

1981

APRIL MAY

\$3.00

CHANNELS

OF COMMUNICATIONS



Premiere Issue

The Magazine of the American Radio History Society



Ivanhoe

MGM—January 16, 17 & 18.

The Big Fisherman

Buena Vista—March 27, 28 & 29.

Jack & the Beanstalk

Columbia Pictures—April 24, 25 & 26.

Margie

20th Century Fox—May 1, 2 & 3.

Blood and Sand

20th Century Fox—May 22, 23 & 24.

State Fair

20th Century Fox—June 26, 27 & 28.

Thunderhead, Son of Flicka

20th Century Fox—August 28, 29 & 30.

Prince Valiant

20th Century Fox—October 16, 17 & 18.

Flame Over India

The Rank Organization—November 13, 14 & 15.

Journey Back To Oz

Filmation Studios—November 27, 28 & 29.

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Time/Life—December 4, 5 & 6.

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Les Brown
Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader:

It is with great enthusiasm that we send you the premiere issue of CHANNELS.

CHANNELS is a magazine about television, but it is not a television magazine. Our aim is to sort out and interpret the developments in the booming business of telecommunications with a view to the public's stake in them. We will be covering the dazzling new electronic landscape, one providing amazing new consumer services and great financial opportunities -- and promising, at the same time, to accelerate the rate of social change.

CHANNELS will alert its readers to these changes and where they will likely have an impact, before the changes actually occur. To do this, we'll be looking at government, business, religion, education, culture, sports, law and journalism.

We hope that after reading this premiere issue you will want to become a charter subscriber. Simply send in the card on the outside of the back cover to ensure that you receive every issue of CHANNELS. If you don't wish to subscribe, please keep this copy with our compliments.



Les Brown

P.S. In our effort to reach key people like yourself with this first issue, it is possible that we have inadvertently sent you duplicate copies. Please help us by passing along any such copies to others whom we should be reaching. Thank you very much.

If “The Medium is
the Message”*
then Channels is
the Message
to the Medium.

CONGRATULATIONS

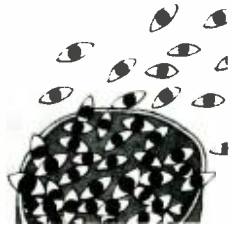
SfM Media Corporation

*With Apologies to Marshall McLuhan

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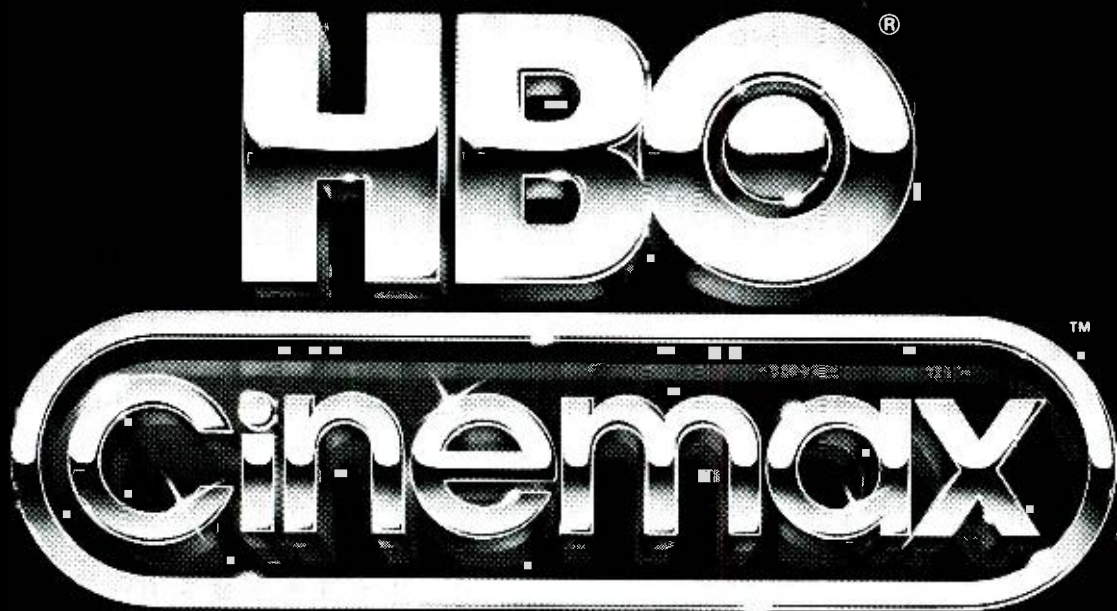
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COVER ILLUSTRATION: JEAN-MICHEL FOLON

Home Box Office: Television for the 80's

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taking pay TV from an idea to a dynamic part of
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Editor's Note

C H A N N E L S

A MAGAZINE OF SERIOUS THOUGHT about television, for people who read?

Not too many years ago that would have seemed an absurd idea. Incongruous. It was well known that intelligent people never watched television—well, maybe a little *public* television, the evening news, a football game.

But that was before we had Presidents who would never have been elected without television, before television became the publicity vehicle for terrorists, and before humble denim dungarees were transformed into expensive, fashionable designer jeans through the miracle of the tube.

It was before people became aware that the electronic environment mattered to them whether or not they watched television—that it was constantly affecting their lives and the lives of their children, in much the same way the natural environment does. That it changed and will continue to change the ways of government, business, religion, education, diplomacy, culture, professional sports, law, and journalism. That for a better society it had to be understood and dealt with. That television will never go away for the remaining history of the human race.

The medium, to paraphrase the late Marshall McLuhan, is the issue.

The issue enlarges with the emerging Second Age of Television, which we shall be calling here Television II. This is the age of cable, pay cable, QUBE, satellites, home video, teletext, large screen receivers, technologies that go by the names of MDS, DBS, and STV, and the forms of television that intersect with computer and telephone technologies. These make for a dazzling, dizzying new electronic landscape, one providing amazing new consumer services and great financial opportunities—and promising, at the same time, to accelerate the rate of social change.

Television II is the bailiwick of CHANNELS magazine.

It will be the purpose of this new publication to sort out and interpret the devel-

opments in the booming business of telecommunications with a view to the public's stake in them. These media are capable of enriching our lives, but if we are not careful, they could also be a corrosive force.

CHANNELS will cover what many are calling a revolution. Certainly revolutionary things are happening on both sides of the television set. People are paying for what they see on television. That to me is as significant a development as the explosion of technology. It will cause monumental changes—both in how people regard television and in how they use it.

When people choose their own programming, retrieve textual information on the picture tube, and rely on television for home security systems, they can no longer disdain the medium or speak of it as an "idiot box."

While the birth of a new age is opportune for the start of a new magazine, CHANNELS was in fact conceived for other reasons. The magazine sprang from an awareness that television is too important a social, political, and cultural force in America to be covered only by a press that has historically viewed the medium as a competitor, or as a wellspring of celebrity features and gossip.

CHANNELS owes its existence to the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation. Its formative ideas incubated at the foundation in the office of Jean Firstenberg, and were later nurtured by Mary Milton, who guided the magazine through the project stage and set up Media Commentary Council, Inc. as its parent. CHANNELS is published not for profit on the Markle Foundation's grant.

As I hope we demonstrate in these pages, CHANNELS will be concerned with issues, ideas, informed commentary, and investigative reporting. My wish is that the magazine also become a forum—a channel of communication, as it were, between the communications industries and the public.

I welcome you as a reader and invite you to take part in the dialogue.

—L. B.

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TOWARD RIGHT CONCLUSIONS

“...right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues, than any kind of authoritative selection.”

—Judge Learned Hand

As an oil company, we've felt obliged to speak out on energy and economic issues that affect our business. Very often, our contribution to the "multitude of tongues" takes the form of advocacy advertising.

But the TV networks refuse to accept advocacy commercials. Isn't that dismissal precisely the kind of authoritative selection that Learned Hand was warning against?

The best contribution any business can make to the public discourse is to say what it truly thinks about public policies and

decisions. The position that Mobil or some other business takes may sound controversial or even outrageous to the press; indeed, sometimes our position has outraged members in our own industry. But shouldn't a responsible press, electronic as well as print, foster the dialogue of many voices that helps the people and their leaders advance toward right conclusions?

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Viewing for Dollars

TOM G., with whom we occasionally do business, has solved the problem, at least to his own satisfaction, of how to keep his children from watching too much television. "I pay them," he says. "Their allowance is based on what they don't watch. They really clean up on Saturday mornings. I don't care if this is the right method or the wrong one. All I know is that in my house it works."

This novel form of pay television, or pay non-television, struck a chord at just the time we were considering the changes facing the advertising industry in this decade. In the next few years, most of the major cities will be wired for at least fifty-two channels of cable television with interactive capability, which means the television set will be able to send digital signals to a transmission center even as it is receiving a picture with sound. It means that people can buy a program commercial-free, from a wide range of selections. The explosion of channels is bound to disperse the national audience. What will happen to those who sell all those household, cosmetic, and automotive products over the air?

The system has worked so efficiently up until now. The advertiser buys a schedule of thirty-second spots, and ABC, CBS, and NBC bring forth the kinds of programs that will deliver a guaranteed number of viewers to those spots. All these years we thought the product of conventional television was programs, when in fact the product was audience. Advertisers have been buying people, not programs, and they pay from \$8 to \$15 per thousand to reach specific demographic targets. With mass-audience television, a single commercial spot can reach as many as sixty million people in one network exposure.

Trouble comes with the new technologies. They not only spread the audience



The Reverend Jerry Falwell

over dozens of channels, but also put sophisticated devices in the viewers' hands that allow them to tune out or skip over commercials or to buy programs that don't carry advertising at all.

How, in the emerging new age of television, can the advertiser hope to get his messages across? The answer is by reversing Tom G.'s strategy—paying the folks for what they watch.

This is the ultimate form of pay television, and it is possible in two-way cable systems that are tied to computers. The idea may sound outlandish, but it actually makes good sense; it is coming as sure as snow to Syracuse. People will actually earn money for watching channels that carry advertising, perhaps at the rate of 25 or 50 cents an hour, credited by the computer to their cable bill. In any given hour, the viewer's choice will be whether to pay for a program or to earn some money for his or her time before the television set.

In two-way cable systems, the computer that sweeps each household every few seconds will know which homes are tuned to a channel that will pay for view-

ing. But in order to prove that they are really watching and not merely leaving their sets tuned to a payoff channel, viewers will have to fill out electronic coupons. That is, they will have to hit the proper response buttons on their consoles when asked.

What will happen, in effect, is that the advertiser will eliminate the middle man—the network or television station—and make direct payment to the viewer on a cost-per-thousand basis. The cost of reaching people won't change much for the advertiser; all that will change is the route the money takes. People deserve to be paid for their attention to a sales pitch. Overall, it's a more dignified way of doing business.

Saving Faith

AT COLUMBIA University's Inter-church Center in Manhattan, where board members of the National Council of Churches' communications division were recently in conclave, the talk centered on television's role in the rising fundamentalist tide. These are critical times for the mainline Protestant faiths, for their congregations are shrinking while the "electronic church" (parlance for the evangelical preachers who buy air time and solicit donations on television) is bulging.

As fate would have it, at the very time they were meeting, the reigning symbol of their frustration, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, was blanketing the media some sixty blocks south in Midtown. So far as is known, none of the seventy-five visiting representatives of the mainline churches were asked to appear on a major talk show. But Falwell, in his two-day visit to New York, logged two hours on network television and also hit three local television stations, seven local radio stations, and three metropolitan newspapers. He also drew a record crowd as guest speaker at a New York Television Academy





TIME

New Faces on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The new President, of course. And TIME's new White House Correspondent, author of Barrett's Law: "Get as close as possible, as often as possible."

News is news and facts are facts, and all the news media have the same starting point. Which raises the question of why so many people prefer to get their news from TIME Magazine.

The answer of course is in a basic premise of TIME's founding fathers: that news is individual people making history, and the better you know the people, the better you understand their ideas and actions.

Hence the relevance of Barrett's Law, quoted above. This January, Laurence Barrett became TIME's White House correspondent; and if his performance on the campaign trail is any precedent, he will be a consummate Reagan-watcher.

During 1980 Barrett spent as much time with Ronald Reagan as any journalist in the world, tracking every step of his way to the White House. And Barrett's exclusive interviews with Reagan sustained a TIME tradition of access to world leaders, including some two dozen exclusive interviews with heads of state this past year alone. It's a relationship earned not only through TIME's prestige and fidelity, but also through the perseverance and probity of TIME's reporters.

"The point of it all," Barrett has remarked, "is to find out *who* that public figure really is." Which pretty much sums up a distinguishing characteristic of TIME correspondents. They are devoted to the job of identifying the who behind the how and why of every event. TIME. Millions more read it every week than any other newsmagazine. Because we work so hard to put more into it.



TIME

More goes into it.

luncheon.

Almost everything about Falwell is paradoxical. He is a certified television star as head of *The Oldtime Gospel Hour* (which claims to reach fifty million viewers on 324 stations in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean), and is also one of television's most menacing critics, as founder and president of The Moral Majority, a fundamentalist social-action group. He upholds the First Amendment in speaking out as an apostle of "the new morality," yet his purpose is censorial. Whether his endorsement of Ronald Reagan was a significant factor in the outcome of the November elections is arguable, but it is not at all arguable that Reagan's election has boosted Falwell's popularity and power. The victory has seemed to represent the minister's own success. Indeed, the Reverend Robert Billings, former executive director of The Moral Majority, has become a religious-affairs advisor to President Reagan.

Falwell derives energy from hostile questions, and he is a match for the prickliest talk-show host around. His dialectical device is to be two persons at once, shifting from one to the other as convenience dictates. For example, on matters of the Bible, which he interprets literally, he speaks as minister of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in condemnation of abortion, pornography, homosexuality, and what he calls "moral perversion." But when these issues touch on politics, as they inevitably do with Falwell, he slips into mufti as head of The Moral Majority and asserts his right to speak out "as an ordinary citizen who happens to be a minister."

At the Academy luncheon, he explained the aims of his movement and predicted that his less-than-two-year-old organization would have a chapter in every state by the end of the year. One of its affiliates, the Coalition for Better Television, would enlist 100,000 people to screen programs and arrive at a "national consensus" on programs deemed "unwholesome." This would be followed by a boycott of the products advertised on those programs. He argues that this course of action would not represent censorship because it involved individuals expressing a moral choice.

He spoke of the organization's wish to support "constructive" programming.

What kind of programming is that? he was asked.

"It falls," he said, "somewhere between *Ozzie and Harriet* and what we have now."

He said the Coalition would influence television but would not try to control it.

Uptown, the mainline Protestants were talking about leasing a satellite transponder to link their churches and, from time to time, send religious programs out to cable systems.

Teaching the ABCs

NOT LONG AGO WE accepted ABC's invitation to a press conference at the Yale Club in New York City. Melvin A. Goldberg, the network's vice president for news, social, and technology research, was making a formal presentation of a set of instructional video tapes, "Getting the Most Out of TV," to Yale University. Accepting on the university's behalf were Drs. Dorothy and Jerome Singer, co-directors of the Yale Family Television Research and Consultation Center. It puzzled us at first to learn that these were the same tapes the Singers had delivered to ABC just a few days earlier. In the series of short speeches that followed, we learned that ABC had given the Research Center \$150,000, in two separate grants, to devise a curriculum that would use video tapes in teaching elementary school children to "become more discriminating television viewers." The video tapes, which ABC produced in three days for an additional \$200,000, are the core of a package that includes teachers' lesson plans and students' workbooks.

We were so intrigued by the idea that we stayed to screen the tapes and read the research report. The Singers had devised a series of eight lessons to teach youngsters some technical aspects of television—among them the special effects used to create live-action fantasy, and video techniques employed in television commercials to enhance the appeal of products. Other "value"-oriented lessons were designed to teach kids that violence on television should not be imitated and that they should not make generalizations about minority-group members based on television models.

The Singers' curriculum was tested for three months with 232 third, fourth, and fifth grade pupils in an Orange, Connecticut, public school. According to the Singers' report, the children's post-test scores show an 80 percent mastery of production technique material and 78 percent on new vocabulary about television. While this level of mastery is indeed impressive after a mere three months of study, we left the meeting much more impressed by the baseline data: It seems these eight- to eleven-year-old kids from Orange scored 50 percent on techniques and 60 percent on vocabulary before anyone taught them anything.

Musing on this, we decided that were it not for television, there wouldn't be any need for these video education units. How clever of ABC to turn this into a public relations event.

We didn't hear any more about the Yale study or the kids from Orange until a few

months later, when ABC Video Enterprises sent us an announcement that it had packaged the film and video portions of the program and are selling it, mainly to schools, for \$1,197. Now we're really impressed; it's not every day that you can get an image boost from a problem you helped create, and make money to boot.

Rx for Public TV

PUBLIC TELEVISION, that beggarly stepchild of the airwaves, is anxiously looking for ways to stay alive in the face of new technologies that threaten to draw off its programs and viewers. Almost everything of importance that public television provides can be delivered equally well by cable or video disk. The march of technology by fragmenting the audience, could devastate public television.

The viewing base for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has never been great, and the noncommercial network can ill afford to lose any part of its audience to cable. Also, government funding of public television, never considered adequate, shrinks with inflation and the budget cuts of the Reagan Administration. The smaller PBS's audience grows, the less compelling will be the arguments for government support.

The public broadcasting industry has always sought some kind of financial stability and is now working on schemes to develop some self-sufficiency through profit-making sidelines, such as magazines that carry advertising. Lawrence K. Grossman, president of PBS, has proposed establishing a cultural pay-cable network whose proceeds would support the national public television system. But even as that project is being set in motion, three of the largest public stations—WNET New York, KCET Los Angeles, and WGBH Boston—formed a company of their own to supply a commercial cable network competitor with programming.

Meanwhile, PBS has formed a division to develop programs for the home video market.

These stabs at going into business seem the hard way to save public television. The industry could best save itself by killing itself off. Yes, by going out of business, wholesale, all across the country—now, while the going is good. That would be brilliant strategy. Because if all 280 public television stations announced on May 1 that the enterprise was hopeless and they were quitting, they would be back on the air within the month, bailed out by another industry—commercial television.

This is because the death of public television would bring economic disaster to commercial broadcasters. If 280 public television frequencies were vacated,

they would be claimed immediately by profit-seeking companies. For the existing commercial operators, this would mean new competitors for viewing and advertising, and higher prices for syndicated programs and sports rights.

Commercial broadcasters would also be stuck with having to provide the educational, informational, and cultural services they were burdened with before public television took over those unprofitable tasks. For commercial stations, which have public-service obligations to fulfill under their licenses, this responsibility would increase staff and production budgets, and diminish profitable time periods.

The third and perhaps most serious consequence is that the 280 new commercial television stations would make possible at least one more national television network that carried advertising. The scramble for programs, talent, audience, affiliates, and advertising would create chaos in the marketplace. With a new network in the picture offering bargains to advertisers—as any new network must—the commercial rates that have been rising steadily for the last half-dozen years would go into a steep dive.

This would cause stock prices to tumble, not just for ABC, CBS, and RCA (parent of NBC), but also for Taft Broadcasting, Westinghouse, Storer, Capital Cities, Corinthian, and all the other broadcast groups that have long been favored on Wall Street. To commercial broadcasting, the passing of public television would be nothing short of an apocalypse.

Because public television has served all these years to keep out a fourth commercial network, it has been one of the government's greatest gifts to commercial television—a boon to its economy. Since that is so, there are moral and practical reasons why commercial broadcasters, who use the public airwaves without charge and make huge profits from their transmissions, should relieve the government and the public from the responsibility of supporting public broadcasting.

On Capitol Hill, the broadcast lobby has beaten down every proposal that commercial broadcasters pay an annual fee for their privilege to use the airwaves, and that those funds be used to pay the bill for noncommercial broadcasting. The argument has been that no industry should be forced to finance its competition.

Well, then, if *forcing* commercial broadcasters to keep public television alive is the issue, let them do it voluntarily. They will; it is in their best interest to do it. But first, public television will have to roll over and die, and it will have to act swiftly before it is snuffed out, beyond reviving, by the new technical marvels.

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Television's Father

THERE WAS A FRONT-PAGE STORY in *The New York Times* on June 27, 1933, that must have been a marvelous change of pace for a public coping with the Great Depression: **HUMAN-LIKE EYE MADE BY ENGINEERS TO TELEVISE IMAGES.**

This was, in fact, the cautious report on the invention of the iconoscope, the electronic camera that would make television transmission practical. Today, at ninety-one, Dr. Vladimir Kosma Zworykin is equally circumspect when he talks about his contribution to the historical breakthrough. In the comfortable living room of his nostalgia-filled house in Princeton, New Jersey (barely half a mile from the Institute for Advanced Study, where Albert Einstein did so much of his research), Dr. Zworykin told of being inspired as a youth by the work of Professor Boris Rosing, with whom he studied at the Petrograd Institute of Technology. Dr. Rosing was already trying to transmit pictures by wire in his physics laboratory. In 1912, Zworykin graduated from the Institute and went on to the College de France in Paris to study the uses of X-rays. With the outbreak of World War I, he returned to Russia and joined the Signal Corps. Those were his last years in his native country.

Although Zworykin has been a naturalized American citizen since 1924, his accent is as evocative of samovars and czars as if he had only yesterday left them behind. One wonders if such fellow countrymen as Nabokov, Stravinsky, and Balanchine kept their land so purely in their speech. It was a cold, slate-gray afternoon when we visited Zworykin, but the outside world gracefully slipped away in the ease of his good-natured house, decorated with paintings of cossacks and peasants, family snapshots, and a thick wooden-framed photograph of his handsome birthplace (now a museum in his honor) in Mourom, two hundred miles east of Moscow. Zworykin once said that his favorite pastime was dreaming. But, he was sure to add, he put his dreams to work.

He seems always to have been eminently practical. With the end of World War I and the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, Zworykin decided that the United States might be a more conducive place to develop his ideas. He studied first at the University of Pittsburgh and then at Brooklyn Polytechnical Institute. In 1920, Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company hired him as a research engineer. During this time he and Tatiana Vasilieff, whom he married during the war, had two children.

In 1929, the brilliant and difficult David

Sarnoff, the force behind the Radio Corporation of America, approached Zworykin and offered almost everything an inventor could desire. The year before, RCA had opened an experimental television station in New York and was now looking for a way to make the system commercial. Sarnoff asked Zworykin how much money he would need to do this; taking a chance, the Russian replied, \$100,000. Hardly missing a beat, Sarnoff signed on the young man to



HUMAN-LIKE EYE MADE BY ENGINEERS TO TELEVISE IMAGES

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STEP TO HOME TELEVISION

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Describes It at Chicago.**

RCA's manufacturing laboratory in Camden, New Jersey. Although the final cost of the project turned out to be \$50 million, RCA couldn't very well be sorry; Sarnoff had put the money on the right man.

Zworykin insists he was among many who contributed to the development of television, pointing out he always worked with a team of engineers. Two others who were developing television systems at the time were John Logie Baird in Britain and Philo T. Farnsworth, an engineer from Philadelphia. But on December 29, 1923, Zworykin applied for the first patent for an electronic television system. It was contested, however, and not until 1938 was the claim patented. What it covered were the fundamentals of electronic television—the iconoscope, which is the camera, and the kinescope, the receiver. Dr. Zworykin did not stop there. In the past sixty years, he has been granted more than a hundred patents ranging from the field of gunnery to astronomy.

His tiny, elegant second wife, Katherine Polevitzky, once a professor of bacteriology, was also born in Russia in 1889. They were married in 1951, and she is still as attentive to him as a young girl. Touching his hand lightly, she coaxed him to describe some of his other inventions. They are a formidable lot: a microscope that magnifies up to a million times and separates objects as close together as one twenty-fifth of one-millionth of an inch; a computer to diagnose diseases; a color tube for home television receivers; a device that enabled precision bombing regardless of weather during World War II; portable television, and a pill to be taken by a patient to record changes in activity in the digestive tract. He also tried to encourage the development of automated highways that would guide automobiles by buried cables and function somewhat like an airplane's "automatic pilot." This, he said, was an attempt to stop all the accidents caused by sleepy drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike.

On the way to the porch to admire the Zworykins' plants and backyard garden, we passed through his study. The walls are lined with medals and citations, but what held our attention was the anachronistic arrangement near his desk. Hanging above a television set (the old-fashioned, hulking kind popular in the fifties) was a painting of the marketplace in Mourom, with snow falling and the townspeople wrapped in cloaks and heavy coats, talking, trading. The mood is vibrant.

We asked Zworykin what he thought of television and how he'd like the medium to develop. Smiling kindly, probably because he'd been asked the same question too often, he replied he would like to see it better and more extensively used in education and medicine. Also he said he

would like there to be instantaneous translations so that people around the world could see and understand the same programs. Other thoughts about his invention he kept to himself. What he did want to talk about was his house in Florida, because what he likes more than anything are the winter days he spends there swimming.

When we left the Zworykin house for the railroad station the taxi driver asked who the old gentleman was. We might have answered that he was a retired engineer who vacationed in the South. Instead we said he was an aristocratic genius who brought us television—and changed everybody's life.

Top-Seeded

THROUGH THE FIFTY-ODD YEARS of broadcasting, female network presidents have been as scarce as female Presidents of the United States. One woman, Jane Cahill Pfeiffer, did serve briefly as chairman of the National Broadcasting Company, but that was not really the same as running the show. Despite her title, she actually served under NBC president Fred Silverman. It took cable, that great promiser of new things, to break the sex barrier.

The first woman president of a national television network in America is a slight, immensely energetic, thirty-four-year-old native of Wisconsin—an absolute whiz on the tennis courts and every bit as adept at the hard ball played today in the cable industry. She's Kay Koplovitz, chief executive of the USA Network (formerly the Madison Square Garden Network), an advertising-supported satellite-to-cable program service headquartered in Glen Rock, New Jersey. USA may be small fry next to ABC, CBS, and NBC, but it is still young and far from full grown. It's carried today on 1,100 cable systems reaching six million households and has been in the black since the sixth month of its operation, which began in 1977.

The company adopted its new title last April, the same time Koplovitz received hers; but she was with the network from the beginning, struck most of its important program deals, and traveled the country to sell the service to local cable systems. The selling was not as difficult as it may sound, in part because Madison Square Garden was one of the earliest cable networks, sprouting up just in time to fill an urgent programming need in the industry, but mainly because Kay Koplovitz knew the cable business and just about everyone in it. She came by that knowledge as corporate development officer and sometime publicist for UA-Co-

lumbia Cablevision (the company partnered with the Garden in ownership of the USA Network) and as a freelance advance agent for Home Box Office.

Well before she became USA's topkick she was renowned in the cable industry for her dazzling play on the tennis courts, and in high demand with the industry's tennis enthusiasts for men's doubles. Her partner was usually Bill Koplovitz, her husband, who is a vice president of UA-Columbia.

It helped to know the people in cable, but her associates in the industry say she became a network president by having the prescience to realize, as early as 1976, how valuable the national cable television rights would become in the eighties for certain professional and amateur sports that were being ignored by conventional television. She secured the rights with the unexpected suddenness of a Tracy Austin ace.

"Many of the team owners found me easy to remember," she recalls. "I was the only Kay they ever dealt with."

From the start, the network revolved around live coverage of Madison Square Garden events. Koplovitz added the exclusive cable rights to a limited schedule of games from major league baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League, and the North American Soccer League, as well as amateur boxing and collegiate sporting events. She was able to land them, she says, "because we were not afraid to think small."

"We went in for some things the more established cable programmers rejected because they saw no immediate return. It's gotten to the point where the big companies don't want to get involved in something unless they see \$60 million clear, right away. We're the guys in the beanies who go in and set up a deal that is basically developmental for both parties."

While there is clearly a heavy emphasis on sports, the USA Network is more diversified in its programming than most cable networks. It carries *Calliope*, an educational-entertainment anthology series for children; *The English Channel*, programs from Britain; C-SPAN, an independent nonprofit network devoted to live coverage of the House of Representatives, and the National Black Cable Network, an independent part-time program service. Also, USA recently entered into a long-range deal with Bristol-Myers for a regular health-oriented series.

In an industry whose program networks tend to take a vertical approach, specializing so as to be all-news, all-sports, or all-movies, the USA Network has been going in a somewhat different direction. That may be because it answers to a different drummer, who is not one of the boys.

A Final Question

AJAPANESE broadcasting executive, paying a visit to our offices a few weeks ago, had difficulty understanding America's decision to let happen everything that could happen in television technology. His country seemed to have all the television service it could handle with five national broadcast networks and a raft of local stations. The same technologies are available in Japan as here, but that country, as most others, is proceeding cautiously with the innovations.

Where, the executive wanted to know, is all the programming going to come from? Doesn't America recognize creative and economic limits when it goes full tilt to cable systems carrying fifty-two channels? Are channels an end in themselves?

Good questions. We replied that technology has always run ahead of programming in America. We pointed out that there are already several new national cable networks on the satellites—HBO, Showtime, The Movie Channel, Nickelodeon, the USA Network, the Cable News Network, the Entertainment and Sports Network and Galavision, just for examples—and more coming on all the time. There are superstations and religious networks, as well as a number of cultural networks. We said we believed that when enough of the largest cities had fifty-two channels to offer, the programming would find a way to come into being.

Yes, that all sounds fine in theory, he remarked, but how does it all get made? Who pays for it? And what happens to the quality of production?

We replied that the programming would probably get cranked out the same way the book-publishing industry cranks out more than 30,000 new titles of trade books every year. We suggested this possibility: that cable channels and television stations might, in the age of the video disk, function exactly the way radio stations have for the last 30 years—they will play recordings and sell advertisements. Programs like *Laverne and Shirley*, which are prepackaged, don't really have to go out over network lines. They could be sent to stations on disks, and each station could draw from its library of disks whatever it wanted to present that day.

Our visitor thought for a moment, then nodded. Yes, he said, you surely could program 52 channels of television that way. But after a pause, he had another question: Who could possibly have the time to watch all this stuff?

We had to admit we were stumped.

—END

Marshall McLuhan died in Toronto on December 31, 1980.

The McLuhan Galaxy

MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S television set, placed in the decent obscurity of a comfortable basement room, was the most out of tune I have ever seen. It straddled the border between function and breakdown; only the dimly perceived stability of the image declared it to be at all in working order. I often thought that Marshall must have begun his quizzical inquiry into the nature of modern media by trying to square the obvious general popularity of television with his own difficult domestic experience of it. This led me to speculate that all his notions about the new ways of seeing required by television related specifically to his own set.

Tactile television, like all McLuhan's ideas, had a complex provenance—more complex, that is, than my hypothesis. His theories had an essential elegance and wit. Even when they were most eccentric, they could not be shrugged off. They needed to be addressed, dealt with. Work was required to respond to his probes. More work was needed to reject them. In his own terminology he was (in a Puckish way) a very "cool" man indeed, demanding a maximum of interaction from followers and critics alike.

Marshall McLuhan enjoyed a measure of fame that seldom comes to anybody in the academy. That fame was in part due to his work. But it was also due to the efforts of others, mainly in advertising, who sought to bring McLuhan, and what they thought were his ideas, before the largest possible public. In the sixties, it was they who marketed this otherwise shy and somewhat dour Canadian professor of English. When "discovered," he was certainly distinguished, but no more than many others—except that, crucially perhaps, his wonderful openness of mind had led him into unexpected areas.

I remember then seeing his image for the first time on a screen in a London advertising agency. He was being unveiled as a sort of master—a man who, from the irreproachable sanctity of a university chair, could justify the advertising industry by seeming to say that the final product of our civilization was the television commercial.



And the advertising industry returned what it saw as a compliment by making McLuhan television's Aristotle. McLuhan was interested in television commercials without particularly liking them. But this intellectual interest was somehow not enough. A personal endorsement was needed in these years; by a public relations sleight of hand which had little to do with McLuhan, it was obtained.

A curious smokescreen was created as advertisers' needs for self-justification collided with McLuhan's lines of inquiry. This smokescreen caused his rapid rise to celebrity—which in turn caused the rejection by his most fervid admirers.

What was obscured in the smokescreen, of course, was his work, his distaste for television commercials, and much else. A Canadian Westerner and a Catholic convert, McLuhan was not the apostle of sixties media chic he was made out to be. His favorite show starred Bob Newhart, a man of goodwill, struggling to make sense of a crazy world much as Marshall was. McLuhan watched Newhart only in the basement. The proper method of communication for Marshall remained face-to-face discourse, upstairs in the living room before a roaring fire. He seemed to be a man in that Celtic tradition that honors "the crack"—hard talk and lots of it, jokes, and flights of fancy at least as elegant as they are plausible. It was this Celtic tradition that suggested to him a new and bet-

ter methodology for examining interesting cultural phenomena. What had the work of media sociology and related fields produced? McLuhan once said of a media studies doyen that if you asked this man to define measles he would start to count the spots on a patient's face. This entire tradition had failed to understand the way in which the world was changing under the impact of media, and it had done nothing to alert people to those changes.

McLuhan wanted to find an appropriate vehicle for his thoughts about these things. And the aphorism was a particularly Celtic, poetic solution. Even when wrong, it can give pleasure by dint of verbal virtuosity. To McLuhan it may have seemed mass communication was, for all its crucial centrality, too slight to bear the burden of normal academic inquiry. And reading what passes for media studies, who is to say he was wrong?

Yet the price of this radical approach was not small. History suffered, and elaborate arguments were often founded on very little data. The result was sometimes nonsense—but it was always "impure nonsense . . . nonsense adulterated by sense."

There was precious little nonsense in the main thrust of McLuhan's work. He attracted the attention of many people—far more than did the small band of academics and practitioners whose interests antedate his own—to the importance of media and to their effects on our sensorium. And he made people actively think about all this. That there are errors and quirks in his theories is unimportant. That this agenda should be created and publicized by a professor of English at a time when most such were still threatened by the very ideas Marshall sought to embrace and understand is an astonishing intellectual feat. It means that when the definitive book (or video disk or whatever) on twentieth century media comes to be written (or made or whatever) it will have to say: "In the beginning, or at any rate very near it, was Marshall McLuhan."

—Brian Winston
Brian Winston is a professor of film and television at New York University. His last book, More Bad News, was written with the Glasgow Media Group.

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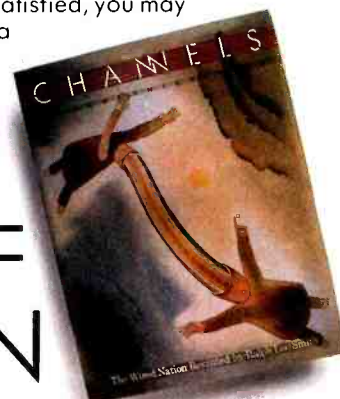
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'I Heard the News Today . . . Oh Boy'

FOR ALL ITS APPARENT FAULTS, television, even at its most sentimental and banal, sometimes shows what kind of people we are; as an unexpected X-ray might do, it suddenly reveals some dark interior patches that need attention. In that week in January when the fifty-two American hostages came back—able to walk and smile and wave at the cameras—more than one person in television's obsessive coverage said it was like the end of a war, a war we had *won*. President Reagan persisted in referring to the liberated Americans as "prisoners of war." What we learned from watching television was nothing more than how fiercely we wanted to "win" something and how happy the hostages and our country were, if happy is not too feeble a word for the fierce jubilation that took place. Anyone who thought of the Iranian people as primitive and demonic, deserving of terrible punishment for holding those fifty-two persons, learned nothing that might have changed his mind.

Having made the story of the hostages so poignant and tiresome and haunting, television persuaded us their release was indeed a victory that seized the attention of the most cynical and inattentive. ABC's *Nightline* was created because of the hostages, and on the seventy-fourth day of their captivity Walter Cronkite began announcing the days until at last it was over. The huge national hunger to rejoice, to feel triumphant and proud, to celebrate a situation easy enough to understand, made many Americans feel redeemed or, as one man wrote, as if the war in Vietnam had finally come to an emotional ending. The favorite word on television was "unity."

There was a strangely nourishing stupidity in the coverage on television, hour after hour, day after day. We learned tiny details about the hostages and their families but nothing about Iran or Islam and precious little about our relations with the late shah. Restrained and thoughtful journalists who know how to read and write went berserk on television, saying such puzzling things, as one man did, "Never in human history had so many people been so close . . . we lived with this crisis no human beings have ever, thanks or no thanks to television, participated in . . . to this degree . . ." CBS's Charles Kuralt, who has both dignity and a love of our language, asked four of the network's correspondents if they too had not become hostages—hostages of the story. All had covered certain families of the detained Americans over the long period. "I am a human being first, a reporter second, an American third," answered one young man in a slightly defiant manner. Good journalists should have emotions, and



"objectivity" is sometimes a useless and false standard imposed on them. But his reply appalled me.

There was a desperate scramble to interview anyone who might be able to comment. The preferred guests seemed to be psychologists, psychiatrists, or former prisoners of war whose opinions, or reminiscences, had little relevance. Naturally, Tom Hayden, always thought of as the symbol of the New Left, was questioned on NBC and said, "It couldn't have come out more positively. A non-violent solution, a negotiated solution, no loss of honor. I think there is a perfect quality to it, at least for this week." No one made the point that the hostages were the unfortunate victims of our foreign policy—of the government's long, total support of the shah. No one mentioned we had given him everything he ever wanted, or that in 1952 the United States helped oust Iran's legitimate premier, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, so the Peacock Throne could go up (a fact many Iranians have not forgotten).


There were a few brave men on television who were not as captivated as the rest of the nation—although we were saturated with voices insisting that the homecoming was "an extraordinary near-religious experience," "a turning point," "a fresh start," "a renewal of American self-esteem," and "a resurgence of American patriotism."

Then I lost my heart to a fellow named Roger Simon, a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, who neatly cut through the babble and the grease. Simon was lined up with an odd assortment of guests to appear on the *Today* show, where all were subjected to Tom Brokaw's foolish questions. "We're certainly happy to get them back, the British were happy to get their troops off Dunkirk," said Simon. "I'm not sure this makes it a victory for America." The other guests were (1) a businessman who had put out flags so others would remember the hostages, (2) a young midshipwoman from Annapolis, (3) a former Congressman from Nebraska, and (4) a rather quiet and sensible ex-hostage.

"Do you feel better about wearing the uniform now?" asked Brokaw of the midshipwoman. Yes, she did. "Do you think it will change your life from here on out?" he asked the genial businessman. "I'm a better person for it," the businessman answered, and also complimented the reporters he had met, mentioning that at some press conferences given by the families of the hostages, he had seen members of the press so moved they cried.

"But that doesn't mean the press was doing its proper job," Simon said, quietly. "Sure we

by Gloria Emerson



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The 'unity' did not seem so certain as the voices of Vietnam veterans began seeping through our sets reminding us how they were treated when they returned.

pretend to be information-gatherers but during most of this we were emotion-gatherers — *mostly we asked the question of the decade, which is: How do you feel?* It seems to be the only thing we cared about, really, because there was a tremendous lack of information and we took what we could get and, for the most part, hounded the hostages' families as was expected and they expected it, and they got what they expected." The former hostage, thirty-nine-year-old Victor Tomseth, senior political officer in the embassy, stayed out of this discussion but did remark, "Now that this matter has been resolved we, as a people, need to go on to the problems that lie before us rather than dwell on the ones that have now passed by."

More than one person worried aloud on television whether the press had not exploited these families, or the hostages themselves. The entire subject was covered adequately by Simon and the psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton, who appeared on ABC. Commenting on the endless celebrations, Dr. Lifton said, "We were forcing something on them that has more to do with the needs of America." But the most brilliant, most honorable, story on television, about how killing such a welcome can be, was shown on *NBC Magazine* with David Brinkley. He spoke of the burden of being called a hero and of the ordeal of a young man "who could not bring himself to react that way." Douglas Kiker, a fine NBC reporter, then unfolded the painful story of Sergeant Jimmy Lopez, who is from the isolated mining town of Globe, Arizona. The lone Marine guard at the embassy in Teheran when the militants attacked, he behaved with dispatch and courage. President Reagan singled him out, mentioning the sign Lopez had scrawled in his cell. The Iranians did not know that "Viva la roja, blanca, y azul" means "Long live the red, white, and blue." In summarizing the warnings of mental health experts, Brinkley added, what "we should have figured out for ourselves is the suffocating effect of our wildly enthusiastic welcome home, and the problem of dealing with hordes of photographers and reporters who followed their every move."

NBC's films showed Sergeant Lopez looking grim, somber, uneasy. "Now home again in Arizona, he found himself in a strange way a prisoner once again—a prisoner in his own home," Kiker said. At the Lopez family's request, local police threw a protective shield around the sergeant and his house, isolating him and his family from the press. He was not in the reviewing stand for a parade in his honor.

"When it was learned that a photographer from *Life* magazine had been allowed inside," said Kiker, "there were complaints and rumors of a \$20,000 payoff and grumbling about checkbook journalism, none of which was true. It was not our best moment." Kiker also reported that the profound effect of such unrelenting attention from the press changed the father of Sergeant Lopez: "Mr. Lopez, who is a very nice man, didn't smoke before. He became a chain smoker and his hands got a little tremble."

It was, as Brinkley said, the story of the good people of Globe trying to show Jimmy Lopez their pride and affection and of the press only wanting to report the story of that welcome. "Somehow it just got all out of hand," Kiker said. That sentence describes it all.

And then the "unity" did not seem so certain as the voices of Vietnam veterans began seeping through our sets reminding us how they were treated when they returned. Some complained about the GI Bill, which had once worked so handsomely for the veterans of World War II, but is now too meager to make a difference. Others spoke of inflation and unemployment. But perhaps what all of these men wanted to say was best summed up by one veteran who said he would gladly have

traded the 444 days in Teheran for his year in Vietnam. On *Washington Week in Review*, Hedrick Smith quoted a letter in *The Washington Star* from a colonel whose son was badly burned in Korea; he reminded us that in Korea and Vietnam fifty-two farm boys died every morning before breakfast.

On *Nightline* Ted Koppel gave nearly a half hour to Vietnam veterans, giving time to the eloquent Ron Kovic, who wrote *Born on the Fourth of July*, by far the ugliest indictment on the veterans' homecoming. Kovic, a paraplegic, did not spare our feelings. He once again asked the nation to help Vietnam veterans, and for government-funded programs providing psychological assistance. For a little while the unhappy ex-infantryman had been a "hot" interview, but before too long the Vietnam veterans became unfashionable again and no more was heard from them.

Often, on television, too small a number was given as the total of the American dead in Vietnam. It should be 57,002.

Gloria Emerson covered the Vietnam War as a foreign correspondent for The New York Times. Her book on the war, Winners & Losers, won a National Book Award in 1978.

TV in the Courts: A Witness for the Defense

by F. Lee Bailey

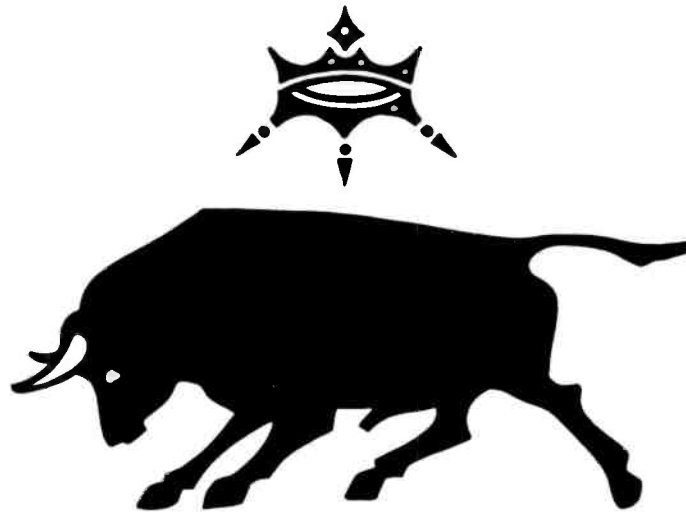
TO A MAJORITY OF THE NATION'S TRIAL LAWYERS, the "big eye" of the television camera is a threat to the jugular. Whether the lawyer is a high-priced defender of the corporate suite or a lowly ambulance chaser, the reaction to the presence of the television camera in the courtroom is usually the same: fear. Not fear that the defendant will be denied a fair trial, but fear of being exposed for what many trial lawyers are—poorly trained, and often incompetent.

In the past, the public has had no concept of how good, or bad, a lawyer is when he defends a client before a judge or jury. The often-held assumption is that the courtroom is a lawyer's natural habitat, and therefore every lawyer has a goodly degree of competence in this legal arena. Not so. Most trial lawyers have had little training for the courtroom (law schools barely scratch the surface), except that which they acquired on the job. Put another way, in the United States, if you say you are a trial lawyer then you are, providing you have a license to practice law. At best, perhaps 40 percent of the profession's trial lawyers measure up to the job. The rest fake it, or bungle cases, leaving the client to pay the often severe penalty.

Given this situation, the television camera, with its ability to report exactly what it sees in the courtroom, could have a devastating effect on those lawyers who have successfully hidden their lack of talent and preparation from the public.

For the past twenty-eight years, the American Bar Association, the pompous "voice" for much of the legal profession, has simply said "no" to pleas that it support opening the courtroom door to the television camera—despite the fact that an ABA study committee reported that television coverage is not "per se inconsistent with the right to a fair trial" and such coverage "may be permitted" under rules to be developed by each state's

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Lucie Salbany, 1980 President of the National Association of Television Program Executives, is Vice President of Programming for Taft Broadcasting, with corporate headquarters in Cincinnati. She divides her time between Philadelphia and the Taft Broadcast Group in Cincinnati.

"The role of television is changing. It's becoming more informational. There's so much information available today, we can't absorb it all. We can't read enough or learn enough to keep up. So television has to help fulfill that role. Most people get their information from TV as their primary source. And that's going to increase.

"There's going to be fragmentation. We have got to respond and compete. We can't do that by buying reruns. We can go back to basics—the era of personalities, when Donahue and Douglas were local. We can go back to that era and start building new personalities in a little more sophisticated vein. Or we can go to informational programming, expand the news, a magazine format, programming that teaches in an entertaining fashion. I'd love to see a program that's segmented, with live elements, dealing with international events.

"Broadcasting must plan for the future now. At some point, home satellite receivers are going to affect us. Are the networks going to bypass the local stations and go right to the home? If that's the case, how are we going to program for ourselves? I've already done a program schedule for 1990!

"Even today demographics are changing. We see the 25 to 54 segment growing, 18 to 49 dropping back. The working woman is becoming very important. At some point, we could see the ten o'clock news on the affiliates, because people are going to bed earlier.

"Programmers have always been looked upon as people back in the control room, sitting in shirt sleeves, creating programming with no 'feel for the business.' That's no longer the case. Programmers are getting smarter. Now they are salespeople, marketers, buyers, and creative people. Programmers really have come into their own. And the smart companies are accepting that and are using them in all phases of broadcasting.

"Taft is in the family entertainment business and, of course, uses both film and tape. There is a need for film in some things that film does best, like news magazines, documentaries, and investigative reporting. Film gives us excellent sensitivity and flexibility.

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America's Storyteller

highest court. Why are the "old bulls" of the ABA so vehemently opposed to the television camera? Their arguments are many, but all of them are legally weak. Some are designed simply to block any attempt to bring the public into the courtroom, which is a far cry from nineteenth-century America, when courtroom windows in rural areas were opened wide so that overflow crowds could hear famous lawyers plead cases.

One of the ABA's more specious arguments against the television camera is that it will turn the courtroom into a circus, with trial lawyers posturing before the camera like so many clowns. In fact, any lawyer who has had experience working in packed courtrooms or before television cameras (when they have been permitted by an enlightened judge) knows that the presence of a camera most often has the opposite effect—it discourages "acting" since it exposes the lawyer-actor before the viewing public. Good trial lawyers are actors in the sense that John Wayne was an actor: They are good at being themselves, good at affecting a "presence" in the courtroom.

The most specious of all the anti-television arguments is this: Television coverage constitutes an invasion of a witness' privacy. Now that has to be almost laughable. If there is any experience in life not intended to be "private," it is participation in a trial. Every word the witness says is recorded verbatim. His photograph, often in unflattering poses, is printed in newspapers. Within the limits of relevancy, a witness' background, motives, personal relationships, and personality are thoroughly aired in public. Missing from the public's perception, however, are his demeanor, the inflection of his voice, and the directness of his response. Descriptions of these traits are left to the print media covering the trial, and their stories typically range from quite good to awful. But if the television camera were allowed in the courtroom, the public would not have to rely solely on the print media but could use television to make a more educated judgment—just as the entire nation did during the televised Watergate hearings.

The weakest of all the arguments against the television camera centers on the premise that television will distort the legal process by showing snippets of trial testimony, perhaps only the most dramatic or emotional. There is no doubt that it will happen just this way. But "selecting" the news is the basic decision-making process editors apply every day to all types of stories. A courtroom trial is not going to be reported in its entirety any more often than a presidential speech. But no one suggests that giving viewers anything less than an entire presidential speech is deliberate "distortion." Tied to this argument is still another that claims television, by its very nature, is disruptive to court proceedings with its noisy camera crews and bright lights. The truth is that electronic improvements are nullifying these objections with each passing year. Cameras are getting smaller and many are hand-held and perform well in natural light. Newer courtrooms certainly can be designed with the placement of camera in mind. Lastly, there is no doubt that a trial judge still has all the power he needs to deal with any television-created situation that does not meet his liking, including, if necessary, reinstating the ban against the camera in the courtroom.

The mention of "judges" brings me to the Chief Justice of the United States, Warren Burger, who is one of the most fiery opponents of the television camera. He has been quoted as saying that the first Supreme Court proceeding that will be covered by television will be his funeral. The Chief Justice may be at least partially right—his funeral may be the first time television gets inside the hallowed halls of the Supreme Court, but I doubt it will be the last. There is no denying, however, that Chief Justice Burger is a major obstacle since he heads the U.S. Judicial Conference, which barred television from federal courts.

But he may be weakening, if only so slightly. In February, the Supreme Court, by an eight to nothing vote, ruled that the states are not prohibited by the Constitution from allowing

television cameras in the courts. Chief Justice Burger, who wrote the majority opinion, said "an absolute constitutional ban on broadcast coverage of trials cannot be justified simply because there is a danger that, in some cases, prejudicial broadcast accounts of pretrial and trial events may impair the ability of jurors to decide the issue of guilt or innocence by extraneous matters."

The case was brought to the Supreme Court by two Miami Beach policemen convicted of burglary following a televised trial. In their appeal, the policemen claimed that the cameras in the Court violated their constitutional rights. It was this inherent unconstitutionality that the Court rejected. But Burger stressed in his opinion that the policemen have the right to appeal their conviction on the grounds that the trial was unfair, or that the jurors were prejudiced by the type of news coverage.

Burger's opinion also supported the states' right to admit cameras in court "notwithstanding the objection of the accused." But he warned that "dangers lurk in this, as in most experiments." Regardless of the Chief Justice's "lurking dangers" twenty-seven states now permit television cameras in at least some proceedings. But ten of the twenty-one states that allow coverage of criminal trials require the defendant's consent.

Finally, a word about another door that had been barred to television and is now open. The "door" in this case leads to the United States Congress, which had long been a captive of those who opposed televising legislative proceedings. But now the House of Representatives has voted to open its proceedings to the television camera. Admittedly, the House is not a courtroom, but the action by the lawmakers cannot but help end the ban on the camera in the court since most of the same arguments were used to prevent its use in Congress.

In the end, I am convinced that this growing pressure to admit the camera to the court will become a floodtide, sweeping away the opposition of the ABA and those incompetent lawyers who know that the "big eye" will expose their shortcomings. But I must admit, there is one argument in favor of barring the television camera that I haven't been able to answer: If television is allowed in the courtroom, it may influence more young Americans to become lawyers. Can the country survive more lawyers?

Attorney F. Lee Bailey is the author of The Defense Never Rests and other books.

The View from Outside

by Michael J. Arlen

TELEVISION today sits in the center of American homes and none too far from the center of American lives—a companionable though unsettling kind of house pet. Here and there, somebody will scornfully announce: "I never watch television!" Or even: "I don't own a television set!" But these defiance matters little. You don't really need to have this pet in your house to be affected by it.

Of course, since television is so close to home, as it were, a lot of people don't seem to know quite what to make of it. It's too close, too intimate an experience. At any rate, it's not one that bears thinking about very much.

TV is entertainment, isn't it? Yes.

George likes to watch football. Yes.

I'm crazy about *Dallas*. Yes.

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It tells me what's happening in the world. Yes.

Television is hard to pin down, almost impossible, but still some people are always trying to pin it down. Television is full of paradox, after all, and this is an age that seems to be rather more comfortable with the terrible swift sword of generalization. Clichés about the magic of mass media drip from the ceiling like stalactites. Stern, sweeping, and apocalyptic pronouncements on the evils of television rain like pebbles upon the heads of insouciant citizens. Thus, television is variously defined as all-powerful, manipulative, hypnotic: a dark electronic necromancer who can as easily sell refrigerators to the Eskimos as elect Wintergreen to the Presidency. Or as a despoiler of youth. Or as an inciter to national violence. Or as a false messenger: a source of dangerously biased news and censored information. And so on.

Naturally, these generalities have a certain amount of truth to them, at least some of the time, at least now and then. Where there's smoke there's fire, as the saying goes, though sometimes it is Paris burning and sometimes only a piece of smoldering rutabaga in the kitchen. As usual, the particular instance is probably what counts.

Television is certainly a powerful authority. On the other hand, it is surely just as true that television is also the most intrinsically porous medium of communication that man in his peculiar wisdom has yet devised. Consider for a moment the unusual relationship that the ordinary viewer maintains with this almighty force—for example, an American family gathered in, or rather drifting in and out of, the proverbial living room, watching the set. Think how hard it is even to read the sports page in the morning newspaper while carrying on a conversation with one's wife about vacation plans; how altogether difficult it is to work on office business or an algebra assignment while seated in a theater, attending to a play; how virtually impossible it is to read a decent novel or listen to a

concert while at the same time talking with a client or best friend or faraway parent on the telephone. But on most evenings of the year, in most households of the land, it is a safe bet that the nation's favorite television programs are being viewed not only happily but satisfactorily while a myriad of such parallel activities are going on—and not so much around these programs as right through them.

Do we then seem to have a porous authority, an oddly permeable wizard? Still other paradoxes abound. For instance, television has created sports while it has destroyed sports. Television has broken down traditional voting patterns, based on party allegiance; at the same time it has brought into being a new, fluid, shifting electorate of videoconscious voters.

Television helped promote our involvement in Vietnam with its simplistic, uncritical, combat-oriented reporting. But these same news reports also fueled the protest movements that turned the country against the war.

Studies by social scientists (George Gerbner et al.), based on national statistical samples, suggest that the more television an individual watches, the more he or she is likely to be inclined to violence, alienation, anomie, etc., though studies by other social scientists (Paul C. Hirsch et al.), based on the same national statistical samples, indicate just as clearly that among the individuals most prone to violence, alienation, anomie, etc., are those who don't watch any television at all.

In social terms, television is commonly regarded as a poor substitute for human contact. But is it a poor substitute for a world without human contact? Consider: Television did not itself bring about the fragmentation of modern family life, as a result of which old people are often separated from the rest of society and left to themselves. Television, however, ministers to these seniors, cast adrift and bobbing on the ebb tide in their Centers, Homes, and Resurrection Cities, connecting them, if not alas to Wayne Jr., newly married and too busy to visit, then

How many specialized publications do you need to keep up with research on these issues—

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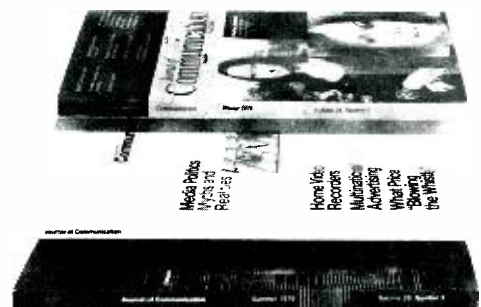
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at least to Phil Donahue and *All My Children*. Consider: In its dealings with the young, television often plays a sleazy Pied Piper to children, will sell them anything, addle their minds, and teach them bad grammar in the process. (The Pied Piper, one should remember, first came to Hamelin town at the invitation of the grownups.) But television also meets the young on their own terms, gives them choice as well as freedom of access, and also provides them — within the glowing, flickering perimeter of the television set — something that throughout history the young have badly needed: a place of their own to exist in, temporarily untalked to, undefined, unimproved.

Is television then a window on the world? Or is it a space we have found to hide in from the twentieth century? The fact is that television sometimes has a way of answering questions that nobody knew were being asked, so perhaps a not unimportant function of a television critic in these times is at least to scan the answers being given by his television set in order to learn some of the questions.

I believe that some of the most interesting questions being raised right now by television have to do with fundamental matters of perception. It has been evident for some time in this country that we have gradually shifted to television as the primary source for our perceptions of the world. In other words, our view outside the window is increasingly defined by television's view: television's news, television's sports, television's level of talk, television's social values, etc. At the same time, television itself has been steadily shifting its own perceptions so as to be in tune with the visual-cinematic era we now live in.

More and more, we see what the cameras see. Our interests become determined by what the cameras are interested in. Our news programs, for example, are under pressure to show us what the cameras deem newsworthy. Our cultural programs reshape dance, theater, painting, or literary material accord-

ing to the camera's eye, as if the formal essence of particular works in nonvisual (or nonfilmic) areas were somehow neutral, waiting to be recast in the new medium.

In important ways, it is a time of liberation; just as in other important ways it is bound to be a time of loss. For one hundred years or so, across the Western world, visual forms and crafts have been emerging from their lengthy servitude to the demands of trying to express nonvisual information. Painting gave up storytelling; photography has shaken free of journalism; movies abandoned the stage play. Finally, television, the most conservative of all the popular arts, the most hidebound, the most deeply rooted in the logic of nonvisual information, and the most massive, has been moving its great weight into the new terrain. Right now, it is in midstride: one foot still planted in the Old World, where visual signs exist mainly to express narrative stories or writerly information, and one foot now pressing into the New World, where visual forms have their own logic.

Is the camera eye but an extension of the human eye, or does it have its own perceptions? Already, to a remarkable extent, the television cameras stare out across the world, peering into politics, into space, into back yards, into courthouses, casting their eyes at family life, public life, sports, sex, revolution, war, famine as well as plenty, while we stay home, also staring — living our lives in terms of what we think the cameras tell us.

—E N D

This is an excerpt from the forward of Michael J. Arlen's forthcoming book, The Camera Age: Essays on Television, published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. Copyright © 1981 by Michael J. Arlen. The author is the television critic of The New Yorker magazine.

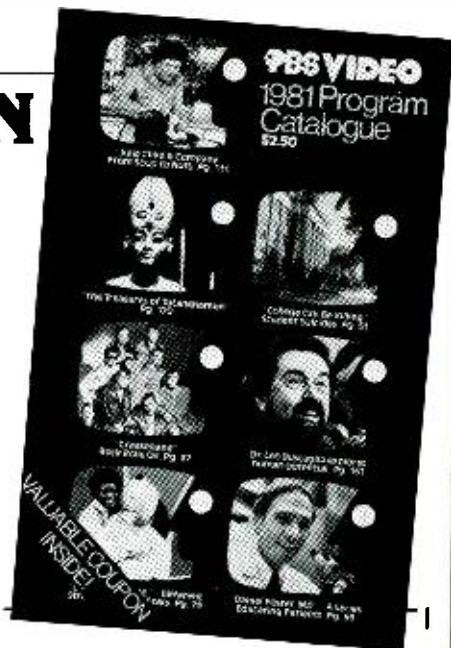
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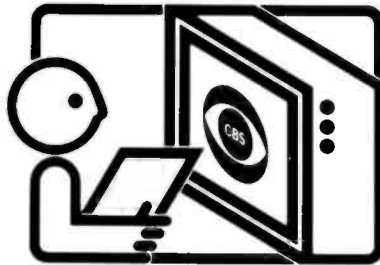


A MILLION-AND-A-HALF STUDENTS JOINED OUR REVOLUTION.

Last December, when CBS aired its three-hour adaptation of Charles Dickens' stirring novel of the French Revolution, "A Tale of Two Cities," another revolution was quietly taking place in cities across the United States.

A whopping 26 million* Americans watched the program. But a sizeable chunk were doing more than just watching. They were actually participating in the on-screen excitement through the innovative CBS Television Reading Program.

A record-breaking one-and-a-half million elementary and secondary pupils in 76 cities took part. They had read the television script prior to the broadcast. Taken part in classroom readings in which they acted out the various parts. They



had been primed on the historic background of the drama and given additional reading material aimed at whetting interest in the show itself and in reading in general.

Begun in 1977, the CBS Television Reading Program is a revolutionary way of linking viewing to reading. Its growing success means an ever-stronger relationship between television and the classroom, as more and more students join the revolution.

A tale of 76 cities. With a happy ending!

CBS TELEVISION READING PROGRAM

*Source: Nielsen Television Index, A.C. Nielsen Company

Where Are We? (And How We Got There)

SHARING A TAXI IN WASHINGTON with Richard E. Wiley a few weeks ago, I shared also his sense of irony that Charles Ferris, and not he, will go down in Federal Communications Commission history as the chairman who did most to deregulate radio and television. In truth it was Wiley, the FCC chairman during the Nixon and Ford Administrations, who got the ball rolling. But Charlie Ferris, his successor in the Carter years, was the one who moved it downfield and scored the goal.

"When I was on the commission and talked about deregulation I was villified," Wiley complained. "I had to invent a euphemism, *re*-regulation. Now if you're outspoken for deregulation you're considered a good guy."

Since I was one of the villifiers, Wiley knew quite well that I considered the honor of being the first to deregulate broadcasting a dubious one. Maybe because I'm not in politics and don't hang around Washington I escaped the epidemic of deregulation fever that struck three or four years ago. On the specific issue of broadcast deregulation I remain a reactionary, unwilling to allow any erosion of the public's rights in the electronic media and unwilling to release the broadcaster from accountability. Since the broadcast medium is a marketplace of ideas as well as of commerce, it cannot as easily be entrusted to regulation by market forces as are the airline, railroad, and trucking industries. The danger is too great that those who prevail in the wide-open business competition may decide which ideas should be transmitted, and which should not, on the most powerful and intrusive of media. Nevertheless, in the new climate, government views itself as an interference in business and is anxious to get out of broadcasting's way.

The first steps to that end were taken two years ago when the FCC, under Ferris, withdrew virtually all regulation of cable television; the second were taken last January when the commission voted to discard the rules allotting radio stations fixed time quotas for advertising, news, and public affairs programming. In the meantime, Democrats in Congress introduced bills that effectively would do away with the public interest standard in broadcasting, lengthen the license term from three years to five, and no longer require municipalities to insist their cable systems provide channels for public access. While none of the bills advanced to the floor, the signs were clear that substantial deregulation of broadcasting was only a matter of time.

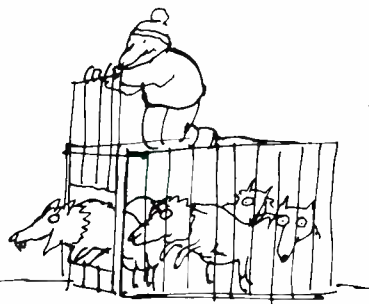
Wiley, now a communications lawyer in Washington, behaved like a true conservative Republican when he began to push for broadcast deregulation a half-dozen years ago. Ferris, when he embraced the cause three years ago, behaved like a true liberal Democrat. How the two arrived at the same point illuminates the dynamics of partisan politics.

Even before Jimmy Carter's election, liberal Democrats had been inching over to the right in response to voters' increasing conservatism. Carter himself moved the political center farther to the right than it had been in at least fifty years. Deregulation turned out to be a Republican idea that Democrats could adopt and benefit from politically. Even liberals could live with it, for it has never been a sin to reduce the size and cost of government, cut down unnecessary paperwork, or foster spirited business competition that might bring down prices of goods and services for consumers. But when it came to the deregulation of broadcast media, the problem for many Democrats was how to reconcile getting on the free-market bandwagon with a concern for the public interest.

The solution had important consequences, since it led to *laissez-faire* policies for the emerging communications technologies—policies that have moved the United States more swiftly than any other country into the Second Age of Television.

Liberal Democrats found the way to advocate broadcast deregulation by taking the route charted by the re-

vered First Amendment. Their thinking crystallized around the views of Henry Geller, the acknowledged guru for communications policy in Washington, who underwent a conversion from public-interest advocate to First Amendment zealot just before joining the Carter Administration. Geller, whom Carter had appointed director of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in the Department of Commerce, believed that government involvement in the program content of radio and television was a greater evil than any broadcaster's venality. He argued that it was pointless to regulate against the natural impulse of broadcasters to maximize their profits, and said he would feel more comfortable as an American if they were allowed to enjoy the same free-speech privileges as the owners of newspapers, magazines, and book publishing houses. Market forces, Geller maintained, would in the end serve the public interest more reliably than a political-ly appointed federal agency through which government might intrude in media matters.



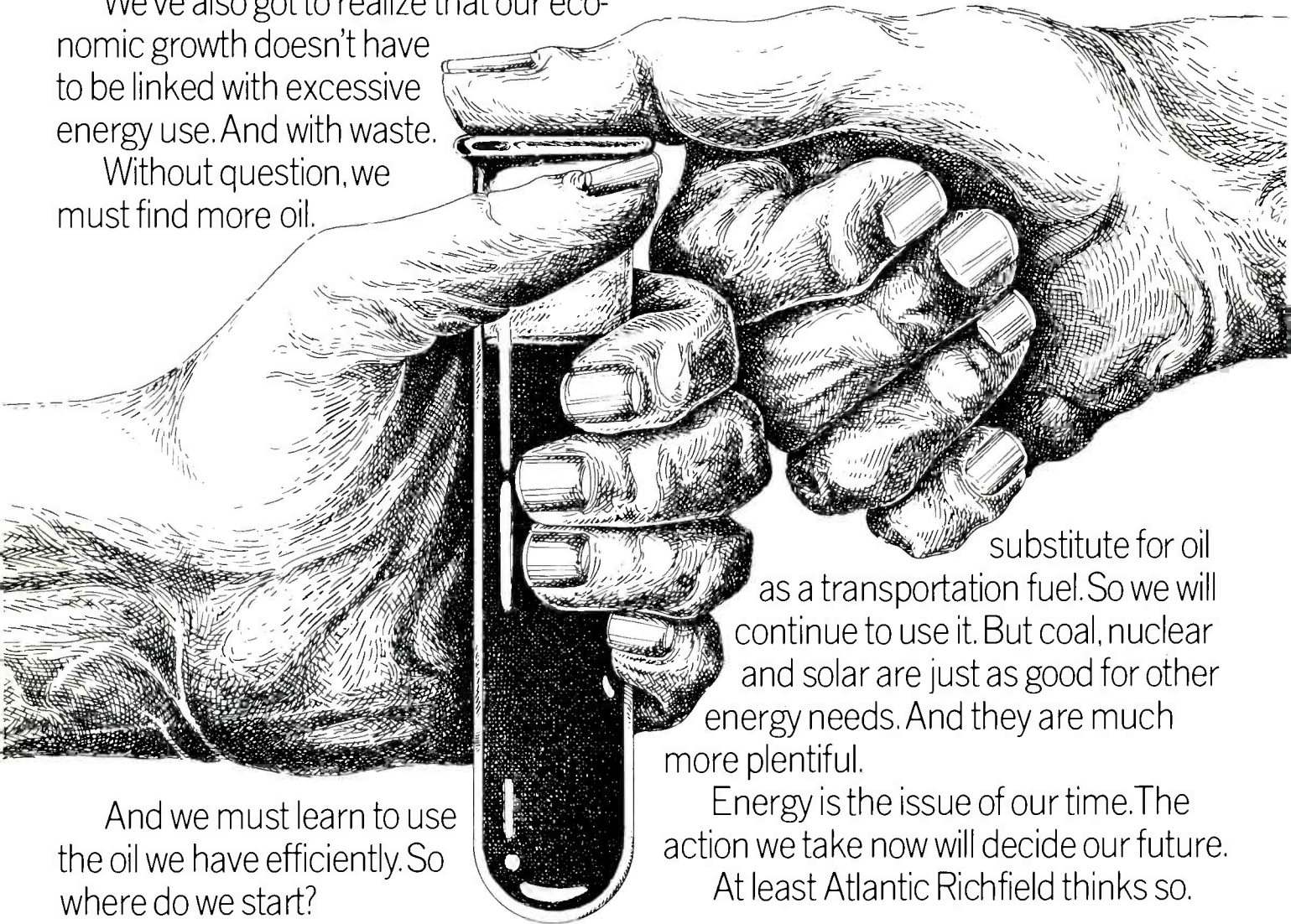
by Les Brown

**Some say the answer
is oil exploration.
Some say the answer
is conservation.
For once, everybody
is right.**

It is exploration. It is conservation. It is alternate energy sources. And it's more.

We've also got to realize that our economic growth doesn't have to be linked with excessive energy use. And with waste.

Without question, we must find more oil.



And we must learn to use the oil we have efficiently. So where do we start?

Scientists say there are billions of barrels of oil still undiscovered in the United States. We have the technology to find it.

Exploration and development will

cost billions. But the money is available.

Even so, the most forceful domestic program won't be enough to meet the coming demand.

Nobody uses as much oil as America. Oil provides half of our energy needs. And half of that goes into transportation.

Smaller cars help. So do mileage standards. And we're getting there. But we still have a long way to go.

Right now, there's no economical

substitute for oil as a transportation fuel. So we will continue to use it. But coal, nuclear and solar are just as good for other energy needs. And they are much more plentiful.

Energy is the issue of our time. The action we take now will decide our future. At least Atlantic Richfield thinks so.

There are no easy answers.

ARCO



Atlantic Richfield Company

The result of this drive to achieve abundance for the sake of deregulation is a national policy unlike any other in the world.

His arguments struck home with many Democratic liberals, for whom the memory was still fresh of the Nixon Administration's efforts to intimidate broadcast licensees. Cited frequently as the most frightening example of this was the attempt by Nixon loyalists during Watergate to punish *The Washington Post* for its journalistic enterprise by challenging the licenses of its television stations.

Geller's influence—his redefining of the liberal line—showed in the policies of the Ferris FCC and in the legislative efforts of Congressman Lionel Van Deerlin to rewrite the Communications Act. Geller's thesis was that full First Amendment freedoms could be extended to radio and television if there were no longer a scarcity of frequencies.

All along, the chief justification for federal regulation of broadcasting was the technological boundary to the number of stations that can exist in the electromagnetic spectrum. Because of these limits, people who received broadcast licenses assumed an obligation to others in the community not privileged to broadcast. Geller reasoned, however, that if the capacity of a television set could be expanded to accommodate vast numbers of channels, the scarcity issue would be dead and regulation could be lifted. The public interest standard could be discarded, because robust competition would provide for every taste and need. There would no longer be a double standard under the First Amendment for print and broadcast.

The result of this drive to achieve abundance for the sake of deregulation is a national policy for electronic communications unlike any other in the world. Some people question whether it is a policy at all. Whatever it is, it opens the gates to every new development in electronic technology, letting them all into the marketplace to battle for attention and acceptance. Ferris, who described his policy as Darwinian, reasoned that the public is better qualified than the FCC to decide which of the technologies should be allowed to exist.

This policy lets cable compete with conventional television, and then permits direct-to-home satellite broadcasting to compete with both cable and conventional television. It also invites into the fray subscription television, multipoint distribution systems, teletext, and hundreds of new low-powered VHF and UHF television stations. In addition, it inspires the FCC to make technical adjustments on the AM band and expand the FM band to accommodate more radio stations. And it opens the skies to scores of satellites. All this is in the face of a potential explosion in the unregulated home video market of disks, recorders, games, computers, and home video cameras.

Thus, the Second Age of Television (to be referred to hereinafter as Television II) is as much a creature of politics as of business and technology. While other advanced countries, with all the same technology available to them, are proceeding cautiously (most have not yet authorized cable, domestic satellites, or any form of pay television, and still have far fewer over-the-air channels than we), the U.S. is going wild with media. It is doing so in what appears to be a democratic fashion, by letting the people "elect" the new forms of television by their purchases, in the same way they elect brands of corn flakes.

This is not the kind of public participation that puts me at ease. The word *consumer* is not precisely synonymous with *the public*, and I reject the idea that what most people choose to buy bears any relationship to the public interest. We saw the problem with that kind of thinking in the consumer's desire for large automobiles. It seems apparent that the public's statutory right to participate in the television and radio process by making itself heard is being transferred by policymakers into the consumer's right to decide which technology to buy or not

to buy. There's a big difference.

I wish I could share Henry Geller's trust in market forces and his belief that cable's multiplicity of channels does away with the problem of scarcity. Market forces, being nothing new, have a bad track record. It was market forces that polluted rivers and the air, and in television it was market forces—unbridled competition—that gave us the quiz-show scandals of the fifties, the deplorable Saturday morning children's programs in the sixties, the exploitation of sex and violence in the seventies, and the now pervasive "happy talk" local news. Since that is the case, if there is to be neither accountability nor standards for service under a free market/First Amendment system, then there can be no expectation that unregulated television will provide much more than pap, albeit in greater quantities than before.

While cable may provide greater program diversity in light entertainment, proponents of deregulation seem to be promising something more—a greater variety of voices. But while it is true that the latest generation of cable systems can offer fifty-two channels of television (or about fifty more than the number of daily newspapers that exist in most cities), it is a mistake to think of each channel as an independent voice. Like the tines of a rake, they all attach to a single handle, and whoever has the local cable franchise controls the handle.

Cable has become such a capital-intensive business that only the very rich can own the large, sophisticated systems. Indeed, it seems likely that by 1990 fewer than a dozen companies will own all the cable systems in America. These questions spring to mind: Will the big companies be representative of the people? Will they reflect minority views? As monopolies in each community, will they control the flow of information only to serve their own interests?

Because there are innumerable ways to pass a printed message, print has—and must have—full First Amendment protection. Anyone with very little money can send a letter or mimeograph handbills. But in a deregulated system, the poor, the disenfranchised, and the dissenters have no way to get on the television screen unless those who own broadcast licenses or cable systems give them access. We are left with a strange choice. If it isn't to be government that rules over these invasive electronic media, then those who will rule instead, and probably more arbitrarily, will be large corporations.

What seems to have been overlooked by Democrats and Republicans alike in their eagerness to deregulate broadcasting was the 1969 Supreme Court decision in the landmark *Red Lion* case, which established that the public's rights in broadcasting are paramount and supercede the broadcaster's First Amendment privileges. Put another way, it is the public's First Amendment before it is the broadcaster's. Some right of access, some right of redress, some safety valve for dissent, must be built into television, or the republic could change very quickly from a democracy to an oligarchy.

No one yet—not Wiley, Ferris, Geller, or Van Deerlin—has converted me from the reactionary who believes the 1934 Communications Act remains as timely as the two-hundred year-old Constitution of the United States. Broadcasters, because they're given the licensed privilege of using the limited public airwaves, are public trustees with an obligation to serve the best interests of their communities. I don't know why they should be less than that. Moreover, I think it is in their own best professional interest to be reminded continually, by the licensing process, that they are not ordinary businessmen but people who have been entrusted with an important national resource, one that can be used either to improve the lives of Americans or to diminish what we are as a society. —E N D

The Birth of a Wired Nation

Having found the key to the major cities, cable television is spreading across America as rapidly as franchise procedures will allow. The phenomenon is freighted, however, with issues that bear on the future of our society.

IN MAY 1970, Ralph Lee Smith's article in *The Nation* attracted wide interest for its assertion that the United States would soon be substantially wired from coast to coast for cable television. Entitled *The Wired Nation*, the article not only covered the social potential of the intriguing new medium but also the policy questions it raised. In 1972, an expanded version of the article was published as a book by Harper & Row. However, when cable faltered in its first attempts to penetrate the major cities, its glamor evaporated, and Smith's prediction was dismissed like an erroneous weather forecast.

Now the picture has changed. Cable has begun to spread rapidly across the country, as was predicted a decade ago. Here, Smith takes a fresh look at cable, assesses its development, and reexamines his earlier conclusions.

The future arrived officially on the 18th of May, 1980, the day the National Cable Television Association convention opened in Dallas. History was not so much made at this event as marked by it. Scores of people not directly involved in the cable industry—financiers, corporation executives, producers, city government officials, and journalists—were drawn to the convention by a powerful sense that something momentous was happening in America. Whether or not they thought about it in these terms, they had made their pilgrimage to Dallas to witness the birth of the New Age of Television.

It was clear that America was on the threshold of becoming a "wired nation," that in the next few years homes and offices all across the country would be equipped for cable television, the rapidly expanding technology that creates dozens of new channels in each community, foreseeably as many as, or more than, fifty.

Old ideas about broadcasting for mass audiences are rendered obsolete by this profusion of television channels. They can potentially break the lock-step of existing commercial television; they can bring a greater variety of informational, educational, and cultural viewing material to the home screen, and can serve the needs of communities, smaller audiences, and special groups. They lend themselves also to new forms of communications services, such as the transmission of textual material, pay television, and home security systems. Cable promises, at once, a television renaissance and tantalizing opportunities for new wealth.

The new networks, pay services, and technical devices introduced at the Dallas convention all reflected the robustness of the industry and signified that cable was now truly, after several tentative starts, on the move across the land. The communications revolution that began incongruously in rural areas and small towns was expanding its programming store as it was beginning to sweep the cities. During the next three or four years virtually every major metropolitan market will

be franchised for cable. Well before the end of this decade the United States will be a wired nation. And when this wiring is done, things will never be quite the same again.

It must be said, however, that costs prohibit the country's ever becoming *completely* wired. Large geographical areas—the sparsely settled countryside between urban centers—will probably never have cable because the cost of "laying hard wire" is so great that no company could find it profitable to build systems there. The American Broadcasting Companies Inc. was probably correct when it estimated, in 1975 testimony before a Senate subcommittee, that the cost of wiring half the country would be \$10 billion—and the cost for the other half \$250 billion.

The portions of the country not covered by cable are likely to be served instead by satellites broadcasting directly to homes, and by the newly authorized low-power television stations. One way or another, these areas will also experience an explosion of channels, and will thus share in the bounty of the wired nation.

A wired nation holds out the promise of convenience, entertainment in abundance, and many other remarkable new uses for the cathode ray tube; it does not, however, promise utopia. For all its allure, the phenomenon is fraught with serious policy questions. Many were raised a decade ago when cable seemed about to embrace the cities, but they remain unresolved and as complex today as they were in 1970. In this decade, we can neither ignore the questions nor delay difficult decisions. If cable is to serve our nation well, we must now look for answers to questions like these:

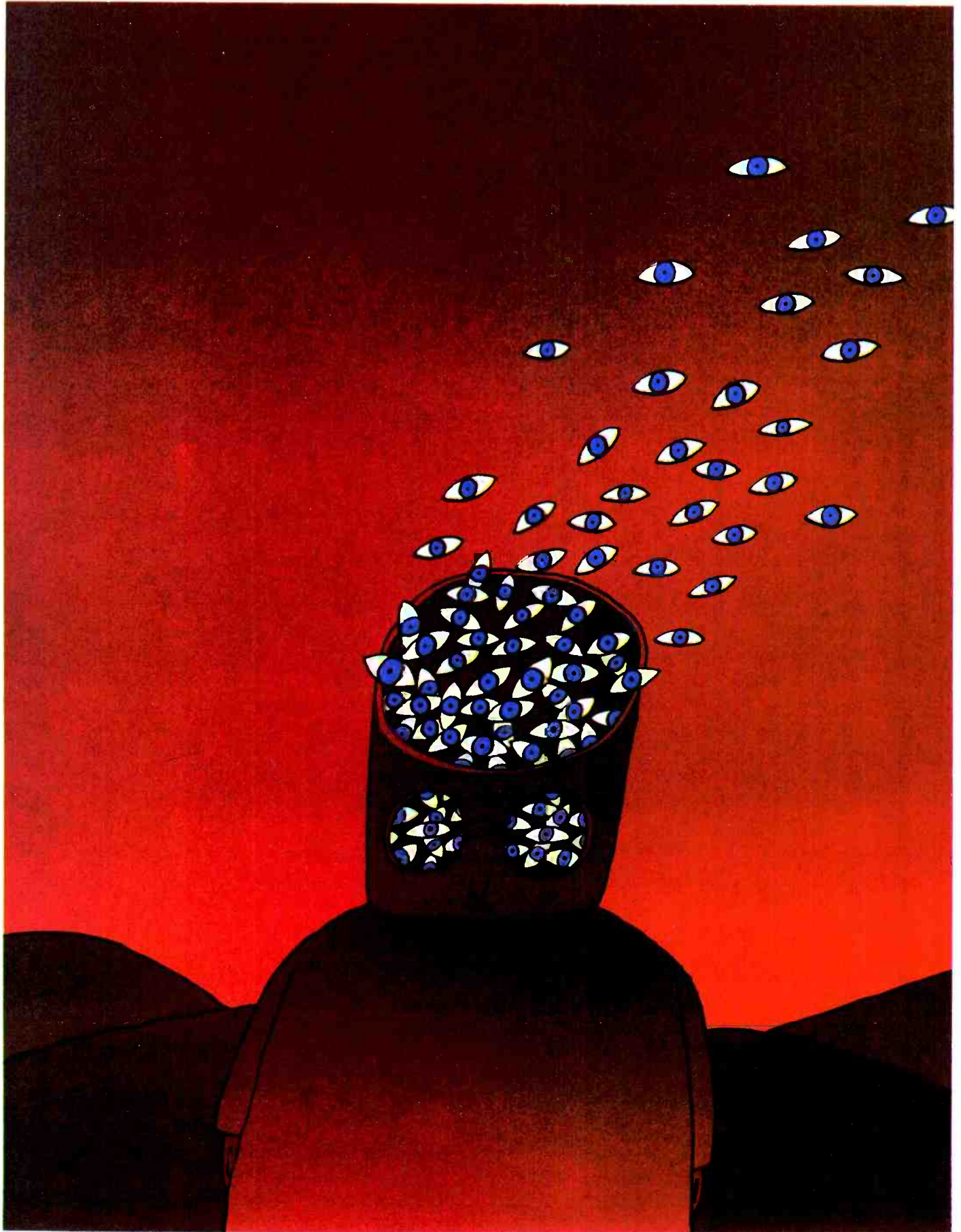
Who will control these powerful new communications systems, and how much should government regulate them? Who will have access rights to cable and how should that be used? What material should be allowed into American homes? Is it healthy for the parties who control the program sources to operate the cable systems through which they are delivered?

Should telephone companies be allowed to operate cable systems and thereby deliver both telephone and television over a single wire? If so, should the federal government regulate—or should the municipality? What should the new rules be? Finally, as companies frantically scramble for cable franchises in the large cities, are they promising more than they can possibly deliver? And if they don't deliver, how may city governments and the public legally respond?

Cable was a long time coming. Its function in the early fifties was to bring in a clear television picture and a greater selection of over-the-air television channels to areas of poor reception. In those days, it was known as Community Antenna Television, or CATV. The excitement over cable came with the discovery that the wire could provide channels in far greater number than the airwaves could, and that these channels might be used for a good deal more than light entertainment. For its social service potential, the new medium caught the fancy of social scientists, urban planners, community organizers, educators, and video

by Ralph Lee Smith

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JEAN-MICHEL FOLON

CHANNELS 3 APRIL/MAY

Thank You, Walter.



As Walter Cronkite retires this week as anchorman for the CBS Evening News, we at ABC News wish to thank him for his extraordinary contributions to our profession, and wish him well in the years ahead.

Throughout his distinguished

career, Walter helped establish America's trust in television as a reliable, accurate news medium.

We join broadcast journalists everywhere in our commitment to increasing that trust, and to maintaining the high standards of excellence he set for so many years.

ABCNEWS 

The medium may already be crippled by furious franchise competition in which bids must offer cash giveaways and low subscriber fees.

enthusiasts. But most of them gave up on it when their ideas did not bear fruit overnight.

The seemingly extravagant visions for cable began to be dismissed in the early seventies as "blue sky," and the Spring 1972 issue of the *Yale Review of Law and Policy* was entirely devoted to what the magazine called "The Cable Fable." The industry itself became doubtful. And the first attempts to wire large cities—Manhattan, for example—were disconcerting. Urban cable construction was found to be far more expensive than rural construction. There were problems with landlords who wanted to be paid for letting cable in, as well as difficulties in gaining access to telephone poles and underground ducts. But the biggest problem of all was that urban residents did not need cable to improve reception. Most households could receive four or more channels with rabbit-ear or rooftop antennas, and therefore would not likely pay for the only service cable then had to sell. The development and delivery of cable's technological promise was stalled by a straightforward dilemma: The biggest and most lucrative markets had no need for a community antenna service. Planners and academicians offered suggestions on how to make cable desirable in the cities, but the real solution finally came from the commercial sector.

In 1975, Home Box Office (HBO), a small pay-television service, made a fateful decision to hitch its future to the RCA Satcom I satellite. Cable's resurgence traces to that single action, for what HBO achieved in transmitting its signal by satellite was an instant national network, one with distribution capabilities resembling those of ABC, CBS, and NBC, but at a fraction of the cost. Other companies quickly followed HBO's lead.*

The RCA satellite soon became saturated with program services for cable systems—some for pay, some carrying advertising, and some designed to increase the attractiveness of the total cable package. For non-pay programming, cable systems spent a few cents per subscriber for the right to carry the network. With advertising-supported networks, the cable operator was allowed to sell some advertising locally.

But the simplest way to fill a channel by satellite was to use independent, large-city television stations specializing in cable's two biggest draws—sports and

movies. Through cable and satellites, these local stations (WTBS Atlanta, WOR-TV New York, and WGN-TV Chicago, for example) all became nationally broadcast "superstations."

Because it carried HBO (the most popular service), RCA's Satcom I became the main satellite for cable. In short order its twenty channels were claimed, and some have been subleased to programmers at handsome profits. Many prospective users are waiting for space, and others have booked transponders on Western Union's Westar satellite in hopes that cable systems would build a second earth station to take down its signals.

In addition to the shower of programming pouring from the satellite, cable has gained from technology such new applications as fire- and burglar-alarm systems; two-way communications capabilities that make shopping, banking, and polling possible by cable; and the use of the home television screen as a display terminal for printed information. Also, some cable systems are building special local networks to facilitate interchanges of visual materials and data between schools, hospitals, libraries, and municipal offices. The cable operator in 1980 therefore has what he lacked in the 1970s—important things to sell in the major cities. And this has incited the wild rush for big city franchises.

The systems that cable companies now propose to build in the large urban markets differ markedly from those constructed in the past. As early as 1963, twelve-channel cable came into regular use in rural areas. It remained standard until the early seventies, when new twenty-channel systems were built. Later, in Columbus, Ohio, an experimental multifaceted system called QUBE was developed by Warner Cable. This system has thirty channels, some of which let subscribers buy specific programs and participate in public-opinion polls. Although QUBE attracted a good deal of attention, it was thought to be unprofitable (Warner would not release figures on its operation) and was not immediately imitated. The QUBE venture has proven profitable to Warner in another way, however: QUBE came to represent the state of the art, and no city considering franchise bids would settle for anything less.

By the end of 1979, 70 percent of all existing U.S. cable systems still had not changed their 12-channel programming capacity. In new franchise offerings, however, channel capacity has rapidly climbed from forty to fifty-two, and in some cases, to more than one hundred. Virtually all bidders now offer the two-

way and pay-per-program capabilities.

Subscribers can now buy new programming in several differently priced tiers of basic service. Typical tiers include combinations of over-the-air signals; satellite-delivered programming; informational, educational, and cultural material, and local-access channels. Cable has moved so far from its position of five years ago that today some companies give away their initial tier of basic service (which used to be cable's economic mainstay). Subscribers to this new-style cable may pay anywhere from nothing to \$50 monthly for the services they select.

Such sophisticated cable systems are terribly expensive to construct. The wiring costs for cities like Cincinnati, St. Paul, and Omaha, with system sizes ranging from 110,000 to 160,000 homes, are expected to run up to \$40 million. Dallas, with 400,000 homes, will cost \$100 million.

Despite such costs, with the vast array of programming and services, few people doubt that high-capacity cable systems can be built and operated profitably in urban centers. But there remains a major question: Has the medium already been crippled by furious franchise competition, in which bids must offer immense cash giveaways and low subscriber fees?

Since early 1979, bids on franchises have gone berserk: eighty or more channels of programming for just \$10 a month; immediate prepayment to the municipality of the franchise fee in the amount of millions of dollars; purchasing of bonds issued by financially destitute municipalities; building and equipping of access centers; funding of foundations to support local programming; creation of tape libraries, and granting of substantial equity in the entire venture to people with political influence, to local civic groups, or to a city itself.

Obviously, this is not a game for the faint-hearted or cautious. Cities and cable companies blame each other for the current craziness. Monroe Rifkin, president of American Television and Communications Corporation (ATC), told a recent gathering at the University of Wisconsin that the cable franchising process occurs in an environment "where excesses are encouraged and realism is penalized." At the same meeting, David Korte of the Cable Television Information Center, a nonprofit group that advises cities, put the shoe on the other foot. "The applicants are promising not only more than the city wants, but more than they are capable of delivering." It is not evident that cities are unhappy with the giveaway offers made by franchisees.

*HBO's historical role in cable's resurgence is detailed in this issue in Martin Koughan's article, "Playing 'The New Television' at Table Stakes."

Fine Tuning.

WNEW-TV New York

KTTV Los Angeles

WTTG Washington, DC

KRIV-TV Houston

WTCN-TV Minneapolis/St. Paul

KMBC-TV Kansas City

WXIX-TV Cincinnati

METROMEDIA TELEVISION

By joining the every-man-for-himself melee that passes for national policy on cable, groups wearing the mantle of the public interest look more like part of the difficulty than part of the solution.

But many do believe unrealistic promises are being made. If the promises cannot be kept, everyone stands to be harmed. As the highly respected journal, *Cable TV Regulation Newsletter*, said in August 1980, "Just when you think franchising competition has peaked and there is nothing left to offer, another summit is sighted and a new crest must be scaled. The future breathing space for a reasonable rate of return seems to be thinning."

Reviewing the six applications submitted for the Dallas franchise, the Cable Television Information Center criticized them all for not showing an adequate rate of return, which is most simply defined as the money a corporation has made on its capital investment after expenses and taxes have been paid. The financial consulting firm of Gary A. Dent Associates, analyzing the same Dallas bids and taking the bidders' own figures at face value, reported that, after twelve years of operations, rates of return on the projected investments for the entire period ran from 4.74 percent down to minus 5.32 percent, with three of the six bids showing rates of return of less than zero. Even if the system were sold after twelve years of operation, Dent figures indicated that the rate of return for all the bidders would be significantly less than the current cost of borrowing money. This approach is risky for any venture. But what makes the high-cost cable situation particularly alarming is the fact that the service is being so blithely merchandised, and its anticipated revenues so cheerfully totted up even before results are in. No cable system comparable to the type now being franchised has been built anywhere before. Both its costs and its potential dwarf those of existing systems. In addition, the demographics of the urban centers receiving the new cable are, generally, very different from the demographics of the medium-sized and small towns that until recently have been cable's principal market.

The limited amount of market experience gained in these smaller systems is not a reliable guide to the economics of big-city "supercable." No one really knows what services and offerings the subscriber to the new urban cable system will actually pay for.

Another complicating factor is that cable's rank among the electronic technologies to be unleashed on the American consumer in the eighties has not been fully established. Technologies that may compete for at least part of the cable subscriber's time and dollar include video tape and video disk, direct broad-

casting from satellite to home (DBS), and multipoint distribution service (MDS).

The last may be a real sleeper. MDS is a microwave common-carrier broadcasting technology that can disseminate television signals within a twenty-mile radius. Current FCC rules permit MDS stations to transmit two television channels in urban centers. MDS signals are principally beamed to hotels, motels, and business establishments, although operators have begun to solicit home hook-ups for the delivery of pay television. To receive MDS one must install a small microwave receiving dish and down-converter that cost around \$250.

It takes \$30 million to \$100 million to bring cable to urban centers; MDS stations can be built and put on the air in the same areas for about \$100,000. Moreover, there is no serious technical reason why the MDS transmission band could not be expanded for twenty or thirty television signals. Because it is a broadcasting technology MDS is regulated entirely at the federal level, so the local franchising situation has no effect on its installation. MDS operations can be established in any city, whether or not a cable system exists there.

ANOTHER COMPETITOR for some viewers is low-powered television broadcasting. This service, for which the FCC is now processing applications, will involve the licensing of hundreds of highly localized television stations throughout the country, each transmitting over relatively short distances. A 1978 FCC Task Force estimated that the cost of creating such a station, complete with minimal program origination facilities, would be \$55,000. Low-powered stations are capable of providing many kinds of television service, including pay television.

To introduce high-cost cable into this volatile scene—especially with commitments that push projected rates of return to the vanishing point—is risky, to say the least. The cable franchising process needs to be greatly reformed, so that the public and private risks can be substantially reduced. It would be wise to curb the lavish giveaway promises made against unknown returns and to delay the introduction of new technology until it has undergone extensive market experimentation. Overall, there is a need for intelligent planning.

Unfortunately, each of those who could lead reform—city governments, access groups, and consumer advocates—stands to lose some of the cable operator's

largesse if the system were to be improved. Most prefer the giveaways being offered to a more orderly and reasonable franchising procedure.

A front-page article in the March 10, 1980 issue of *access*, the publication of Ralph Nader's National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, summarized the current mood in making these recommendations for local action:

- "Ask for twice as many local channels as the cable company offers;
- "exact a high franchise fee;
- "find out what is available in the finest cable systems today, and then ask for more."

Now that cable companies are realizing that local access groups will be making substantial demands, those companies are incorporating high-cost access projects, with large staffs, into their proposals.

By joining—and, in fact, leading—the every-man-for-himself melee that now passes for national policy on cable, groups wearing the mantle of the public interest look more like part of the difficulty than part of the solution. The essential problem is the absence of any national policy on cable.

There are two well-established objectives of United States communications policy. The first is *establishment of a strong national pattern of communications*. The Communications Act of 1934, which created the FCC, states that the Commission was formed:

for the purpose of regulating interstate and foreign commerce and communication by wire and radio so as to make available, so far as possible, to all people of the United States, a rapid, efficient, nationwide, and worldwide wire and radio communications service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.

The second goal of communications policy, reflected in many of the FCC proceedings, is *the promotion of communications capabilities at the local level*. This objective was well stated by the President's 1968 Task Force on Communications Policy:

No aspect of communications policy is more important than measures or arrangements which would permit or encourage the growth of communications of all kinds within localities: the dis-

(Continued on Page 88)

Texas: A Giant State of Mind

The eyes of television are on the Sunbelt, where *Dallas* and its knock-offs rework old familiar imagery into new symbols that speak for American values and yearnings.

One hundred and fifty years ago, people wrote "GTT" over the doorways of busted-out post-war rent farms in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. That meant the family had "Gone to Texas." They piled everything worth taking onto a two-mule wagon and headed west. The people were after cotton and cattle. And land. The oil came later, much of it from under land that was fit for neither cows nor plows, land that had already changed hands more than once by the time it was drilled.

Today they come from Los Angeles and New York; they come in comfort, on the big jets, first class—high rollers, ready to buddy up with the down-home types. Taxiing into the gigantic horseshoes of Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, they already sport the boots and hats, boutique items bought in little side-street shops in fashionable neighborhoods back home.

They've come to scout locations or to film some title sequences and 'establishing shots.' Or they've come just for the fun of it, to see what it's all about. They'll meet the rich folks with Hollywood connections, talk to the mayor, eat some barbecue. They'll hop in a pickup and wheel down to "Yewston" to see Gilley's and the Galleria, listen to a little music, cuss the heat, and head for home two days later. The very least the new travellers hope for is a good television pilot, something that blends stereotype and audience expectation, glamour and violence, high stakes and low-down loving.

It's residuals they're farming now, the gleam of syndication shining in the vice-presidential glance like hope in the eye of a forty-acre farmer. "GTT" still works. Now it means—"Get Texas Television."

Because of the unexpected success of *Dallas*, Texas is hot. *Time* doesn't do covers on subjects that aren't. And while nobody in Los Angeles or New York knows how to start a trend, they certainly do know how to spot one. Quickly then, in every stage of production, come the copies. *Texas*, the daytime version of *Dallas*, brings the same soap-opera license to old topics of social intrigue, class strife, financial chicanery, and sexual confusion. With marvelous bravado this show moves into such topical areas as Middle Eastern revolution and petroleum politics, while keeping regional roots on the surface with such lines as, "If I had to move off this ranch I guess I would die." *Knots Landing* ties *Dallas* to Southern California with familial ropes, but little more than random accents remain. *Flamingo Road* leaves Texas for Florida, where flesh and sweat are supposed to be in equal supply.

What are we to make of this sudden run of "y'alls," these "ma'ams," and "Daddys"? These fanciful, often stereotypical, and sometimes exploitative images have seized the public's imagination—highbrow, lowbrow—in England and Nigeria, all around the world. We desperately needed to have J.R. live, and yet we knew so well that whoever shot him should be awarded a "Good Deed of the Week" prize. The audience's incredible involvement has a lot to do with the show's exquisitely fortuitous casting. Who could have planned the success of

Larry Hagman's grin or of Victoria Principal's testy stride? Even greater contributions to the show's success were the spread of country music and the popularity of crossover performers like Dolly Parton and outlaws like Willie Nelson. Chicago wore boots and the Lone Star Cafe was a New York hit before we had the new television Texans. Even the Cowboys, called "America's Team," show striking similarities to *Dallas*. Like Miss Ellie waiting for a phone call, Tom Landry paces the sidelines in tense anticipation, and the Dallas Cowboys' bouncy, sexy cheerleaders give the younger Southfork women lessons in how to dress for breakfast.

"Trend" is too mild a way to explain television's country fixation. *Dallas* and the other shows—*Urban Cowboy* and the country music movies, Burt Reynolds as hero-hick, even Sheriff Lobo, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and the cartoon characters who hang around Flo's café—tap a far deeper source in American entertainment. The West and the South, and now the new hybrid, the Sunbelt, have always served as a mirror on which the image-merchants project characters who never existed, the cowboys, hillbillies, bandits, and dumb sheriffs. Their actions are performed within the broad limits of the imagination, rarely bounded by the average person's experience. Still, they amuse and thrill us, and they seem familiar. We have heard it before but never in so appropriately contemporary a manner. These characters are talking to us about ourselves, and their words come from some of popular culture's most powerful and appealing language. What we get is a sense of place, of tradition, and of true character. And we like what we hear because such qualities are in very short supply these days.

For the most part television is as devoid of any real sense of place as a theme park. While most critics think that this is because everything is filmed in California, the visual aspects actually have little influence on our *sense* of place. Reference to a regional food, a touch of what the audience thinks of as an accurate accent, and the mood is set. A sense of place must be evoked, not duplicated visually. This is why *Kojak* was better at place than *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Jump-cut titles that take us around a city do little to evoke its mood if the immediate action doesn't follow through.

Southern shows have been best at developing this quality. *The Beverly Hillbillies* traded continually on the premise that the family had moved from *someplace* to *no* place and that it was genuinely disturbed by the fact. *The Waltons* managed, with voice, theme, and historical reference, to plant itself in the minds of viewers as actually representing the mountain communities of Virginia.

Dallas and the new Sunbelt series are superb at creating this quality, weaving a texture of place that feels familiar. We've seen the huge swagger, the openness to stranger and friend alike. We've heard the loud, familiar voices, ringing as if everything is a celebration. But we've also seen the sinister threat that comes when the eyes narrow and the voices drop to

by Horace Newcomb

Horace Newcomb, an associate professor of English at the Austin campus of the University of Texas, is the author of TV: The Most Popular Art, and editor of Television: The Critical View.



We want the old frontier dream. This is why we always have westerns in America even if they are high-rise, glass-fronted, six-lane concrete westerns—even if there are old Mercedes hub-caps lying beside the road instead of buffalo chips.

a whispering intensity. We know all this from John Wayne's drawl, James Arness's stance, the soft thunder of "When you call me that, smile," even from Lyndon Johnson's remembered boasts.

These are the evocative cues. Their real importance is found in qualities that accompany them, telling us that this is a place of confrontation, of testing, of possible violence. The potential for failure is strong, matched only by the sense of possibility. Men and women are measured here daily, and threatened frequently. It is an old and complex dream world in which one must gamble and fight repeatedly to hold on to what he has.

And when Texas is involved, there is always the lust for empire. In history and fiction the state has lured visionaries, politicians, scoundrels, outcasts, missionaries, and entrepreneurs. There was supposed to be enough for them all. But empires call for emperors, emperors become despots, and the dream curdles.

Played small, this is the plight of the gunfighter. Reputation established, he waits now for every puny fool who wants to bring him down. The best examples are in epics like *Red River*. John Wayne, as Tom Dunson, builds his vast ranch from nearly nothing, only to be defeated by a failure of nerve when he is threatened by financial ruin and the manhood of his figurative son. In a way this Texas story is a microcosm, not just for the West, but for the whole country. Cursed and blessed with grand dreams and vast land, we've spent decades trying to remain pure while making the big kill. From the very early westerns through the work of Ford and Hawkes, to films like *Giant*, *Hud*, and *Urban Cowboy*, we live it out over and over again with our tainted heroes.

WHAT *Dallas* has done—and it counts in large measure for the show's success—is to transfer these old western meanings to a new and different world, to the Dallas of express highways and sunning skyscrapers. The old shows began with the stagecoach topping the horizon. Now we swoop over the scurrying cars in a helicopter, carrying the horizon with us. We sense that the barbecues and lonesome music mask a deadly seriousness. The shoot-outs have merely been transferred to the boardrooms, and when we see the brothers W. Herbert and Nelson Bunker Hunt bluff Congress on the evening news we understand them better because we

now know J.R.

But it would be a big mistake to define the new West or the success of *Dallas* solely in terms of these regional characteristics. Eventually tradition tamed the frontier and checked rampant opportunism.

In *Dallas*, tradition begins at home. Throughout the show we swing from office to ranch, restaurant to dining room, boardroom to den. Family is the second powerful attraction of the show. As we Texans sometimes say, "How's ya Ma-ma'n'em?"

Thank goodness Miss Ellie didn't marry Digger Barnes. Despite his protestations to the contrary, not even the passionate love of this good woman would have kept him from becoming a whiny old drunk. In choosing Jock she chose the sunrise of a dynasty. She holds the family together with those crinkly-eyed smiles and bosomy embraces. Jock may not understand it all, but when one of the boys or girls offends his wife, or what she stands for, he comes down with both boots. Actually, like all good parents, Miss Ellie and Jock just want the best for their kids, and like most they spend a fair amount of time worrying about them. That's part of the tradition.

Again, the real genius of the show emerges in the tension of transferring those old values to the inhabitants of the new West. For all the younger Ewings, their spouses, friends, and assorted lovers, these traditions are the backdrop against which they play out their own frantic struggles for stability, happiness, and success. They believe in the old ways, but they don't know how to make them work in a time and place where money and power dominate. Tradition makes Pam feel inferior, but it also drives her to search for her own personal identity. For Sue Ellen and Lucy, tradition threatens freedom. Both are trapped, and to escape they must behave badly. To the old people, then, tradition is part of a rich existence and full of meaning. To the young ones it is merely part of the air they breathe. And to J.R. it is a tool.

Utterly realistic in the show's fictional world, J.R. at once embodies the sense of place and sneers at it. He believes in tradition and family, perhaps more than anyone else, and he uses them to keep Bobby in line and Sue Ellen on a string. Dynasty is what he wants and he will go to any length to obtain it. There is no contradiction in character when J.R. tenderly holds his infant son. He is holding his world together until his son can take over. That is J.R.'s one and only business, hobby, dream, and burden.

He is the third great feature of *Dallas*, made possible in part by the other two: sense of place and the idea of tradition. Without such texture he would be a caricature. Hagman also helps to prevent this with small actions. His face disintegrates when someone discovers one of his schemes, his anger pours out briefly before he regains control of Sue Ellen. He hurries from his call girl because he finds no real satisfaction.

As a result, television has its most developed character since Archie Bunker, and the two are much alike. Both are obstinate, intent on blundering through the world as if they were utterly sure of their intentions and actions. All the while we know that they remain on the verge of failure and defeat. They appeal to us as much for their weaknesses as for their strengths. We like to know that behind their facades our villains are touchy and vulnerable.

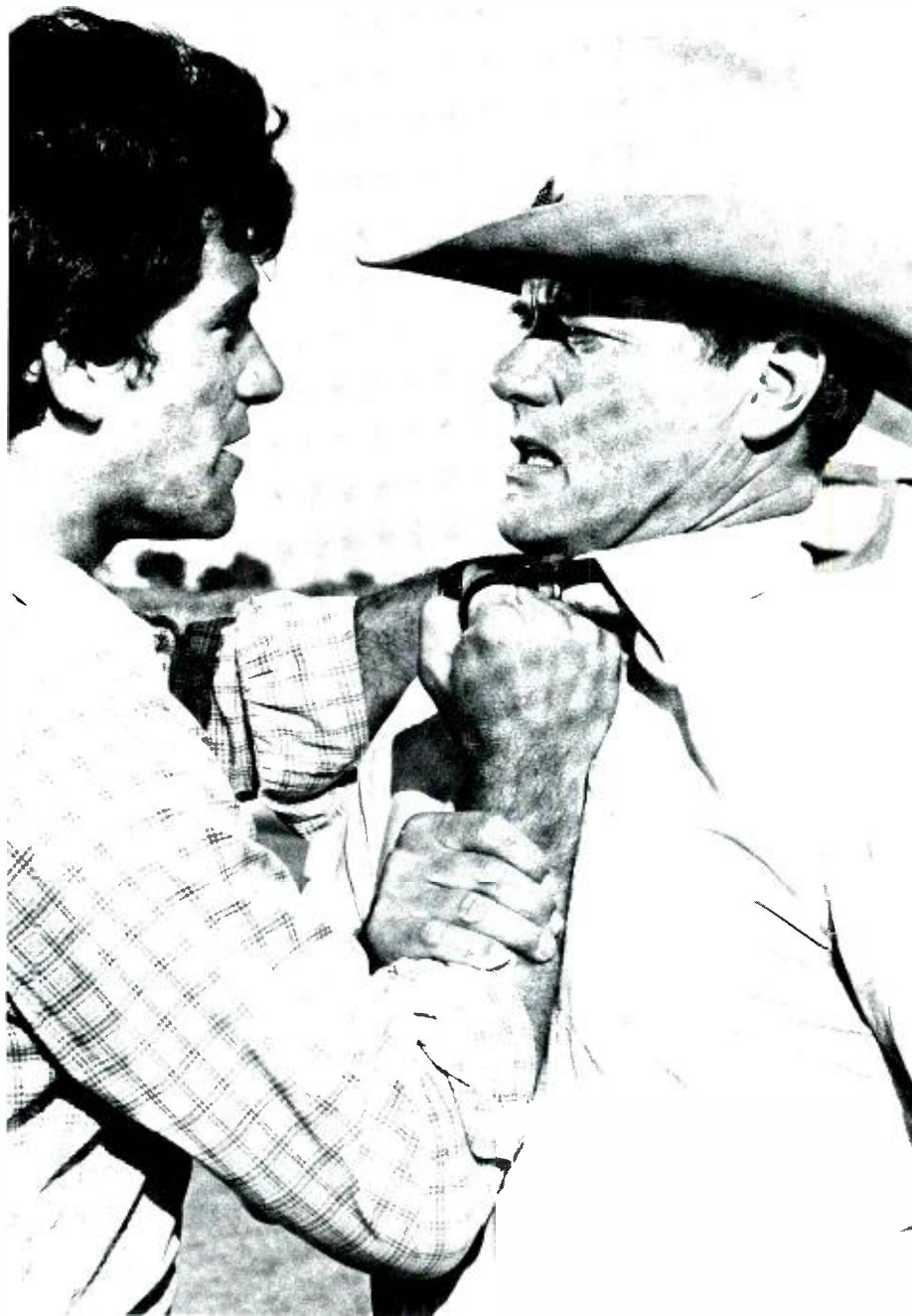
J.R. blends the old West and new, inevitably winning battles by using old ways. He pushes civility to the limits, strains every family tie, every sign of love, overlooking basic morality, the law, and business ethics. If there is something to grab, J.R. grabs it.

In this way he is much like the prototypical "Good Old Boy." What is marvelous about that term is that many of us truly desire to be "Old" and to be a "Boy." We want to behave rambunctiously and at the same time be taken seriously, getting adult responsibility in the arenas of money, sex, and power. Therefore in his action, the Good Old Boy demands to be honored, and pleads for approval.

More than anything else, more than money or even power, J.R. longs for his father's approval. Without this he will have nothing of true value to pass on to his own son. To receive the nod from Jock, J.R. must be capable of some flamboyant act, something truly worthy of his father's own exploits. Around this theme all other Ewing narratives unfold. We wait and watch as story after story develops and fades into another. We wait as we waited in numberless westerns for the gunfight to begin, held in suspense by our hope for the tarnished hero. With its brilliant appropriation of soap opera form, *Dallas*, perhaps indefinitely, has postponed resolutions. In such an unending story there is always hope, for J.R. and for us.

The power of *Dallas* lies in this extraordinary accomplishment of the oldest pop-culture trick. It has recycled a cluster of America's most basic images and polished them into a financial success. Probably without knowing it, the show's

Dallas evokes an old and complex dream-world where one must gamble and fight repeatedly to hold onto what he has.



creators pump nourishment into audience's veins. Their timing is perfect. As a nation we are actually growing older and developing the caution that comes with age. It is a time of decline, of recession and restriction, a time of real trouble. The grand old cities of the East and the Midwest are burdened with financial failure and bitter winters. Small wonder that the Sunbelt flourishes and *Dallas* leads the ratings. Small wonder, too, that J.R. has become a national symbol, replacing the mellower, resigned, saddened Archie Bunker.

A certain political resonance in all of this relates to our recent Presidential

Elections. Carter's success was much like the initial success of *Dallas*; both were exotic. In the new South, the true southern romantic and the cavalier have long since been replaced by the efficient manager. There may have been little of J.R. in Jimmy Carter—but we usually go for the loner, the outsider from the hills that Carter represented. Four years ago he was the only one willing to face down the gang in town. The Sunbelt was promising its old salvation and, for a moment, when Carter's people walked down Constitution Avenue, it was as if the film hero Shane had come back. Now that all seems anachronistic. It didn't work, and like

Cooper at the end of the film *High Noon*, Carter packed up his family and rode out. The Reagan Administration promises style and power, an understanding of boardroom politics, big money, and smooth deals. At the moment, J.R. and the glamour of high finance are more intriguing to us—offer more—than the gunfighter's purity of mission.

The paradox is obvious. The wheelers and dealers in *Dallas* are all hip-deep in booze, blackmail, and what some folks call illicit sex. Their world has a frightening callousness. It may sound rather offensive to many Reagan supporters, and no doubt the Moral Majority eschews *Dallas* as another example of crumbling values. But for them, as for many voters, the unpleasantness of tawdry glitter and soiled boots are overshadowed by what they see as the new Administration's sense of purpose and will. Maybe we should have anticipated the conservative sweep when J.R., acting on knowledge gained from his private intelligence sources, saved Ewing Oil from the clutch of greedy nationalists. In the face of utter disaster he took action and did what a man had to do. No negotiation. No fine ethical dilemma. That he sold friends out in the process might give momentary pause but for the ruthless clarity of intention. We had already heard of Lone Ranger diplomacy. No wonder "J.R. for President" bumper stickers appeared immediately.

What we see in J.R. is a refusal to give up. He holds on. The grand gestures count, as they always have in the romance of the West and the South. Why else would John Travolta in *Urban Cowboy* need so desperately to ride the bull and ride it better? Why would we thrill to Burt Reynolds' "bandit" character if it were not for his remarkable will?

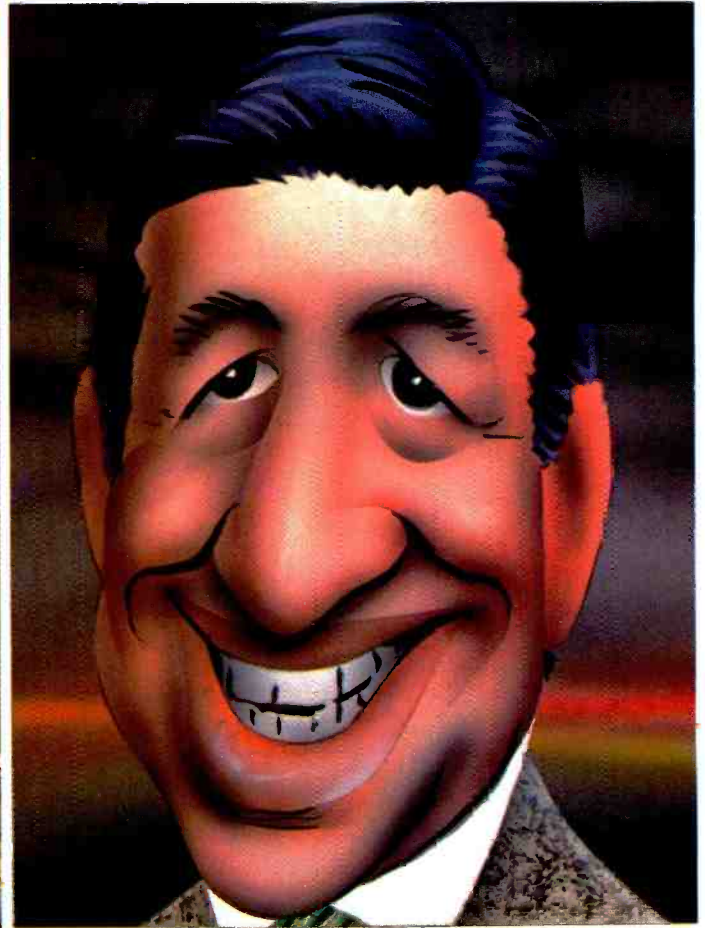
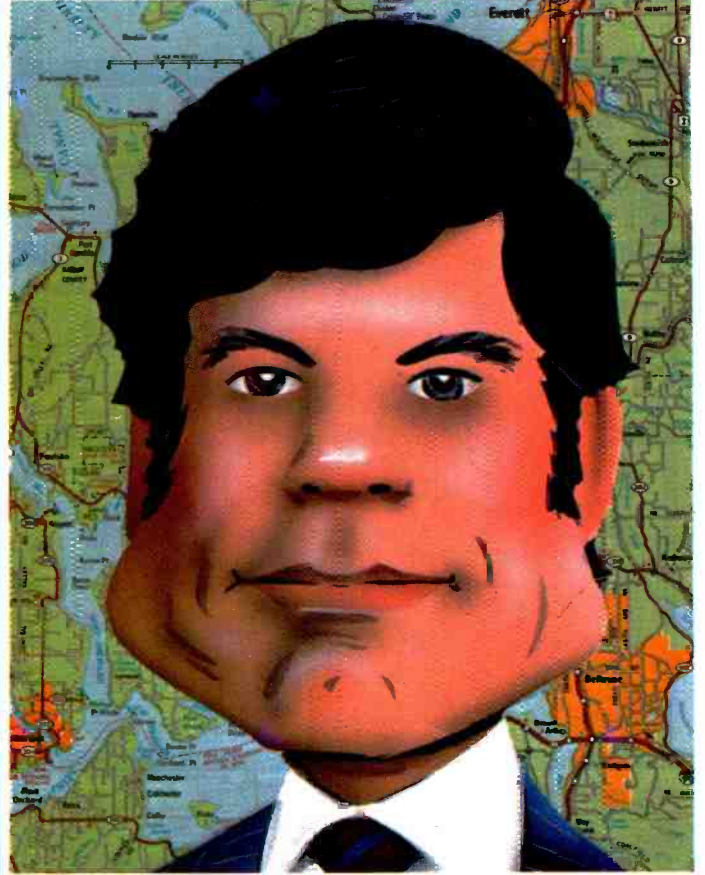
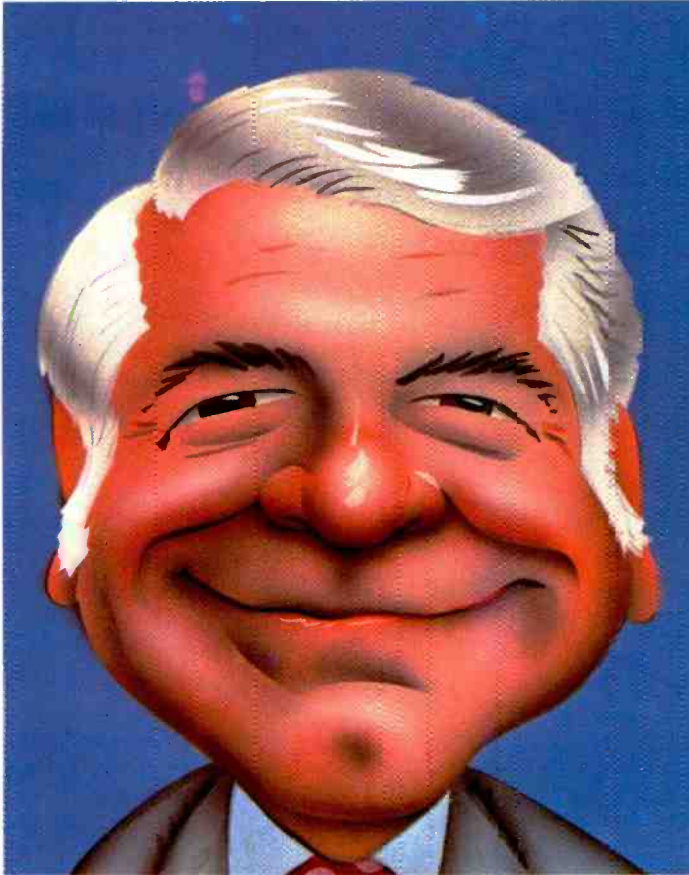
This is why settlers came to Texas originally, and why "GTT" never needed a translation. This is why we always have westerns in America although they are high-rise, glass-fronted, six-lane concrete westerns. Even if there are old Mercedes hubcaps lying beside the road instead of buffalo chips, we want the old dream. As usual, imagination exceeds experience.

Other shows will try to move in on the territory. Many of them will succeed in capturing one or two of the elements that have made *Dallas*. My hunch is that none of them will gather all of them into a single world as powerful and compelling as this one. *Dallas* got there first and claimed the water rights. If it comes to a showdown, we all know who to back.

—E N D

by Jonathan Black

Jonathan Black is a senior editor at Quest/81 magazine.

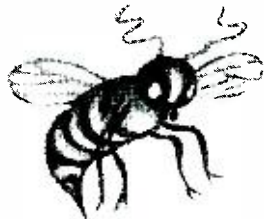


CHANNELS 2 APRIL/MAY

ROBERT GROSSMAN

The Stung

Dozens of corporations and private citizens complain of having been set up and ill-used by CBS's *60 Minutes*. A number of those who consider themselves victims are fighting back and documenting the journalistic flaws.



LET THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING. *60 Minutes* has contributed great and wonderful moments to television journalism. There have been compelling interviews with the likes of Vladimir Horowitz and Fidel Castro, charming glimpses of faraway places, and exposés—the show's featured attraction—on subjects ranging from giant chemical companies to con-men, quacks, and charlatans. But in its twelve-year climb to Number One in the Nielsen ratings, *60 Minutes* has also evolved a style and method that occasionally erode the very trust and rigor at the heart of investigative journalism. Too often the show has impaired its own effectiveness with theatricality or slanted editing. The need to maintain the loyalty of forty million viewers can spawn an overwhelming desire to please. Were *60 Minutes* the subject of one of its own exposés, that compulsion might evoke some troubling questions.

A key problem lies in the misconstrued role played by *60 Minutes*' four correspondents, Dan Rather, Harry Reasoner, Morley Safer, and Mike Wallace. Given our addiction to heroes—a habit bred in the glamor gossip of *People* magazine and on the talk-show circuit—it's inevitable perhaps that these on-screen stars should have become television's Four White Knights, indefatigable hounds of justice who pursue and nail the corrupt meat inspector, the Medicaid swindler, the mail-order minister. But, appearances notwithstanding, our heroes often play walk-on roles in the weekly Sunday drama. In fact, *60 Minutes* is largely the work of producers.

There are twenty producers at *60 Minutes*. Once a story idea is "blue-sheeted"—given the go-ahead—it's the producer who hits the field, prepares research, sets up interviews, and generally tailors a segment's focus. Then, and only then, does the correspondent arrive on-scene to be briefed for the interview segment. This division of labor places the correspondent at a dangerous remove from a story's development. It also makes his interview less a flexible probe for information than a mock trial with the verdict already determined by the producer's pre-set questions. Moreover, the producer decides in most instances who should, and who should *not*, be interviewed. And that decision may be influenced by a segment's predetermined slant.

On December 9, 1979, in a segment called "Garn Baum vs. the Mormons," Harry Reasoner reported on the travails of a Utah cherry processor, Garn Baum, who claimed the Mormon Church had conspired to drive him out of business. Not only had the church spearheaded a successful boycott among Utah cherry growers, Baum charged, but the church's all-pervasive influence made it virtually impossible for Baum to obtain lawyers in his subsequent antitrust suit against the church. "We have really had a hard time getting legal counsel," he told Reasoner, in an un rebutted statement that suggested Baum had had *no* lawyers. In truth, he'd been through five lawyers in four years, among them a top antitrust attorney, Dan Berman,

who represented Baum for two years and ran up almost \$8,000 in litigation costs alone. Berman was not interviewed for the segment because he had "checked first with the church on what line to take," according to producer Dick Clark. Berman vehemently denies this. But even if it were so—would that be sufficient reason to omit any mention of Berman, or of Baum's four other attorneys? In response to an irate 240-page complaint from the church-owned CBS affiliate in Salt Lake City, *60 Minutes* conducted an internal investigation and conceded the report "flawed . . . by the inadvertent omission of Baum's five lawyers." "Inadvertent" seems a diplomatic way of putting it. Allusion to Baum's attorneys clearly would have eroded the segment's thrust.

There was certainly nothing inadvertent in another producer's decision to censor vital data in a Reasoner report aired two weeks earlier. "Who Pays? You Do" reported on the shocking cost overruns at Illinois Power's (IP) nuclear reactor under construction at Clinton, Illinois. In painting his picture of waste and mismanagement, Reasoner interviewed several former IP employees—one, the "sharpest critic," as Reasoner described him, being cost engineer Steve Radcliff. There was only one problem: Radcliff had totally falsified his credentials. He'd never graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology as he claimed he had, never received a PhD from Walden University, and was never a professor at Fairleigh Dickinson. These lies emerged long before broadcast, during testimony before the Illinois Power Commission, which was hearing IP's request for a consumer rate hike (and which refused to recognize Radcliff as an "expert witness"). The segment's producer, Paul Loewenwarter, knew of that testimony. CBS vice president Robert Chandler later admitted that "It was a very wrong decision. If I'd known, I would have insisted that be part of the story." One wonders. Had Radcliff's lies been made "part of the story," the case against IP would have been badly weakened.

In any case, the IP report was flawed by two *other* flagrant errors committed during that broadcast. Reasoner declared that IP requested a fourteen percent rate hike. In fact, only one quarter of that amount was slated for the reactor at Clinton. And the Illinois Power Commission had *agreed to* IP's rate increase, not denied it, as Reasoner said.

"The IP story got by us, I'm not proud of that one," admits Don Hewitt, the show's executive producer, founder, and mastermind. Yet as with all segments where flaws are occasionally acknowledged, Hewitt and his colleagues insist the essence of the piece remains intact and accurate. Perhaps so. But an investigative news show risks its credibility when the errors accumulate. Nor is it reassuring when *60 Minutes*' correspondents minimize flaws by charging critics with what Dan Rather calls "misplaced attacks on the show's integrity." He says, "I plead for some perspective. When attention focuses on *our* mistakes, it's not whether Illinois Power did the job *they*

Usually, people burned by *60 Minutes* must nurse their outrage privately, because the show's most common infractions — the subtle distortion, the innuendo, the misleading statistic — don't warrant a day in court.

should have done — it's whether *60 Minutes* did."

In a similar vein, Mike Wallace shrugs off the slipshod research in "Over the Speed Limit," a 1976 report on amphetamine abuse, because the man who eventually sued, a maligned diet doctor, was "not the proper subject of investigation." The report's prime target was Dr. Feridun Gunduy, who eventually lost his license thanks to Wallace's exposé.

It was only briefly and toward the end of the segment that Dr. Joseph Greenberg was put in the hot seat. Wallace interviewed Mrs. Barbara Goldstein, who claimed that the Long Island endocrinologist had given her "eighty . . . eight-o" pills daily to reduce her weight, among them four to six amphetamine-type drugs. She then told Wallace that her complaints to Greenberg went unheeded, and that as a result of the medication she spent two years feeling utterly confused. Worse, she blamed Greenberg's pills for the birth defects of a daughter born later. Greenberg wasn't deterred by his brief moment of infamy. He slapped the show with a \$30 million libel suit.



THOUGH THE FILES at *60 Minutes* are crammed with outraged, threatening letters, in its twelve-year history less than two dozen libel suits have been filed against the show, and not once has CBS lost. Few people stung by *60 Minutes* have the wherewithal, determination, or actionable complaint to sustain a long costly suit against CBS's crack attorneys. Dr. Joseph Greenberg, however, appeared to have money and outrage to spare, and as the trial progressed in a Long Island courtroom last spring, it seemed he might actually shatter *60 Minutes*' winning streak.

For starters, the doctor's sole on-air accuser, Mrs. Goldstein, had been a patient *ten years before* the segment ran. The "amphetamine-type" drugs were not strictly amphetamines as defined by the *Physicians Desk Reference*. The most damaging fact was that Wallace had never confronted Dr. Greenberg with Mrs. Goldstein's charges, never pressed Mrs. Goldstein for the exact names of her medication, and relied almost entirely on the tips of a former secretary and on the research of his producer, Grace Diekhous. Mid-trial, however, as CBS was set

to prepare its defense, Greenberg mysteriously dropped his suit and settled for an apology that was hardly an apology. "CBS regrets any embarrassment he *feels* [italics added] he sustained as a result of that broadcast," is the crux of the CBS statement. The statement was never aired and CBS cites the dropped charges as vindication — proof the doctor was guilty as charged (if not by Mrs. Goldstein, at least by several other witnesses CBS had ready to testify). Greenberg's attorney, Jonathan Weinstein, disagrees. The doctor achieved his aim, clearing his tarnished medical reputation.

Wherever the truth lies, Greenberg succeeded where most have failed. He aired his grievance in public. Usually, people burned by *60 Minutes* must nurse their outrage privately, because the show's most common infractions — the subtle distortion, the innuendo, the misleading statistic — neither warrant a day in court nor induce *60 Minutes* to issue one of its rare on-air "retractions."

In the course of a 1977 report on the hazards of excess sugar consumed by children, for instance, Dan Rather reported that General Foods' pre-sweetened breakfast cereal, Cocoa Pebbles, contained, astonishingly, "53 percent sugar." That charge was but one of a half-dozen slurs that prompted General Foods president Jim Ferguson to fire off an irate complaint, tagging the segment, "shallow, slanted . . . resorting to sensationalism." In fact, Rather was measuring Cocoa Pebbles' sugar content by *weight* — a misleading standard since sugar is so heavy. (General Foods also claims his figure was 8 percent too high.) The exact per-serving amount would be two rounded teaspoonfuls — somewhat less sugar than is found in a medium-sized apple or orange. During a three-hour interview with Rather, the General Foods spokesman had repeatedly pointed this out, but his protests got left in the editing room.

"But was 53 percent wrong?" asks Rather in defense. No, not exactly. Not grounds for libel. It was more a little white lie of ambiguity, not so different from an infraction Wallace committed that same year in a piece on Valium.

In building his case against the reckless marketing of the Hoffmann-La Roche drug, Wallace interviewed Dr. Bruce Medd, La Roche's "in-house medical expert," and asked him if he knew a Dr. Fritz Freyhan. "Reliable fellow as far as you know?"

"A knowledgeable person in psychiatry," answered Medd (thereby violating

the first rule of combat with Wallace: Never attest to the credibility of a potentially hostile witness).

"A knowledgeable person in psychiatry," intoned Wallace, and proceeded to read from a Senate transcript: "Senator Gaylord Nelson asked him, 'If you were the editor of a medical journal, would you accept an ad like that?' He's talking about a Valium ad, and Dr. Freyhan says, 'I would not. As a matter of fact, I am editor-in-chief of a psychiatric journal, and my contract provides that I can accept or reject specific commercial advertisements.' He would not accept the ad," said Wallace.

As it stood, the statement was accurate. But a footnote would have revealed the following: Nelson's hearings on drug abuse were conducted in 1969, eight years before the broadcast. Furthermore, while the viewer might be left with the impression that Dr. Freyhan opposed Valium advertising, the truth was quite the opposite. The year of the Nelson hearings, as well as the year following, Freyhan ran Valium ads in every issue of his quarterly magazine, *Comprehensive Psychiatry*.

Misleading? Clearly. Just as the "cap" to the Garn Baum story gave viewers a false impression that nicely fit the segment's slant. "Garn Baum," read Wallace, "has now found a lawyer who will argue his case, but a federal judge in Utah says there isn't enough evidence for a trial. So Baum and his attorneys are appealing to a federal court in Colorado." What Wallace seemed to be suggesting was that even *judges* in Utah were so under the church's influence that poor Garn Baum had to seek impartial justice out-of-state. In fact, the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals covering the Southwest region happens to be located in Denver and was merely Baum's next judicial recourse.

"Mistakes" like these are no doubt bred in that highly-charged Nielsen atmosphere where, of necessity, subtlety is sacrificed for impact. There's no room at the top for dull shades of gray, a fact that slowly dawned on the "stung" as the show achieved its notoriety (at *their* expense). Increasingly then, potential interview subjects have grown wary of the predictable dangers that lie in wait at 7 p.m. on Sundays. And not a few have taken steps to protect themselves. Before its segment aired, Hoffmann-La Roche sent 400,000 physicians and pharmacists a brochure offering free copies of the entire, *unedited* transcript. Illinois Power had the wherewithal and cunning to counter-punch in a more unprecedented fashion. It decided to film *60 Minutes*

'The show scares the hell out of my clients,' says one public relations consultant. 'Everyone knows there's got to be a hanging each Sunday.'

while *60 Minutes* was filming IP, and just two months after the December 1979 broadcast, uncorked its own forty-five-minute tape—"60 Minutes/Our Reply"—styled and paced just like a slick Hewitt production, with Reasoner's on-air broadcast repeatedly interrupted to amplify, or correct and admonish, its accusers. To date, more than twenty-five hundred tapes of "Our Reply" have been dispatched to Kiwanis Clubs, utility companies, journalism schools, and members of Congress.



IN THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY, there is now a trend toward hiring public relations consultants to avert a disaster on the tube. For years—even before Rather's report on sugar—General Foods has been sending vice presidents and employees to Dorothy Sarnoff, a New York consultant who specializes in grooming politicians and businessmen for jousts with the media. Not only does Sarnoff coach clients on poise and preparedness, but she stresses their "rights" as interview subjects—such as controlling the interview site. General Foods, for instance, had selected the modest office of its on-air spokesman, although Rather vetoed the office and maneuvered the company into its giant wood-paneled boardroom. Finally, Sarnoff urges clients, "Never do a show unless it's live and unedited." Clearly, if this advice were followed it could seriously impair *60 Minutes'* access to future interview subjects.

A similar strategy prevails at Media Comm—an offshoot of the giant public relations firm Carl Byoir Associates—that also prepares naïfs for likely combat with the man whom Media Comm president Virgil Scudder calls "Mike Malice." When a large company embroiled in labor disputes was approached by *60 Minutes* for an interview, its management went to Scudder with the question, how do we wriggle out and not risk one of those "refused to appear" charges? Scudder's strategy: "Tell them you're willing to go on provided the interview runs intact and unedited. Now I happen to know they just won't do that." Sure enough, no interview was filmed.

"*60 Minutes* scares the hell out of my clients," says Scudder. "It's the tremendous pressure to stay Number One. Everyone knows the program's got to have a

hanging each Sunday."

Yet despite the awaiting hangman's noose, *60 Minutes* is still surprisingly effective at enlisting the cooperation of even wary interview subjects. Why, one wonders, have so many victims of *60 Minutes* aided and abetted their own hoisting? "We don't have subpoena powers and they don't have suicidal tendencies," says Wallace. "Something must persuade them it's in their own self-interest."

The temptations of ego have led more than one innocent soul to the gallows. Who, after all, can resist the macho challenge of hand-to-hand combat with Wallace? Who doesn't secretly think he can best the Grand Inquisitor at his own game? Then, too, the journalists at *60 Minutes* often disguise their motives. Richard Aszling, the General Foods vice president who supervised the Rather interview, claims he was duped by producer Andrew Lack's description—"A show on children's nutrition and what they eat." Of course it wasn't that at all.

In a celebrated interview with Daniel Schorr soon after the House Ethics Committee cleared him of leaking a secret CIA report to *The Village Voice*, Schorr claims Wallace lured him with the line, "You're the champion of the First Amendment, you're the hero of the week." Indeed, that was the topic of the first half of the interview. But the second part—the part that aired—was a distinctly unworshipful grilling on Schorr's suspension from CBS and his rumored slurs at CBS colleagues.

Obtaining an interview under false pretenses lies at the crux of Billie Young's pending \$25 million libel suit against *60 Minutes*. According to Young, she was asked to participate in a segment on "New Authors," and being the publisher of Ashley Books, a small Long Island press, she readily cooperated. In truth, the piece was an exposé of "vanity publishing"—"So You Want To Write a Book"—a fact that dawned on Young too late, well into her interview with Morley Safer. "What percentage of your authors' books are subsidized?" Safer suddenly asked. Ambushed, Young began protesting the interview was "dishonest" and "out of context." (Ashley Books publishes very few subsidized books, unlike Vantage Press, the segment's prime subject, which publishes any author willing to pay the costs.) She demanded, "Cut!" She tried to pull off her microphone. "I can't get it off, I don't know how," she wailed, and the interview continued, with Young a literal prisoner of her own naïveté.

But even those who are neither duped

nor naïve may be induced to cooperate after weighing the risks of non-appearance. Absence can look quite incriminating, especially with Dan, Mike, Morley, or Harry at center stage to point out that empty chair—"So and so, after repeated letters and queries . . ." In a Rather segment last spring—"The Kissinger-Shah Connection"—Henry Kissinger had considerable trouble weighing the pros and cons of appearing on the program. Granted an "equal time" interview after the piece, he agreed but later changed his mind. Whether he made the right decision will never be known. What is clear is that the piece prompted more outrage and criticism than any in the show's history.

The segment purported to document a "link" whereby Kissinger, during 1973 and 1974, acquiesced in the raising of Iran's oil prices so that the Shah could buy costly U.S. weaponry and serve as America's policeman in the Persian Gulf (recently abandoned by the British). The piece relied on four witnesses to connect Kissinger, the Shah, and "the price we're now paying for gasoline." By all accounts, the evidence was flimsy: Two of the four witnesses—former Undersecretary of State George Ball and James Akins, U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia from 1973 to 1975—had openly hostile relations with Kissinger. Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations, Mansour Farhang, could only cite a "confluence of interests" between the Shah and Kissinger. William Simon, former Treasury Secretary, did little to confirm Rather's thesis, though he did concede, "Well, there could very well be some truth in that." (He later claimed his remark had been taken out of context.)

Critics, ranging from high-powered chums of Kissinger to newspaper columnists, lambasted the show for its biased witnesses and Rather's inadequate grasp of complex Mideast oil policies. "The argument made no sense," charged Thomas Bray, associate editor of the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial page. "Supply and demand, not OPEC's or the Shah's blandishments, led to the quadrupling of prices in late 1973." Kissinger himself called the segment "malicious, ridiculous, and untrue" and, in an irate sixteen-page letter fired off to CBS News president William Leonard, charged, "The problem is that all your witnesses gave only one point of view, which was both tendentious and demonstrably erroneous, while no independent participants were presented to give a different view."

Apparently, Dr. Kissinger failed to grasp Hewitt's Nielsen-winning formula.

Debunking *60 Minutes* has become something of a popular sport. Why? Perhaps from the urge to shoot down any acclaimed success—the same temptation that lures *60 Minutes* into toppling a power-block grown too strong.

A balanced in-depth probe on Mideast oil politics would have evoked a mighty yawn from *60 Minutes*' viewers, accustomed as they are to news presented as theater. And theater requires not only its stars—those heroic Knights—but an occasional villain. If Rather reduced a large, intricate topic to individual drama, the fault belongs largely to Hewitt's eagerness to personalize issues. Small wonder *60 Minutes* is often accused of squeezing the world into a hyped-up formula. Ideally, such topics belong to the networks' hour-long documentaries—*CBS Reports*, *NBC White Paper*, or *ABC Close-Up*. But ironically, the very success of *60 Minutes* has worked to weaken both the impact and frequency of those documentaries. "Has *60 Minutes* damaged other longer vehicles? Yes," concedes CBS's Chandler, "to a degree that's true." Meanwhile, every tick of that relentless stopwatch provides another confirmation of the viewer's narrowed attention span.



IN DWELLING ON some *60 Minutes* flaws—the hype, the slant, the impulse to dramatize—there's always the danger of losing, as Rather says, "perspective." Debunking *60 Minutes* has become something of a popular sport. Why? Perhaps from the urge to shoot down any acclaimed success—the same temptation that lures *60 Minutes* into toppling a powerblock grown too strong, an idol verging on hubris. But then, just as one questions one's motives, there looms from the past that most troubling of stories: the seven-year-old, \$22.5 million libel suit filed by Colonel Anthony Herbert.

Herbert was a Korean War hero and decorated battalion commander in Vietnam who was abruptly relieved of his command after he reported a My Lai-type massacre (six prisoners shot by American soldiers) that his commanding officer, Colonel Ross Franklin, allegedly ignored. Herbert's best-selling book, *Soldier*, recounted this shocking cover-up, as well as other atrocities, and landed Herbert on the Dick Cavett show, where he became an instant media celebrity. But Wallace and producer Barry Lando had their doubts. In twenty minutes they totally shattered the legend of Colonel Anthony Herbert by discrediting him as a fraud, a liar, and probably a brutal sol-

dier prone to criminal acts of violence himself.

In this 1973 program, Wallace interviewed Herbert's commanding officer, Franklin, who claimed Herbert *never* reported the atrocity. Wallace produced receipts from the Hawaiian hotel that Franklin, recuperating on a brief R&R, seemingly left the day *after* the alleged report. General John Barnes, the man who had relieved Herbert of his command, described him to Wallace: "I thought he was a killer, enjoyed killing . . ." Barnes added that Herbert had never reported any war crimes or atrocities. In the interview with Herbert, Wallace showed him Franklin's canceled hotel check, and a flustered Herbert could only reply, "m-hmm. I can probably find you checks—I don't know. I can probably find you—I don't know about this check. I can probably find . . ."

The segment was tough and convincing and, if correct, gave its audience not just terrific drama but a worthy insight into the perils of blindly promoting media celebrities. However, during seven years of pre-trial discovery proceedings, and with a mass of data gathered by Herbert and his attorneys under the Freedom of Information Act, numerous disturbing facts have come to light. Among them:

—Franklin, during a *second* interview with producer Lando, admitted that Herbert said "such fantastic things sometimes . . . people could very easily disregard them, tune out, turn off." "Could you yourself have done that?" asked Lando. "Yeah," replied Franklin, "I have done that frequently with Herbert." That second interview was neither shown nor mentioned.

—During a Pentagon interview with Franklin and other Army officers, secretly taped by the Army, Wallace is heard pressing, "Ideally, if we can get somebody on the film to say, 'I don't know whether he reported but he is capable of doing that sort of thing himself [acts of brutality].'" Wallace, searching for evidence to support the segment's thesis, seemed anxious to present Herbert as a brutal soldier.

—Franklin's canceled check—"made out to the exact amount," said Wallace—was, in fact, \$25 short. Mistake? Confusion over a \$25 deposit? Or could Franklin have returned to Vietnam one crucial day before he said he had?

Most important, numerous interviews and pieces of testimony were *omitted* by

Wallace or Lando. "I do know for certain that Herbert reported the killing of six detainees," read the sworn statement of a certain Captain Jack Donovan—never aired. Another captain, Bill Hill, said he heard Herbert report the incident by radio to a superior—meaning either Franklin or Barnes. Interviews with men who served under Herbert, stressing his care for prisoners, were never mentioned or aired.

Ironically, Lando had first proposed a pro-Herbert piece "to take a look at the original charge of atrocities . . . whether the Army has tried to whitewash the whole affair." But with Herbert already a hot media item, neither Wallace nor Hewitt was interested. Then too, in 1971, CBS had aired its celebrated *The Selling of the Pentagon*, and perhaps a second military exposé would not have delighted CBS president Frank Stanton—who had recently received a contempt citation for refusing to turn over *Pentagon* outtakes. In a lengthy *Atlantic* article, Lando himself summed up his abrupt about-face: "Something finally snapped. The inconsistencies, the evasions I had been so eager to overlook now took on a different hue."

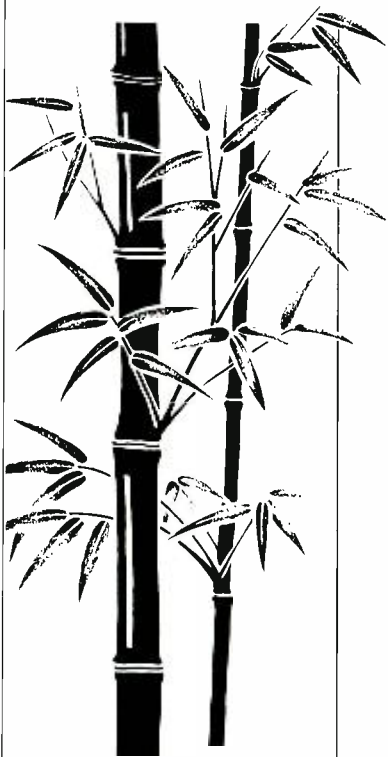
Whatever the motives that launched the Herbert exposé, Lando pursued his quarry with a zeal that, in hindsight, raises some serious questions about *60 Minutes*' commitment to fair, unbiased reporting (ones that may be resolved if *Herbert v. Lando* reaches trial later this year). In their eagerness to nail Herbert, the producer and Wallace may have calculatedly blindfolded themselves to contradictory data. Like the Mormons, like Illinois Power, like Dr. Joseph Greenberg and Daniel Schorr, Colonel Herbert may have been felled by Hewitt's all-consuming realpolitik: the desire for impact.



BUT THE ULTIMATE QUESTION IS, has Hewitt performed an important public service by alerting countless millions to the dangers of sugar and Valium, to the hazards of church hegemony? Or has he not also further narrowed our vision of what to expect from the medium? Catering to our crudest entertainment reflexes, after all, risks demeaning the imagination, and thwarts the patient groping for reality that makes us not just informed but enlightened. To accept less turns us all into victims of *60 Minutes*.

—END

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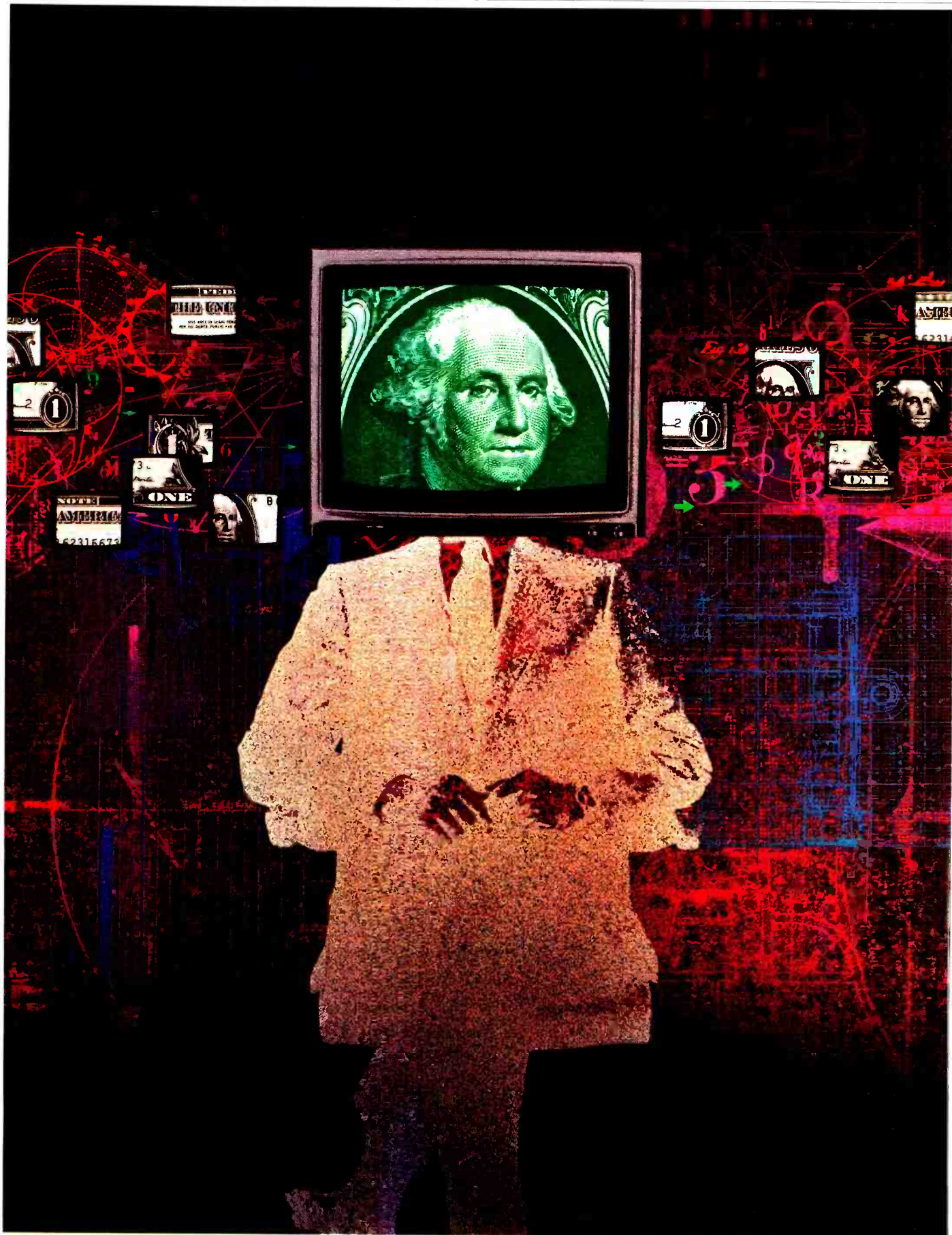
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"We're producing results"

by Martin Koughan

Martin Koughan was a producer of PBS's Bill Moyer's Journal at the writing of this article. He is now a producer for CBS News, working on the new science series, Universe.



CHANNELS 50 APRIL, MAY

FRED OTNES

Playing 'The New Television' at Table Stakes

Lured by the gold dust, large corporations in growing numbers are taking the plunge on the future. Many are new to media. When the dust settles, there may be a raft of new electronic empires.

IT WAS BILLED AS "THE THRILLA IN MANILA," a typical example of boxing hype, or so it seemed. However, for the group of spectators watching the Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier rematch from a Holiday Inn in Vero Beach, Florida, what appeared to be promoter's hyperbole has turned out to be understatement.

On that evening of September 30, 1975, a hundred or so local dignitaries and cable television executives gathered in front of monitors that ringed the hotel's ballroom. Robert Rosencrans, president of UA-Columbia Cablevision, which owns the Vero Beach cable franchise, threw the switch that brought the fight halfway around the globe from ringside. "The picture quality was just fantastic," remembers Rosencrans, "better than off-air broadcast signals we were getting from forty miles away. It made the whole business come together." For the first time, a new communications highway was opened to a national television audience.

J. Richard Munro, head of Time Inc.'s Video Group, was not trying to change the world in Vero Beach. His main objective was to save his business, which had suffered \$20 million in losses during the previous four years. Munro's biggest disappointment was the lukewarm performance of his novel subscription program service called Home Box Office (HBO). After three years of intense promotion, the service had signed up fewer than 200,000 cable homes. HBO's problem was distribution. The service was transmitted from New York to cable operators by microwave, which limited its market to the Northeast. If an economical means of national distribution could be found, HBO had a chance to become a significant profit-maker for Munro's division.

Gerald Levin, president of HBO, suggested that the solution sat in fixed orbit 22,300 miles above the equator. Levin was convinced that satellite communication technology could be applied to cable television transmission. If Time Inc. were to lease a transponder on the new RCA Satcom I satellite, Levin argued, the HBO signal would be made instantly available to every cable system in the nation. In spite of the Video Group's dismal track record, the Time board agreed to risk \$7.5 million, the largest single investment the Video Group had ever made, on a six-year lease for a Satcom I transponder.

Once committed, Munro and Levin had to convince cable operators, almost all of whom were losing money, that it would be worth their while to spend \$100,000 each for earth stations to pull the signal in. They knew it would be a difficult sell; they needed a very special demonstration to fire the imagination of industry leaders. They found it in the heavyweight title fight from the Philippines.

Not many of the publishing executives at Time Inc. shared Dick Munro's enthusiasm. "For a week before the fight," he recalled, "people kept stopping me in the corridors to say, 'Dick, what the hell are we buying for \$7 million?' There was a lot of scratching of heads."

Since the demonstration in Vero Beach, events have moved with astonishing speed. That \$7 million has brought HBO into nearly six million cable homes, and the company now generates annual revenues close to a quarter of a billion dollars. That makes HBO pay television's first certifiable oil gusher, and its success has set off a rush of prospectors anxious to drill their own wells.

Stuart Evey is a man who knows a gusher when he sees one. As the vice president for diversified operations at Getty Oil, Evey sees the potential of pay television as "much larger than anything we have in operation." Like a host of other major corporations with no previous experience in communications, Getty is moving in fast to get a piece of the action.

"To figure out why we are getting in, you just have to multiply \$4 a month (HBO's share of revenues) by every pay television subscriber," Evey explains. "That's all you have to look at. People are paying for home entertainment. Many are paying for two services. They will be paying for three. I believe the home will become the major entertainment center of the future." Today, eight million Americans are spending close to a billion dollars a year on pay television, and that is the barest tip of an iceberg. By the end of the decade, according to some estimates, a nation of "free television" watchers will be paying more than \$13 billion a year for television entertainment.

Spurred by these projections, Getty has challenged HBO with a new feature film service called Premiere, a partnership of Getty and four movie companies, Twentieth Century-Fox, Universal, Columbia, and Paramount Pictures. The film companies agreed to provide their new features exclusively to the Premiere consortium nine months before they are made available to HBO and other pay networks.

Although the partners have spent an estimated \$20 million to set up Premiere, there is a distinct possibility that they will never see a nickel in subscriber revenues. A Federal District Court judge, in response to a Justice Department suit, has called the Premiere consortium a "per se violation of the anti-trust law," a ruling currently on appeal. But even if Premiere never reaches the satellite, its partners do not expect heavy losses. The pay-television market is expanding so rapidly that the transponder Premiere leased last April for \$5 million could now be worth twice or even three times as much.

If Premiere never makes it to the consumer, Getty Oil will remain a major new force in cable programming. In September 1979, Getty launched its Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), a seven-days-a-week, twenty-four-hours-a-day, all-sports network that is one of the fastest growing program services in the cable industry. There is, however, one important difference between ESPN and HBO. By mid-decade, Getty expects ESPN to be entirely supported by advertising.

Advertising revenues, virtually nonexistent in the industry until recently, will become an important new source of revenue

Like a host of other major corporations with no previous experience in communications, Getty is moving in fast to get a piece of the action.

for cable television, amounting to an estimated \$350 million by 1985. The reason partly has to do with demographics: Cable viewers, according to audience studies, watch more television and are more affluent and better educated than commercial television audiences, making them an attractive target for the advertisers.

DICK MUNRO'S GAMBLE ON "The Thrilla in Manila" did win over the skeptics on the publishing side of the corporation. Today, Munro is the president and chief executive of Time Inc. Gerald Levin, who first thought to use the satellite, heads the Video Group, which controls an arsenal of six satellite transponders and boasts earnings approaching \$100 million a year. Although Time's Video Group now enjoys a dominant role in the new industry, the expansion of its cable franchise operations is facing strong competition. Cincinnati recently awarded its cable-television franchise to Warner Amex Cable, a prize that was supposed to be Time's.

"It looks like a repeat of what happened in Pittsburgh and Dallas," Levin explained. "There are three possible explanations. The first is sinister. The second is that they execute politically better than we do. And the third is that QUBE is having some impact."

The QUBE factor may just be the most important. QUBE is the product of Warner Amex Cable Communications Inc., a marriage of opportunity between the entertainment brains of Warner Communications and cash-rich American Express. Inaugurated in 1977 in Columbus, Ohio, QUBE turns the passive viewer into an active participant in programming. Using a hand-held decoder, QUBE subscribers can select programs on a pay-per-view basis; transactions are recorded by a central computer, which supplies subscribers with an itemized monthly bill. This two-way capability has so impressed local communities that Warner Amex won two-thirds of the big city cable franchises awarded last year.

The competition to wire the big cities is rapidly becoming one of the fiercest corporate battlegrounds in history. "All of this is happening in an environment of great euphoria over pay television," observes analyst Tony Hoffman of A.G. Becker, the investment banking firm. "The music has stopped and everybody is going for the chairs. It is similar to the rush in the thirties and forties to get radio and television licenses. The idea is to get control of the pipeline, anticipating

the explosion of pay services that will allow them to get a piece of the action as the money comes pouring through."

Warner Amex is uniquely positioned to make the most of this new pipeline. Drawing on American Express's marketing and direct sales expertise, Warner Amex has introduced direct home merchandising to its subscribers. The profit potential of retailing and other services marketed directly to the home could be as much as three times larger than pay television, something that would make the HBO gusher look like a leaky faucet.

"We are finding something we suspected," said Warner Amex chairman Gustave Hauser. "People are willing to pay for more and different kinds of television and other services. QUBE's home security is the fastest-growing business in Columbus. For a monthly fee of about

AT&T plans a new spin-off subsidiary dubbed 'Baby Bell'. What has the cable industry reaching for its lobbyists is the possibility that 'Baby Bell' could start on its first day of business with as much as \$10 billion in assets.

\$15, subscribers can have complete home fire, burglary, and emergency medical alarm services. And a lot more is coming."

QUBE's latest offering, a home information retrieval service called CompuServe, is a joint project of Warner Amex and H&R Block, another newcomer to the telecommunications business. The experiment represents the first mass-market marriage of cable television and a computerized data bank. QUBE subscribers will be able to rent Warner's Atari-800 home computer, which can summon up the latest features from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, airline schedules, encyclopedia references, or cooking and home-care advice. The service even allows one QUBE user to address electronic messages to another.

With the home computer in place, Warner Amex will soon introduce an even more promising new service: teleshopping. Users will be able to call up product information on their screens, compare prices and brands, and make credit card purchases with the touch of a button.

According to Walter Forbes, the chief executive officer of Comp-U-Card, the nation's largest electronic shopping service, there are major economic advantages to home retailing. "A retailer has bricks, mortar, people, taxes, all sorts of overhead," said Forbes. "All we have is a computer and an operator. That lets us sell twenty percent to forty percent below retail prices, lower than discount stores. The sky's the limit for this industry. We think we are the future of retailing." Forbes is obviously not alone in that assessment. Comp-U-Card recently attracted a new partner—Federated Department Stores of Cincinnati, the retailing giant that owns Bloomingdale's and other blue-chip department stores.

Satellite networks are now so accessible that there is nothing preventing any organization from becoming a communications power overnight. Take the example of just one participant in that first transmission to Vero Beach—the Holiday Inn.

The hotel chain, hoping to improve its core business, decided to provide free HBO in every room, so it began to install earth stations at many of its 1,500 locations to catch the HBO signal. In the process, Holiday Inn came across another possible application and a whole new business. By installing large screens in the hotel meeting rooms, the chain can link up any or all of its strategically located hotels for instant business meetings. Teleconferencing, as it is called, allows a national sales manager in New York to address all of his salesmen simultaneously, or just those in Dubuque, Chicago, and San Diego. The size of the group is no problem; all of the nation's Avon representatives could attend the introduction of a new product line by driving to the local Holiday Inn. And teleconferencing is not all.

"We now have the largest potential theater network in the world," boasts Bruce Walker, the president of HI-NET Communications Inc., a new subsidiary of Holiday Inns. "Our Holidex reservation system is the largest dedicated data network in the business. We could easily go into the money order, telegram, or electronic mail business because we have the distribution system and facilities staffed twenty-four hours a day. That makes us a mini-AT&T. It is too early to tell how much money there is to be made. There does not seem to be any topside."

The fact has not escaped the notice of the real American Telephone and Telegraph. For the past ninety-five years, Ma Bell has been content merely to pass out telephones and collect the monthly bills.

“The music has stopped and everybody is going for the chairs,” says one investment analyst. “It is similar to the rush in the thirties and forties to get radio and television licenses. The idea is to get control of the pipeline”.

It has never had to market service to the home, but the telecommunications revolution has changed that for good. The \$120 billion company is now anxious to prove that if an interactive wire is needed to bring lucrative new services into the home, its wire would do just fine.

Ma Bell began testing the water last year in Albany, New York, with the introduction of an electronic Yellow Pages called Videotext, which is actually a video classified advertising service. With the Yellow Pages electronically updated on a daily basis, it requires no great leap of imagination to add a home computer to the mix and achieve the direct home merchandising service that cable operators are pinning so much hope on—and the cable industry still has almost eighty percent of the nation left to wire. The Albany experiment will be expanded in Austin, Texas, this summer to include channels of brand information and advertising.

An electronic Yellow Pages is child's play, however, compared to a just-completed joint experiment that AT&T and the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain conducted in Coral Gables, Florida. Using a home information system called Viewtron, similar in capability to QUBE's CompuServe, Coral Gables subscribers were able to ask the computers of *The Miami Herald* for the latest breaking news, to buy merchandise from Sears Roebuck, to book airline reservations, or to interact with educational programs in everything from boat handling to Spanish.

AT&T plans to spin off these and other consumer services into a new subsidiary dubbed “Baby Bell,” a move that has won conditional approval from the FCC. What has the cable industry reaching for its lobbyists is the possibility that “Baby Bell” could start on its first day of business with as much as \$10 billion in assets.

“The telephone company is a threat to anyone who must compete,” warns Gustave Hauser of Warner Amex. “Freeing AT&T would place everything in the hands of a monster who would control all of the information and communication in this country, a monster that would be complacent. It is not desirable as a matter of public policy.”

The problem with these doomsday predictions is that AT&T lacks one vital piece of the puzzle: The home telephone wires cannot accommodate video pictures. Bell Labs has been working with optical fibers—laser-activated glass wires that can deliver 1,000 video channels—but to get them into every home would involve the same massive building project confronting the cable industry. And without a variety of television enter-

tainment alternatives, AT&T faces a very difficult sell to the consumer.

The armies of lawyers and lobbyists are already forming for the war between AT&T and the cable industry, but in the battle over control of the home wire, they may be forgetting one important lesson learned from “The Thrilla in Manila”—the fastest and cheapest route to the consumer is 22,300 miles above the earth.

ON NOVEMBER 15, 1980, Satellite Business Systems (SBS) launched the world's first commercial satellite designed for high speed business communications. Unlike other business information networks in development, which rely on regional earth stations to distribute the signal, SBS will give its business users a direct satellite link by means of a rooftop antenna, and it offers a capacity that dwarfs the competition.

A partnership of International Business Machines (IBM), the Communications Satellite Corp. (Comsat) and Aetna Life & Casualty, SBS is an important link to the “office of the future,” a totally integrated business information system that allows any worker instant electronic access to every office machine, every data base and every employee in the company, no matter where he is located. IBM has been building sophisticated communications facilities into its new lines of office machines to exploit SBS's voice, data, facsimile, and video capabilities. SBS marks the beginning of a whole new era of digital communications and an enormously lucrative new industry that is being hotly pursued by AT&T, Exxon and Xerox.

Three days after the satellite launch, IBM opened its first American retail store in Philadelphia. The company says that its IBM Product Centers are intended to stimulate office product sales to small-business men, and that may well be the case right now. However, a national chain of retail stores (IBM refuses to say how many are planned) will also neatly accommodate the inevitable introduction of the IBM home computer. Company spokesmen deny the existence of any such product, but the economics of IBM's situation make those denials so much smoke. For the past two decades, IBM has been increasing the capacity and cutting the cost on each new generation of computer, a trend that forces the company to increase sales dramatically just to stand still in revenues. To maintain its leadership position, IBM must soon enter large new markets, and there is little doubt among industry observers that the

corporation has its eye on the largest market of all—the home.

The home computer will eventually become an integral part of “the office of the future,” since half the nation's workers are in the information-moving business and thus will be able to perform their jobs from their living rooms as effectively as from their offices. And IBM will offer its home computer customers an additional capability that is sure to leave the competition far behind.

A little more than a year ago, IBM formed DiscoVision Associates, a partnership with the entertainment conglomerate MCA Inc., to produce the laser video disk. Capable of reaching any impression on the disk instantly, the laser beam stylus provides random access to picture and stereo sound, or any type of diagram or printed material. The disks could offer fun and entertainment from MCA, or business and information from IBM. When the video disk is finally joined by a fully compatible IBM home computer, the result is a powerful home information/entertainment system.

“It becomes an electronic book,” says Dr. Nicholas Negroponte, a professor of computer graphics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has been experimenting with optical video disks. “The computer allows you to expand the information on the disk. It is extremely interactive and personalized, made to order for each user. As soon as the home laser disk can record frames—and I have seen no less than a dozen that are already operational—then the user can randomly assemble broadcast images. Before I went to bed at night, I could instruct my computer to prepare a five-minute news program with only those items I wanted to see, because it knows me, the stocks I own, my business acquaintances, my personal interests. It could logically sew these images together just for me.”

Capabilities to attract the hobbyist, to be sure, but they do not guarantee quick acceptance in the mass market. What is missing is some cohesive element, something to make the home information center an important, shared social experience, a cultural glue something like a television network. In fact, exactly like a television network.

On December 17, 1980, Comsat filed a proposal with the FCC to launch the nation's first and only commercial direct broadcasting satellites (DBS), powerful enough to transmit television signals directly into every home in the nation equipped with the appropriate rooftop antenna. For a monthly fee of \$25, subscribing households will receive 400

Satellite networks are now so accessible that there is nothing preventing any organization from becoming a communications power overnight.

hours of television each week on three "counterprogrammed" channels—a Broadway play on one, a children's special on the second, a sporting event on the third. DBS will be the first television service to offer a high-resolution picture with stereo sound, a second language audio channel, closed captioning for the deaf, and a teletext (information retrieval) capability giving access to 100 pages of printed information and graphics. And because DBS receivers can be turned on and off from a central facility, the service could offer the same pay-per-view option as QUBE. DBS is being touted as a "magazine stand of the air." "We expect to build a mass audience by putting together hundreds of special interests," said Comsat programming consultant Richard Galkin.

To get DBS off the ground, Comsat is searching for a cash-rich partner, and the candidate with the most to offer is already its partner in the satellite business: IBM. With television signals dedicated to IBM's home computer-video disk system, DBS could become far more than simply an entertainment network. Nearly every new television service currently under development could be delivered by direct broadcasting signals.

The only missing link in this dream communications system is the return loop from the home to remote computers in the office, banks, and other commercial institutions. To achieve this talk-back capability, a DBS service would need a cable or telephone land-line component; and one may soon be available. Time Inc.'s Manhattan Cable is in the process of installing local loops for business customers of Comsat and IBM's SBS service in New York City. It would be no great technological feat to plug in Manhattan Cable's residential customers.

There are still uncertainties facing the telecommunications entrepreneur. At some point, Congress, the FCC, or the Justice Department may choose to step in and regulate these emerging industries, although they have refrained to date because technology and the marketplace are evolving faster than anyone's ability to analyze them. But the unknowns have not slowed the race to catch up with the future. It is being run on a very fast track that leads right into your home. What makes this futurist's dream imminent reality is something Dick Munro learned that night in Vero Beach, something that is creating excitement in boardrooms across the nation.

"The thing about this business," says Munro, "is that no one knows how high is up."
—END

One Who Caught the Future

THESMALL, independent cable operator is surely a dying breed. "Mom and Pop" systems, once a fixture on the cable landscape, are rapidly being gobbled up by large corporations looking for a share of the burgeoning home marketplace.

Charles Dolan may be the last independent cable operator to be a leading force in the industry. His Cablevision Systems Development Company is the largest independent cable concern in the nation—although still small by industry standards and unprofitable until 1980. In today's bullish cable television market, Dolan's company is worth a breathtaking \$250 million. That makes his personal net worth at least \$80 million, and the figure is climbing fast. None of this is directly attributable to his having created, and then lost, Home Box Office.

The story of how Chuck Dolan got so rich provides some insight into just how quickly things have changed in the cable television business. In 1961, Dolan founded New York City's first cable television service, which came to be called Sterling Manhattan Cable. This gave him the distinction of being the first person to build a cable system in a major American city. He nearly went broke in the attempt. Delays, caused by bitter opposition from broadcasters and the telephone company, drove Sterling's construction costs beyond all projections. Dolan was forced to raise capital by going public in 1968, and before long he had a new corporate partner, Time Inc. With each new public offering, Time worked to amass the controlling interest in Sterling.

By 1971, Time executives dominated the Sterling board of directors, and Dolan began to find himself on the losing side of nearly every vote. With some reluctance, he agreed to turn over operations to Time-appointed managers while he went to work full-time on a pay television network idea he had proposed. Dolan's first order of business for the Sterling Movie Network (renamed Home Box Office) was to hire as program director Gerald Levin, a smart young Wall Street lawyer. Thanks to Levin's ingenuity, HBO was operational within a year.

During this period, Time Inc. was convinced that the cable and broad-

casting business had peaked, and the company was hastily divesting itself of all its cable franchises and broadcast licenses. (Time's disenchantment with cable was not to last long. When it became clear in 1975 that use of the satellite was going to make HBO a gigantic success, the company plunged back into cable, buying out ATC Inc., the second-largest multiple system operation in the country.)

Ironically, Dolan learned that in the fifty-mile cable system Time had built on Long Island, 90 percent of the new subscribers were taking the optional HBO service. A very promising indication. "That doubled our cash flow right there," he recalled.

Dolan sold his few remaining shares in Sterling Manhattan to Time for \$600,000 and made an offer to buy the Long Island franchise, but there was one problem. Time had already put the property up for sale, and Warner Communications was bidding for it.

Warner had offered Time slightly less than \$1 million, but had attached a number of conditions to the sale. Thanks to a promise of financial support from the chairman of a cable equipment supplier, Dolan agreed to match Warner's offer unconditionally, and the deal was signed.

Today, Chuck Dolan's Cablevision Systems covers 4,200 miles and calls itself the largest cable operation in the greater New York area. Dolan is also a founding partner in Rainbow, a new pay cable network. Given his track record and considerable assets, Chuck Dolan is one of the few independent operators in a position to compete for the hotly contested big-city franchises, and he has already filled applications in Boston, Chicago, and the four remaining boroughs of New York City.

He faces a tough fight, particularly from two cash-rich competitors, Time Inc. and Warner Amex Cable. Is Dolan worried? "If you have any confidence in your product, you can handle competition," he said. "It's more fun that way, anyhow."

After nearly twenty years of flirting with bankruptcy, Chuck Dolan can finally afford to have fun in the cable television business. By some estimates, he will be worth \$400 million at the end of the decade.

—M.K.



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Beyond the Pale

Television has its own black history. The author recalls how it felt to grow up in the monochrome television world of the fifties, and to see real blacks for the first time on newsfilm in the turbulent sixties. Today, black situation comedies are in the Nielsen Top Ten, and yet the black voice still isn't being heard.

In the fifties, you didn't see no part of no blacks on TV. You had to be creative if you wanted to see some brothers—had to sit there in your living room and imagine some black folks. And with the people you saw on the tube, it were not easy. I mean, yeah, there was Amos 'n' Andy and sometimes old pop-eyed Mantan Moreland in a movie running like hell from somethin' he thought he seen. But for the most part you didn't see nothin' resemblin' a spade. Me, I used to get up and turn on the radio, listen to 'The Shadow,' that's 'bout the closest thing to a spade they had on the air at the time. ♪

This comment was overheard at a Harlem bar during a commercial break in a Saturday afternoon football broadcast, as a group of patrons bantered about how often they see blacks on television. The old-timer who made the remark—the bar's resident philosopher-comic—was, as usual, injecting a bit of irony and contention into an otherwise predictable conversation. And, as odd as they may have seemed to the younger patrons at the bar, his observations were basically correct.

Certainly, blacks' changing roles have made television-watching today a radically different experience from what it was in the early fifties, when I was a child in a small Midwestern mill town and my family purchased its first television set.

Then, any child old enough to spend Saturday afternoons at the movies, to scan the newspapers occasionally, or to be aware of current radio programs, knew that for some reason—illogical as it may have been—blacks were rarely seen, heard, or mentioned anywhere in the media. When they were, they appeared in the guise of some grossly distorted burlesque figure, never more than a borderline literate—or they were perpetrators of some ghastly crime. In other words, they were *not* really blacks as I knew them. (There were very few rapists among my early acquaintances, and I just didn't know anyone for whom grinning was a constant preoccupation; media images notwithstanding, growing up in the ghetto was a very *serious* and dangerous affair.) But since no one else seemed to question the situation, I simply accepted it as just another of

the strange perversions of the adult world.

Even so, my initial encounters with blacks on television during the fifties were tinged with a persistent uneasiness. I mean, to be presented with Farina, Stymie, or Buckwheat of Hal Roach's *Our Gang* comedies, with Mantan Moreland in the Charlie Chan mysteries, with Stepin Fetchit and Willie Best—and to realize that they were the *only* blacks on television—was to sense an attitude both insulting and frightening in the nonblack world beyond one's living room. *Is that the way they see me?* That question always hung there, somewhat dampening the humor of those old movies.

And if the black image in those movies (which constituted a large part of early television programming) was embarrassing, it was no better in the weekly series. One would have thought that blacks had only three occupational options: singing and dancing, working as a servant, or—again—just grinning. There was Eddie "Rochester" Anderson as a valet on Jack Benny's show, and there was Lillian Randolph as a maid on *The Great Gildersleeve*. Later on, the title role in *Beulah*, yet another maid's part, was played at various times by Ethel Waters, Hattie McDaniel, and Louise Waters. And of course, there was *Amos 'n' Andy*. Except for entertainers such as Lena Horne, Leontyne Price, the late Nat "King" Cole, Harry Belafonte, and a few smiling faces in crowd scenes, these shows offered the only representation of blacks on early television.

Still, as sparse and distorted as that representation was, I can recall waiting anxiously in front of the television set any time a black performer was scheduled to appear. (Few blacks I knew ever missed *Amos 'n' Andy*.) Despite the rapt attention, though, we rarely identified with those blacks on the home screen.

The strongest impression I derived from television in the fifties, then, was a sense of the vast distance between the black and the white worlds. Programs like *Beulah* or *The Jack Benny Show*, and movies with comedians like Mantan Moreland or Stepin Fetchit, presented blacks in white environments, portraying them in such a bizarre manner that I couldn't for a second imagine they had anything to do with reality. They were about as authentic to me as Superman or Br'er Rabbit. *Amos 'n' Andy* was the only show at the time with a nearly all-black cast, and that made it a little more familiar to me. Moreover, in private—that is, not in the presence of whites—I found Kingfish's larcenous antics hilarious, and not that far-removed from those of certain people I knew who could have been his prototype. (At the time, I don't recall that any of us were aware of the more serious consequences of the burlesque images of black professionals—doctors and lawyers—perpetuated by this show.) Still, *Amos 'n' Andy* only worked to confirm my sense of the black world as an insulated, separate place from which I could only escape at considerable risk to self-esteem and safety. I have little doubt that it did the

by Mel Watkins

Mel Watkins is an editor at The New York Times Book Review. He is currently writing a book on black-American humor.



CAROL WALD

CHANNELS APRIL/MAY 57

Neither *The Jeffersons* nor *Sanford* clearly expresses the style of humor traditional to black communities.

same for the fair-skinned children I saw every day in school (but never saw afterwards).

IF CERTAIN SOCIAL CRITICS ARE right about the medium being the message, then the message of the fifties was all too clear: "If you white, you right. If you black, get back." Considering the grassroots idealism and optimism still alive among blacks at that time, and the visual medium's power to mold behavior patterns, the timing for those black video images was atrocious. Not only was television not suggesting even the possibility of a racially harmonious America, it was affirming just the opposite—a separatist world, where blacks were only tolerated in white society as servants, buffoons, or entertainers. It doesn't require much hindsight to recognize that the television images of the fifties and the early sixties were ruinous to black-white rapprochement. We are probably still paying for the medium's blunder with added social unrest and racial violence.

Ordinary blacks finally made their first significant television appearances during the sixties civil rights movement—not in sit coms, but during sit-ins and on national news broadcasts. The impact was overwhelming. Suddenly, here were throngs of real, live people—until now confined by American television to the realm of the nonexistent.

For me—one of a handful of black students at a Northern college during the sixties—watching those newscasts was a shattering experience. The blatant inhumanity and brutality emerging from the confrontation between black protesters and unyielding whites brought home a hard truth: From the moment the first dog or fire-hose was turned loose on a crowd of blacks, the first black child spat upon by an enraged Southern housewife, the first skull cracked by a well-aimed nightstick, one knew that the dream of black assimilation into the fabric of American society had been set back for decades—possibly forever. For an entire generation of black children just now moving into adulthood, those were the first real images of blacks interacting with whites ever witnessed on television. They are images unlikely to be forgotten, much less forgiven.

For whites, also, this abrupt intrusion of blacks onto the television screen, and therefore into their homes, must have been appalling—whether because they empathized with the protesters and ab-



The all-black programs of the seventies have been replaced in the eighties by programs featuring blacks in integrated casts.

horred violence, or because they were hostile to those upstarts who dared step "out of their place" and threaten a monochromatic world.

The civil rights movement fizzled with minimal gains and ultimately halted under the weight of benign neglect. But it accomplished much in directing media attention to the plight of black Americans: National awareness expanded throughout the sixties with coverage of the more militant protests and race riots.

It does not seem altogether coincidental that *I Spy*, the first prime-time adventure series to feature a black in a starring role, first aired in 1965, the year after race riots erupted in Philadelphia, Rochester, New York City, and Elizabeth, New Jersey, and a month after the destruction of Watts in Los Angeles. Nor is it surprising that NBC suddenly discovered an easing of resistance among advertisers and affiliated stations to the idea of a black lead in a weekly series.

And so Bill Cosby became the Jackie Robinson of network television, co-starring with Robert Culp as a CIA agent in *I Spy*. Cosby, a twenty-seven-year-old

nightclub comedian at the time, made his dramatic debut in the show and went on to win three successive Emmy Awards for "outstanding continued performance by an actor in a leading role in a dramatic series." Yet, despite the quality of his performances and the undeniable entertainment value of the show, I could never see the casting of Cosby as much more than a thinly disguised attempt to cool off the anger and bitterness that had ignited the Watts riot.

After all, he portrayed a character accepted by the system who continually risked his life to protect it. Moreover, at a time when the fight for equal rights had made racial violence endemic, the subject of race was seldom even touched on by Cosby or Culp. The show had absolutely nothing to do with the reality of America in 1965, and consequently had little or no effect on the growing racial tension. It did represent a breakthrough in casting, and apparently television executives thought this was enough.

But, just as early riots had spurred television networks to hire blacks both behind the scenes and on camera, continued violence in American cities—and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.—intensified the drive for more adequate black representation in the television industry. Protests by black organizations about bias in the industry had also increased dramatically. In certain instances, lawsuits had been filed against television station owners and, as with WLBT in Jackson, Mississippi, some owners were threatened with loss of their federal licenses. The Federal Communications Commission had by this time adopted an anti-discrimination policy based on the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

So, with pressure from all sides, by 1968 the television industry had to give in to the push for racial balance. In typically premature fashion, network executives began to contend that "the day of equal opportunity" was near and, conceivably to prove this claim, they scheduled two new shows featuring blacks, ABC's *The Outcasts*, a western starring Don Murray and Otis Young (portraying a former slave) as bounty hunters in antebellum America, and NBC's *Julia*, starring Diahann Carroll.

The Outcasts was produced ostensibly to correct some of the flagrant distortions in *I Spy*. Many of the episodes depicted conflict, even animosity, between Young and Murray, and Young's color was presented as a continuing problem for him. In other words, *The Outcasts* generally paid stricter attention than the other show to the real problems faced by

blacks, but it foundered in the ratings and had a short life.

In *Julia*, Diahann Carroll played the widowed mother of a six-year old child. The first television series to focus on a black family, *Julia* conspicuously lacked a father figure. But the harsh criticism the show received still seemed undeserved. While *Julia* and her son Corry were not typical blacks, they weren't inconceivable. They did not reflect the attitudes or mores of the black masses, but they were representative of black middle-class attitudes, which (like *Julia* herself) were extremely light if not quite white. But then, that was the rub.

BLACK. FOR MANY CRITICS in the late sixties, meant *distinctively* black. That was associated only with the black lower classes, who were, and still are, the prime victims of American racism. *Julia* had little to do with them. Diahann Carroll herself described the show as "lightweight entertainment that was about as true to life as any other series." Still, no judgment of the show seemed more apt at the time than a friend of mine's remark, "Julia fiddles while Chicago burns."

Not until the late sixties, when militancy had become the dominant mood among blacks and the battle had literally been taken to the streets, did the television industry fully respond. And even then, its only offerings generally ignored the crisis of black-white conflict. There were exceptions, of course, such as the CBS *Black America* documentary series, which began with the Bill Cosby-narrated "Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed." Ironically, that segment spent considerable time pointing out the distorted images of blacks that Hollywood had introduced and television had perpetuated—lazy, shiftless darkies, cowardly buffoons, lecherous ne'er-do-wells. The 1968 television season may have eliminated insulting portraits of blacks, but it left me with as much uneasiness as had the past distortions.

That season did at least mark the beginning of an era, however. Blacks no longer had to fight merely to appear. For nearly a decade, practically every show had a black actor or actress in a continuing role, or frequently included a black performer in one of its episodes. Variety shows usually had one or more black guests, although few blacks hosted such programs. The public pressure of the late sixties and the lagging economy of the seventies drove sponsors to seek out "special markets," so blacks began appearing regularly in commercials as well.

The number of blacks on the air reached a peak during the seventies,

when several shows with nearly all-black casts (*Good Times*; *The Jeffersons*; the original *Sanford and Son*; *What's Happening!*) were aired. Only *The Jeffersons* has lasted. The others have been replaced by programs featuring black performers in integrated casts. And these recent shows run the gamut: from *Diff'rent Strokes*, starring Gary Coleman as a precocious child living with his adoptive white family, to *Sanford*, with Redd Foxx as the grizzled, acerbic junk dealer playing opposite a nonblack employee. Although blacks remain plainly visible during television's peak hours, the number of blacks in regular roles on weekly, prime-time network shows has noticeably diminished in the past few years.

Moreover, as a recent Civil Rights Commission report stated, blacks appearing on television are disproportionately cast as teenagers and in situation comedies. Since 1968, almost all new weekly series starring blacks fit into one of these categories. Only the short-lived *Bill Cosby Show*, in which Cosby portrayed a schoolteacher and coach, even attempted any serious depiction of black life.

There have so far been no long-lasting dramatic series (to compare with *The Waltons*, *Lou Grant*, or even *Little House on the Prairie*) focusing on black life in America. Except for *Harris and Company*, which aired only briefly in 1979, and *Palmerstown, USA*, the Norman Lear-Alex Haley production temporarily shelved after an inauspicious beginning, none have even been tried. And the few dramatic specials seen on network television, with the exception of *Roots* and *Roots II*, have drawn severe criticism from blacks. Just last year an organization was formed specifically to prevent the airing of the NBC television drama *Beulah Land*. In this instance the film's title was indicative of its content, and the black organization protested the "offensive and degrading stereotypes that perpetuate the image of the slave as ignorant, oversexed, slovenly, dependent on the whim of his master and filled with love for that master and the master's land." Some minor changes were made in the script of *Beulah Land*, although the producer contends they were not in response to the protests. The film ran last October, and critics justifiably pointed out that the grossness of its stereotypes was matched only by the inanity of its plot.

Commercial television's staple program form—especially for its black performers—is not the serious drama. It is the situation comedy, which requires extreme oversimplification in its quest for humor, and practically prohibits any exploration of contemporary life. These limitations notwithstanding, two black sit-

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H·A·R·M·O·N·Y B·O·O·K·S

There is a real difference between black and white humor. Black humor is more attitudinal; it's not what you say, but how you say it.

com characters—George Jefferson and Fred Sanford—have occasionally provided accurate glimpses of black attitudes.

As Jefferson, Sherman Hemsley portrays a black man who, after building a thriving laundry business, has moved his family into a luxurious Upper East Side apartment in New York City. Jefferson is an odd combination of the aggressive, materialistic, successful businessman and the pompously proud black man. He is as anti-white as Archie Bunker is anti-black, and just as Bunker's gibes about minorities are defused by his prevailing ineptitude and stubborn self-righteousness, Jefferson's insistently caustic racial remarks are made acceptable by his ultimate buffoonery. Still, humor is often double-edged; just as there is a considerable segment of the nonblack television audience sharing Bunker's attitudes toward minorities, Jefferson's cynicism about whites and most American ideals (excluding the pursuit of money) reflects the sentiments of many blacks.

Similarly, Redd Foxx's portrayal of Sanford, despite the comic guise, often provides insight into a skepticism of middle-class values common among blacks. Sanford's stubborn insistence on maintaining his own identity reflects a genuine black attitude. And he also mirrors the shift in black perspective over the recent decades—from a self-conscious denial of so-called black behavior to an assertive flaunting of it.

In both *The Jeffersons* and *Sanford*, however, the performers themselves are responsible for conveying this real-life quality. They must go beyond the script to do so. Neither show clearly expresses the style of humor traditional to black communities.

It is distressing for one who grew up with that distinctive black style of humor on street corners, and later in theaters like the Apollo, to miss it in most television sitcoms—even in those with black comedians. This conspicuous lack speaks of the networks' blinkered devotion to the wants of the majority. According to some blacks inside the industry, the absence of the black style of humor may be a prime reason for the gradual disappearance of black shows on television.

According to Matt Robinson, a black writer and producer whose credits include the films *Save the Children* and *Amazing Grace*, "all comedy on television is based on the Jewish comedy style—the style of the borscht-belt standup comedians who do gags with a rapid-fire approach: set up-set up-punch line. The style was adopted because it solved the

technical problem of television's having to get everything in quickly. Because it is a fast medium, you have to grab the audience quickly, within the first thirty seconds or so, or else they change the channel.

"In a show like *Sanford*, for instance, the tone of the humor is often black, the material is black-oriented, but the structure follows the same formula as any other television show. It's based on the unlikely proposition, as we all know, that there is always someone standing around with witty, flippant responses for anything that's said. That's not a black development.

"I think black humor stopped being a dominant force with the advent of television. Black humor, to me, is that stage-show type of humor that flowed from specific characters and situations that were familiar to other blacks—almost exclusively so."

Many white writers agree with Robinson's assessment of television humor. According to Dick Baer, who has written scripts for black sitcoms like *What's Happening!!* and who now writes for *Archie Bunker's Place*, "Comedy dealing with racial matters has to do with what people expect blacks to do. To a certain extent, it's what blacks expect blacks to do. But since whites are in the majority, they make the decisions about how blacks are going to figure into the entertainment industry. They are working both sides of the streets. They are selling non-servile blacks to placate the black audience and at the same time showing stupid or amoral blacks or unrealistic blacks to satisfy the white audiences' assumptions about blacks."

Bob Peete, a black writer who worked on *The Bill Cosby Show* and was a story editor for *Good Times*, explains it another way: "There is a real difference between black and white humor. The chief distinction is that black humor is more attitudinal; it's not what you say, but how you say it. The attitude imported to the line gets the laugh. For instance, if Redd Foxx is on camera and someone knocks at the door, Redd might say, 'Come in,' and the audience would crack up. Now 'come in' is obviously not a joke, but with Redd it can be funny. Richard Pryor does the same thing, he doesn't tell jokes. On the other hand, white humor is structured to a straight-line-punch-line format."

According to some black performers and writers, the disparity between creation and performance in a black sitcom adversely affects the quality of the material, which in turn almost assures the

show's failure. "It's a self-fulfilling type situation," comments one writer. "White writers produce mediocre shows about blacks and, when they fail, decide that the audience doesn't want black shows. Therefore, fewer shows are produced."

The reasons for the dwindling number of black shows on television may or may not be that simple. It is clear, however, that television sitcoms are a virtual wasteland when it comes to authentic black humor—despite the work of Redd Foxx, Sherman Hemsley, Robert Guillaume, and Ja'net DuBois (of the defunct *Good Times*). Some black comedians, such as Richard Pryor, have refused to attempt molding their humor into the sitcom format. Since blacks are predominantly represented on television in sitcoms, a more authentic prime-time view of black style and attitudes seems extremely bleak.

ONE POSSIBLE REMEDY for the situation has been suggested by comic actor Cleavon Little: "I've been doing pilots for years and they've failed, I think, because they've all had white writers, white producers, and white directors. If we had blacks doing those things—all of them—we could bring another kind of ethos, nuance, to the comedy. That hasn't been investigated. Let us try, control our own humor, and I'm sure you'd see a difference."

No network has yet agreed to this proposal. The results of such an experiment, however, may be revealed shortly in a new thirteen-part noncommercial series entitled *With Ossie and Ruby*. These half-hour shows, airing on PBS, star Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee and present a varied entertainment package featuring comedy, music, drama, and literature. Although Davis stresses that the show's focus is "the common landscape shared by all Americans," most involved guests and writers are of minority backgrounds. With its emphasis on vaudeville, blues, and jazz, on poets and dramatists such as the late Langston Hughes, the program's reception may well indicate whether television audiences are receptive to more authentic material by blacks and other minorities.

Meanwhile, if the present trend continues on network television, the problem for many black viewers seeking more realistic reflection of their own culture during prime time may again become as it was for that Harlem bar's resident sage—a matter of imagination. —END

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The Taking of PBS 1-2-3

Robert Chitester, a broadcaster with a political crusade, has found the surest way to get his programs on national public television — and he has become a political evangelist on a government-supported system.

THERE IS NO WAY of measuring how much the public television special, *The Stan Freberg Federal Budget Revue*, contributed to the 1980 Republican sweep. It had some effect, no doubt, since the Hollywood song-and-dance extravaganza was dedicated solely to the GOP's theme, "Get the Government Off Our Backs," and was broadcast by 152 public television stations in the last days before the election. The irony was that the one-time radio comedian's program was a mirror image of the kind of government programs it satirized: It was indirectly but heavily tax-financed, its costs far overran its budget, the deadline was not met, and the quality of the work was generally unsatisfactory.

Yet, although an artistic dud, the Freberg show was successful as an element of a carefully organized, continuing campaign by a broadcaster to use public television as a vehicle for flat-out ultraconservative propaganda. More significantly, it demonstrated clearly just how vulnerable public television can be to incursions by political ideologues, however openly they operate. The *Revue* was not simply another innocuous show in the prime-time schedule but the third in a projected series of programs designed to sell "free market" principles on non-commercial television. It is part of a long-range crusade to "convert" Americans from media ensnared "by the socialist rallying cries of equality and brotherhood for all."

These words are from a manifesto written by Robert Chitester, a wiry, intense man of forty-three who runs WQLN-TV, the public station in Erie, Pennsylvania, and who is committed to countering what he sees as the country's socialist tendencies. If people are selfishly motivated, he believes, a better society will develop.

"I suggest," Chitester writes, "that the vitality of free markets, as the only effective means of both *organizing society and concurrently preserving freedom*, must be dramatized. . . . As a broadcaster, I certainly feel that the electronic media should be a key element in this effort . . . every means available for communicating ideas and thus influencing actions must be used."

Chitester, as a public television manager, discovered how national air time might be gained in the system—or if not gained, taken—for political evangelizing. Surprisingly, the procedure proved to be quite simple. It was based on these tenets:

1) No program, however worthy, can get on public television unless there is money to back it; and conversely, almost any program can get on if a foundation, corporation, or government agency funds it—as long as the program meets the system's guidelines.

2) Most station managements are made nervous by investigative reporting, exposés, and programs critical of the Establishment, but they are generally quite comfortable with programs that are pro-business, nonpolitical or, if political, inclined to conservatism.

3) The Public Broadcasting Service has very little power in

the system and can, if necessary, be circumvented. Contrary to popular belief, PBS is not a network but the national distributor for a loose affiliation of noncommercial stations. PBS does not produce shows but can reject programs that do not meet its standards. However, if PBS rejects a funded program and enough stations want it, the program may be aired independently over PBS satellite facilities.

Chitester's projects were right for the market; there apparently is no shortage of foundations and corporations ready to support programs promoting ultraconservative views, and plenty of public stations are happy to have them. When Chitester ran into problems with PBS, he simply made an end run around the organization and got his program on national television another way.

His first two productions in the crusade—the Milton Friedman series on conservative economic theory, *Free to Choose*, and the hawkish program, *The War Called Peace*—were amply funded, and gained PBS distribution partly because each aired contrasting viewpoints in a closing discussion. But PBS balked at airing Freberg's *Revue* right before the November elections, because of fears that it might be perceived as partisan propaganda. Instead, PBS offered to televise the program in the spring. That, however, was not what Chitester had in mind. So with his program funded, and with a large number of stations willing to play it before elections, Chitester created a special national hookup of his own on the public television satellite.

His formula for getting on the air has worked three times, and there is more to come.

"What is needed," Chitester writes in *Communications and a Free Society*, the pamphlet with which he solicits funding, "is program after program after program that emphasizes—sometimes directly, sometimes by quiet example—that nothing of value in human history has been accomplished without the effort of individuals working as *free* explorers of the world around them."

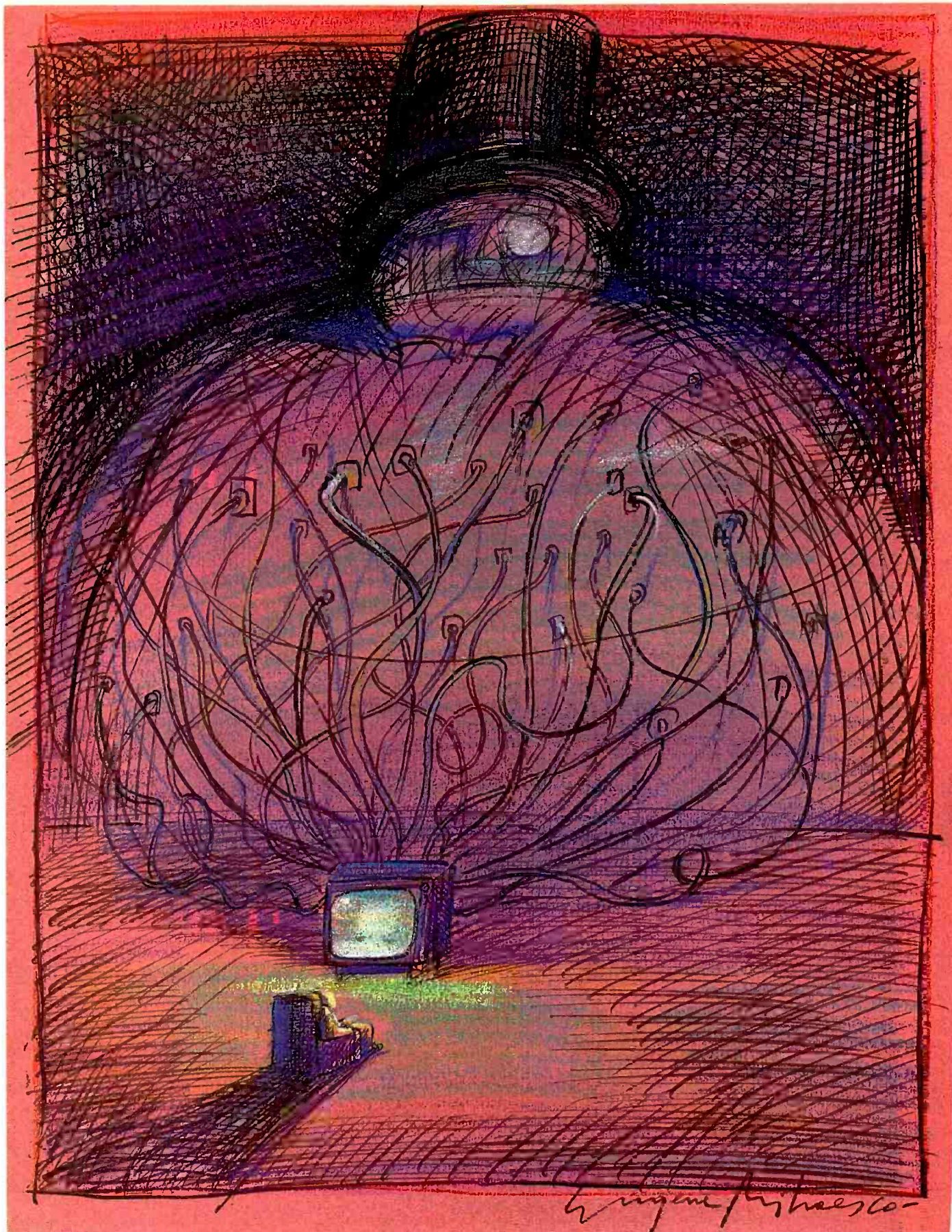
Although public television was never meant to be a medium for advocacy, Chitester has no qualms about using it to promote his political ideology. In justification, he says, "The success of the American Revolution was in part due to the founders' natural ability as propagandists."

ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA (population 118,964) is an unusual place for Chitester's campaign to originate, since most public television productions have come out of the country's largest cities. In fact, WQLN-TV's only previous programs for the national public television system had been *Economically Speaking*, a discussion program on the free-market theme, and a series on tropical fish.

Erie is archetypically American: It has industry, a lovely farm hinterland, and a rich ethnic mix, as well as increasing

by John L. Hess

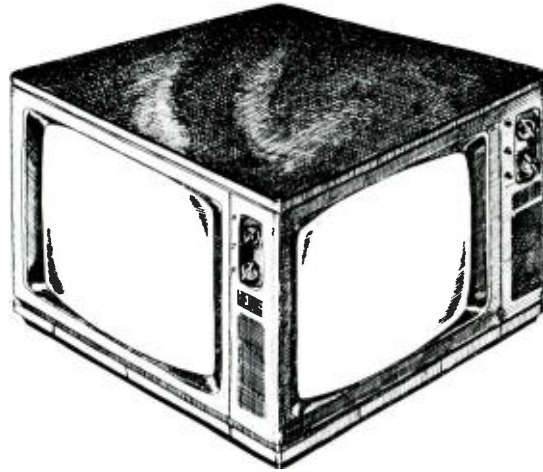
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The Milton Friedman series was a success. It opened the purse strings of big funders and enabled Chitester to plunge further into the programming business.

unemployment, suburban sprawl, a badly "rehabilitated" city center, and pollution that has helped to destroy its lake fishing industry. The city is unionized and Democratic, and the county, by a narrow margin, is conservative and Republican.

WQLN is in many respects a typical public television station. It carries much of the PBS schedule and some local service. Most of its board members are from the local business establishment, and viewers who contribute money to the station are overwhelmingly of the middle class. What is less usual about WQLN is the number of Erie residents who resent the station. Their dissatisfaction became apparent a year ago when WQLN became a prospective junior partner in a Canadian company seeking the cable franchise for Erie. The station applied for a waiver of the Federal Communications Commission's ban on ownership of such franchises by broadcasters in the same market; that action aroused strong opposition from the trade union council, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, feminists, and environmentalists. All charged that WQLN was actively biased against them and was neglecting vitally important local issues.

WQLN denies the charges emphatically. Nevertheless, many of its critics continue to believe the station is not meeting its license obligation to serve the needs of the community—because it is so involved with serving the personal program of Robert Chitester, its president and chief executive officer.

His muttonchop sideburns and casual clothes make Chitester appear the campus liberal he was when he taught broadcasting at nearby Edinboro State College in the sixties and ran a noncommercial radio station there. Although he worked for George McGovern's campaign in 1972, his liberalism did not survive the decade.

IN 1976, as head of the Erie public stations, Chitester called on W. Allen Wallis, the chancellor of the University of Rochester, who was then a member of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (the organization that distributes federal funds to the public television system). Wallis, a prominent economist who had taught at the University of Chicago with Milton Friedman, was also a director of several large corporations and a trustee of two conservative think tanks. Wallis gave Chitester a copy of Milton and Rose Friedman's 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*. It became his Bible.

Anyone who watched the 1980 Friedman series, *Free to Choose*, on PBS, or who read the best-seller of the same title, is familiar with the message: Government is the root of evil, and free enterprise is the source of good. Friedman would pretty much do away with the present welfare and public school systems, labor unions, the minimum wage, tariffs, corporate income tax, and the Food and Drug Administration. This is conservative libertarianism, a sort of anarcho-capitalism.

Chitester's meeting with Wallis inspired him to ask Milton Friedman to do *Free to Choose*. To produce it, Chitester had to raise \$2.8 million—more than twice his station's annual budget. At first, he says, big corporations were reluctant to help for fear of reprisals from Washington. However, in an article on Chitester last year, *Fortune* magazine commented, "It must be said that some or all of this may be a figment of Chitester's imagination. He tends to romanticize himself as an underdog in the battle against the forces of statism. In any case, as things turned out, he got a lot of support, for if Bob Chitester is anything he is a persuasive salesman."

A fund connected with National Presto Industries made a large contribution, the Sarah Scaife Foundation (one of the Mellon group that heavily subsidizes ultraconservative causes) gave \$500,000, and Getty Oil put in \$330,000. The Reader's Digest Association donated \$300,000, plus a free ad in the magazine and a favorable review that never mentioned, as *Fortune* noted, "that it had helped to underwrite the show." Other donors included Firestone, Pepsico, Eli Lilly, General Motors, Hewlett-Packard, and the Adolph Coors Company, owned by Joseph Coors, the rightist brewer. They regarded the project a reply to the PBS series by the liberal economist, John Kenneth Galbraith.

The production personnel for the Friedman shows, like those for Galbraith's, were British. The series was filmed in eight countries, and as the programs took shape Chitester's dreams grew grander. He sketched some of them in his *President's Report*, written on April 20, 1977:

"As a direct benefit of meeting with a large number of companies regarding the Friedman project, I've been able to discover their general areas of interest in programming, participating in program planning at the earliest stages. For example, a meeting with AT&T revealed their interest in developing programs related to technology for PBS broadcast . . .

Dr. Edward David has agreed to open doors at Bell Labs."

David is now with Exxon. He is helping Chitester on educational programs, including one with the National Association of Manufacturers, and on a major series based on a forthcoming book by William Tucker, *The Age of Environmentalism*. The latter, says Chitester, "examines the real motives of 'professional environmentalists' and the adverse impact of their actions on our basic freedoms."

Chitester's critics accuse him of serving his interests before those of the community, and of selling out to big conservative money. But there is another way of looking at this. If Chitester does put his own interests first, he is only doing what he deems natural and best for society under his philosophy. This is a philosophy that holds "ruthless selfishness" to be the fundamental virtue. Indeed, Chitester plans a public television show on that theme.

As an entity licensed and subsidized by the federal government, WQLN is supposed to be nonpolitical. It is a public institution, receiving two-thirds of its operating budget and much of its capital funds from federal and state sources. Gifts to the station are tax-deductible, which makes that portion of its income directly subsidized by taxpayers. The station is therefore subject to certain legal restrictions.

Restive under the resulting curbs, and sensitive to the ambiguity of his position in attacking government with government funds, Chitester has found a way around some of the problems. He has set up two companies—sometimes described as wholly owned subsidiaries and sometimes as affiliates. Neither company's account is open to inspection.

Chitester is president, and Wallis chairman, of Public Communications Inc., the not-for-profit producer of the Friedman series and other shows. Chitester's other firm, Penn Communications Inc., is a for-profit company selling his series' cassettes and other educational materials to corporations, which then present them to schools as gifts.

Salaries and other financial details of these operations are secret. For instance, when WQLN's manager, David Roland, was asked how much Public Communications spent on the costly Freberg show, he would say only that the budget was "an internal affair."

WQLN, with its public status, should be obliged to full financial disclosure. Roland contends, however, that "the only affiliation Public Communications and WQLN have is the same management."

If Chitester does put his own interests first, he is only doing what he deems natural and best for society under his philosophy—one that holds 'ruthless selfishness' to be a fundamental virtue.

But Roland did provide WQLN's audit report, which shows in footnotes that the station owns all the outstanding capital stock in the for-profit Penn Communications "and is affiliated by certain elements of common management with Public Communications Inc." It also states that WQLN guaranteed a \$200,000 bank loan to Public Communications and sold unspecified "distribution rights" to Penn Communications for \$17,000. The two companies seem to occupy most of Chitester's and Roland's time.

UNLIKE OTHER public television officials, Chitester says he hopes for the day government stops funding public broadcasting, but like many of them he has been seeking alternative sources of income. About three years ago, he began renting WQLN's facilities on an occasional basis to local producers of commercials; he stopped when competing private enterprises protested the unfair competition from a government-supported institution. His bid for the Erie cable franchise was withdrawn. The Milton Friedman series was a success, however. It opened the purse strings of big funders and enabled Chitester to plunge further into the programming business. In *Communications and a Free Society*, he proposes this ten-year schedule:

—A second Friedman series on the history and the use of money;

—An annual musical comedy special on the federal budget, with Stan Freberg pointing out its waste, mismanagement, and erosion of personal freedom;

—A show based on Richard Dawkins's book, *The Selfish Gene*, "in which 'selfishness' is examined as the prime motivator of action and a positive social characteristic";

—An annual ninety-minute special with William F. Buckley Jr. on the status of human rights in the world;

—Programs on the family that, among other things, question the motives of its detractors;

—A special on author Elizabeth Whelan's thesis that food additives and industrial chemicals are only a minor cancer risk for most people;

—A series challenging the theory that crime is often caused by poverty;

—A series based on author Brian Crozier's belief that the Soviet Union has already started World War III;

—A program on "Taiwan-U.S. relations and the importance of U.S. commitments to our allies";

—A special using William Tucker's

Harper's magazine articles, which questioned the motives of environmentalists;

—A series on Daniel Boorstin's book, *The Americans: A Democratic Experience*, a tribute to private initiative that was mostly put together with government funds.

The Friedman series launched Chitester's campaign with a bang. PBS considered it a fair counterbalance to the Galbraith series. However, Friedman played a larger role than Galbraith in selecting the panels and controlling the discussions following each segment. Robert Lekachman, a participant, said the taped segments he saw later were "rank, inaccurate propaganda," and that the panels were not balanced. A true balance, he said, would have required the presence of someone from the extreme left, not just polite social democrats like himself.

PBS also broadcast Chitester's second major production, *The War Called Peace*, a ninety-minute special on the Crozier theme that aired in July 1980, after the frustrating events in Iran and Afghanistan.

The War Called Peace was partly funded by the Heritage Foundation, which is supported by Coors and other conservative philanthropists. Chitester also developed a link for joint programming with the conservative Hillsdale College. He then began asking for money from large corporations and foundations which had never been associated with ideological programs of this type. For the Freberg show though, he went to old reliables like Scaife, Fluor, MAPCO, and National Presto.

The *Revue* was supposed to have been ready in April 1980, but not until July was an hour-long version screened for PBS officials. They were not enthusiastic. Hollywood-garish, the show was a humorless, sophomoric jape at government spending, featuring Uncle Sam as a fiend chasing taxpayers, the IRS as a Gestapo grilling them, and so on. The PBS people said it was not up to their standards. Later, others saw this statement as a tactical error, for it included observations on the content as well as the quality. (PBS is not supposed to be concerned about producers' ideas.) On grounds of taste, the PBS executives objected to an anti-welfare routine called "Poverty Pimps" (which featured two black and two white dancers in pink "pimp suits"), and to a beauty contest number in which a grossly fat woman wins the title "Miss Federal Budget."

One PBS official remarked that while the show purported to attack the whole federal budget, it concentrated on the so-

cial services and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to the exclusion of such sources of waste as the Department of Defense. The irony here is that Chitester obtained \$340,000 from HEW as recently as December 1979—while the Freberg show was in the works—for a new WQLN antenna. And that was only one of many federal grants he received.

In light of the PBS criticism, Chitester cut the hour-long show to thirty minutes, deleting some of the offending material. This version, less than half as bad as the original, went back to PBS in September.

The PBS staff and its Program Managers Advisory Committee still did not like the show, but their opinions became moot when PBS offered to broadcast it in 1981, near income tax time. Barry Chase, director of public affairs programming for PBS, explained to Chitester that if it were broadcast before Election Day, "it could be looked on as a politically partisan program." Chitester stormed that indeed the federal budget was a political issue and that the time to run it was precisely when politics was on the public's mind. It is not hard to understand his anger, for by April 15, 1981, his show might well be satirizing *Reagan's* budget—which was perhaps not exactly what his underwriters had in mind.

Thus, Chitester decided to broadcast his special on an ad hoc public television network, without PBS's blessing. Claiming rights as a PBS member station, WQLN announced the show on the PBS teletype and beamed it on the PBS satellite with the restriction that it only be shown *before* the election, between October 3 and November 3.

PBS appended to one of WQLN's teletype messages to stations: "A REMINDER THAT THE PROGRAM DESCRIBED IN THIS MESSAGE IS NOT A PART OF THE PBS NATIONAL PROGRAM SERVICE." Another message warned that "PBS CAN MAKE NO WARRANTIES AS TO ITS SUITABILITY FOR BROADCAST. A third, from Barry Chase, restated PBS's position that "THE SUBJECT MATTER IS MORE APPROPRIATE FOR BROADCAST AROUND THE INCOME TAX DEADLINE OF APRIL 15TH" and added that discussions with WQLN were continuing with a view toward moving the program to a later date.

Chitester called this sabotage. Nonetheless, 152 out of 280 PBS stations did choose to broadcast the Freberg *Revue* when Chitester wanted it seen. Given the facts that a representative committee of station executives deplored the quality of the show, and that PBS questioned the propriety of its timing,

'The real problem is not that anybody is shaving points,' says a PBS official, 'but that it's harder to raise money for an Andrew Young than it is for a Milton Friedman — maybe ten times as hard.'

one gets a sense of the current climate in public broadcasting. Chitester sees his success — correctly, it appears — as "a loud and clear signal to PBS affiliates that they have a viable alternative to distributing programs." And thereby, he demonstrates that he doesn't need PBS.

Times are hard for PBS. The organization not only faces financial stress but also a revolution in cable and pay television that may spirit away its viewers and key program sources. And the political right continues to accuse it of liberal bias while the liberals and labor accuse it of conservatism. Publisher Edward W. Barrett of the *Columbia Journalism Review* wrote last November that public broadcasters "are more timid than they once were and more timid than are many commercial broadcasters." PBS president Lawrence K. Grossman takes an opposing view, however: "I don't want to sound smug, but as long as we get nailed from every side, we are probably doing all right."

While member stations have long used company-made educational films, PBS it-

self has kept firms from underwriting programs in their direct line of interest (with some oversights, such as Safeway-Julia Child). For the same reason, it barred major union funding of a projected series on the history of the labor movement. But it does accept contributions by corporations for programs that may incidentally serve their interest.

Barry Chase says PBS advanced \$10,000 to a producer to outline a series on the views of Andrew Young, the civil rights activist and former United Nations ambassador. He admits that this advance was only a license to look for more money. And he intimated that the outlook for such programs is not good.

"The real problem is not that anybody is shaving points," he says. "It's that it's harder to raise money for an Andrew Young than it is for a Milton Friedman — maybe ten times as hard."

There appears to be nothing in Chitester's ten-year plan that cannot be made to fit PBS's standards. Indeed, to date, PBS has welcomed his contributions, objecting only to the timing of the Freberg

show and some of its content. "When a station programmer goes on an ideological kick," Grossman says, "I think it raises a grave problem." But when Chitester as an independent producer goes on an ideological kick, Grossman implies, it does not raise a grave problem for PBS.

The weakness built into the public television system — detected by Chitester and the keystone of his success — is its great dependency on corporate and other donors. When it was created by an act of Congress in 1967, public television was meant to serve all elements of our society, treat all issues even-handedly, and be above commercial imperatives. In practice, however, ideas that appeal to monied institutions stand a better chance of being expressed on the noncommercial airwaves than ideas that don't have the funds. This leaves the system unprotected from wealthy individuals and institutions eager to promote a political point of view. If the rich speak louder than the poor on public television, then it is not *public*.

—E N D

WELCOME!

MCATV

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

ALL THAT JAZZ

KRAMER vs. KRAMER

GOING IN STYLE

ELECTRIC HORSEMAN

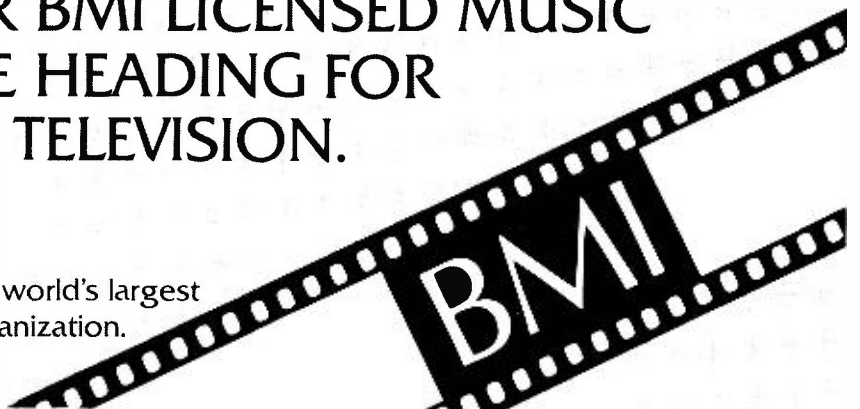
URBAN COWBOY

COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER

PLUS

**TWENTY MORE OF VARIETY'S TOP 30
BIG RENTAL FILMS OF 1980
AND THEIR BMI LICENSED MUSIC
ARE HEADING FOR
TELEVISION.**

What the world expects from the world's largest
music licensing organization.



Well before behavioral scientists began to consider the question, *The New Yorker's* cartoonists were examining television's influence on our lives.

Through Eustace Tilley's Looking Glass

THERE HAS BEEN SO much said about how television has put a crimp in writing that no one has taken note of how much writing it has spawned. Libraries are bulging with treatises, analyses, histories, deprecations, and eulogies of the medium, so much so that the curious need never heat a tube but have only to crack a book. Yet of all this plethora of literature, I know of only one source that has constantly and consistently offered continuing and cogent comments, and has done so using pictures, with or without captions, to make its point.

This organ of observation is *The New Yorker* magazine, whose cartoons are more likely than not worth a thousand words when it comes to informing you of television and its effect on society. They constitute a running commentary that started sprinting, according to the magazine's own files, on July 2, 1927, with a cartoon by Al Frueh depicting men playing pool near several "television booths" labeled with alibis like "Sick Friend," "Delayed at the Office," and "Out of Town." The caption reads "The Men's Club Keeps Abreast of Science." Pretty feeble, you say, this *Punch*-like misconception of television; but remember, it was ahead of its time.

The next television cartoon, by Mary Petty, which appeared in 1938, the first in a string continuing down to present reading, shows a writer signing a contract and asking, "Then everything is settled but the television and doll rights?" Talk about prescience! Even as you read, writers are still haggling over the same questions.



"It's hard to imagine what people used to do before television, isn't it?"

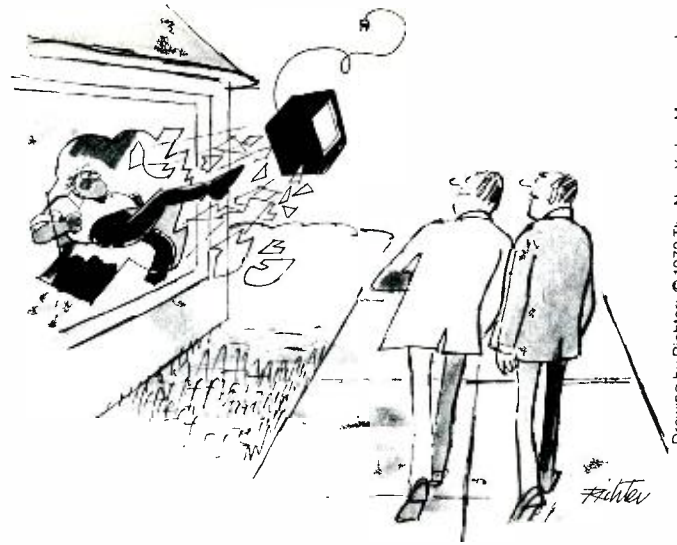
that is, as witness the Moslem prostrating himself before a picture of a minaret on television (by Anatole Korarsky). But you need not travel to discover the compulsion of the electronic image. "How come you laugh only when the laugh track laughs?" asks the wife of her television-watching husband in an Ed Frascino cartoon. A lady in the park with her daughter is feeding the pigeons and a policeman chides her, "Why isn't that child at home watching *Sesame Street*?" (by Robert Day).

Life's thorough permeation by the box in the living room is borne out by Starke's church sign that cautions, "Inasmuch as this service is to be televised, reverence during prayer, spirited participation in singing, and an attentive aspect throughout the sermon are kindly urged." My favorite has to

by Richard F. Shepard



"My TV is brighter, sharper, and better-focussed than I am."



"There's a man who's asserting his right not to know."



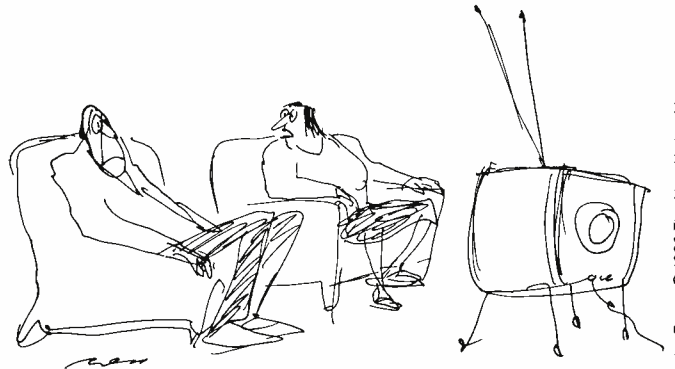
"Dear Harold, by the time you play this videotape cassette, I will be far, far away."



"No, this conversation does not remind me of something on last week's 'Mary Tyler Moore Show.'"



"Who determines the lowest common denominator, and how can they be sure they haven't slipped below it?"



"Thirty-one years of television together. Surely that means something."

be the Day cartoon that shows a father changing a flat tire and telling his kids, "Don't you understand? This is *life*, this is what is happening. We can't switch to another channel."

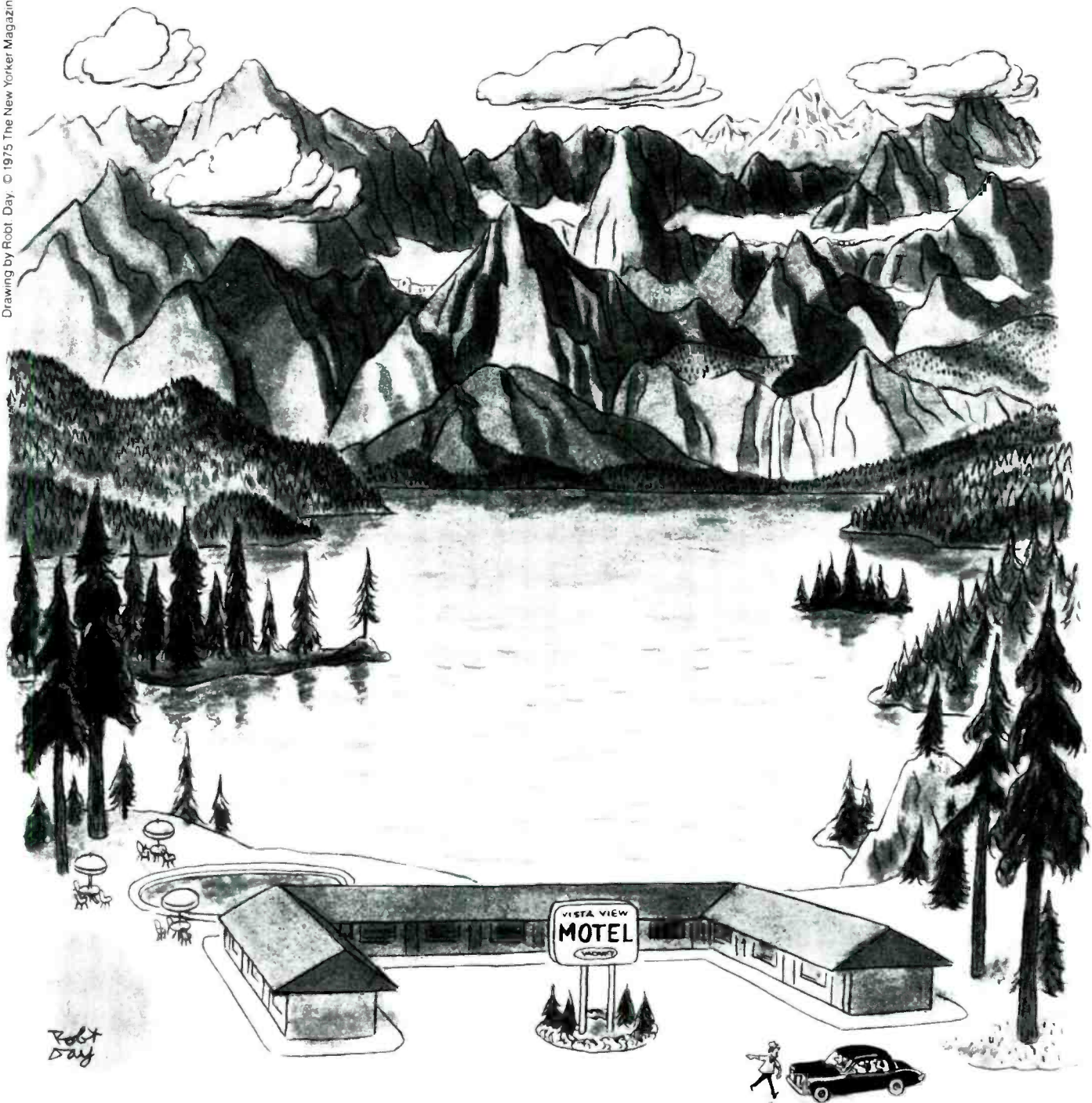
You can categorize *New Yorker* television cartoons infinitely, and perhaps a computer is doing that right now (the magazine has also fixed its eye on computers, but that's another bag). But there are meaningful slots into which most of them fit, such as politics, the technical side, the programs, the newsmakers, the weathermen, sports and, always, the audience. In the *New Yorker* style, they are no less withering for being suavely, even dispassionately, couched in drawing and in caption.

"Quick, Marjorie! They're about to announce the winners of the November elections," a man watching the set calls to his wife. This is in a cartoon by Jane Stevenson in June 1976,

months ahead of election day. Laugh, but don't laugh too hard — the day is coming and you know it. In 1980, Reagan was pronounced a landslide winner less than half an hour after the polls closed in the East. Wait until 1984.

Educational television? Two kids are studying, under duress, and the little boy says to his little sister, "You just wait until the Board of Regents gets a channel. Then they'll be *begging* us to watch." That Barney Tobey drawing appeared in March 1952. Oh, if only our satisfaction with what we know came through windows that open into the future rather than through rear-view mirrors.

Not to forget the snobberies and pretensions emanating from the living-room tube. "Just not having a television doesn't automatically make them intellectuals," says a man to his wife



"No color TV! Only black-and-white! I laughed in his face."

in an elevator taking them to a visit. Or the wife to her husband, who is furious at what he is seeing, "Oh, for heaven's sake, you'd think you had a monopoly! Right this minute it's insulting the intelligence of millions of Americans." (The first by Donald Reilly, the second by Joseph Mirachi.)

It is no trick at all to pontificate on what this constant flow of contemporary art means, but that would be pompous and not half so portentous as the cartoons themselves are, and they do it in far more pithy style. Whether they deplore or merely laugh at it, these cartoons attest to television's inundation of our America. If the cartoons of Thomas Nast toppled Boss Tweed, they did not eradicate corruption for all time. *New Yorker* cartoons go very deeply into television's effect on all of us, but they do not moralize and they certainly do not pretend

to stamp it out.

When Lee Lorenz's prizefighter asks his manager, "Tell me again how many living rooms I'm going into tonight," he is not being extraordinarily egotistical. It is far more than that, as you will perceive when you tune in the news tonight and see the policeman carefully explaining the nature of the crime in a way he never would elsewhere, when you see the man-in-the-street burnishing up his vocabulary for his moment before the little red eye. *The New Yorker* is not making us laugh at extraordinary characters, it is making us laugh at ourselves—and maybe, unless you're in a hurry to finish reading it and get back to *Masterpiece Theatre*, to think. Thinking is something its immobile cartoons give us time to do; the quick flickerings on the tube never could.

—E N D

Teaching the Kids a Little Sex

Television has moved quietly into the controversial area of sex education. To date, more than forty hours of programs have been televised. Many have serious failings, yet they have raised no public outcry.

SCHOOLBOY FATHER—As a result of an affair at summer camp, fifteen-year-old Daisy becomes pregnant. The romance ends after the last campfire, so Charles does not learn he has become a father until his mother reads him the local paper's "Cradle Roll" nine months later. The birth of his son triggers Charles's feelings of his own abandonment by his father. Unable to accept Daisy's wish that the child be placed for adoption, Charles demands the opportunity to keep his baby.

Quickly Charles learns that parenting does not fit neatly into his regular schedule of school, job, and social activities. When it prevents his attending a classmate's birthday party, Charles returns the baby to a social worker for placement in an adoptive home.

"Schoolboy Father" belongs to a genre that has emerged the last few years in made-for-television movies. Many of the films are adaptations of young-adult novels like Judy Blume's *Forever* and Norma Klein's *Mom, the Wolf Man and Me*. Since they explore such sensitive topics as a teenage girl's first experience with sex and coping with a mother's live-in boyfriend, they have been shown in the 9-to-11 p.m. time period designated for adult programming. "Schoolboy Father" differed from these shows in one important respect—it was made expressly for children.

Produced as part of the award-winning series *ABC Afterschool Specials*, it is among more than forty hours of programs created by networks and independent companies for the purpose of teaching kids about sex. What is notable about this trend is that network programmers have traditionally avoided using television for education. With the exception of one-minute learning messages inserted in such Saturday morning cartoon programs as *Godzilla* and *Drak Pack*, they prefer to leave educational matters to public television. Except, it appears, when it comes to sex.

Four years ago, the new ground was broken when ABC's Squire Rushnell, vice president for children's and early morning programming, saw a childbirth film on *Good Morning America* and decided that a show on reproduction would make a good *Afterschool Special*. "My Mom's Having a Baby" was put on the drawing boards, and sex education became grist for television's mill. One might say Rushnell was betting on a sure thing. Sex draws viewers, even in low-popularity formats like news documentaries. "My Mom's Having a Baby" was an enormous ratings success. Its 35-percent share of audience so impressed ABC officials that they repeated the *Afterschool Special* episode on a Sunday evening against NBC's Walt Disney series, where it again made an impressive showing. Neither of the subsequent *Afterschool Specials* about sex, "Where Do Teenagers Come From?" or "Schoolboy Father," matched the audience levels of the first, but each garnered the

series' highest rating for the year it was broadcast.

Since most broadcasters consider ratings and profits first, it is not so remarkable that these programs were made. But it does come as a surprise that they have gone virtually unnoticed by that usually vocal and outspoken majority, the parents of juvenile viewers. In public schools, no subject causes such a furor as the suggestion that "life science" be taught. Entire school budgets have been held in abeyance while parents debated the subject with each other and the school board. Typically, objections have emerged from fears that knowledge of sex will lead to experimentation, that teachers will usurp what is considered a private family responsibility, and that religious beliefs will be undermined. Drs. Dorothy and Jerome Singer, co-directors of the Family Television Research and Consultation Center at Yale, devised a program to help elementary school-children become critical television viewers. They purposely did not include any mention of sex, despite its prevalence on television, because of the resistance the subject meets in school settings.

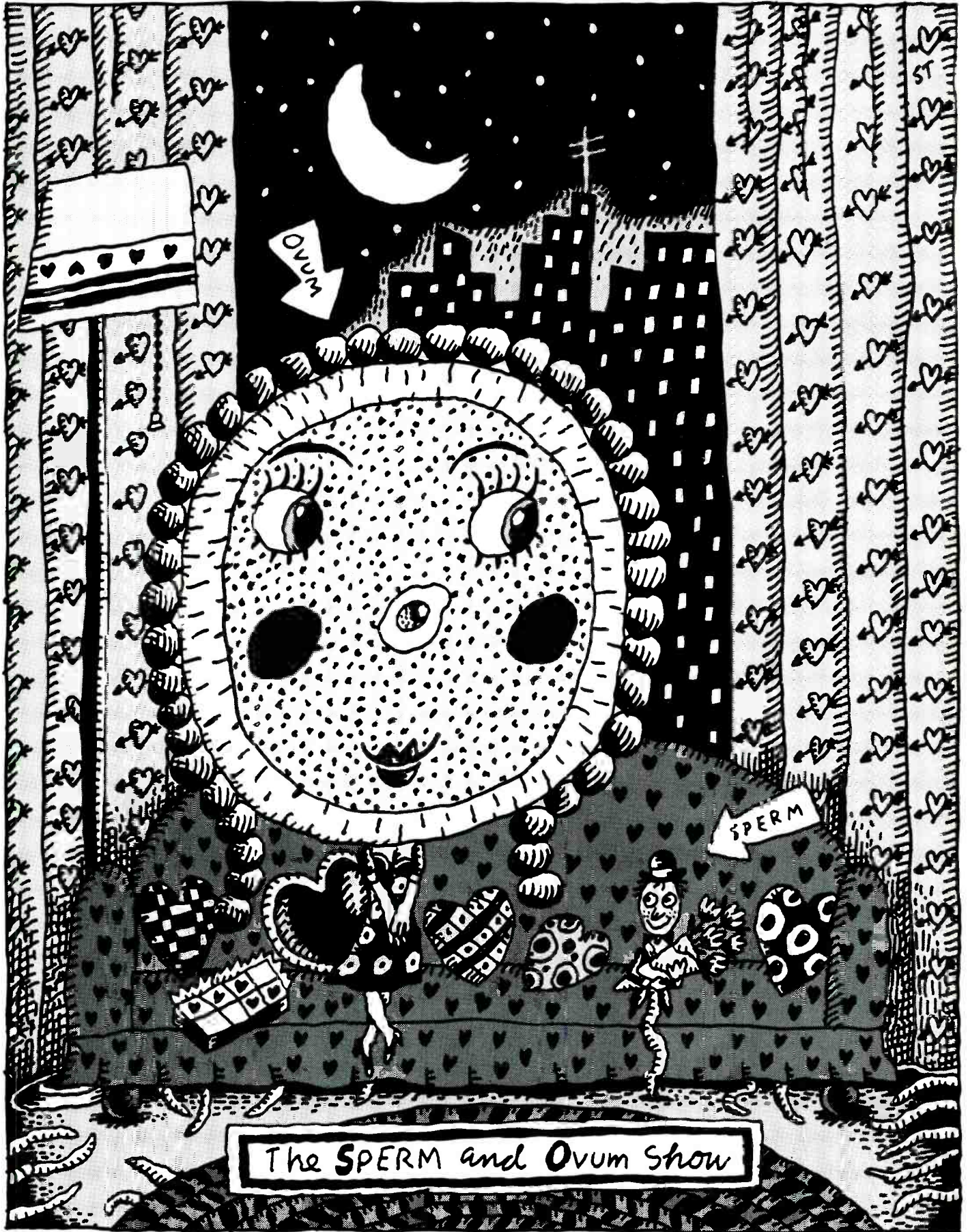
Psychologist Lee Salk believes the network sex education programs have escaped controversy because parents are far more intimidated by television than by schools. "Even though parents pay, however indirectly, for what's on TV, they do not exercise the same authority in both realms," he says. Salk's observation is borne out by the scarcity of objections to the programs—even though, according to Susan Futterman of ABC's broadcast standards and practices, *Afterschool Specials* usually generate a lot of mail.

Occasionally, a children's program is screened by a focus-group of consumers brought together to discuss its relative value. That happened with CBS's *The Body Human* series. Only one objection was raised at the screening of its two sex education segments, "The Facts for Boys" and "The Facts for Girls." In the latter, the producers had used a dance sequence in which the featured ten-, twelve-, and fourteen-year-old girls went through various ballet steps choreographed to illustrate the maturing of the female body. A few in the focus-group considered this part of the program sexist—though it is hard to imagine the same point being illustrated by a person in a football uniform with shoulder pads and cleats.

Broadcast executives believe what surveys tell them—that children's shows about sex serve an important social need. According to a Johns Hopkins study made last year, for instance, nearly 50 percent of girls in the United States between the ages of fifteen and nineteen engage in premarital sex—almost double the number indicated in polls ten years ago. Also, teenagers have 50 percent of all abortions and 25 percent of reported venereal disease. To address these problems, programmers at ABC, CBS, and PBS (NBC, according to Mary Alice Dwyer, its vice president for children's programs, has elected to present light entertainment in the afterschool hours) have concentrated on three areas of sex education:

by Clare Lynch O'Brien

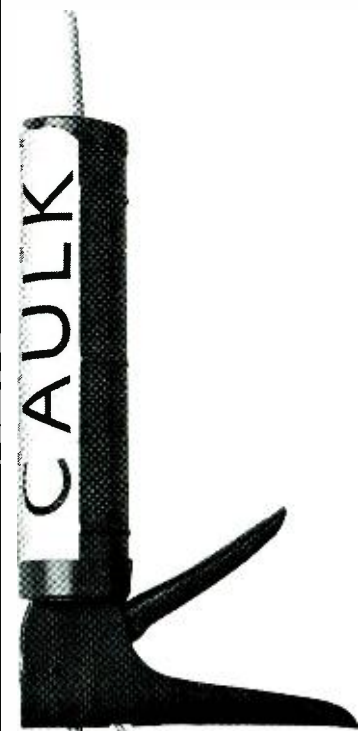
Clare Lynch O'Brien is the associate editor of Channels magazine.



SIMMS TABACK

CHANNELS 2 APRIL/MAY

KEEP IT UP, AMERICA

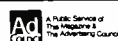


Look what's happening! All over America, we're working together to save energy and it's paying off.

Here's how:

■ Weatherstripping and caulking around doors and windows prevent escaping heat in winter and increase air conditioner efficiency during the summer.

LITTLE BY LITTLE, IT ALL ADDS UP.



reproduction, body development during adolescence, and some of the consequences of sexual activity during teen years.

"My Mom's Having a Baby," designed by ABC for nine-year-olds, attempts to present the facts of human reproduction. Elaine Rushnell and Susan Kennedy wrote a story that explores a child's anxiety and jealousy over the birth of a sibling. And since pregnancy and birth stimulate children's curiosity about reproduction, ABC chose pediatrician Lendon Smith to narrate an animated film-within-a-film depicting fertilization and gestation, which he presents to the three prepubescent children featured in the program. Smith's discourse is periodically interrupted, usually before some point of information, by an animated sequence of one or another of the children's fantasies about reproduction—such as, babies are brought by the stork, or are grown in cabbage patches. The fantasies are replaced with the producers' interpretation of "facts." And producers David H. DePatie and Friz Freleng (of *Pink Panther* fame) depict conception as a kind of macho romance. The sperms have faces and personalities—some are plodding and determined, others aggressive and menacing, a few happy-go-lucky. The actual fertilization is a boy-meets-girl, boy-gets-girl story. The ovum has long, curly eyelashes and Clara Bow lips. Hearts pulsate around her as one of the nice-boy sperms becomes enthralled with her charms. One, two, three times he rams into her side, and then the miracle of life, as perceived by ABC, begins.

In "Where Do Teenagers Come From?" the two boys and the girl from "My Mom's Having a Baby" enter adolescence. The story centers around the girl's concern about her changing relationship with the two boys, the changes in her body and in her mood. These changes prove sufficiently distressing to attract the attention of Dr. Smith; he presents another film-within-a-film, this one explaining menstruation, nocturnal emissions, and masturbation in the context of the hormonal changes that stimulate them. The description of menstruation is clear and useful; the explanations of nocturnal emissions and masturbation, however, are distorted and muddled. As Smith describes nocturnal emissions, an animated character bolts upright in his sleep, flashes a saw-tooth smile, sighs, and cuddles up with his pillow. This brief, unconscious moment provides the film's only hint that pleasure enters into sex. Masturbation is not really even mentioned but vaguely alluded to as "touching yourself in places that feel good." Such an oblique reference implies disapproval of the word—to say nothing of the masturbation act itself.

CBS's "The Facts for Boys" and "The

Facts for Girls," from *The Body Human* series, deal with the body's development during adolescence. Both cover the physiology and emotions of sex in the scientific manner for which the adult series has been acclaimed. In a documentary format, producers Thomas W. Moore, Alfred R. Kelman, and Robert Fuisz combine facts with group discussions of feelings about growing up. Animated segments illustrate the function of mature reproductive organs during sex. In a discussion with several girls at a slumber party, Marlo Thomas, host of the girls' segment, talks about the "myths" of menstruation, which include some old wives' tales. Judging from the girls' vacant expressions, most of these predate their grandmothers' era. In her effort to dispel the myth that menstruation can limit one's activities, Thomas confides that she makes love with her husband during her period. This revelation seems to come from left field, since the need to understand the difference between being physically and emotionally ready for sex is her theme with these ten-to fourteen-year old girls.

Ken Howard (of *The White Shadow* series) hosts "Facts for Boys." He joins some teenage boys on a camping trip, where they share confidences about sex. Howard asserts that sex is "a lot of fun . . . when you're ready for the responsibility." The animated film showing the male reproductive organs during sex includes an unfortunate exception to an otherwise honest presentation: The penis is flaccid. Not surprisingly, no one involved with the program is claiming responsibility for this distortion, but it implies that something about this reality is offensive.

OF THE VARIOUS PROGRAMS specifically designed for teenagers, all but one are dramatizations about sexually active minors. The exception is *Feelings . . . With Dr. Lee Salk*, PBS's elegantly mounted discussion show, particularly good because of Dr. Salk's gift for talking to young people. The two-part program airs some teenagers' thoughts and feelings about sex. All felt parents, rather than school or television, should explain sex. A girl thought her mother was the best teacher, saying emphatically, "I have no interest in my father's point of view about sex." What, asked Salk, did they think about their parents having sex? One said it was disgusting, while another answered, "It fills a need they have." Salk also asked if their parents were seductive with each other. "Never!" was one answer. "My mother doesn't even own a pretty nightgown. She and my father walk around naked all the time anyway."

In 'The Facts for Girls,' Marlo Thomas talks about the 'myths' of menstruation. Judging from the vacant expressions of her audience, most of these 'myths' predate their grandmothers' era.

This sort of denial, says Salk, is both typical and normal, because "such discussions are very embarrassing to kids."

This year, the Boston-based public station WGBH introduced a new series for adolescents consisting of twenty-four half-hours, dramatic with documentary inserts. Each segment treats a subject considered of interest and importance to teenagers, and addresses broader social issues. Six deal with sex in the form of prostitution, homosexuality, unwanted pregnancy, rape by a boyfriend, and venereal disease. The series, *The New Voice*, is named for a school newspaper at the fictional Abraham Lincoln High School, the setting for each of the dramas. In order to appear hip and, one assumes, appeal to teenagers, the dialogue is frequently vulgar. In "Kiko's Pain," for example, Kiko embarrassedly confesses his VD to a friend from behind a toilet stall as "a dose of the clap." Learning what the secret is, Kiko's friend laments, "guy meets girl, scores, and comes down with VD." In a two-part story about the pregnancy of a promising black student, the conflict is seen as whether or not to tell anyone about it. Just about every important issue raised by the situation is either glossed over or ignored.

Psychologist Salk is most outspoken about programs that teach sex in this light-entertainment format. "The manner in which sex is presented to children," he says, "affects both their knowledge and their attitudes about sex. Programs that distort information by anthropomorphizing sperms and eggs leave young children confused and upset." According to Salk, a more direct misrepresentation—like the flaccid penis in "The Facts for Boys," or the offhand reference to masturbation in "Where Do Teenagers Come From?"—is even more damaging. "Deliberately distorting information about sex conveys the impression that there is something wrong with it," he says. "Many adults think these messages discourage kids from experimentation. They will not; they will simply generate guilt feelings about sex."

Obviously, a measure of concern for children should infuse these programs. And those responsible feel they take their roles very seriously. "We do not play God with these subjects," says Sandra Gartin, ABC's East Coast director of children's programs, whose primary responsibility is for *Afterschool* and *Weekend Specials*. "We don't say, 'Let's do a show about sex.' We consult several child-development experts. They tell us what subjects are most important to

kids, then we develop a story, often based on a book, and our consultants read and approve the eventual script."

While consultants are used on all the sex education programs, few have the sort of influence that makes them accountable for what appears on the screen. Eda LeShan, an advisor to ABC on a number of its children's programs, was one of the consultants on "My Mom's Having a Baby." She liked the presentation of childbirth in the context of warmth and loving feelings; she was not satisfied, however, with the animation of fertilization. "Simply consulting on a program," LeShan says, "is no guarantee that the program will turn out exactly the way you want it to." Dorothy Singer of the Family Television Research Center maintains that "more often than not, consultants are window-dressing used by the networks to keep the FCC and FTC off their backs." Nonetheless, when questioned about ABC's lineup, Squire Rushnell said, "Every script, every story board, every thirty-second spot that goes into children's programming on ABC, is the most scrutinized of all television."

The decision-makers are not only producers, writers, network programmers, and their consultants. Each network has a broadcast standards and practices department—sometimes referred to as a network "censor"—that decides what is acceptable for broadcast using guidelines for taste and social responsibility. There are frequent clashes between hopes for the highest possible rating and the desire to maintain acceptable standards. The road to the public is not a smooth one. Each participant in the creation of a program is inclined to blame others when work fails or is criticized.

ABC's Susan Futterman joined the broadcast standards department after receiving a master's degree from Harvard. "We fight like hell over these scripts," she says. "I know I'm going to lose on half the points I fight for. We all have to give on some things." As she describes it, what viewers are left with is a negotiated truce between the decision-makers.

According to Futterman, profit is the impetus behind these programs about sex. "We do hard-hitting topics," she says, "because Marilyn Olin wants high ratings." Until February 1981, when she left to become executive producer of *Kids Are People Too*, Olin's job as ABC's vice president for children's programs had been to develop shows delivering the largest possible audience while meeting the network's responsibility to the public. Judging from the flaws in some of the

shows, that responsibility has not been met. As long as television is available to anyone who can turn a dial, we must assume that all programs will reach all children, regardless of their age or of what they have been taught. Adults understand things that children do not; programs must be evaluated in light of a child's experience.

In the early days of *Sesame Street*, when some parents were unsure about whether they wanted Children's Television Workshop teaching their children reading-readiness, I met an earnest mother at a cocktail party. She was a dislaimer of television, one who claimed to have television in her home only for moon landings, assassinations, and *Masterpiece Theatre*. When the conversation turned to *Sesame Street*, she described her son's experience. The show has always done a masterful job of accommodating a toddler's seemingly limitless tolerance for repetition. For emphasis in a counting segment, the writers came up with a little ditty that went, "one, two, three, four, five-five-five." This mother said her toddler believed, for some time, that that's how one counts—one, two, three, four, five-five-five. But the mother failed to pick up a very important point about television and young children, the very message her son was relaying with great clarity: Children are quite literal. They believe what television tells them.

Psychologist Robert Liebert of the State University of New York at Stony Brook notes that at eight or nine years most children move from magical to logical reasoning. For example, he says that if a child of seven or younger is asked what makes the tide come in and out, he might answer, "my daddy." As he becomes capable of logical reasoning, the child is more likely to say, "the moon." But, Liebert cautions, "frequently, on closer scrutiny, we learn that although he gives the scientific answer, the reasoning behind his answer is incorrect."

WE CANNOT therefore be sure exactly what children draw from these programs in terms of information or attitudes. Nor can we be certain what impact the shows will have on developing sexual feelings. But the fact that most of the programs reflect childlike fantasies, rather than a realistic, integrated understanding of sexuality, suggests that those who have undertaken sex education on television might be the worst teachers.

—E N D

Can Television Save Detroit?

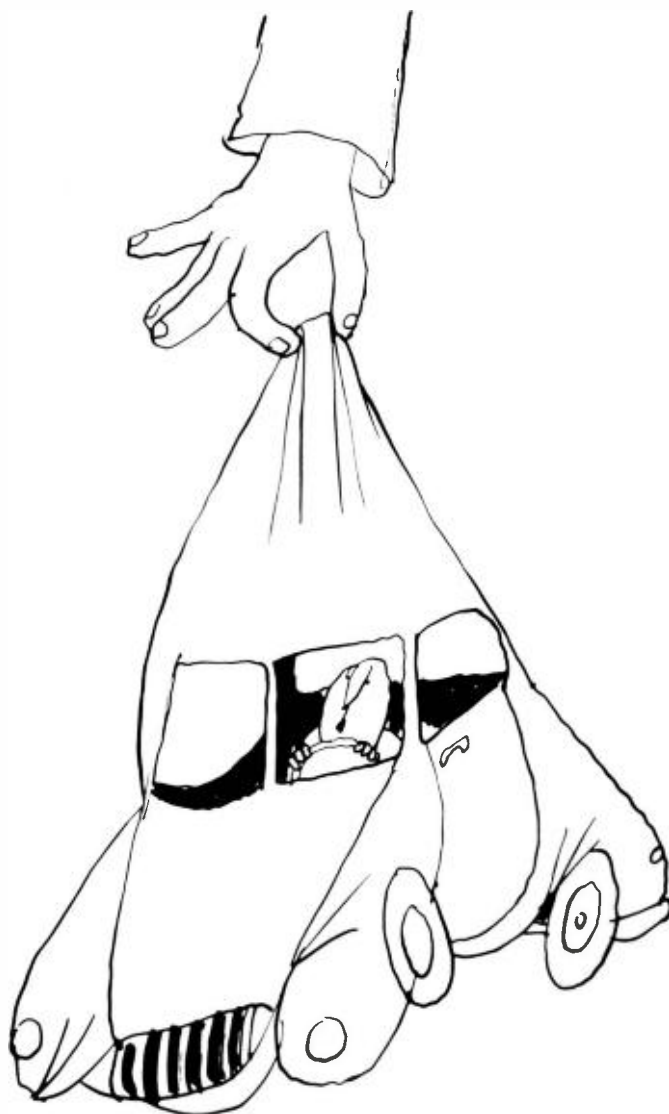
For thirty years commercials sold cars on their size and power. In a desperate shift of gears, big advertising dollars now go to make Americans think small.

IN 1978, when the advertising agency for Chrysler began planning the campaign for the new K cars, it tested the concept that Chrysler had borrowed some of its best ideas from abroad. People involved in the test were incensed. What's wrong with America? they wanted to know. Can't American technology build a good car?

The U.S. automobile industry is in the fight of its life, battling the worst slump in its history, trying to stem the invasion of Japanese imports, and struggling to restore faith in its technological leadership. Detroit has given television—that extraordinary salesman—one of its biggest assignments ever: not only to convince a skeptical consumer to buy American cars, but to proclaim American manufacturers capable of building cars worth buying—smaller, cheaper, fuel-efficient cars that can get from here to there without falling apart.

The failing Chrysler Corporation alone spent approximately \$75 million—three-fourths of its 1980 advertising budget—on television. In a single January evening, Chrysler spent \$2 million on NBC, reaching 100 million viewers with each of its spots in the Super Bowl telecast. “With a vehicle like the Super Bowl,” commented Kenyon & Eckhardt Advertising’s Lou Maloof, “we can change people’s perceptions overnight.”

No one is foolish enough to believe that one season of television commercials can undo fifty years of planned obsolescence and a pricing system that equated bigger with better; but it was advertising that taught us to place a heavy emotional investment in our cars, to flaunt them as egotistical statements of sex and status. The cars and the ads were a perfect expression of the national image—fast, aggressive, loaded with extra



power. Then the country changed. Function replaced fantasy, but American car advertising continued to use the old clichéd approaches.

Foreign cars had always stressed function, which was why they were able to carve a niche in the American market. When Volvo ceased being an inexpensive car, it offered in exchange for higher prices a quality car with longevity—staying power. One Volvo ad showed a man standing by the side of the road looking at metal pieces that had fallen off passing cars. “The roads of America are strewn with broken promises,” he said. A new Volkswagen ad focuses on bread-and-butter issues. A woman with a red VW station wagon and a load of kids says, “It costs next to nothing to run.” “What are you buying with all the money you save?” the voice-over asks. “Food,” she says, hefting a bag of groceries.

Function and economy have been the last things on Detroit’s mind. As the Arabs became virtually the only people left in the world with enough gasoline to fill Detroit’s tanks, the industry has continued to produce expensive gas guzzlers. Part of Chrysler’s trouble has been

(and still is) that its very corporate name conjures up an image of a big car. As late as 1979, six years after OPEC first struck, American cars were averaging less than fifteen miles per gallon. Only corporate thickheadedness could have ignored such a loud warning signal as the rise in imports from a 5 percent market share in the early sixties to 26.7 percent today, with 20 percent of the increase occurring in the last two years alone. Even now, a part of the industry seems to think that accelerating import sales are just a passing fad, that Americans will tire of scrunching themselves into little Japanese boxes (no matter how well made) and return to the more spacious accommoda-

tions of yore. Says Joe Cappy, Lincoln/Mercury general marketing manager, "In the late 1980s, there'll probably be a mileage variation of six miles per gallon among all cars. Big cars will be smaller—there won't be much difference. People will go back to buying a car for pleasure." Cadillac thinks in terms of "justifying." "In order to take my family to church on Sunday, I need two Hondas or one Cadillac," says Frank Cadicamo, Cadillac advertising manager.

"It is unthinkable," wrote a corporate consultant in a business magazine, "that an entire industry could be ill-managed for so long." Alas, it is all too thinkable. Asked why it took so long for Detroit to notice the disaster, a Ford executive said, "I guess we weren't very smart." Detroit, like Washington, is in disarray, floundering around without a coherent strategy. The industry lacks the flexibility necessary to shift gears easily in a crisis. It is afflicted with the "NIH" syndrome—"not invented here." If Detroit didn't invent it, it can't be much good. Hidebound and insular, the industry is inextricably locked into an inefficient corporate system. In 1974, Ford's sales were bolstered by two popular small cars—the Mustang and the Pinto—so Ford didn't think it had to do anything else. But the Mustang became outdated, and the Pinto developed an unfortunate habit of exploding when hit from the rear. In 1975,

Lee Iacocca (then at Ford) tried to persuade Henry Ford II to build small front-wheel-drive cars to sell in 1979. Iacocca's timing was off. Henry's personal life was a shambles (marital and other problems), and he needed money. In the car industry, the profit is in big cars. The company added nothing new to the 1980 lineup. General Motors, the sleeping giant, did not bestir itself until 1977, when it finally produced smaller Chevrolets and Cadillacs.

The advertising, scrutinized and flattened by layers of bureaucracy before approval, reflects the industry's problems. Dismally unimaginative, most commercials are created by Detroit agencies (or branches of New York ones) that have been doing them for decades; they might as well be in-house agencies. For forty years, Detroit's ideal commercial has been "The Queen's Portrait" (Detroit has always thought its cars were gorgeous)—a car photographed on a pedestal, gleaming like a jewel, with sexy women draped over it, and a front seat that seemed to extend for miles. The cars didn't do anything, they just sat. Many of the 1981 Buick, Oldsmobile, and Pontiac commercials carry on this tradition. A Buick sits on the grass while Billie Jean King raves about its color. An Oldsmobile ad shows an attractive blond woman walking along the street toward her car, which is parked, shining, at the curb. "Wait till you see my new car!" she exclaims. When asked about the ad the agency man said, "Isn't she a great-looking woman?"

"They're into metal," says Lear Levin, an independent director of commercials. "They want the car seen from certain

angles with reflections in windows." Another director says, "When you meet with the client, you spend two hours on the height of the camera to show the car's beauty to the best advantage. They want you to raise it a half-inch, drop it a half-inch. They spend hours talking about whether they should mention the mirrors."

The Detroit School of Advertising tends to feature happy Norman Rockwell families gamboling in suburban heaven. There is a certain simplicity, a child-like quality about them. The copy line for the Chevette, which is shown being shot out of a cannon-like arrangement, says, "one tough son of a gun." A Buick Riviera commercial, not wildly exciting to begin with

but containing some small degree of wit, ended its trip up the hierarchy with all the juice squeezed out of it. The car was positioned as "the ultimate in luxury and sophistication." In its original version, it was compared to other "ultimates": If the Riviera is just another car, then the World Series is just another ball game, *Jaws* just another fish story, and Mona Lisa's just another smile. The fish and the smile were replaced by the Golden Gate Bridge and the Fourth of July. "The head of Buick in Detroit didn't feel comfortable with it the other way," the agency man explained.

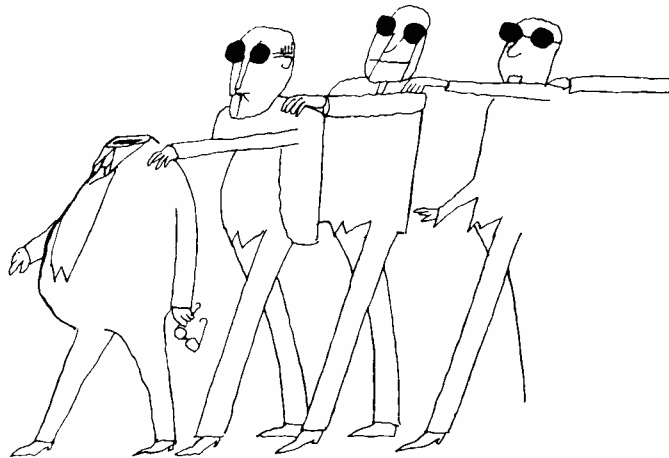
Although 65 percent of car buyers choose their cars for pragmatic reasons—economy, dependability, durability—

Detroit is still trying to appeal to our emotions. This year's emotion is patriotism. It comes in both hard- and soft-sell versions, sometimes incidental to other themes. The Lincoln Town Car, speeding swiftly through the night, "is not the latest miracle from Europe." A barely glimpsed Chevrolet license plate says "USA," and a small, almost unnoticeable medallion in red, white, and blue proclaims the car to be "America's first choice." American Motors cars, which are all about durability and galvanized steel, are also "The Tough Americans."

But it was left to Lee Iacocca, Chrysler's board chairman, to pull out all the stops. "For too long America has been relying on imports," he says on camera, "Yankee ingenuity is doing it again . . . If everyone in America drove a K car, we wouldn't have to import a single drop of OPEC oil." The basic Dodge Aries K commercial features Yankee Doodle music and a celebrity—Angie Dickinson, Gregory Peck, George Kennedy, or Frank Sinatra—reciting, "America is not going to be pushed around anymore." The basic Plymouth Reliant commercial ends violently, with a fist ramming into a pump.

Chrysler's commercials are aggressive, active, fast-moving—all America is supposed to be. Its agency, Kenyon & Eckhardt (operating out of New York), chose the theme to aim at the national frustration, the anger at OPEC, inflation, and the sense of waning imperial might. The closest thing to a new strategy for selling cars, this campaign is an unabashed return to the style of the fifties. The ads hark back to those glorious days when we could just send in the Marines and have done

'It is unthinkable,' a corporate consultant wrote, 'that an entire industry could be ill-managed for so long.'



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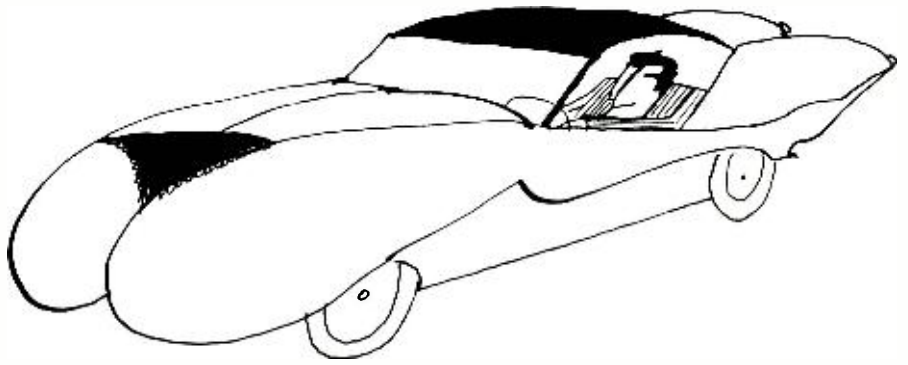
with it. The message could not be clearer: Chrysler is leading the way to making America great again, and if you buy a K car, you too can participate in this noble endeavor.

Advertising executives disagree about the use of patriotism as a motif. Robert Gillooly, Ford Division advertising manager, insists, "Our research said that if we can provide Americans with the mileage and quality, they would rather buy U.S. The kiss of death is to base sales totally on patriotic appeal. People don't want to buy a car they don't want. You can't just wrap yourself in the flag." Says Joe Cappy of Lincoln/Mercury, "There's more to say than that. You don't have to hit them between the eyes. It's a quality thing. It's not our image."

Pontiac ran a series of comparative commercials, in which a Japanese, a German, and a Swede are made to look like fools trying to comprehend how Pontiac managed to beat out their Datsun, Volkswagen, and Volvo in price, mileage, and styling. "How does Pontiac do it?" they all ask, bewildered. "Know-how," a chorus of voices informs them. A lot of Americans apparently had the same comprehension problem. The Chevrolet people, who were thinking of doing a similar comparison ad, did studies that proved people's skepticism of the Pontiac commercials. "There were problems of credibility," said Russ Chick, Chevrolet advertising manager. "People thought foreign cars were better."

Looking for a new theme, Ford read the national psyche as Chrysler had, but played on it in a different way. In 1979, Ford ran a quiet little commercial, reminiscent of an older Volvo commercial, about how the roads in Ireland were long and bumpy and Ford was Number One there. "It was surprising to some people that we were the best sellers in Ireland and England," said Robert Gillooly. With the \$7 million network launch of the Escort in 1980, Ford lifted itself out of the American quagmire and transformed itself into a "World Car" company. The company took two negatives—the fact that Americans couldn't seem to build a decent car, and the fact that Americans were out of work while parts of U.S. cars were being manufactured abroad—and turned them into a positive: internationalism, imperialism, a higher form of patriotism. The Ford logo tag is a globe. Held in the paws of the Lynx (another of the new World Cars), America owns the world.

The Escort commercial shows a virtual United Nations of engineers in a conference room. Ford has indeed pulled to-



gether these resources; the same German and Japanese engineers who built such superior imports are now advising Ford. The car is covered with a patchwork cloth worked in the flags of many nations. The voice-over says, "built in America to take on the world," as the car drives through unspeakable road conditions. Said Bob Gillooly, "The picture of international brains cooking up something together takes away from the low price of the Escort. If you come out with a low price, there's a negative impact on the perception of quality."

The size/price/status/quality equation is still haunting Detroit, as it turns itself inside out to convince us that we can have it all, we can drive a small car and still be a big wheel. Small cars acquire class by being parked in front of large houses, frequently with circular driveways. Cars are smaller, but somehow bigger; the new cliché, replacing "longer, lower, wider," is "smaller in size, yet more spacious than ever before." A Buick Skylark and Electra commercial, called "Vice Versa," teams 6'7" Los Angeles Lakers star Magic Johnson with jockey Willie Shoemaker: "They made their efficient smaller cars luxurious ... and their luxurious larger cars efficient."

DETROIT STILL HAS DIFFICULTY admitting that the quality of its cars does not measure up to that of the imports. When you talk to GM advertising people, they sound like salesmen. "Citation is built around the fact that this is a proven car; it has a good track with performance," said Russ Chick of Chevrolet. There is also a sense that the unmentionable re-calls are partly the government's fault, that Detroit has never had a chance to explain its side of the story. The sloppy fit and finish that have been Detroit's hallmark are addressed obliquely in its ads, which feature a good deal of door slamming for the satisfying *clunk* that tells you the car has been welded to-

gether properly. Hands fiddle with upholstery to assure a smooth, perfect seam. "Every seat is hand-fitted" in the Ford Granada, a car "with a commitment to quality" that has been examined by "thirty-eight inspectors."

Technology, once an implicit virtue, is the new symbol for both status and quality. Horsepower has been replaced by computer-power. GM advertises a "Computer Command Control" system that keeps the emission from wasting gasoline or polluting the air. The advanced-technology commercial is usually filled with flashy space images—the mental detritus of *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*—which serve several purposes: Electronic glitz tells the world that the company has the know-how, that it can compete with the best; it allows ordinary people to count themselves among the sophisticated.

Pure status has gone underground, but Detroit does not really believe Americans will renounce it for the drab virtues of economy. "We don't think our buyers live by mileage alone," says Russ Chick, speaking of the Malibu, one of Chevrolet's mid-sized models. Cadillac, whose new slogan is "Trust Cadillac to Lead the Way," advertises a newly efficient engine so that its owners won't feel like social outcasts. The engine shifts from eight to six to four cylinders according to the driver's needs and inclinations. You can accelerate to the floor in the eight-cylinder mode and get ten miles per gallon, or drive carefully on four cylinders and get twenty-eight. If you don't get good mileage it's your fault.

A few of the new commercials show signs that Detroit is waking up to the eighties. Faced with the same image problem as Chrysler—cars that were classy gas hogs—the Lincoln/Mercury people took a new tack. Having lost Kenyon & Eckhardt when Lee Iacocca persuaded the agency to take the Chrysler account, Lincoln/Mercury took its busi-

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The size/price/status/quality equation is still haunting Detroit, as it turns itself inside out to convince us that we can have it all, we can drive a small car and still be a big wheel.

ness to Young & Rubicam (Y&R), giving it the freedom to try unconventional approaches. The agency was not required to report back every new squiggle on the drawing board, and it used creative people who were not specialists in the automotive field to work on the Lynx and Cougar ads.

Y&R decided that the K cars' red-white-and-blue jingoism was too low-class for its cars. There was no point in saying the cars were "all new," built from scratch, because in theory every new model car is assumed to be all new. In fact, the creative people decided, maybe it was better not to say very much at all. The agency went \$400,000 over budget saying very little (Lynx and Cougar spent almost \$8 million on their network launch in October and November), but the new Lynx commercials are the most inventive and arresting on the screen. They are almost entirely visual and so elegant that you know the car must be, too.

The scene is a surrealistic moonscape. Eerie music plays, and a giant white ball appears off center, as mysterious as the slab in *2001*. The ball disappears. The car appears and disappears. A lynx appears with the car. There are quick shots of the car's interior. The cat prowls around the car. The ball returns and rolls over to reveal the mileage, and the cat leaps on top of it. The ball turns into a globe, the Ford logo tag. The voiceover is calm, slow, hypnotic: "Starting today, the world belongs to an American car. Starting today, the world belongs to Lynx."

Humor, previously confined to the iconoclastic import ads, has also made an appearance in Detroit. Detroit always took itself much too seriously to laugh at anything having to do with cars. But Ford is now testing a series of commercials that compare the usefulness of the Fairmont (a family car) with that of three very fancy sports cars—a Maserati, Ferrari, and Lamborghini. One of the ads is an offscreen quarrel between Darling and Snookums over who is going to drive the Fairmont. Darling needs it for his clients, and Snookums needs it for the children.

Snookums: You bought the Ferrari, you drive it.

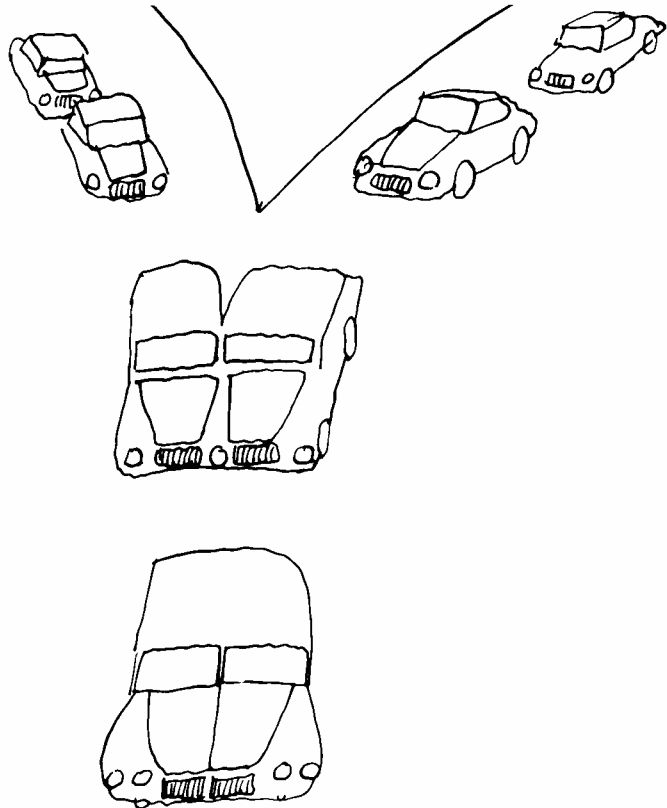
Darling: I can't take four people in a two-seater.

Snookums: Should I tie the kids to the fender?

Darling: The kids can take the bus.

Snookums: Your clients can take the bus.

In another, a casually-dressed young man says, "Just look at my Lamborghini



... just look. I didn't pay 100,000 smackers to get your fingerprints all over it," and drives off in the Fairmont.

Ford does not now plan to air the commercials. Says Bob Gillooly, "There's a possibility that some people would connect the Fairmont to the Ferrari and conclude that it's not their kind of car. There's a general feeling that this is a strange comparison."

These few commercials are the only signals from Detroit that a fresh approach to ads might boost sagging sales. Chrysler's patriotism theme paid off for one month, October—the month most of the commercials were aired. For thirty-one days the company was in the black before it collapsed again into near-bankruptcy. But the response to Ford's international-theme Lynx ads has been extraordinary: "95 percent of the people we polled said the ad made a convincing case and played back the technical features; 75 percent remembered the numbers. This is unheard of. No one usually remembers," says Ford's Joe Cappy. Whether these figures will be translated into sales remains to be seen.

There are other factors to consider. Detroit maintains that its biggest worry is the economy, the high interest rates, and the high price of cars—"sticker shock," Detroit calls it, when people go out to buy a car and discover that it costs \$4,000 to \$5,000 more than it did a few

years ago. Meanwhile, the imports are moving further into Detroit's psychic territory, stirring old fantasies: Having made their mark by playing up economy, foreign cars are now talking sex and luxury, adding gadgets and gimmicks in the old Detroit manner. A new VW commercial shows three sexy women in evening gowns draped over a shiny black Rabbit, stroking and caressing the car as it sits on a dais. It gleams like a jewel. The Japanese are selling macho sex in the Datsun 280 SX—a sports car "so luxurious, there are virtually no options," a line that is pure Detroit. The Japanese have also started to manufacture a recorded voice that reminds you to turn off your headlights, a gadget worthy of Detroit at the height of its fish-tail phase. The motivation is economic, to justify higher prices. But effectively, Detroit is "changing places" with the imports. The foreign cars are trying to supply the comfort Detroit has always prided itself on, just at the moment Detroit is having to trade down to economy. Ford's Cappy may have been right in saying that most cars will be very similar in the late eighties, but Detroit will have to get through the next few years first and find new ways to present its case. If the new cars really are such jewels, it will take time for people to find out and decide whether there will be a Ford in their future or whether Volkswagen will do it again.

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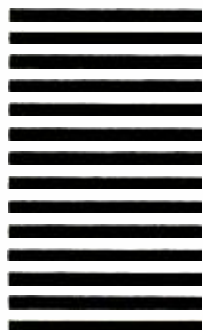


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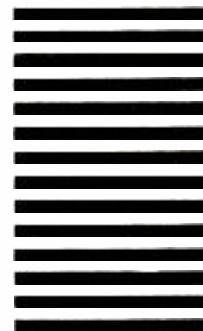


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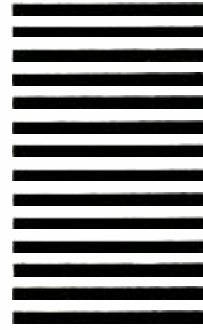


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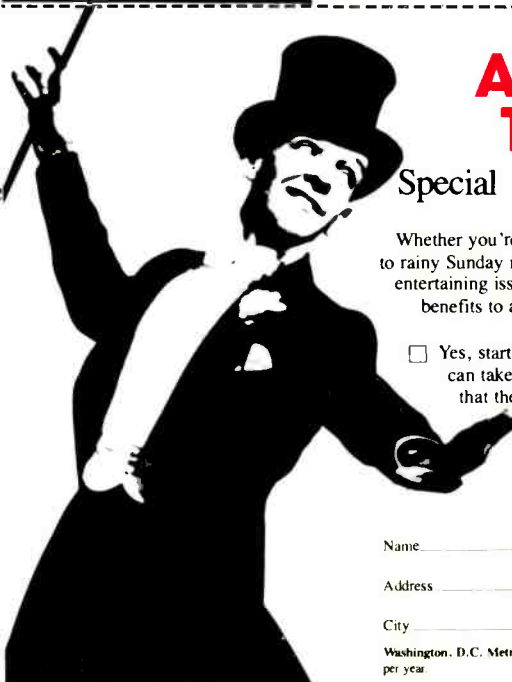
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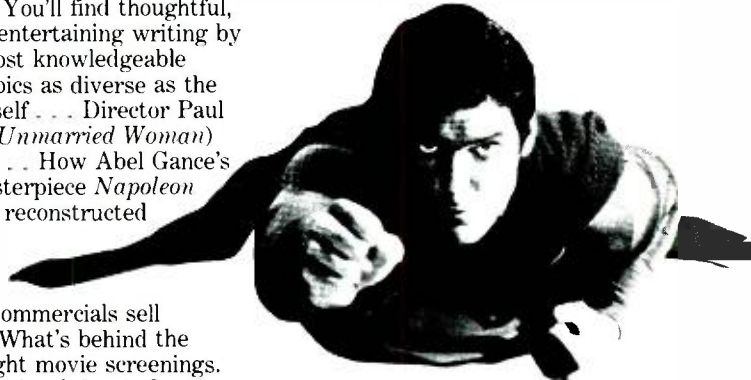
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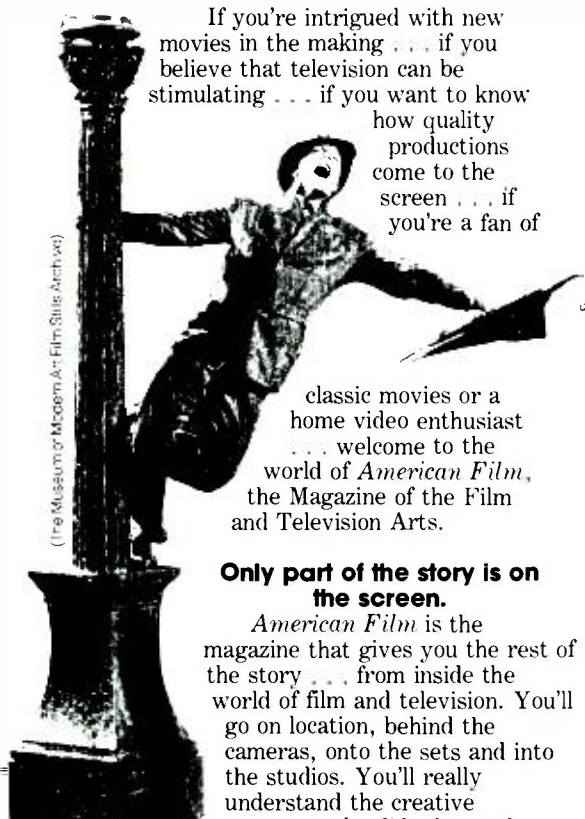
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(The Museum of Modern Art—Film Still Archive)



TOP LEFT: How do directors overcome technical difficulties like photographing a dancer Singin' in the Rain? LEFT: What are today's films saying about the changing rules of love, marriage, fidelity, friendship? TOP RIGHT: Is merchandising of spinoffs more important to commercial success than the film itself?

(Columbia Pictures)



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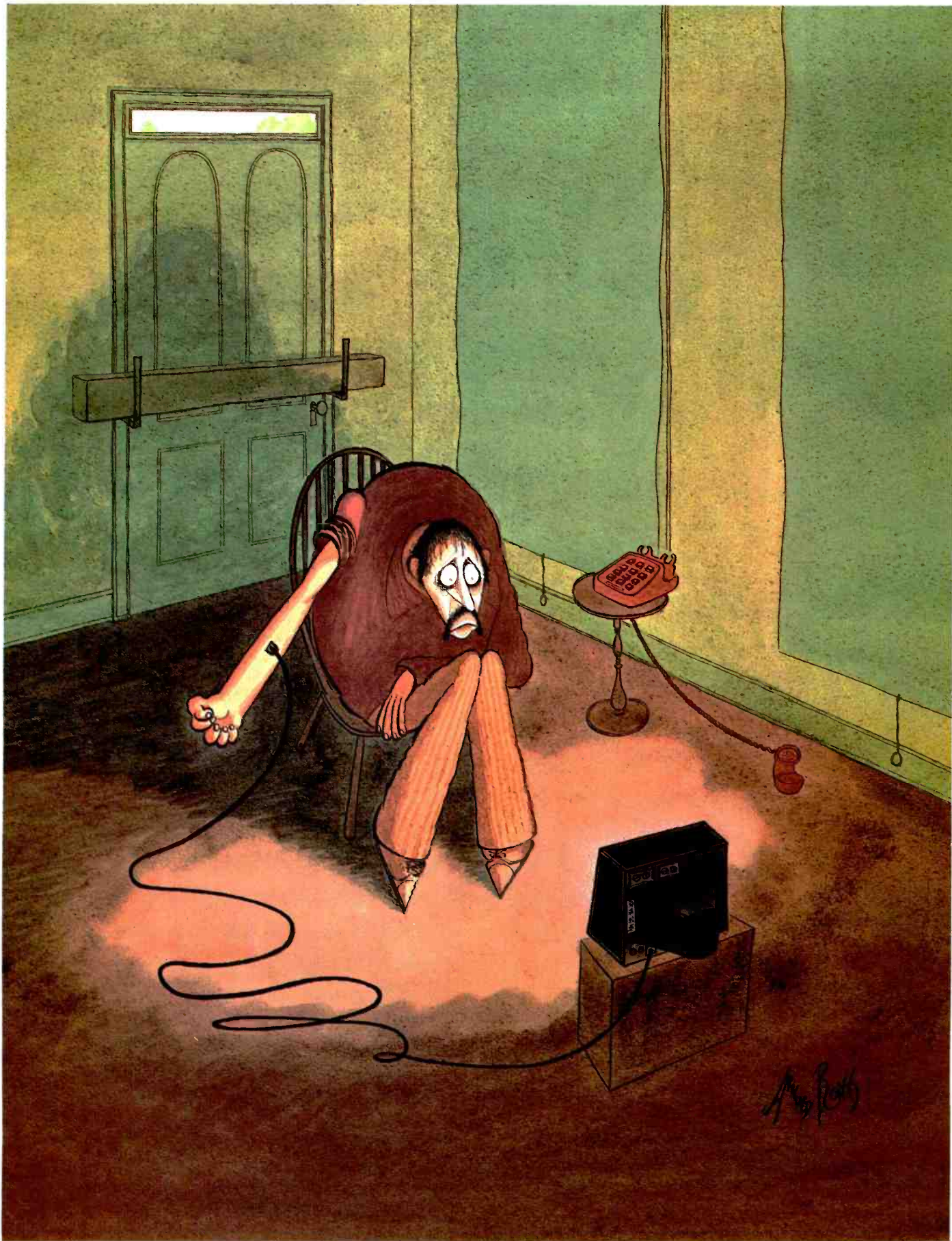
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5216

by William H. Pritchard

William H. Pritchard teaches English at Amherst College, and is author of The Lives of the Modern Poets.



CHANNELS 2 APRIL/MAY

One Man's Soap

One Amherst don is happily hooked on a venerable daytime soap opera. He tells here what he gains from it and how it keeps him from faculty meetings, scholarly works, and healthful jogging.

FOUR YEARS AGO I suffered what I feared would be an irreparable loss; not of the tragic sort — the death of a loved one or the grievous ending to some human relationship — but of a sort curiously painful nonetheless. *Somerset*, a soap opera I had become deeply devoted to, ended its run; and on December 31, 1976 — in a shocking half-hour of reconciliations, tying up loose ends (not all of them got tied up), and generally empty affirmations — the show disappeared forever. It would have been a sensible time for me to form a New Year's resolution and decide to spend that half-hour after lunch engaged in some admirable pursuit like reading through Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or buying a pair of running shoes, some funny clothes, and preparing to run a bit up and down my local Northampton Road. Oddly enough these alternatives never entered my head. After a few days of mourning, and of surly midday dissatisfactions, I sat down for a serious session with *TV Guide* by way of mapping out a strategy for latching onto a new Soap.

Although for the leisured housewife or lazy college student, many Soap-viewing possibilities exist, the rigidity of my own habits precluded much freedom in choosing. The Soap had to occur in the 12:30-1:30 time period and had to be of the half-hour variety — a whole hour of watching takes too large a chunk out of the day in which books have to be read. For a time I tried *Lovers and Friends*, a charmless, short-lived replacement for *Somerset*; then I watched a bit of *The Young and the Restless*, but found it filled with too many beautiful young people talking to excess about their various "hangups" and how so-and-so had "copped out" or been "hassled" in some manner or other, usually sexual. Clearly *The Young and the Restless* would not do for a man of settled habits, even though it dealt with controversial matters like birth control pills. *Ryan's Hope* had been highly praised for its vigorous characterizations and on-site photography, but it was an Irish soap, filled with wonderful lovable Irish characters — not the sort of thing for a Welshman of morose leanings.

That left *Search for Tomorrow*, a half-hour show which I was delighted to find out had premiered in 1951, thus making it, along with *Love of Life* (since deceased), the most venerable of all the Soaps. By that spring I had settled into becoming a *Search*-watcher, and now, four years later, consider myself an authoritative commentator on the whole affair. Let me therefore tell you a bit about the characters and their situations, and then try to explain how someone in his right mind (my current illusion about myself) could become enthralled with the whole operation for years on end.

To begin with, there is the amorphous, elusive title. *Somerset* was the straightforward name of a small town in Michigan where things took place, but *Search for Tomorrow*? Whose search, and just how "for tomorrow"? Clearly an old-fashioned radio soap opera title, like *Life Can Be Beautiful* or *The Guiding Light* (the latter now on television), meant to evoke roman-

tic yearnings and a vaguely uplifted sense that there's Something More To It All than there appears to be day by day. It would have been too simple, I guess, to title the show *Henderson*, the imaginary town where its action takes place. Henderson is out there somewhere in the Midwest, southern Illinois maybe. There are oil fields to the south, and people often have to fly down to New Orleans, home of the powerful Sentell family, a number of whose members have moved to Henderson for obvious reasons of plot.

Henderson has, of course, a hospital, in fact two hospitals (one on the "other side of town"), into which various members of the cast are taken or wheeled for attention to their assorted brands of blindness, leukemia, slight skull fractures, or brain tumors pressing on the optic nerve causing major headaches. They will be cared for there, in Henderson Hospital, by Dr. Bob Rogers, head of it all, good friends with most of the cast (he's seen 'em come and go), and filled with the richest bedside manner.

When people are not in the hospital they tend to gather at the Hartford House or Inn, run by the two oldest members — from point of service — of the *Search* cast, Joanne (Jo) Tourneur (for years Jo Vincent, but recently married yet once more) and "Stu" Bergmann. Jo (played by Mary Stuart, who has been with the show since its inception and is thus accorded star status) is, quite simply, the finest person in the world. Not an ounce of pretentiousness, or greed, or envy, or lust (that I can detect) or pettiness or rancor or any other of the deadly and not-so-deadly sins stains this lady's character. A fount of homely wisdom with a wonderful temperament, Jo has lived all her life in Henderson; indeed she behaved in New Orleans, when she visited there recently, as if it were as morally remote as Tangier. "Stu," co-owner of the inn and married to Ellie — a woman whose simplicity makes Jo look sophisticated — is, as he would like to say about himself and often does, a man of relatively few words and basic human decency. He will take a drink, but only now and then, and if he has more than one becomes wholly confused and infantile, then winds up being put to bed by Ellie and catching a bad cold as a result of his folly.

Though Stu is simple, he knows what he likes (and it's not Art). Or rather what he doesn't like. He doesn't like charming, verbally articulate men who attempt and succeed in winning the affections of (1) Jo, or (2) his daughter, Janet Collins, who is especially prone to disastrous affairs of the heart. He would be equally enraged if one of these men tried to cotton up to (3) Janet's daughter, Liza, or (4) Ellie. Fortunately for Stu, Liza is completely wrapped up in her dashing handsome, extraordinarily rich and powerful husband, Travis Tourneur ("Rusty") Sentell, and their recently adopted baby. While nobody has ever been seen making a play for Ellie.

Anyone who watches *Search* for a while becomes aware of certain patterns, which by their repetition provide an odd satisfaction. Let me run through a few of these, by subject:

In the Soap, as in life, trouble always lies ahead, the difference being that the hooked viewer feeds on this trouble and finds it exhilarating.

Books. Nobody is ever caught dead reading a book, unless he or she (most probably she) is in a blue funk about her love life. If she is interrupted while reading a book (and it will never be named, just referred to as "a book," not the *Aeneid* or *Shōgun*), she will gratefully put it down and launch into an explanation, to the interruptor, of "what's wrong." More likely she will be leafing through a magazine in the most idle manner, just looking to begin the next conversation about Problems. (Of course, it would be hard to make an exciting scene out of someone reading the *Aeneid*, or even *Shōgun*.) At times (at least on *Search*) poetry is quoted, usually Shakespeare, often inaccurately or with lines left out so as to make it more "understandable." Shakespeare by the way—especially *Romeo and Juliet*—is Wonderful, even though no sane person would be found reading him.

Food. People are often seen dining, either at the Hartford House or at Ernesto's (one of those terrific little Italian restaurants everybody loves), but there is never a visible piece of food disappearing into anyone's chops. Usually people toy with their food ("You're hardly eating anything"), find that they're "not hungry," and launch once more into talk about Problems. Women tend to eat something like a spinach salad for lunch, never (say) corned beef and cabbage or Yankee Pot Roast (perhaps unavailable in Henderson). They are tempted by the dessert, but abstain because of the calorie count. Men are inclined to eat more meat.

Drink. Stephanie Wyatt, the closest thing to a "bad" woman on the Soap, is allowed to have a martini, which she does quite often. Other women, if they indulge at all, will invariably have a glass of white wine (what, by the way, is wrong with red wine?) but never seem to drink it. Whiskey in private houses is always there in a decanter; never is a bottle visible. Younger, poorer types have been known to have a beer. Everybody drinks coffee, endlessly, all the time, all characters evidently possessing cast-iron stomachs. Nobody asks for Sanka instead. Diet soda is a possibility; also champagne on festive occasions.

Sex. Perhaps I should have put this earlier, but there is relatively little sex on *Search*, though heterosexual relationships are the staple of the show (no homosexuals that I've noticed). Lovemaking is highly romanticized, bodies and faces blur and swirl so you can't make out what's going on and of course nothing really is. "Haunting" melodies fill the air. There is occasionally some intense kiss-

ing that is not much fun to watch. Some characters are allowed dream-fantasies in which they meet their partner all dressed up in beautiful clothes, at some fancy occasion. The heroic male really does Sweep the Heroine Off Her Feet, something that is often difficult to accomplish in real life (I speak from personal experience). In very serious scenes preparatory to lovemaking, we get a glimpse of the male's naked torso. This must be fairly well covered with hair, at least it seems to be *de rigueur* for a job on *Search*. There is little extra-marital sex—not much at all in the way of "illicit" goings-on. We must remember that this show has been running for thirty years and has its roots in the sensible pieties of the fifties. Sometimes the dialogue becomes forcefully explicit, as when Stephanie, speaking of the perils her eighteen-year-old daughter Wendy is exposed to, opines that young people of that age like to get to know each other well—"and I *do* mean in bed," she adds, with one of her fine wisdom-of-experience facial expressions. Or there was the following exchange just the other day, when lawyer Kathy Phillips tried to compliment Garth the Artist (he is a *very* difficult, unconventional fellow) on his dealings with her young son, Doug. Kathy: "You're very good with little boys." Garth: "I'm not so bad with big girls either." You see the force of that innuendo.

Religion. Almost everybody believes in Something, but nobody has any words for it. People don't go to church except for the occasional funeral or wedding. Catholic, Protestant, Jew—it's all the same, presumably.

Race. There is an occasional black, often an assistant lieutenant in the police department who works for a slower-witted white man (the black is invariably clever). But nonwhites appear only intermittently and are never given quite enough to do.

Children. Invariably blond-headed, incredibly cute, good at putting their arms around their (divorced) mother and saying how much they love her, which brings tears to her lonely eyes. Infants, of course, are always a good investment of time.

The Aged. Not usually visible on *Search*, though at the moment a whole series of credulous oldsters have gone to Jamaica with evil Dr. Winston Kyle to be (don't they wish) cured of their afflictions by his faith-healing.

Pot. Nobody on *Search* smokes pot, thank God.

Jogging or Running. Nobody on *Search* jogs or runs, except in pursuit of

someone. I don't quite understand the absence of this practice but don't really object to it either.

Christmas is a good time to watch *Search* because it shows off, by contrast, one's own real life Scrooge-like tendencies. "I love Christmas, I love to wrap presents," breathes Jo, a light in her eyes, many wrapped presents testifying to this enthusiasm. But we know it can't go on for long, that happiness, and indeed within minutes Martin's playing of the market has become an issue, has caused the light in Jo's eyes to be replaced by the pained, martyred forbearance she is so good at expressing. In the midst of Christmas joy, trouble lies ahead.

But of course in the Soap, as in life, trouble always lies ahead, the difference being that the hooked viewer feeds on this trouble and finds it exhilarating, both in anticipation and in the event. I know someone who avoids depressing movies because she says there's enough sadness in life. The viewer of a Soap would like to avoid, or postpone considering until evening, the sadness and trouble lying about him in the world outside, and ahead in his own life—so he cultivates its daily occurrence on the television screen. At least my life is not, for the moment, as hopeless as *that* one, says he. At least (looking at despondent Lee Sentell, staring gloomily at a beautifully decorated Christmas tree) *my* fiancée does not have a brain tumor and has not been spirited away by Dr. Kyle to Jamaica, there to be subject to his "incredible power over women, *in every way*" (as Lee has been informed). But then, a paper Santa Claus hung on the tree miraculously turns into the fiancée, Sunny Adamson, who says to her Lee, "Hello there, Gloomy-Face," and proceeds to remove her Santa Claus cap and cloak! They embrace fiercely, until the vision fades.

From the tone of this report it may seem to you that my interest in *Search* consists wholly in picking apart its absurdities, unrealities, and generally half-baked attitudes, which I as a superior person don't share. I think you would, however, be wrong. How superior can one be toward an event that provides one daily sustenance? On the other hand, there has of late been a compensatory inflation in the value of Soaps—claims made that here is where the finest acting anywhere is to be found, or where certain social, cultural, medical facts are at least recognized. Though the acting is good enough for my tastes, and though I suppose you could say that an issue (like Alternatives to Surgery) is at least raised, I can't believe that therein lies the Soap's

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real power to compel. Its compellingness has more to do with the construction of a world — not a world of complex thought or psychological penetration, but a world nonetheless — full of names, faces, voices, gestures, and attitudes that impress themselves on our ears and eyes and that don't disappear after a half-hour or hour as they do on evening television. Or rather, we *know* that they will be back tomorrow, certainly the next day; that five days a week, give or take an occasional national holiday (or Presidential Inauguration, damn it) they will be there for us on CBS.

It is the ongoingness of *Search*, or of any Soap, that is the key to its power and that a person untouched by this power can never understand. How many times have I heard someone say authoritatively about a Soap that "nothing ever happens in them. I watched one for a while, missed three weeks of it, turned it back on and they were still talking about the same things" — as if that settled it for the Soap. I may ask in return, "What do you want to happen on the shows you watch?" Try *Vegas* or *Starsky and Hutch* if you like a snappy little incident begun, muddled, and ended over the course of an hour. Something happens in our life every day; at least we grow older, finish one thing, begin another, lose this and gain that. But *Search*, though certain characters come and eventually go, remains essentially the same. Time stretches out endlessly, it seems, for the latest complication is clearly going to take months until it begins, even slightly, to unravel. And as it just goes along, nothing really happening, one suddenly finds oneself pleased or moved by the merest, smallest thing — a gesture, a twist of the voice, a way of saying something. (David Sutton, an admirable character who I fear may be about to leave the show, has a way of saying "Thank you," sincerely, that makes me feel life is worth living.) You never quite know at what moment something strangely evocative may occur, but you can only respond to these moments if you've sat around many months or years and watched programs that evoke nothing.

A FEW FINAL REMARKS: The most painful moment for any Soap watcher is when a visitor or guest says, "Please, go ahead and watch your program . . . what is it . . . *Reach For the Sky*? maybe I'll watch it with you." In any event, total silence must be enforced, else you may be confronted with questions like "Who is she?" or "What is that?," which reduce the hardened viewer to stuttering confusion and despair. How can this outsider ever begin to understand what is so deep within your bones? Also, if you are going

to watch *Search* you must plan to be unavailable for any business or friendly lunches, brown-bag, intimate, or otherwise. When colleagues (I am a teacher) suggest that our department might meet next Tuesday at noon or 12:30, I find myself devising various stratagems by which to disentangle myself — but how many dental appointments can one legitimately claim to have? Conferences with students must be ended briskly with the phrase, mumbled in some haste, "I have an appointment with . . ." (the rest left indistinct). Once I quitted a friend under the pretense of having to see a person named Somerset. I suppose he could as well have been named *Search*. And since I dislike taking the phone off the hook, there is always the chance that it will ring (who could be calling at this hour?), in which case the thing to do is to say quite urgently and intensely, "Can I call you back in fifteen, (twenty, ten) minutes?" then rush back into the inside world.

There are some lines from a poem by David Slavitt that say as well as anything I know what is involved in watching a Soap. Mr. Slavitt's favorite appears to be *All My Children*, but the name hardly matters, as he lays out the essence of them all:

*They wade through sorrows
scriptwriters devise
in kitchens, hospital rooms, divorce
courts, jails
or cemeteries, and nearly
everyone tries
to do the right thing. And
everyone fails.*

Slavitt goes on to note the usually "desperate" mood of these characters whose "happiness is only a setup for woe," then concludes with the following confession:

*Stupid, I used to think, and partly
still
do, deploring the style, the
mawkishness.
And yet, I watch. I cannot get my
fill
of lives as dumb as mine: Pine
Valley's mess
is comforting. I need not wish
them ill.
I watch, and I delight in, their
distress.*

That "delight" may not be the Eternal Delight that William Blake once identified with Energy, but in a world of time, not Eternity, it does pretty well.

—E.N.D.

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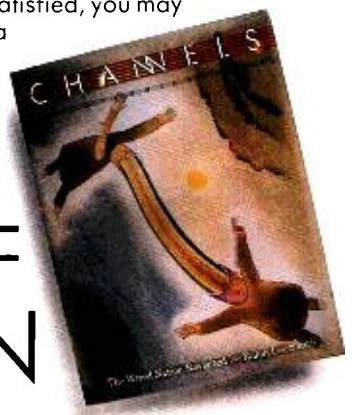
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The Wired Nation

(Continued from Page 37)

discussion of local issues; contact with local or regional political leaders; tapping local talent; the use of local resources in education, technology, sports, and the expression of all kinds of local interests.

Cable is capable of contributing much toward the realization of both these objectives, but the size and value of its contribution depends on how some urgent questions will be dealt with. Who will run these powerful communications systems, who will supervise, and for whose benefit? Who will have access rights to cable, for what purposes and for the transmission of what kinds of material? Who will be turned away?

WHEN I WROTE *The Wired Nation* in 1970, I urged Congress to designate cable a common carrier, like the telephone system, satellite systems, and multipoint distribution service. Under this kind of regulation, owners of cable systems would forego all right to program them. Instead, they would lease channel time to all those who want to present programs, and the leasing would be done on a non-discriminatory basis at standard posted rates. Cable would be available on the same first-come, first-served basis as the telephone. The cable system's owner would have no right to refuse any law-abiding customer. Everyone would have the right to be a cable broadcaster.

My proposal aroused a great deal of interest but produced no action. Now it may be too late to institute such a policy. In many large cities, cable franchises have already been granted with the understanding that the operator will choose the program networks and pay-television services the system will provide and that the operator will share in the proceeds from these services. Since the economic plan of these systems has been worked out on that basis, to drastically change the rules now would create chaos. Yet it is alarming that after all these years there still exists no mandate or structure to help determine a standard for access rights to cable.

All that had served as a structure were rules adopted by the FCC in 1972 requiring all new cable systems in urban centers to set aside one channel each for educational, governmental, and public use at no charge. Also required was a "leased access" channel on which the operator could sell time segments. But these rules were overturned by the federal courts in 1978 on the ground that no adequate basis for them existed in the Communications Act of 1934. The decision abrogated the federal government's right to require

either commercial or noncommercial access to cable under existing law.

This leaves the matter up to Congress, but tides running in the national legislature appear to favor less, rather than more, government power to mandate access. A bill (S. 2827) introduced in the Senate in June 1980 would have given the cable operator control over all video services on his systems, thereby prohibiting municipalities from requiring access to cable systems in their franchises. The

move was headed off, not because the Senate was unfriendly to the idea but because the National League of Cities filed a strong protest against any diminution of municipal franchising powers.

Ownership patterns pose another crucial set of questions. For example, the three major pay-television suppliers—Home Box Office, Showtime, and The Movie Channel—have ownership ties with large MSOs, the multiple-system operators of cable. All three are also af-

The Dimensions of Cable: 1981

CABLE'S PAST is traced in growth figures.

Ten years ago there were 2,639 cable systems with a total of 5.3 million subscribers. This represented cable penetration in 8.7 percent of American television households.

In 1975 the figures grew to 3,506 cable systems, 9.8 million total subscribers, and a household penetration of 14.3 percent.

Last year the cable census, according to *Television Digest Factbook*, was 4,300 cable systems, approximately 17.2 million subscribers, and a national penetration of 23 percent.

From 1970 to 1979, cable added subscribers at the rate of about 1.1 million a year. But the next year the gain was 3.1 million, signaling the accelerated growth that is expected to continue as the wiring begins in the nation's largest cities. Cable is kept from blanketing the great population centers overnight only by the complexities of the franchising process and the time needed to construct the physical plant.

Estimates vary on how fast subscriber penetration will reach 30 percent, considered by many advertising agencies the point at which cable can be called a mass medium. Some believe the milestone will be reached in the next two or three years.

Meanwhile, pay-cable services—chiefly those offering relatively new movies, uncut and without commercials—have sparked cable's growth much more effectively than advertising-supported programming. In 1975 only 150 cable systems offered a pay channel, and the total number of pay subscribers came to about 265,000. Pay cable hit the one million mark in 1977. Last year there were more than six million subscribers, this year more than eight million.

Cable's future, when growth is no longer an issue, will likely be marked in program services, channel availabil-

ity, and billions of dollars in revenues. Cable industry revenues for last year are estimated at \$1.5 billion for the basic service and an additional \$850 million for pay cable.

More than two-thirds of the existing cable systems are old installations that offer twelve or fewer channels. Last year, only 358 systems were listed by *Television Digest* as having a capacity of thirty channels or more. But as the number of large-capacity systems increases with cable's urban thrust (some new systems are being built with fifty-two channels, some with even more), the number of new networks and pay services distributed by the Satcom, Westar, and Comstar satellites will inevitably expand.

Even with relatively few large-capacity cable systems to receive them, the satellite-distributed services for cable are already substantial in number. They include the following:

Superstations—WTBS Atlanta, WOR-TV New York, WGN-TV Chicago.

The Movie Channel—Warner Amex's pay network offering movies exclusively.

Showtime—the Viacom-Teleprompter pay channel of movies and entertainment specials.

HBO (Home Box Office)—Time Inc.'s pay-cable subsidiary offering movies and entertainment specials.

Cinemax—HBO's new sister movie channel offering a different selection of films than HBO.

Home Theater Network—a pay network devoted to G- and PG-rated movies.

Rainbow—a pay cable network made up of two parts: *Bravo!* a cultural and performing arts service two nights a week, and *Escapade*, which provides R-rated movies the other three weeknights.

Nickelodeon—Warner Amex's non-commercial channel devoted to children's programming.

filiated with program production companies—The Movie Channel with Warner Bros. TV, Showtime with Viacom Enterprises, and HBO with Time-Life Films. A fourth pay network, Rainbow, was recently established by another group of MSOs.

So each of these four enterprises consists of a national supplier of pay programming and a large group of captive cable systems to which the programming can be distributed. Four of the top

five—six of the top ten—big cable companies in the United States are involved in these combines. And these same big cable companies have been capturing the lion's share of the new franchises being granted in major cities. Of the ten big-city franchises granted since the beginning of 1979, seven were conferred on companies involved in these combines, and in an eighth city, sections containing approximately half the population went to one of these companies through pur-

Alpha—ABC Video's new advertising-supported cultural service carried during the evening hours on the Nickelodeon channel when the children's service ends.

Cable News Network—Ted Turner's Atlanta-based twenty-four-hour-a-day service, supported by advertising.

USA Network—advertising-supported channel of varied programming, including Madison Square Garden sports; Thursday night baseball; *Calliope*, a children's feature, and *The English Channel*, programs from Britain.

ESPN (Entertainment & Sports Programming Network)—an all-sports channel featuring professional and collegiate events.

Black Entertainment Television Network—part-time network of black entertainment and sports.

Galavision—pay channel of varied Spanish-language programming, chiefly variety, drama, and sports.

C-SPAN—noncommercial public affairs network devoted mainly to gavel-to-gavel coverage of the House of Representatives.

PTL—evangelical religious programming from Charlotte, North Carolina.

Christian Broadcasting Network—evangelical religious programming from Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Trinity Broadcasting Network—evangelical religious programming from Santa Ana, California.

UPI Newstime—channel of continuous voice-news reports illustrated by still photos that wipe across the screen in the slow-scan process.

SPN (Satellite Programming Network)—channel emanating from Tulsa, Oklahoma carrying movies, variety programs, and celebrity talk shows.

MSN (Modern Satellite Network)—channel of advertising-supported entertainment and opinion

programs emanating from St. Petersburg, Florida.

ACSN (Appalachian Community Service Network)—educational programming, mainly college-level and continuing-education courses.

Las Vegas Entertainment Network—channel of adult live entertainment.

These will be joined before long by several new cable networks now being organized, among them:

CBS Cable—an advertiser-supported cultural service emphasizing the performing arts, scheduled to run twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

Grand Alliance—the Public Broadcasting Service's joint venture with several performing arts institutions, which will present cultural events on a pay channel.

Bluebird Network—code name for Radio City Television's pay network, dedicated to high-quality entertainment and educational programming, of programs from the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Cinemerica—channel for viewers over forty-five years of age, offering movies, game shows, and informational and instructional programs.

Private Screenings—pay service concentrating on sex movies, mostly those that fall just short of X-rated, operating weekends from midnight to 3 A.M.

Beta—joint venture of ABC Video and Hearst Corporation, a channel airing programs of particular interest to women.

Finally, there is the controversial *Premiere* network—a pay channel offering movies fresh from theatrical release—which is to be a partnership of Getty Oil and four major Hollywood film studios. Because the four studios would keep the movies from competing pay-cable networks, *Premiere*'s debut has been held up by court action. That ruling is pending appeal.

—R. L. S.

chase and acquisition, after the franchises were granted.

As cable comes to the cities, power is being consolidated by companies that are already large and already heavily involved in ownership and programming. Since the courts have ruled that the FCC has no power to require access to cable, these companies are free to do as they wish about granting access on their cable systems to new competitors in the programming field. Even where access is granted, the combine controls the marketing of all programming and services. It would not likely promote the programming of a strong competitor if that meant helping the rival make a dent in the national marketplace.

Interestingly, the arrangements now being left to take root in the cable industry bear strong resemblance to the arrangement the government outlawed for movie companies. In the film industry's earlier days, several of the major film studios also owned large theater chains. They used this marriage of exhibition and distribution to control ticket prices and to exclude competing films from their theaters. In 1948 a Justice Department consent decree put an end to such ownership arrangements, forcing the movie studios to divest themselves of theater chains. Now, through the new electronic media, the centralized control of programming, distribution, and exhibition is sneaking back into the marketplace.

Yet another issue in the coming of the wired nation, and perhaps the most enigmatic of all, is the role to be played by the telephone company. Ma Bell, the world's largest corporation—and, as a matter of interest, the world's largest common carrier—is at present not involved in cable. The FCC ruled in 1970 that telephone companies cannot build and operate cable systems in areas they provide with telephone service, except in rural situations where telephone company construction is the only feasible alternative.

However, with their tremendous switching capability (which can be applied to two-way cable communications), and with their increasing experience in laying and operating fiber-optic cable, telephone companies are obviously capable of building high capacity cable systems anywhere. Indeed, some people may consider it desirable to have one wire coming into the home—carrying both telephone and cable—rather than two discrete wires.

The real question is not technological but philosophical. Should Ma Bell be allowed to bring its massive economic power and leverage into this field? If so, under what kind of regulation and with what restrictions?

These questions are not likely to be

(Continued on Page 92)

Radio, Writings, and Ritual

Radio in the Television Age

By Peter Fornatale and Joshua E. Mills
The Overlook Press, \$12.95

TELEVISION HAS BEEN BLAMED for debasing much of our culture in the past twenty-five years. Yet no American institution would seem to have as valid a reason to blame television as radio. It was television in the forties, after all, that directly ended radio's "Golden Age" as a lucrative network industry and as the favorite source of family entertainment. Indeed, so heartless was television to its predecessor in the early days that network bosses used millions of dollars in radio profits to offset television's initial losses—just so the infant could ultimately push the parent aside.

But if television was in one sense the worst thing to happen to radio, it may also have been the best. As Peter Fornatale and Joshua Mills tell the story, television's mass packaging left radio free to "fill the cracks" with all sorts of local or specialized programming—from community news to ethnic music, and even highbrow stuff like classical or jazz. Gone, perhaps, were coast-to-coast hosts like Arthur Godfrey, but in their place came record-spinning deejays—folksy, corny guys who were vital in helping local stations establish their own images.

More imaginative still were the independent station owners. Although clearly intent on carving out an advertising market, or "segment," these managers nonetheless broke the dial wide open with new formats. One of the authors' favorites is Texan Gordon McLendon. Schooled in Oriental languages at Yale, McLendon instead involved himself in his rich family's fledgling interest in radio after World War II. It was he who pioneered the simulated broadcast of sports play-by-play from wire copy, complete with sound effects, going so far as to have his background assistants click their tongues like tennis shots and mumble in British accents during Wimbledon matches. Gradually, and always slyly, McLendon built an empire of local out-

lets, including the nation's first all-news station, XTRA (it was actually based in Tijuana, Mexico, but beamed into Los Angeles.) He was also one of the first to start a "Beautiful Music" station—KABL in San Francisco ("As the fog rolls in under the Golden Gate Bridge . . ." the disc jockey would coo à la Rod McKuen).

Inevitably, radio stooped to more hucksterism than did television—from wild cash give-aways to the payola scandals of the late fifties, which the authors outline with notable clarity. But because it also targeted its audiences—teens, blacks, country music fans—much sharper than television, radio became the more intimate medium as well. When transistorized technology brought radio out of living rooms and into car dashboards and the palms of our hands—and lately, wrapped it around our heads—this was even more evident. Then again, in times of social crisis (the authors' prime example is the Northeast blackout of 1965), nothing "tribalizes" large groups of people faster than a radio.

A good deal of research went into this book, but fortunately it doesn't read that way. Fornatale and Mills, a New York radio host and former pop culture columnist, respectively, avoid heavy communications theory, preferring instead to recount the stories of curious radio Hows and Whys: *How* FM came to symbolize quality, for instance (it began as a simple experiment in superior, static-free sound); or *Why* progressive rock stations have grown so slick and inflexible in the last decade. (They became slaves to their own hip profitability—witness the following from an insider: "The only time an FM staff would hold a struggle meeting these days is if there was a pound of cocaine that needed dividing.")

Most useful of all is the love the authors feel for the medium; they argue for regulatory reforms that would give disk jockeys greater freedom to select their own music. They hope for the elimination of automated programming, and for the establishment of an Office of Public Advocacy at the Federal Communications Commission to maintain contact with the

public. (The FCC recently voted to discard some of the regulations for radio stations, including its ceilings on commercial time and its requirement for news and public affairs programming.)

Better still, their affection for radio serves to remind us of a taken-for-granted companion: Somewhere, as we spin the dial—from a late-night talk show on Pittsburgh's KDKA to a noncommercial rock-a-thon on Seattle's KRAB—there is a friendly signal waiting to be heard again.

—Allan Ripp

Allan Ripp is a staff writer at Time magazine.

The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar

By Gregor T. Goethals
Beacon Press; \$11.95.

HOW DO IMAGES FUNCTION in modern times? Has technology changed their power to express and shape world views? How has television appropriated and transformed traditional cultural symbols? These are the questions art historian Gregor Goethals raises in *The TV Ritual*.

The premise of Goethals's book is that all societies derive their cohesive force from images through which cultural myths and transcendent values are conveyed. When the images originate from religion, as they have traditionally, they are sacred; when they originate from television, as they have recently, they are profane. But regardless of their means of conveyance, their function is the same: to order the common experience and interpret public events.

To carry the premise into the realm of television, Goethals offers a secular vocabulary modeled on the sacred, thus allowing for neat parallels: "Like traditional icons, commercials appeal to hope and fear. They even promise miracles. . . . By buying a product, everybody has a chance to become a member incorporate

in the mystical body of those who have been redeemed from obesity, ring-around-the-collar, bad breath, or simple human loneliness." Or, "Just as traditional rituals offered opportunities for relating the self to a transcendent order, in a secularized society a regular event like the nightly news can answer a need for ritual." Society, in other words, has come to depend on television as the prime source of its public symbols and popular piety.

With these premises, Goethals finds iconic imagery in everything television offers. *Dallas*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Star Trek*, for instance, represent respectively the three visual metaphors—family, nature, and machine—that run through American culture, as do *The Waltons*, *Gunsmoke*, and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Viewers of these shows, Goethals implies, can live briefly in the same symbolic worlds as those depicted in an earlier age by artists Currier and Ives, John James Audubon, and Charles Sheeler. *Saturday Night Live* carried on the iconoclastic tradition of cartoonist Thomas Nast with Dan Ackroyd's caricatures of Jimmy Carter. The National Football League play-offs provide a solace similar to that received from a liturgical mass.

This view unfortunately distorts, and justifies through generosity. By placing television imagery in a historical continuum, Goethals presents a far cheerier and more organized picture of television fare than is warranted. She acknowledges this in her introduction: "Although I use traditional religious art forms to interpret contemporary television," she writes, "I do not wish to imply that there is a corresponding aesthetic quality or an equal profundity of world views." Yet in her conclusion, she contradicts herself, worrying briefly about the unknown sources of our shared symbols: "Who or what has the power to select the icons on television? The producers? The networks? Sponsors? The FCC? The ratings? Local stations? Technology itself?"

Although Goethals' systematic analysis enables her to explain why live coverage of special events is still television's lure and unique strength, why the nation buzzed about who shot J. R., and why the neutrality of news coverage can nevertheless influence reporting, it doesn't allow her to deal with the diluted quality or destructive nature of many of the television icons she spots. More importantly, it doesn't let her explore her really interesting question: "Who or what has the power to select the icons on television?" If we agree with her argument that televi-

sion images have replaced those of religion and high art, the question takes on an immediacy that undercuts the book's cool abstractions. —Suzanne Mantell

Suzanne Mantell, a former editor at Harper's magazine, is teaching at Stanford University.

Television Today: A Close-Up View

Readings from TV Guide

Edited by Barry Cole

Oxford University Press, \$19.95; paper \$7.95.

THIS ODD COUPLING of Oxford University Press and *TV Guide* calls up incongruous images of stifnecked dons poring over stacks of glossy little pages devoted to "The Wit of Toni Tenille" or "Eric Severeid: At His Leisure." Not so. *Television Today* is a collection of what a mass market magazine likes to call "think" pieces, and just the sheer breadth of its coverage is remarkable. Culled from issues of the past eighteen years, these essays constitute a comprehensive and authoritative seminar on the state of television—a seminar with reporters, critics, and industry insiders as participants. For a tyro in the field, it is a crash course; for an expert, it might even provide a surprise or two. For the rest of us, it is a vigorous, provocative look at the political, economic, social, moral, and cultural issue that is American television.

Cole brings a great deal of authority to his editor's role. He is a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania who doubles as a teacher at Penn's Annenberg School of Communications, and he has done consulting work for the Federal Communications Commission and the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Communications.

He has divided the book into seven sections ("Audience," "Programming," "Censorship," etc.) and written a graceful, informative introduction for each. His briefer lead-ins for the separate pieces, however, often seem labored and gratuitous, and the essays themselves are usually pretty styleless and lumpen. Never mind; you're in this for the information.

Facts are of the cocktail-chatter variety. An episode of *Dallas* cost \$660,000 to produce, and William Paley owns two million shares of CBS stock bringing more than \$5 million in dividends in 1979. Some facts are shocking. An essay called "The Child Probers" describes how children are used as guinea pigs in behavioral-

conditioning experiments conducted in the name of market research. This Orwellian excess prompted Dr. Karl Menninger to declare that parents who "volunteer their children for such experiments can examine their own consciences."

The "News" section contains the ineluctable analyses of the ways television has transformed the American political process and created a demand for media-genic statesmen. There is also a characteristically terse offering from David Brinkley, in which the veteran newsman argues that television news broadcasts ought only to report stories determined to be "interesting to at least ten percent of the audience." NBC, he suggests, should never have done an item about a front-line skirmish in the recent war in Lebanon because most "ordinary working Americans" probably didn't care about it. Another surprise springs up in an elucidating explanation of why television fails at on-the-spot, or live, coverage (a fact that would seem to contradict the very nature of television news): because the medium tends to overexaggerate or oversimplify the ongoing event.

The networks are a familiar enemy in "Effects," where they are revealed (once more) as Temples to Greed and Mediocrity. The distinguished drama critic Louis Kronenberger puts it most persuasively—and passionately—when he writes about an "antivilized" medium in which the "Great Networks are splendidly assisted by the Great Advertising Agencies and the Great Artists' Representatives, so that the alluring daughters and nieces of art—Language and Laughter, Melody and Declamation and Dancing—are constantly bedded and wedded to the paunchy sons and nephews of Mammon. . . . There had been nothing too elegant for [television] to coarsen, too artistic for it to vulgarize, too sacred for it to profane." But before you cast your television set down the chute to the Everlasting Hell of the Compactor Room, read "Censorship and Control," in which network executives, station managers, and producers find themselves tied to the railroad tracks by villains as diverse as Procter & Gamble and the Nixon White House.

Back in the early seventies, President Nixon and his cronies declared themselves displeased with documentaries on public television that attacked American bankers, offered a sympathetic profile of Fidel Castro, examined American intervention abroad, and investigated subversive activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The final blow for the Nix-

onites was the hiring of Sander Vanocur and Robert MacNeil, who were perceived as "left-wing, anti-Administration." *TV Guide's* own Neil Hickey, a frequent contributor to this collection, traces in impressive detail the disturbing story of how the Nixon Administration tried to bully board members of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting into canceling all future public affairs programming. When that failed, Nixon baldly vetoed the two-year funding bill in June 1972 (just a few weeks after you-know-what)—a move, Hickey says, "that rocked PTV [public television] to its foundations."

It's Kronenberger, and not Nixon, who would find much to rejoice about in "The Future." This section promises a video revolution bringing literally hundreds of channels into every home, thereby signaling Gotterdammerung for the networks as we know them; the new channels will eliminate the need for the middleman who moves programs from the studio to the living room, and will offer a world of television no longer subservient to the base demands of an indiscriminating mass audience. Neil Hickey should be allowed the last encouraging word: "It's certain that today's twenty-year-olds will enjoy a far saner, more multifarious communications environment than anything we know today. . . . The public will be addressed, at last, in all its variety, potentiality, and dignity rather than as an immense herd of dim-witted sheep to be delivered to the highest bidder."

—James N. Baker

James N. Baker is an assistant editor at Newsweek magazine.

The Biggest Company on Earth: A Profile of AT&T

by Sonny Kleinfield

Holt, Rinehart and Winston \$14.95.

YOU'D EXPECT a 300-page book about the phone company to be about as entertaining as the phone book. But, thanks to Sonny Kleinfield's lively writing and indefatigable reporting, anyone rash enough to plunge into *The Biggest Company on Earth* will not find boredom for a good 200 pages. Until the book finally sinks under the weight of its mammoth subject, the author manages the heroic feat of making Ma Bell engaging and even colorful.

The real credit goes to Kleinfield's monumental appetite for obscure but fascinating facts. He has answered every conceivable question one could ask about AT&T, and the result is a mother lode for trivia buffs. Some of his tidbits are imposing reflections of the company's vastness, such as the information that AT&T has an annual payroll of \$21 billion (bigger than

the budgets of the Interior and Energy Departments combined), employs 1,030,000 people (7,452 of them named Smith), and mourns the passing of 200 shareholders every day. Others are more esoteric. It is surprising to learn, for instance, that the ringing you hear when you make a call is not the actual sound of the phone at the other end. And the news that a greater proportion of phone numbers are unlisted in Los Angeles than in any other American city suggests great reaches of unexplored sociological terrain.

Kleinfield learned things like this by talking to what appears to have been hundreds of people. The book, which grew out of a series of articles for *The New York Times*, includes the expected interviews with assorted bigwigs. But equally important, Kleinfield has gone into the field to talk to ordinary employees. He accompanied a phone repairman on his rounds, observed operators at work, spent a day at the New Jersey center, which directs all long-distance calls originating in the United States, and trailed after a Bell representative whose job it is to visit stockholders. He even tracked down the lady whose voice is heard on the Time-of-Day recordings in most cities—Jane Barbe of Atlanta, who hopes her daughter will succeed her. And Kleinfield has enlivened all this research with an endless supply of charming anecdotes.

But eventually he must get down to the thankless task of examining Bell's internal structure, familiarizing the reader with its antitrust battles, and discussing problems like wiretapping and fraud against the phone company. Here he tends to fall back on long quotes from the principals, which gives a flavor of the issue without making it intelligible. Kleinfield is better at reporting than analyzing. On matters like government regulation of Bell, perhaps the most important issue, he uses such a broad brush that one can't tell if he is too fearful of boring the reader or just unsure of his understanding.

Finally, Kleinfield, like the reader, still doesn't know what to make of this Gargantuan entity. Here are all the right questions—is Bell too big? is it more dangerous than valuable? can it compete in the freer market of the eighties?—but the reader gets no closer to answers than when he started. Maybe this isn't Kleinfield's fault. His final image compares AT&T to the ocean—sometimes quiet, sometimes destructive, but "always there." But to me, AT&T most resembles God—great, forbidding, mysterious, and ultimately beyond comprehension. And like God, one suspects, AT&T is bound to have its way in the end.

—Stephen Chapman

Stephen Chapman is an editorial writer and columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

The Wired Nation

(Continued from Page 89)

raised by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, which has repeatedly said it has no interest in entering the field of cable television. The parties most likely to pose them are the elected officials of some large city at some not-too-distant moment. Weary of franchising battles and giveaways, uncertain whether the offers they receive now will prove financially unrealistic later—or disillusioned to find, after granting a franchise, that the company can't or won't deliver what it promised—the officials in such a city may petition the FCC for something new: that AT&T be licensed to build and operate a common-carrier cable system in their city, something it could accomplish quickly. If and when that happens, how should the government respond?

Just when such issues are being pushed more urgently to the forefront of the public agenda by cable's growth, Washington is caught up in the new doctrine of deregulation. The prevailing idea in the capital today is that commerce is better regulated by the marketplace than by government bureaucrats. This has prompted the FCC to disband its Cable Television Bureau and abandon most of its regulatory structure for cable.

As with all philosophies of public policy, deregulation has merit and important uses but tends to be overapplied. It is too easily used in place of thought and planning. And it is notably inapplicable to cable because, as a practical matter, deregulation cannot be achieved by removing only the federal presence. This is because two additional levels of regulation—state and local—lie between cable television and the marketplace. Cancellation of the federal role merely shifts responsibility to the states and municipalities, where there is neither the mandate nor the equipment to formulate rules with a view to the national interest.

Right now, in 1981, it is essential that the federal government move back into cable regulation and remain there. The FCC should not, and undoubtedly would not, repeat its old mistake of imposing highly detailed and complicated regulations on cable. What is really needed now is a national charter for this important new medium—one that would provide broad outlines for the industry's structure. This is not a task to be left to the FCC, which has struggled in the past to reconcile new technologies and old laws and repeatedly was challenged in the courts.

If cable is to grow sensibly and in ways that contribute to national communications goals, the responsibility falls to the Congress and the President of the United States.

—END

The Outlook for Detroit: Pointe Counterpoint

Ben Brown
The Detroit News

NOBODY HAS TO TELL ANYONE in the Motor City about hard times. Wayne County, which envelops Detroit and forty-two other incorporated communities, failed to meet its payroll for several weeks running last year and has cut back drastically on services to pull a fragile budget into shape. Yet even here, your ability to cope with bad times varies according to where you live and who you are.

Nothing, for instance, points more dramatically to the contrast between rich and poor, to the gap between hope and reality in access to new technology, than the cable franchising process in side-by-side Wayne County communities. On the one hand there's the troubled city of Detroit, heavily black and poor, saddled with 13 percent-plus unemployment, with 18 percent of households (according to 1980 figures) below the poverty minimum. On the other, right next door, nestled along the shores of Lake St. Clair, is the Never-Never Land of the Grosse Pointes—lily-white, overwhelmingly Protestant and among the very richest of Midwestern communities.

When cable television came to town, there was no question where it wanted to live. The five Grosse Pointes have stable, homogeneous communities of single-family dwellings. They are classically "up-scale," with household incomes that rarely dip below \$30,000, making them prime customers for all the high-profit cable treats—everything from the premium pay channels like Home Box Office to the elaborate home security systems.

As many as 25 cable companies came courting last year, but four of the Pointes

decided to go into business for themselves, joining with an adjacent community called Harper Woods to form Grosse Pointe Cable Inc. Grosse Pointe Cable links three sets of partners—the five participating cities, Teleprompter Inc. (which manages the system), and Grosse Pointe War Memorial (a community center). The company pays each of the cities the usual franchise fee and divides the profits among the partners. Teleprompter gets 50 percent; the War Memorial gets 25 percent, and the cities divide the remaining 25 percent according to the number of subscribers they've generated.

So if things go according to plan, the rich little communities to the northeast of the struggling city will get a little richer. They'll have a state-of-the-art cable system they will completely control, while they rake in franchise fees, split the company's profits, and fund the activities of their community center.

Major cable outfits like Teleprompter usually frown on this municipal-ownership business, but the appeal of the Pointes inspired a suspension of the rules. "It's better to have a small piece of Grosse Pointe," a Teleprompter executive told *The Detroit News*, "than nothing at all."

But when it comes to Detroit, more than a few companies will decide it's better to have nothing at all. Wiring the sprawling city, with its 437,800 households, will be a monstrous feat, requiring something like 2,800 miles of cable and as much as \$200 million. And given the fact that the median family income in the city is about half the Grosse Pointe minimum, there's little promise of high profits down the line to justify a huge investment up front.

What's more, to serve a city made up of a hundred little cities—racial and ethnic minorities, all with individual demands

on a telecommunications system—a Detroit cable system would need a far wider range of services than is required by homogeneous communities like the Pointes. Then there's the question of wiring priorities: The Detroit cable advisory group has already committed itself to a cable-laying philosophy that won't leave the poorer neighborhoods unserved while a company hooks the wealthier sections to the cable first.

Unlike the juicier suburbs, which can write their own tickets, the city will probably have to pour the franchise fees it collects back into the system to help support all the required cable services. Otherwise, a cable company might balk at providing the same sort of local-organization and community-access channels the suburbs get as part of their franchise deal.

Nobody has to tell anyone in the Motor City about hard times.

CBS Puts Teletext On the Road

Eric Mink
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

VISITORS TO LOS ANGELES department stores, museums, and hotel lobbies this spring may want to allow a little extra time for their trips. They may find themselves playing with one of the more intriguing instruments of the coming video revolution: teletext.

CBS, which has been conducting teletext experiments for two years, plans to install up to a hundred specially equipped television sets in public places both to demonstrate what its teletext system can do and to evaluate response to it.

Teletext is textual information (as op-

posed to films, photographs, and videotapes) that is broadcast over the air. Its fare includes television log listings, entertainment guides, community billboards, and advertisements.

The system comes into homes on unused portions of the standard television signal. Of the 525 electronic lines that make up a television picture, 504 are used to display a visible image. The remaining twenty-one lines are called the vertical blanking interval, the "black" bar that appears when a television picture starts to roll.

Most of those twenty-one lines are used for electronic signals that help keep the picture coherent and steady. It is on the unused lines that teletext data are transmitted and received. CBS, for example, is using lines fifteen and sixteen for teletext. A decoding device is required to display teletext information on a television screen. The data are broadcast in electronic "pages," any of which can be selected for display by the viewer. In the Los Angeles experiments, users will have a selection of sixty to a hundred different teletext pages.

CBS's teletext experiments began in March 1979 in St. Louis. Using KMOX-TV, a company-owned VHF station, and KDNL, an independent UHF outlet, CBS conducted some nine months of technical tests on two different teletext systems at eighty separate locations in the St. Louis area. A mobile van was equipped to measure teletext reception under various geographical conditions.

Among CBS's conclusions: The French system, called Antiope, was superior to its chief competitors, the Ceefax and Oracle systems of Great Britain. The company also determined that teletext signals behave very much like the television signals of which they are a part, according to Dwight Morss, spokesman for the network's engineering and development wing.

The St. Louis tests were followed by others conducted out of Chicago. CBS fed the teletext signals for these on telephone land lines, satellite relays, and coaxial cables. KCET, the public television station in Los Angeles, also participated in a half-hour teletext test that elicited responses from almost five thousand viewers. In addition, last summer CBS was so confident of its findings—and so impatient with the failure of the Electronic Industries Association committee to reach any decision on the teletext issue—that the company petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to issue rules creating a single standard for teletext. Based on its test results, CBS recommended its version of the Antiope system for that standard.

"Without one standard," said David Percelay, director of the CBS Broadcast Group's teletext project, "teletext will

die. There would be too many competing systems." He cited Antiope's superior graphic display quality, greater flexibility, and nearly unlimited potential for expansion as reasons to adopt it. In one specific example, Percelay said that teletext's program captions for the hearing-impaired were vastly superior to those now employed by ABC, NBC, and PBS and relayed through decoders sold at Sears stores. "We believe the technology of those decoders is already obsolete," he said. Teletext captions, on the other hand, can be placed at various positions on the television screen and can be displayed at varying speeds—at the viewer's option. (CBS had been criticized for not participating in the captioning campaign that began last year at the other networks.)

CBS's petition has been opposed by ABC, PBS, EIA, the National Cable Television Association, and the North American Philips Corp. The Canadian Department of Communications prefers a teletext system of its own, called Teli-don.

Percelay said that the upcoming Los Angeles tests (in which CBS's KNXT, KCET, and Boston's WGBH-TV captioning centers are participating) are designed to "assess the system's commercial potential and assess its impact" in the community. He said that although "ultimately, teletext could be a mass medium," CBS is aiming initially at an "upscale" demographic—that is, at young adults with money to spend.

In the fall of 1981, following the spring demonstrations in public places, CBS will move into another test phase, according to Percelay—placing television sets equipped with teletext decoders in about a hundred private homes.

Cronkite in Tryout for a Kids Series

Lee Margulies

The Los Angeles Times

IS IT RELEVANT?" That's the question persistently asked of teachers by high school students demanding to know the connection between their studies and the "real world."

Walter Cronkite thinks television can provide the answer. He believes the medium providing distractions for young people can also be utilized to forge the relevancy link in their education. After nurturing the concept for fifteen

years—since his own daughters were in high school—the esteemed CBS newsman is developing a series for public television that would tie the news of the day to the subjects high school students study in classrooms across the country. "We want to excite an interest in learning," Cronkite explains, "excite a desire for further knowledge and to get away from the notion that what they are learning is something from the dead past or an impractical skill, but to stress the idea that it ties in to the world right outside their school yard."

Entitled *Why in the World*, the series had a five-episode trial run in Los Angeles last October on KCET. The results were sufficiently encouraging to prompt Cronkite and the nonprofit company he chairs, Satellite Education Services, to begin lining up the \$2.5 million to \$3 million needed to start production in the fall.

The concept is this: Each school morning, *Why in the World* would broadcast a half-hour lecture by a college professor or another authority, relating a story in that day's news to some traditional academic pursuit, such as history, science, literature, or mathematics. Schools would tape the programs for use at a teacher's discretion.

The trial run, for instance, happened to coincide with the opening of baseball's World Series, so one of the week's discussions integrated that topic and another—the economics of professional sports. "It was terrific," Morrie Katz, chairman of the social studies department at Belmont High School, said later. "It reinforced just what I was teaching in my consumer economics class."

Other subjects included the Presidential campaign then in progress; the importance of the automobile to the American economy; the awarding of the Nobel Prize for genetic engineering, and the Iran-Iraq war. For the last program, Sig Mickelson, a former president of CBS News who is vice president and general manager of Satellite Education Services, had hoped for a discussion of Arabian literature and *The Arabian Nights*, but was unable to find a person qualified to deliver such a lecture and settled for a straightforward explanation of the conflict. The professor explained that a reduction of oil from the Middle East would affect not only gasoline availability but also the production of records and cosmetics—items of special importance to teenagers.

Mickelson says finding the right expert for the day's subject will be easier if the series develops as planned—that is, if it has access to the Los Angeles public television station (where the test was produced) as well as stations in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. "We'll have a lot more flexibility with a national talent pool," he observes.

Both by design and economic necessity, *Why in the World* would make limited use of newsreel footage, graphics, and other visual elements that television news viewers have grown to expect. From the beginning, Cronkite has wanted gifted teachers who could enthrall students with sheer energy, vocabulary, and love of ideas. "I just think if you get the right people, there's nothing that can compare with the power of words," Cronkite reasons.

Many of the students and teachers who participated in the test did not agree. There were numerous gripes about the listless format. As one teacher put it, "Most students lose interest with just talk." Improvements in this area will be made if funding for the full school year is secured, Mickelson says, but budgetary limitations and the daily production grind will still keep the operation relatively simple. "Kids who feel TV isn't TV until there is motion from beginning to end are going to complain," he says, but he agrees

with Cronkite that the vast majority can be won over if instructors perform up to expectation.

Despite the criticism of the format, the overall reaction among students and teachers at the seven Los Angeles-area high schools participating in the test was favorable. A survey conducted by the University of California at San Diego found that 88.2 percent of the teachers felt *Why in the World* could be integrated into their teaching plans, and that 73 percent of the students found the programs interesting. That the need exists for such a television series was painfully evident. "*Why in the World* is a good concept because it's my opinion that most high school students know very little about current events or follow the news," one teacher said. Another remarked, "I think these kinds of programs should be encouraged. The kids are not going to watch the news at night, so if you want them to keep up with it you *have* to bring it into the classroom."

man for Storer Broadcasting, which holds franchises in numerous small communities outside the city limits, said there are at present "no plans to do anything" to counter Warner.

Meanwhile, Warner is campaigning flat-out for what amounts to re-election. In early February, the company began running newspaper, radio, and television ads promoting its two-way QUBE communications system. Anne Hall, Warner's director of franchising for Dallas County, sobbed when the city council awarded her company a cable franchise. Then she cried foul when Sammons intervened. Now she's soberly determined not to let a big one get away.

"Nobody is going to walk all over Warner Amex," Hall said. "We assume the company that printed the petitions will try to win the election. But we're not going to spend money needlessly if there's no opposition."

Dallas represents the largest unpicked plum in the nationwide cable franchising war, Hall said. Larger municipalities such as Los Angeles and Chicago aren't wired yet, but these cities plan to divide the franchise among several cable companies.

If Warner prevails in the referendum, the company expects to service its first customers by January 1982. If not, the city council could begin the bidding process anew or ask the six competing companies to hold fast on their bids until another vote is taken.

The Dallas referendum is not unprecedented in Texas. In 1973, residents in Houston voted to rescind a cable franchise awarded by the city council. It wasn't until 1979 that Houston decided to award five separate cable contracts. (Now that decision could be invalidated following a recent federal grand jury finding that Houston mayor Jim McConn conspired to prevent bidder Billy Goldberg from receiving one of the five cable franchises. The jury said the conspiracy involved McConn, the city of Houston, and one of the franchise recipients.)

Voters in Mesquite, a suburb of Dallas, also went the referendum route to vote on whether the winner of the cable franchise should be allowed to program uncut R-rated movies. Warner Amex and Sammons both contributed money to the ad hoc Citizens for Cable TV, which supported individual freedom to choose which programs are viewed in the home. Those opposing R-rated films said they were relying on God rather than money to help them win the referendum vote. In a record election turnout August 9, Mesquite residents voted 4,095 to 2,580 in favor of allowing R-rated films on cable. Ten days later, the Mesquite City Council awarded the cable franchise to Warner Amex.

Contest for Cable in Dallas To Be Decided at the Polls

Ed Bark
The Dallas Morning News

THERE'S NOTHING NOVEL about cable television companies coming to blows over the right to "wire" a major city.

In Dallas, though, the first knockdown punch was thrown after it seemed the final bell had sounded. On October 29, the Dallas City Council voted 8-2 in favor of awarding a lucrative cable franchise to Warner Amex. It appeared the company had prevailed over five competitors, including the hometown Sammons Communications Inc.

But shortly after the decision, the city secretary was presented with a petition signed by more than 2,000 citizens who requested a vote on whether to accept or reject the council's decision. A sixty-seven-year-old state law says only 500 signatures of qualified voters are needed to force a referendum on the granting of a municipal franchise. The petitions, gathered from among some 912,000 city residents, eventually were validated and a referendum vote set for April 4, but not before Sammons had been implicated as the instigator.

Ernest Blank, Sammons' president, at length acknowledged his company had printed most of the petition forms, but he insisted there was no cover-up.

"From the very beginning, I said we

supported those who came to us and asked to participate in a petition drive," Blank said. "We obviously are not going to sue anybody over the cable franchise award. But I see nothing wrong with giving the public an opportunity to vote on the franchise if they believe the decision should be reconsidered."

Among the petition signers were groups of employees from hospitals that receive financial assistance from the Sammons Foundation. In the final stages of the franchising battle, company founder Charles Sammons told the city council that when he dies, 51 percent of Sammons stock would go to five local charities. Several council members immediately charged he was trying to buy the cable franchise. In a prepared statement issued last November, the Sammons company said it planned to "set the record straight, distinguishing fact from innuendo, and giving the public straightforward information on which to base its decision" in April.

But since then, Sammons has clammed up. Asked recently whether his company plans to campaign actively against Warner's second drive for the cable franchise, Sammons vice president William Strange replied: "We have just absolutely no comment to make on the whole deal."

The president of Cox Cable, another previous applicant for the franchise, said his company would not try again if city voters rejected Warner. And a spokes-

As the wait for cable television stretches seemingly to infinity in Dallas, a quartet of subscription television companies have moved in to fill the void. A typical ad stresses that over-the-air pay television, with its wealth of uncut movies, is available now rather than later at a cost of \$19.95 a month.

The rapid influx of pay television companies means Dallas has twice as many as any other city in the country. It's doubtful they all can co-exist profitably, and attrition could set in as soon as April if Warner Amex gets the voters' approval. For the time being, though, there apparently is money to be made in the "Metropolitan"—the area covering Dallas, Fort Worth, and the smaller communities in the twenty-five miles between these cities. As of mid-February, the pay television companies claimed to be servicing more than 30,000 subscribers who are tired of waiting for specialty cable channels such as Home Box Office and Showtime.

"I have a hard time believing anybody's going to pay almost twice as much for one-eightieth the programming," Warner's Hall contends. "I think they're here in hopes that cable television will be delayed indefinitely in Dallas.

"We've put in two long years of work in a city that is nationally acclaimed for having the purest cable TV selection process that the industry's ever seen," she added. "At times I am personally frustrated. Warner Amex wants this market. Let there be no question about that."

Boston's Cable Franchise Is Rotating on Access

Robert A. McLean
The Boston Globe

COMMUNITY ACCESS to cable television, like the old-fashioned New England town meeting, is a form of grassroots democracy. In its purest form, CATV means total citizen participation in programming and production. Safeguarding the public's rights and privileges has been one of the stickiest issues any community has faced in choosing a cable system operator; too many have been burned by operators who promised the moon, then did a fast eclipse when they had the franchise.

Boston is among the first of the nation's big cities to formulate a plan to protect and encourage true public access by placing control of the so-called "access channels" in the hands of a citizens' group. A December proposal made by a cable access advisory committee appointed by Mayor Kevin H. White called for the establishment of a nonprofit corporation to govern the operation of the access channels—20 percent of the total number of channels the franchise operator would provide. The corporation, comprised of fifty mayoral appointees, would set aside these channels for strictly local use.

The advisory group further recommended that the system operator be required to contribute \$150,000 initially and earmark 5 percent of gross revenues to pay the cost of public access operations, including staffing, training, production, promotion, and distribution expenses.

When White released the city's guidelines on February 7, he asked that there be local participation in the ownership of the cable system as well, through the sale of bonds to Boston residents. The report added that the city wants the final contract to include an 8 percent gross annual contribution, of which 5 percent would go to the nonprofit corporation and 3 percent to the city. (There may be a legal problem with the city's prospective share because Massachusetts state law limits the fees that cable operators can pay a city to 50 cents per subscriber.)

There were nine original applicants for the Boston franchise, and one—*The New York Times*—dropped out in December. Three of the remaining eight were expected to drop out before the April 23 deadline for final applications.

Some of the Boston bidders made promises in their initial applications, ranging from a city-wide chain of "access centers"—complete with studios and mobile vans—to one offer of a cash kitty of \$1 million, plus \$3 million in matching fund solicitations.

To best judge the legitimacy of such pledges, city officials will examine the applicants' track records in other cities where they have applied and/or secured franchises. Still in the running at press time were Warner Amex of New York; American Television and Communications, Englewood, California; Times Mirror Cable Television of Los Angeles; Rollins of Atlanta; Cablevision, Woodbury, New York; Tribune Cable of Boston; Abetta Corporation of Boston, and Boston Cablevision Services.

For most of the bidders, Boston is the largest target to date that would be wired from scratch. The few bidders who have big systems already operating purchased them from other developers.

Mayor White expects the Boston franchise to be awarded by late summer and construction to begin sometime next

year, but the city won't be completely wired until 1985.

Shortwave of the Future?

Benjamin Morrison
The Times-Picayune
New Orleans

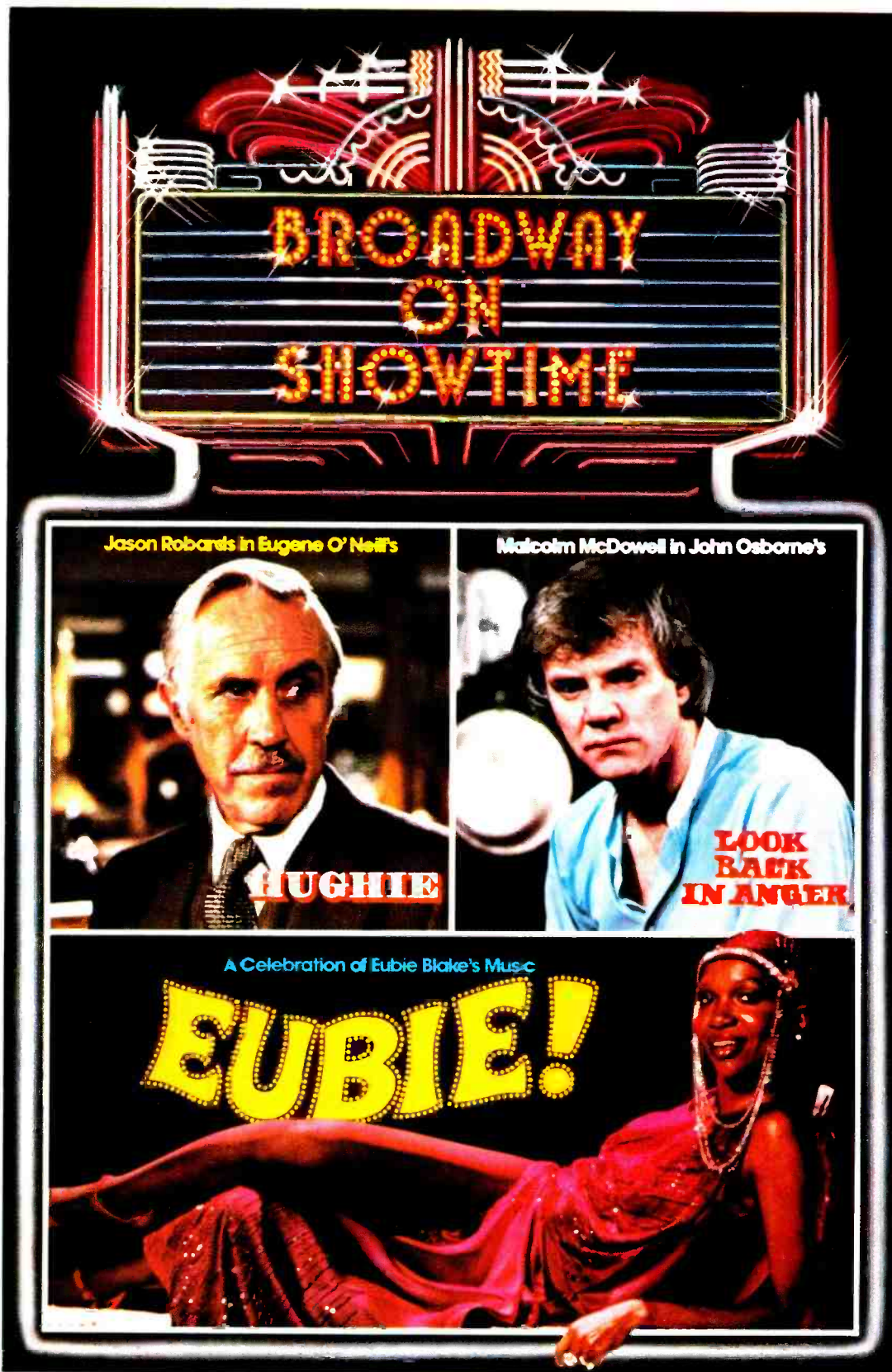
FOR THE FIRST TIME in more than three decades, a new American radio station plans to broadcast commercially on the international shortwave band. Following unanimous approval by the Federal Communications Commission late last year, applicant Joseph M. Costello III of New Orleans says his station should be on the air this fall, reaching not only North and Central America, but over the North Pole to all of Europe and parts of the Mideast.

Costello, who owns all or part of five Louisiana radio stations, and several movie theaters in the New Orleans area, says he expects to invest \$750,000 in the new station, which will use a 100,000-watt signal to broadcast rock music.

Shortwave has for many years sat idle in this country. WRUL (known as "New York Worldwide") started in the forties as a commercial shortwave station in New York, and ceased operations in the early seventies. By then, its owner was the Mormon group, Bonneville Broadcasting. Only the Voice of America and four religious stations now operate on the U.S. international shortwave band. (The FCC does not authorize domestic shortwave, though the wording of the U.S. Information and Education Exchange Act of 1948 does not forbid nongovernment broadcast on the international band.)

For Americans, shortwave brings to mind rather exotic images—foreign propaganda, small boys with crystal sets, wartime "spying" on the enemy. Actually, it's just another part of the radio spectrum, like the more familiar AM and FM. What shortwave has is the unique ability to broadcast thousands of miles, although listeners do need a shortwave receiver.

Costello says his station (which he hopes to call WRNO, after his present flagship New Orleans FM station) will not offer propaganda, a traditional staple of shortwave, although time will be sold to religious groups. Rather, he plans "just music, just entertainment . . . and commercials, to whomever will buy them." So far, he says, the home office of Sears, Roebuck and Co. in Chicago has been the largest firm to inquire. —END



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