempt for those who abuse power and kinship with those oppressed. *Tube of Plenty* is such a history.

Erik Barnouw's classic on the evolution of American television is a book worthy of encore. In Tube, Barnouw achieves the most challenging of feats for a writer — he ennobles without pontificating. And he is as welcoming to the uninitiated as he is respectful of the well informed. Fortunately for those intrigued by television, Oxford has published a second revised edition.

The organizing principle is that radio begat television and that TV inherited much of the parent's genetic material. *Tube of Plenty*, then, is an album of television's development — beginning at infancy through, with the addition of the new chapter "Progeny," parenthood. With graceful and insightful storytelling, Barnouw also vividly illustrates how the medium's maturation has been inter-

twined with the course of American history. It's a brilliant stroke, which accounts, in part, for the book's lasting value as a reference on the television industry.

Barnouw recognizes patterns that recur throughout TV history. For instance, during the 1980s, media organizations were prime targets for corporate takeovers, not unlike when ABC was being eyed by ITT decades ago. In the 1960s, though, as Barnouw points out, the purchase was blocked because ITT's political involvements threatened to undermine the integrity of ABC News. Clearly the political climate had changed dramatically four presidents later.

Barnouw also draws connections between who occupies the White House and what appears on American TV screens. When Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as "the evil empire," writes Barnouw, this cold war rhetoric "echoed the Dulles era. Programmers took their cue from the new hostility." The series *Mission: Impossible* was resurrected and the networks broadcast shows like *The A-"Team* and the ABC miniseries *Amerika*.

At each crisis, Barnouw pushes the PAUSE button, then plays out the scene slowly to help us comprehend the meaning of the picture. With masterly elegance, he crafts a compelling narrative that simultaneously documents and evaluates television's past and gives us a framework for engaging the future. Understandably, every scholar examining TV history cites Erik Barnouw.

While some writers see history as a story that explains, other authors take a more argumentative tack. They employ history to prove a point. Sticking close to the spine of an argument naturally leaves out the texture and sense of completeness typical of a richer, more comprehensive study. The hallmark of this style of history is that it invites debate. Into this group would fit the latest work by J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television*.

With this new book — a major achievement that deserved a more attractive package than the one provided by the publisher — MacDonald moves beyond the genre studies and specific issues of his earlier books to take on the whole of television history. In *One Nation Under Television*, he declares that "network TV failed the nation because of its fixation on popularity." His is the story of the demise of the Big Three networks.

MacDonald argues that decisions made by the FCC in 1945 inhibited competition in the television industry and made monopoly inevitable. He cites the postwar rush to make TV available and David Sarnoff's prediction later in the decade that the medium's ultimate contribution would be "its service toward unification of the life of the nation."

What followed, as MacDonald chronicles, was an incremental concentration of power and control over programming by the commercial networks. The message of the book is that "the networks maintained their hegemony over U.S. television ... ensuring in the process that this would remain one nation under network television."

With the publication of this book, it seems MacDonald has thrown down the gauntlet and challenged the master Barnouw with a different approach to documenting TV history. Both works have similar structure and format; both cover the same historical period; and both conclude with the decline of the networks, the blossoming of the satellite era, the rise of narrowcasting and a warning that the industry faces an uncertain future.

There are marked differences, though, in the philosophies and methodologies of the two works. For instance, throughout *Tube of Plenty*

Barnouw makes a special effort to expose those who have interfered with the people's right to know truth — Vietnam,Watergate and, throughout the Reagan presidency, the "puzzling discrepancies between various versions of events," notably his handling of the Iran-contra affair.

In analyzing the deregulatory fervor and the spate of corporate mergers that distinguished the Reagan years, Barnouw's apprehension about the fate of a free flow of information is palpable. Media companies were seen as the key to power and profit.

"Soon the networks themselves," Barnouw writes , "once the pivots of the industry, became engulfed," And he raises concerns about the potential for self-censorship at news divisions that are owned by Pentagon contractors.

MacDonald, too, questions whether corporate interests influenced the willingness of network journalists to pursue divisive stories in the 1980s. But he seems more inclined to allow that viewers don't care to know the facts: "Perhaps because the Watergate scandal had illustrated the disconcerting potential of expose at the highest level, viewers did not want to know 'the whole truth.'"

Barnouw examines how television has been involved with the patterns of American life. He has a keen eye for excellence. In *Tube of Plenty* Barnouw praises the bright bursts of content that have punctuated the numberless hours of television's offerings — from fifties drama, *All in the Family* and *Roots to Vietnam: A Television History* and *Eyes on the Prize*. He seems more willing to recognize that on many occasions throughout TV history, liberal dreams have come true — the nation has been edified by television.

MacDonald's technique is less polished. In places he infuses himself into the discussion, often using superfluous qualifiers, as in a reference to "unctuous" liberalism; to Herman Hettinger as the "distinguished" professor; or when discussing Roy Huggin's "perceptive" article, which extols the virtues of the marketplace standard.

MacDonald also adopts a polemical style in his book, so he doesn't develop stories of heroes and villains such as those found in *Tube of Plenty*. This is most noticeable in the treatment of McCarthyism.

MacDonald makes fleeting references to loyalty oaths and blacklisting. And he convincingly describes how 1950s broadcasting disseminated a white middle-class, cultural viewpoint. But curiously, nowhere in this analysis — or anywhere in the book — does MacDonald mention Senator Joseph McCarthy.

This rather clinical treatment lacks the impact of narrative history and fails to make the kind of lasting impression the reader deserves to gain from such a disturbing episode in television's past. Consequently, other statements in the book, such as those about TV's timidity in the face of controversial issues, or criticisms about bland political commentary, seem hollow because of the skimpy development of the stories of those who took the risk and fought McCarthyism.

Barnouw, by choosing to explain rather than argue a case, freed himself to explore the emotional aspects of this period. With precision he deftly conveys the imposing weight of the moment. Truman, he tells us, held office during a "witch-hunt atmosphere ... treason was its keynote."

Barnouw also shows us the cover of the inflammatory *Red Channels*, the one with the red, left hand closing on a microphone. And he reproduces the blacklist and discloses his own respect for those persecuted by it: "It was a roll of honor."

Finally, after John Henry Faulk beat the blacklist in court in 1962, television could relax. Barnouw writes, "Topics that would have been consid-

ered too controversial a year or two earlier were now welcomed."

Though both historians establish the same point about television's cowardice in the 1950s, Barnouw, with his superior writing and by taking a holistic approach, succeeds in evoking the anguish that marked the period and the relief that accompanied its demise. He crafts a memorable story that stays with the reader.

On other subjects, for example the quiz-show scandal, MacDonald and Barnouw harmonize. MacDonald explains how TV in the fifties streamlined the business and emphasized popular programs — easy to produce; neutral in tone; and well within conventional guidelines. He calls it the "All-American perspective." One result of the public outrage over the quiz-show trickery, MacDonald concludes, was to strip advertisers of control over content and hand it over to the networks.

This turning point in TV history was evolutionary, though. Barnouw points out that NBC president Pat Weaver, as early as 1953, wanted to shift advertising control to the networks. He introduced the "magazine concept" for selling commercial time — the plan used when he launched the *Today* and *Tonight* shows. And he withheld programming time from sponsors for "spectaculars" (as he called specials).

Then came Minow, another subject which reveals the disparate views of the two authors. MacDonald combines the story of FCC chairman Newton Minow's 1961 Vast Wasteland speech with that of Spiro Agnew's Des Moines speech, eight years later, as evidence that government officials were beginning to "talk back" to the networks. MacDonald does acknowledge that the two attacks came from different perspectives. But by joining them together to show that broadcasting was being criticized for "distorting what the citizenry saw and understood of reality," he seems to compress details to make a point at the expense of accuracy.

Barnouw, by choosing to display the full sweep of TV history with events placed in natural context, makes it clear that Minow was using his forum for a broad, philosophical purpose. Minow challenged the industry to live up to its charge to serve the public interest; he wanted more from television. And despite the conclusion of James Baughman, which MacDonald adopts — that the Commission is " a small, toothless dog" — during a short slice of time, Minow, bolstered by the moral suasion of the Kennedy administration, was successful in influencing the TV industry to strive for social as well as economic good.

In contrast, Agnew wanted less from television. Specifically, he wanted the network news divisions to stifle their analyses of Nixon's foreign policy and any criticism of his administration, actual or implied. Coupling the Minow speech with Agnew's to show the decade was bracketed by two government darts aimed at the industry — as with omitting McCarthyism — imposes an artificial neatness on history. MacDonald seems to be setting up his final point: that organizational and technological changes in the industry, originating in the 1970s, finally did what government never could, which was to dilute the networks' power over the nation's culture.

This conclusion, though sound in many respects, overlooks a profound period in TV history — the early 1960s, when an enlightened regulatory spirit stimulated television to offer diverse entertainment, children's and educational programming, innovative news, and controversial commentaries and documentaries.

In his preface, MacDonald promises neither passionate condemnations nor hosannas about television, which ultimately proves unsatisfying. By restraining his passion, MacDonald

walks the same middle ground traveled by the bland commentators he criticizes. In the end the reader is left feeling sad about television — hopeless, but not sure why. He says network TV failed the nation, but he also says there was never any reason to expect the medium would uplift the culture anyway.

Despite its somber tone, though, this is an informative book, especially when MacDonald sheds the argumentative straightjacket and surrenders to his own fascination with history — such as on the genesis of the networks; the way national programming subsumed local fare; TV's move to telefilms; or the regulatory changes that precipitated what he terms is a "new video order." The issue of TV haves and have-nots, which he raises, also deserves more attention in cultural studies. With *One Nation Under Television*, J. Fred MacDonald provides a framework for further discussion on the networks' monopoly, which promises to increase our understanding of its influence on American society.

As for *Tube of Plenty*, Barnouw has again expanded the magnificent mural he first exhibited in 1966 with *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933* — itself a noble addition to broadcast literature. With such an auspicious beginning, it's no surprise that *Tube of Plenty* would not only become the standard, but that it would be summoned for several encores. It's a masterpiece. ■

Tom Mascaro's articles on broadcasting have appeared in *Current*, *Electronic Media*, and *Television Quarterly*.

VIEWPOINT

"Is is only programming as a whole in which public television fails. Is The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour terrific? Compared with network news, absolutely. Financially, though, it looks like a shoestring operation, so lacking in reporters that it often seems captive to a regular cast of Washington characters, those same old usual suspects, who dilate on Washington matters terribly interesting to people terribly interested in Washington.

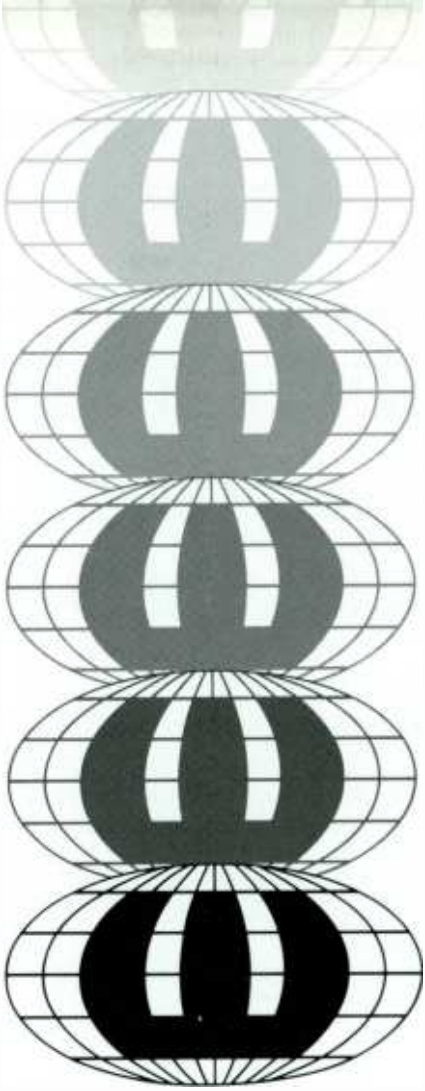
"Is there a local news show on any public station? Not in Washington. Not in New York. There used to be in Boston, but that was dropped. The trouble is that news is controversial ... Better to play it safe.

"Which is the trouble with public television. Most of the marvels cited by its angry devotees are wonders of uncontroversial blandness: another airing of Pavaroti, more great animal films ... a really neat piece on science — all very valuable, to be sure, very high-minded, but spiceless and finally — dull ...

"For spice and excitement, public TV buys the Brits ... Which raises the question why America's public TV can't do at all what Britain's public TV does superbly.

"One explanation: the BBC has guaranteed public funding without political interference. In America, it's kowtow to politicians for peanuts, beg enough to pay the light bill, pray for an occasional miracle like The Civil War, meanwhile keeping it bland to the political buccaneers won't notice you're there.

–Russell Baker,
The New York Times



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CORRESPONDENCE

SERGEANT BILKO'S WRITERS

To the Editor:

My name is Coleman Jacoby. I am a comedy writer, and I have been a member of the Academy and the Writers Guild for over thirty years. I knew Nat Hiken through many of those years and worked for him on two shows (Milton Berle and Bilko) so naturally I read the "Kingmaker Of Comedy" article by David Everitt in a recent issue of Television Quarterly *with great interest.*

It was a long overdue tribute to Nat, who was justifiably regarded as the most talented and unique comedy writer of his time. The article was also the most perceptive I ever read on Nat, and during his career a lot was written about him.

The piece gave Nat full, and fully deserved credit, for his creative genius in fashioning the Bilko show, but alas, it fell short of giving credit to some of the other writers, who contributed enormously to the show when Nat left after its second year. I was among those writers. Two others were Arnie Rosen, my late partner, and Billy Friedberg, also gone.

During the first two years, 1956 and 1957, a lot of excellent writers worked on the show. Arnie Rosen and I were week-to-weekers, and even in this limited capacity we did quite a few shows, among them "Harry Speakup", which we wrote with Nat (see the credit). This episode is often recalled as one of the funniest shows of the series. Arnie and I won our first BILKO Emmy this year (1956). Two more were to follow.

As noted in the article, Lennie Stern worked on the show during one period in the first two years, but as was not noted so did the late Tony Webster. Tony Webster, even to this day, is acknowledged to be one of the most original and gifted comedy writers in the history of television.

So much for the first two years. When Nat left the show, Billy Friedberg, became the headwriter, and part of one of the two writing teams that did all the shows in the last two years. Billy's writing partners were Neil Simon and Terry Ryan. Arnie and I were the second team.

How such a record could be overlooked is almost impossible to understand. Our credits are right there at the end of every episode we wrote.

In conclusion, as a lifetime member of the Academy, I believe my departed friends and I deserve the courtesy of a corrected record.

– COLEMAN JACOBY

CORRESPONDENCE

Reply to the Editor:

I am sorry Mr. Jacoby feels that he and his co-writers were slighted by my article on Nat Hiken. There is no doubt that all the writers mentioned in his letter deserve a great deal of credit for their work on the Sergeant Bilko show. But — and this point seems to be missed in Mr. Jacoby's letter — the purpose of my article was to tell the story of Nat Hiken's career and describe his contributions to TV comedy; the purpose of the article was not to provide a history of the Bilko series. Obviously, the two subjects overlap to a large extent, but they're not the same thing.

If my article was a history of the Bilko show, I would have gone out of my way to discuss all the contributions made by the talented writers Mr. Jacoby mentions. I would have also gone into greater detail about the ensemble cast assembled for the show, a cast that included such wonderful comic actors as Billy Sands, Herbie Faye and Mickey Freeman. For that matter, I would have spent more than a couple of sentences describing Phil Silvers' involvement. Who, after all, was more important to the show than Silvers? — with the exception of creator Hiken, of course. But, again, the focus of my story was Hiken's work, and not only Bilko but his other shows as well.

Mr. Jacoby rightly points out that he and his fellow writers did a great job of carrying the ball for the last two seasons of Sergeant Bilko (and I say as much in my article, even though I don't list the names of the writers), but Hiken wasn't even involved with the program at that point, so it would have been inappropriate for me to devote much space to the creation of the shows during those two years.

The complete story of the making of the extraordinary Sergeant Bilko is a story that should be told, with a full discussion of all involved. The same can be said for Hiken's Martha Raye Show and his Car 54, Where Are You? Perhaps those stories will be told some time soon.

– DAVID EVERITT

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Sonny Fox, *USA*
Ralph C. Franklin, *USA*
Lawrence E. Gershman, *USA*
Karl Honeystein, *USA*
Arthur F. Kane, *USA*
Robert F. Lewine, *USA*
Ken-ichiro Matsuoka, *Japan*
Richard O'Leary, *USA*
Kevin O'Sullivan, *USA*
Renato M. Pachetti, *USA*
Lee Polk, *USA*
James T. Shaw, *USA*
Donald L. Taffner, *USA*
David Webster, *USA*