

The Lie of TV's Political Power, by Walter Karp

CDC 00415

CHANNELS

O F C O M M U N I C A T I O N S

1983 MAY-JUNE

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The Fall and Rise of Public Television

by Martin Koughan



SPECIAL REPORT

THE TALK SHOW
America's Stream
of Consciousness

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The Fall and Rise of Public Television

The prospect of doom is forcing public TV to become the network it has never been.

BY MARTIN KOUGHAN

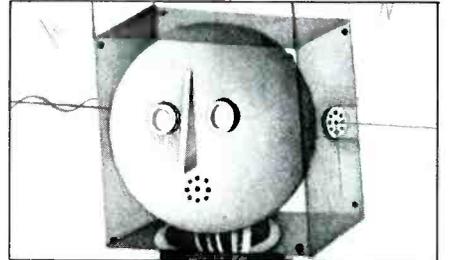


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Meet Hero I. He walks, talks, stands guard, and tells bad jokes at parties.

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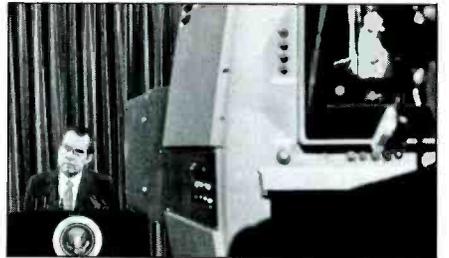


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The Lie of Television's Political Power

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Through three decades, the talk show—TV's most indigenous form—has done everything but go away.

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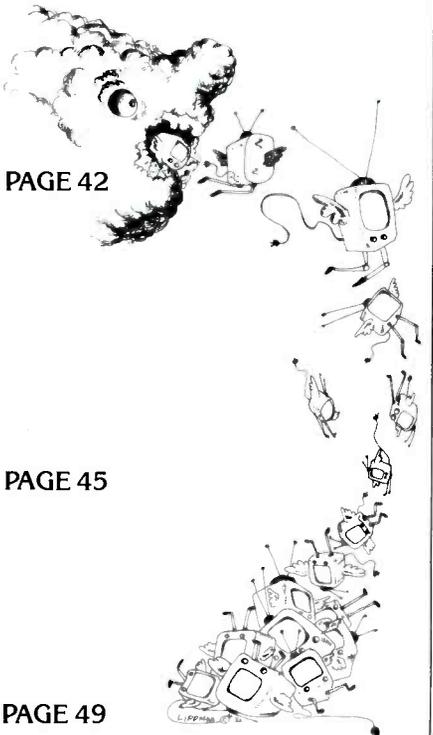
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Psychochatter

Talks shows have flipped for Freud. Some offer insight, others peddle pain as entertainment.

BY ROSS WETZSTEON PAGE 49



COVER ILLUSTRATION BY KINUKO CRAFT

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Making Our Mark

THIS ISSUE, marking the second anniversary of *Channels* and the start of Volume III, appropriately features work by some of our best "discoveries"—the writers Walter Karp, Martin Koughan, Ross Wetzsteon, James Traub, Savannah Waring Walker, and Michael Pollan. We claim them as discoveries, although most have been published widely for years, because they had not written about television before *Channels* came on the scene.

I consider one of this magazine's notable achievements to be that it has brought important new voices and perspectives to the dialogue on television-and-society, and that it has elevated the dialogue beyond the old rhetoric and cant. In forging a new kind of television criticism, we have published not only the leading expert writers in our field, but also many people not normally associated with television, such as Robert Coles, Nicholas von Hoffman, Christopher Lasch, Mimi Sheraton, Todd Gitlin, Michael Wood, Peter Prescott, Lewis Lapham, Benjamin Barber, Gloria Emerson, Kathleen Cleaver, Loren Jenkins, Michael Malone, and Milton Viorst.

While we can't count the brilliant William A. Henry III among our discoveries, we have provided him with a regular forum that has brought him back to television criticism. (He remains in the daily employ of *Time* as an associate editor.)

And our practice of featuring a single cartoonist in each issue has helped us create a body of pictorial commentary from such famed ink-bottle wits as Charles Barsotti, Roz Chast, Jack Ziegler, Arnold Roth, Patrick McDonnell, and Lou Myers.

Before popping the champagne corks on our birthday, the *Channels* staff met for a sober look at how far we've come in two years. Is the magazine fulfilling its original editorial promises? Has it established a place for itself in the crowded magazine field? And most important, perhaps, is *Channels* making the grade in pure business terms?

We found the answers to be, happily, yes on all counts. I offer the following items in evidence:

- Andrews & McMeel, the Kansas City-based publishing house, has on its spring list a book entitled *Fast Forward: The New Television and American Society*. It is a compilation of exemplary articles from *Channels*, half of them devoted to the new media, the other half to the new television criticism.

- Universal Press Syndicate has begun syndicating the material from *Channels* on a regular basis to newspapers around the country. The charter clients include such papers as *The San Diego Union*, *Nashville Tennessean*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Baltimore News American*, *Boston Globe*, *Denver Post*, *Philadelphia Daily News*, and *The Calgary Herald*.

- *The 1983 Field Guide to the New Media*, which *Channels* offered as an insert in the November/December issue, was a smash. Bulk orders have been overwhelming. Scores of universities are using it as a text, and for some it has provided a course structure. The enthusiasm has prompted *Channels* to expand its frequency to seven issues a year, with the seventh a new, updated annual *Field Guide*.

- A 13-week public television series on the new media is currently being developed for the 1984 season by WGBY, Springfield, Massachusetts, in association with *Channels*.

- The New School for Social Research in New York has formed a partnership with *Channels* for a series of seminars and conferences on the second age of television, to be essentially a live extension of the magazine.

- Advertising linage increased 90 percent over the first year, exceeding our most optimistic projections. Moreover, this whopping growth occurred in an economy that has generally been rough on magazines.

- Subscribers to *Channels* more than doubled in number during the second year of publication, and the rate of subscription renewals has been exceptionally high for a young publication, clearly attesting to its acceptance.

On all fronts, the outlook for Volume III is superb.

Okay, Audrey, let's pour the bubbly.

L.B.

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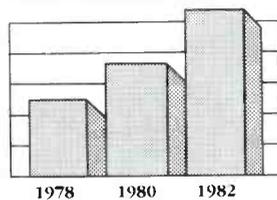
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Yes. Public Television.

Remember the headlines?
Cable was going to deal a crippling blow to public television.
Long-heralded series like Masterpiece Theatre would soon vanish.
Before long, the new technologies would put us out of business.

Now, two years later, public television has not only survived,
it is flourishing. Culture channels like CBS Cable and The
Entertainment Channel have signed off; others are floundering.
And for the last three years, the commercial networks
have suffered a dramatic loss in audiences.
Where have all the viewers gone?
To PBS for one.

PBS Prime Time Audience Share



Public Television's share of the prime time audience has more than doubled in the last five years.

Rather than reaching a select few, as some would contend, public television now reaches more than 50% of America's households on a regular basis. Ironically, the viewing of public television is more than 18% higher in homes with cable than those without. The proliferation of cable, rather than taking viewers away, has actually brought us new viewers.

The fact is, public television has never been more alive or more appreciated.
The numbers speak for themselves.
America is saying "Yes."

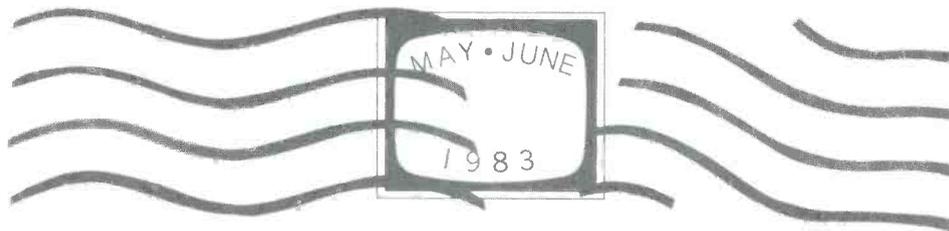
Public Television. It's better than ever.



Boston

Our special thanks to the underwriters who are supporting public television in 1983.

Sources: 1) Nielsen Television Index; 2) PBS Research



Crying Foul

IN "THE FCC PROUDLY PRESENTS THE VAST Wasteland" [Public Eye, Mar/Apr], Les Brown defies ex-FCC chairman Newton Minow (e.g., "the most influential television critic who ever lived") and once again casts Mark Fowler, the current chairman, in the role of the villain (e.g., the individual singlehandedly responsible for "a desert of moral, intellectual, and spiritual poverty"). The good-guy/bad-guy theme, while making for a livelier article, is a gross distortion of reality. Mr. Brown's scare scenario of a defoliated forest where television licensees break the antitrust, obscenity, and libel laws with impunity is irresponsible. As Mr. Brown should know, all of these areas are beyond the FCC's jurisdiction. The truth is that the Fowler administration has advocated reliance on minimally regulated marketplace forces rather than content

regulation of television programming, and has adopted policies encouraging the growth of a vibrant and diverse video marketplace.

Stripped to its essentials, the article advocates an elitist, "force them to eat cake" approach by a paternalistic government. While Fowler is condemned as a myopic, misguided bureaucrat, Minow is praised because he "worked at being the conscience" of the television industry. Surely, any student of the Watergate era will recognize that the lifted eyebrow or the raised voice of an FCC chairman amounts to an insidious form of governmental control. Fowler, in an address to broadcasters, said it best: "I confess that there was a romance bordering on chivalry when a chairman might declare television to be a vast wasteland. Those kinds of pronouncements, as I see my job, are not mine to make. You are not my flock, and I am not your shepherd."

ERWIN G. KRASNOW
Senior Vice President
National Association
of Broadcasters
Washington, D.C.

Koppel emerged after the release by Iran of the 52 American hostages. *Nightline* actually began as a program on March 24, 1980, 10 months before the hostages were released.

Ms. Walker proceeds to assert that "having more air-time for news has not always meant more news." Whatever that may mean, it's rubbish to imply that *Nightline* has ever meant having less news. *Nightline* has consistently augmented both the quantity and quality of broadcast journalism.

Having lightly tarred *Nightline*, Ms. Walker proceeds to feather *Viewpoint*, with her prissy aversion to journalism that attempts to reach a mass audience. "A sort of *People* magazine," she writes, "but one that everybody can watch without feeling guilty, since it's all done in the name of ethics." Ms. Walker is of course entitled to disdain popular appeal, but I think differently. Since its inception two years ago, *Viewpoint* has programmed more than 13 hours, providing a forum for critics of broadcast journalism on topics as diverse as invasion of privacy and the invasion of Lebanon.

In the words of the jurors of the recent duPont-Columbia Award, *Viewpoint* is "the bravest new TV series of the year, in which ABC regularly gave its critics access to network space to air their grievances . . . providing them with the electronic equivalent of an op-ed page and letters-to-the-editor column."

GEORGE WATSON
Vice President
ABC News
New York City

Points of View

I'M ALWAYS GLAD TO SEE STORIES SUCH AS Savannah Waring Walker's recent piece on *Viewpoint* and *Eye on the Media* [Program Notes, Mar/Apr].

However, I want to set the record straight on one omission. *Inside Story*, with Hodding Carter as chief correspondent, is beginning its third season on PBS and was the first television series to examine press performance regularly. Unlike *Viewpoint* and *Eye on the Media*, *Inside Story* analyzes how both print and broadcast media are covering the news.

NED SCHNURMAN
Executive Producer
Inside Story
New York City

ALLOW ME TO STATE MY GRIEVANCES WITH BOTH the accuracy and opinions of Savannah Waring Walker's snide review of the *Viewpoint* program series on ABC News.

As a matter of fact, Ms. Walker is incorrect to say that *Nightline* with Ted

Toast from a Host

"DEFACE THE NATION" [TV GUIDANCE, JAN/Feb], was a masterpiece. As a five-night-a-week interviewer for PBS, I know well what Andrew Feinberg means about the way "the verbally elusive politicians are in control of these interview shows."

I plan to mail (in plain brown envelopes) a copy of the article to several politicians I know.

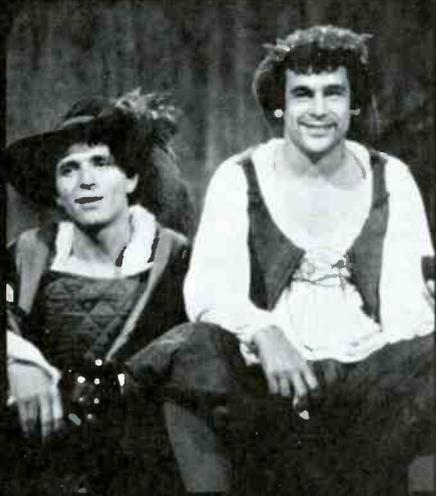
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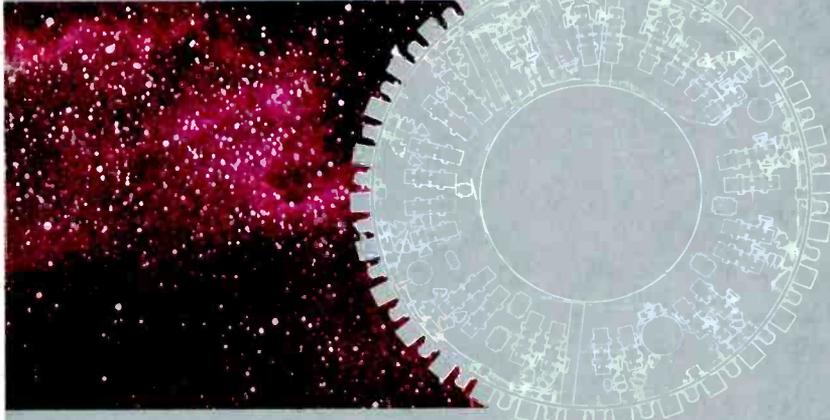
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CROSS CURRENTS

Playing the Set

On a push-button afternoon in Pittsburgh, we browsed through that city's eighty-channel, interactive, top-of-the-line cable system and caught:

"So you might say that our modern, complex world has *increased* the possibility of having headaches? . . ."

"Stay where you are, Maw. Don't let them get close enough to throw a burning branch . . ."

"Stargell had to *fight back* the tears when his Mom and Dad were introduced before *50,000* cheering fans . . ."

"When you're with the Flintstones, you'll have a gay old time!"

You have to wonder how Fred, Wilma, and the other troglodytes of the 1960s ever had a gay old time, what with no viewing to while away the leisure hours but one public and three commercial networks, and a local channel or two. Warner Amex Cable's Qube offers its Pittsburgh subscribers (of whom there were 66,000 in March) practically every programming service available on the WESTAR and SATCOM satellites. That still leaves a lot of empty space, and Warner has added a number of local and pay-per-view channels. And that *still* leaves empty space—so a mere sixty-three of the eighty channels have thus far been activated. These include eight movie channels, seven news channels, five public-access channels, channels for culture, sports, religion, and children. Most everyone's got a weather channel; but Pittsburgh has *two*.

Before you begin looking into jobs in the steel industry, you should know that extra-large cable systems like this one charge subscribers by the tier. Channels are sold in lots; the more you choose to receive, the more you pay every month. Warner's basic tier in Pittsburgh gets you very little besides the local service for \$5.35. The whole shooting match, on the other hand, runs \$50.70. You've really got to like your television.

Now, you might wonder whether Pittsburghers have *better* television than you do, but then you're missing the point. They have *more*. Take talk shows, for example. Pittsburgh's afternoons are now filled with tons of talk. Everyone tries to figure out everyone else's problems. On the Satellite Program Network, a woman named Tavi asks about headaches. On

Daytime, a woman in a nice lavender sweater says that fathers want to be more involved with their kids in the eighties.

Occasional intrusions of unmediated reality do bring the giddy carousel to a halt. A British television production called *One in a Thousand*, in which an ordinary-looking couple are told by an ordinary-looking nurse that their child has spina bifida, a terrible disease of the nervous system, rouses painful emotions—an awful, almost unfair shock. On Pittsburgh Personals, a teletext channel, a woman has paid for a message reading: "Elvis, memories of you are keepsakes which shall never pass." "Brush your breath with Dentyne" plays in the background.

The hand-held console, which makes it so easy to change channels that you can hardly bear watching anything for more than a few minutes, also makes it possible to communicate with a central computer. You can watch *A Little Sex* or *Cousin, Cousine* on one of the pay-per-view channels by pushing a button on your console; several dollars will be automatically added to your bill. You can play an interactive quiz game and win a camera. Or you can choose your favorite bachelor for

a night out with a bachelorette on *Singles Magazine*. You may never leave your couch again.

Qube has already changed the lives of its subscribers. Take Linda Verzon, for example. She had paid very little attention to television before, except for sports and news, so when Qube's salesman came to her home she "slammed the door in his face." But it turned out that many of her friends had fallen in love with the system, so on the slender income she earns as an officer in the University of Pittsburgh's sports information department, Linda decided to take the plunge, buying practically every available service for \$42 a month.

When she was interviewed, Linda had only had Qube for a month, and she may still have been in the initial stages of infatuation. "The first few days," she recalled, "I watched it absolutely nonstop. I couldn't get over the fact that I could lie on the couch and push buttons and watch all these things. Now I'm more removed from it." She paused for effect. "I can wait five minutes before turning it on."

Linda's style of viewing is particularly well-suited to this new television experience. She doesn't so much *watch* the set

Gong That Man

What do you get when you cross Chuck Barris with low-power television?

We are, alas, soon to find out. Having sufficiently polluted the mainstream airwaves with *The Gong Show*, *The Dating Game*, *The Newlywed Game*, and *Three's a Crowd*, Barris has apparently decided that LPTV could benefit from his special brand of entertainment.

In March, Channel America, a recently formed subsidiary of Barris Industries, applied to the Federal Communications Commission for 28 low-power television licenses, in such places as Santa Fe, New Mexico, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, Vero Beach, Florida, and Honolulu. Fine, you think; a low-power TV signal can only travel 15 miles or so—I'm safe, right? Wrong. For besides its own stations, Channel America plans to establish a low-power program network to bring Barris shows to any low-power station in the land.

But wait. Wasn't low power origi-



nally conceived as an alternative to mainstream broadcasting? Wasn't the idea to create thousands of new, small-scale TV stations that would bring minorities and the non-rich into broadcasting? Well, certainly it's too soon to doubt that Chuck Barris subscribes to these noble ideals—or that he can reconcile them to his style of programming. Why not *The Chinese-American Gong Show*? Or *The Chicano Dating Game*?

Watch your local listings.

M.P.

as *play* it, like a musical instrument. "I just come in, sit down, and turn on anything at all. I'll go up and down all the channels, because I'm too lazy to look in the program guide." Only rarely does she watch a program from beginning to end. Still, she keeps the set on virtually all her waking moments. It's what she does these days. Her concluding thought: "I'm totally happy with it. . .almost."

J.T.

Job-a-thon

"In our region of northeastern Ohio," says Mark Kern, public-relations director for WKYC-TV, Cleveland, "unemployment is around 14 percent, and in some areas it exceeds 20 percent. We wanted to do something about it. We wanted to actually put people back to work." What the NBC-owned station did was to broadcast a three-hour job fair.

The idea was borrowed from KGAN-TV, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which claims to have been the first TV station in the country to produce a job-a-thon, a kind of telethon on which people present their resumes and employers advertise job openings on the air. Working with the state employment office KGAN-TV solicited about 250 job openings from employers last July, announced them between segments of a movie, and then arranged for some 700 applicants to advertise their qualifications. The result: new jobs for about a hundred people.

Since then, more than 60 television stations around the country have devoted air-time to match people with jobs and discuss unemployment-related problems. WKYC's job fair in Cleveland was probably the largest of these campaigns. The station was assisted not only by the state employment service but by five educational institutions. The aim was to provide the unemployed with the skills to find jobs on their own.

During the broadcast, some 20,000 people applied either by phone or in person at the five designated remote locations for more than 1,000 job opportunities. The jobs ranged from manual labor to engineering, from an opening for a music teacher to one for a belly dancer. In the view of the job fair's producer, John Emmert, the broadcast succeeded even for those who failed to find placement, because it gave a sense "that we're all in this together."

E.S.

TV News on Paper

For decades, newspapers and magazines have bemoaned their plight in the face of new methods of electronic communication.

First radio, then television, and most recently videotex, have been accused of dealing death blows to the print media. One industry study claims newspaper-reading will drop between 30 and 60 percent in households with videotex.

Instead of passively accepting this view of the future, one newspaper chain has decided to beat the visual media by joining them. In *USA Today*, Gannett Co. has created a hybrid newspaper that is truly a creature of the electronic age—a publication that has more in common with television than the newspaper as we know it. The same satellites that bring television pictures to our home receivers also bring *USA Today* to major cities across the country. Data are transmitted page by page from Washington, D.C. to the different markets, where quality printing techniques are used to turn out the thousands of copies hitting newsstands every morning. Without these newly developed technologies, the country's first national general-interest daily could not exist.

The newspaper made its debut in the Washington area last September. By April, it infiltrated 44 of the top 100 markets. Its circulation increased to 800,000 in the same month, and is expected to reach 1.15 million by year's end. Gannett must be doing something right.

In content, *USA Today* is less like a newsmagazine or major city newspaper than a distillation of television news and talk show with a touch of friendly hometown rag. Its stories are people-oriented, practical, and short—some are but a single sentence. Just one article in each of the paper's four sections is allowed to run onto a second page. Its "A" section, geared to hard news, runs about a dozen pages. Two of these are devoted to a round-up of local news from each of the 50 states, one is dedicated to blurbs on "newsmakers," one to weather, and one to an open forum on "a major issue in the news," such as pornography on cable, health-care costs, or state budget deficits. With yet another page dedicated to an interview with such celebrities as F. Lee Bailey and Albert Shanker, only four to six pages are left for news and ads.

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AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Subjects such as the lower airport taxi fares and the IRS crackdown on those "frequent flier" bonuses are written up on the front page. Obviously, *USA Today* isn't aiming to supplant *The New York Times*. Its message reads more like, "Move over Phil Donahue, Dan Rather, and the local television news team. The first television show in print is here."

USA Today, in fact, may be more like television than television itself. It delivers not only words, but pictures in vivid color. Its format caters expressly to the broadcast concept of the 30-second attention span. The newspaper also has a transient feeling. It's there to entertain and provide some information, then be thrown away.

The newspaper's readers are largely upscale and peripatetic; 90 percent of the time the paper is purchased at a newsstand or from a vending machine. Because *USA Today* is available (in theory, at least) anywhere, at any time, it outdoes traditional television in one way very important to its readers. So far it's the only method of getting the flavor of the Boise evening news program, along with Albuquerque's, on the red-eye from L.A. to New York.

ANNE SHAHMOON

Games to Grow by

Children's Computer Workshop, a subsidiary of Children's Television Workshop, is trying to do for video games what its parent, the creator of *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*, has done for television.

In conjunction with Atari and Tandy, CCW is marketing 24 games bound to gratify parents who consider the likes of *Star Strike* and *Pac-Man* violent, mindless, and addictive. The new games will be educational as well as entertaining, and, according to a CCW spokesman, will appeal to girls as well as boys, and foster cooperation among players. The company has designed one group of games for home and one for school use.

In *Cookie Monster Munch*, aimed at preschoolers, the child must pilot a figure through a maze, using a joystick, in order to "eat" the cookie at the end. By playing, the child becomes familiar with the concepts of right-and-left and up-and-down.

In another game for preschoolers, *Ernie's Magic Shapes*, the child learns to discriminate among shapes and colors—a



fundamental cognitive skill. When Ernie waves his wand, an object appears on the screen. The child then tries to select the identical object from a group at the top of the screen. If the two objects match, they both disappear. CCW researcher Leona Schauble points out that "the significant feature" of both *Ernie* and *Cookie Monster* "is that, unlike educational toys, where the learning is divorced from the actual game, in our games the learning is an intrinsic game element."

The classroom games, like the home games, have been crafted to delight as well as instruct. In *Picture Palace*, first- and second-graders can make words transform themselves into pictures, and vice versa. Each program offers a visual setting—"farmland," or "magicland"—and within each program, single words summon up one of seven images. If the player selects the word "castle," a castle appears on the screen. This association of words and pictures develops vocabulary and reading skills.

All the CCW games seek to encourage "pro-social" behavior, and some for children seven years and older aim to foster a spirit of cooperation. In *Taxi*, each of two players has a cab to pilot around a city map, with scores based on the number of passengers delivered to their destinations. The two players can compete, but they soon learn that both will earn more points if they work together.

Of course, no manufacturer considers his video games antisocial, and Atari, for one, argues that all of its games, and not just the ones designed by CCW, have educational value. But a video game, like a television program, presents its miniature world in a certain light, attaching desirable or undesirable consequences to this or that choice. Triumph through mass destruction has been the essential subtext of many video games. Even if they prove only marginally more instructive than the current crop, the CCW video games may claim the social value of providing pleasure in a setting that is, instead, peaceable and friendly.

SIMI HORWITZ

Smelling Is Believing

Think fast: What does your boss smell like? Brut, Carter Hall, Harris tweed, unbridled ambition, pheromones rampant? Pheromones? We'll get to that. The point is, smells are a critical element of communication. Really. According to the highly serious International Resource Development Inc., which charges \$985 for its studies, the disappointingly slow growth of videoconferencing can be traced directly, if not entirely, to the absence of "telesmell" capacity.

According to David Ledecy, an IRD researcher with a PhD in psychology from Harvard, people who confer by video "don't find it really conveys the 'presence' of the remote participants." You can build bigger and better screens, and try to give business executives a comforting resemblance to familiar television stars, but something will still be missing. Observes the Harvard graduate: "A face-to-face meeting includes some subtle elements, possibly including the effects of faint odors from body secretions."

Take away the smell and you've taken away the person.

This brings us to pheromones, which may not even exist in human beings. But if they do, these "message-carrying chemicals . . . may play some role in attracting members of the opposite sex or producing warning signals to potential sex rivals." This sounds suspiciously like a convention of moose, but IRD muses that pheromones, for some reason or other, may be the key to face-to-face meetings, smellwise.

The tragedy of this major finding is that the technology needed to transmit these comforting bodily signatures around the globe is a good 10 years away. This very expensive report suggests the use of "environmental fragrances" in the meantime, but you've got to wonder if the time hasn't come for a crash program in pheromone transmission. Surely the nation that put a man on the moon can put some pheromones in Phoenix.

J.T.

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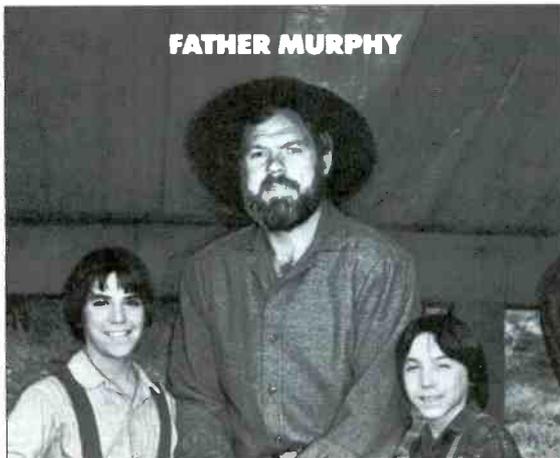
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Old Dog, New Tricks

UNTIL NOW the RCA video disc has been bringing up the rear in the parade of new technologies. Unlike its more dazzling cousin, the LaserVision interactive disc, the RCA disc could only be played from beginning to end, like a record, which meant the viewer could only use the system to watch movies and other conventional programming.

But RCA's first interactive disc player has finally arrived. When it goes on sale later this year, it will put the communications giant in a stronger position to compete with the makers of the LaserVision disc, which has had a four-year headstart in interactivity.

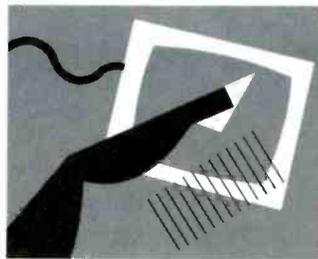
The new player allows the viewer accurate and speedy access to any part of an RCA disc (including those already on sale). It also, according to RCA spokesman Jim Murphy, paves the way for interactive games and instructional discs.

The development could cut into sales of the more costly LaserVision system: RCA's improved model is not expected to cost much more than its existing \$325 one.

Exercising Choice

THE AUDIENCE for network television is evaporating, and there is conjecture now about whether the cause is cable, pay cable, or independent stations playing *M*A*S*H*. But a recent national study of television viewers conducted by Decision Research Associates on behalf of Group W suggests another possibility.

Though television may be the leisure activity Americans engage in most frequently,



only 15 percent of the survey's respondents listed television as their favorite pastime: most ranked it behind reading. The category garnering the highest score for leisure-time enjoyment: physical activity, the

preference of 50 percent of the respondents.

Summarizing the results, Rob Duboff, general manager of the research firm, said: "It's not astonishing that network shares are falling, but it is interesting that the threat may not be from where we think it is. It's not the alternate technologies that are eating away at the audience. Simply, it's that television programming is less and less interesting, while athletic activity of all forms is more and more interesting."

VCRs: The Sound of a Boom

AN AMAZING thing has been happening to video-cassette recorders since December 1982: They've been selling. Sluggish VCR sales had spread a good deal of discomfort around RCA, Sony, and the 29 other firms in the business, and the VCR seemed like a technology whose time had not yet come. But sales in the last few months have, incredibly, doubled the year-earlier figures;

1983 figures are now likely to top three million units.

The feverish spate of buying may have something to do with price. A standard RCA VHS unit that might have sold last year for \$525 now sells for \$425, or even lower. Sony has similarly reduced prices on its Betamax, the second most popular brand. A growing price war is stimulating sales, if not profits: At these prices no one is making much money.

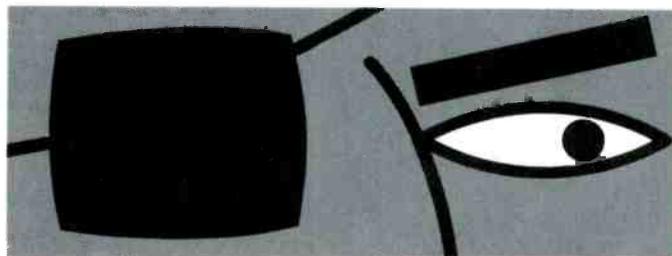
Price notwithstanding, the

VCR's moment may have arrived. Color TV sets sold slowly, too, until four million households had them, and sales took off. VCRs, now in five million homes, may have reached the same point. Substantially greater VCR penetration could cut into television ratings, hasten the development of pay-per-view schemes involving home taping, such as ABC's Home View Network, and lend cassette sales a greater weight in movie deals.

The Penance of Pirates

IN SAN DIEGO, COX Cable estimates that approximately 65,000 homes have been stealing its pay-service signal, costing the company between \$8 million and \$12 million annually. Cox is fighting back.

Says Chuck Peters, chief of Cox Cable's security department, "We have a fourteen-person security force sweeping the entire system daily on a street-by-street basis. If they spot a wire going into a non-subscriber home, they make a note of it." If the home is receiving cable without charge



because of Cox's poor accounting procedures (which, Peters admits, happens all too often), the company rectifies its mistake.

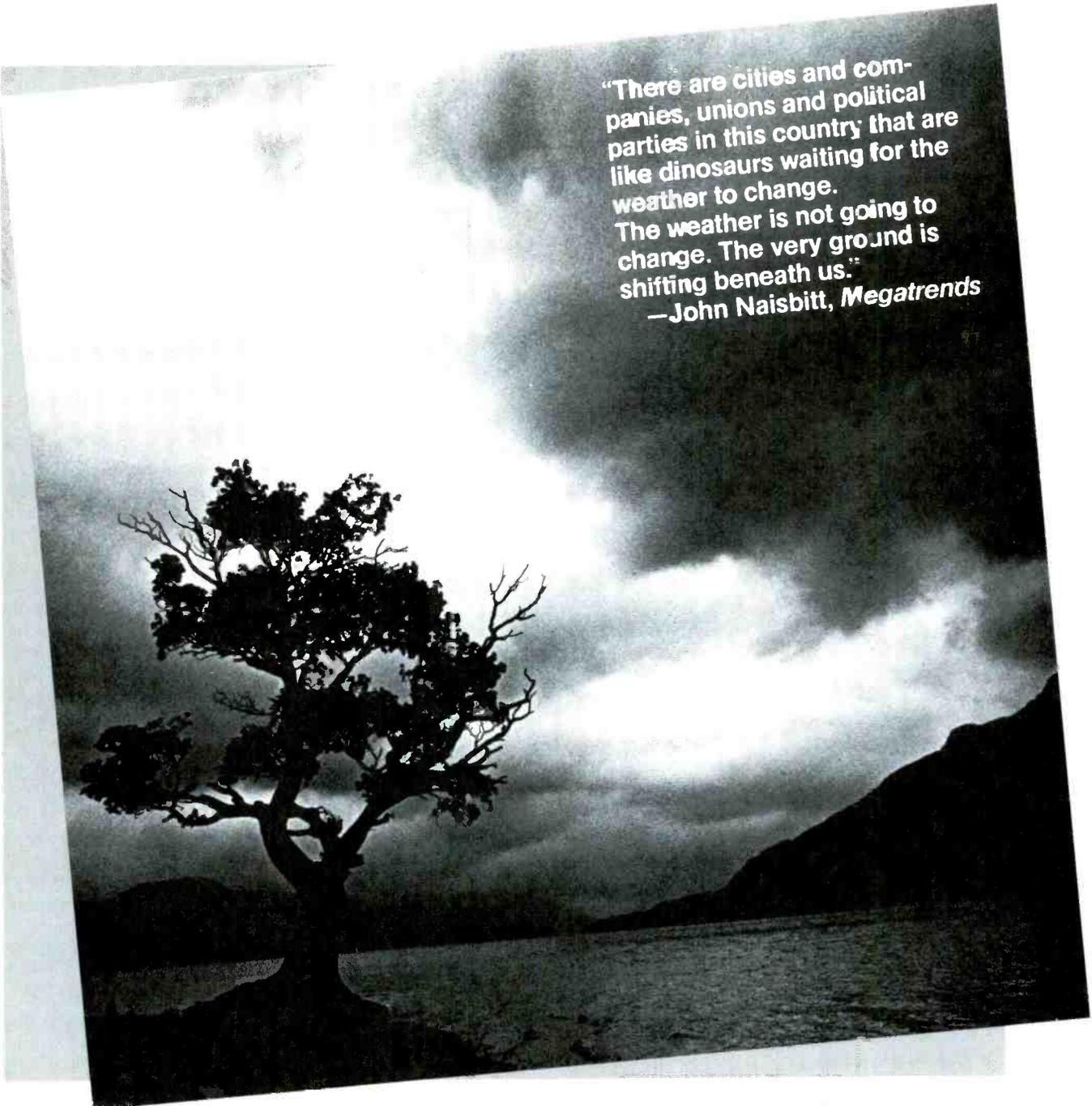
If it is determined that the viewer has illegally tapped into Cox's line (by breaking into a locked control box or by splicing into a neighbor's line),

the security force attaches a "sweep analyzer" to the wire to detect whether or not an illegal converter is being used inside. Armed with this evidence, Cox Cable either convinces the offender to subscribe or disconnects the illegal line and turns the evidence over to the district attor-

ney for prosecution.

At Cox Cable's instigation, the California state legislature has passed a tough cable-piracy law making prosecution a threat that can't be ignored. Anyone convicted of possessing an illegal wire can be fined \$6,000 and jailed for up to 90 days.

Although no one has yet been prosecuted, the threat of legal action has already had its effect. More than 4,000 illegal converters have been turned in to Cox Cable, and approximately 2,000 former pirates now pay for the cable services they used to receive free. ■



“There are cities and companies, unions and political parties in this country that are like dinosaurs waiting for the weather to change. The weather is not going to change. The very ground is shifting beneath us.”
—John Naisbitt, *Megatrends*

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“Those who anticipate the new era will be a quantum leap ahead of those who hold on to the past,” writes John Naisbitt in *Megatrends*. “If we can learn to make uncertainty our friend, we can achieve much more...”

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Is Home Taping a Crime?

by Eric Scheye

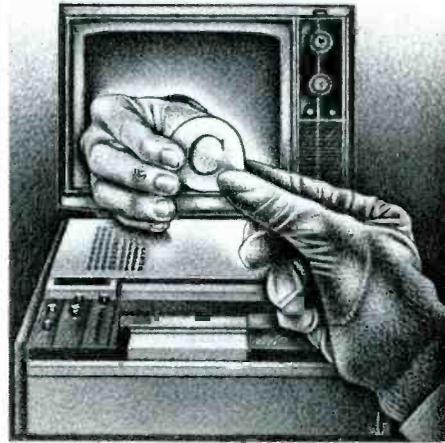
ONE THING is impossible for God," Mark Twain once declared, "and that is to find sense in any copyright law on the planet." Certainly the confusion arising from the Betamax case—the copyright suit brought against Sony Corporation of America by Universal City Studios and Walt Disney Productions—lends credence to Twain's despair. Copyright law was once merely arcane; new technologies have now made it utterly bewildering.

The Betamax case began in 1976, one year after Sony introduced the home video-cassette recorder (VCR) into the United States. Universal and Disney, producers of television and theatrical movies, charged that home taping on the VCR constitutes an infringement of their copyright. But a federal district court disagreed, holding that taping falls under the "fair use" standard, which stipulates that consumers can legally use copyrighted material if that use is "socially valuable" and does not diminish the worth of the copyrighted material.

Having lost the first round, Universal and Disney appealed, and in October 1981 the circuit court reversed the earlier decision. Last January the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case, and it will lay down a final ruling later this year. In the meantime, Universal has sued all other major VCR manufacturers and distributors—though no action will be taken in those cases until the high court's ruling is known.

Much more than the contending economic interests and the consumer's convenience are riding on the decision. As stated in the Supreme Court's landmark *Red Lion* decision of 1969, "It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas." Yet information has become an increasingly expensive commodity, so public access to that marketplace may indeed be impeded. Attaching a price tag to home taping might thus harm our First Amendment rights.

Universal and Disney counter, however, that it is not the First Amendment that is at stake but the right to property.



According to Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, "The single most important right is the right to property." Television movies, sitcoms, and talk shows are "intellectual property" owned by the authors and ostensibly protected under copyright provisions. To use property without paying for it, the argument goes, is a form of stealing. The VCR robs the plaintiffs of their money, since no one pays to tape at home. "Somebody is using property that belongs to someone else," testified Valenti before the U.S. Senate. "I think it is well settled in this society that nothing of value is free."

Valenti compares the VCR to a "wild animal devouring everything in sight," or a "great tidal wave." More soberly, Peter Nolan, Disney's senior counsel, claims that copyright protection is the only rule insuring a studio's fair return on its work. Currently, eight out of 10 theatrical films do not recoup their investment through movie-house release. Studios, therefore, depend for profitability on post-theater markets, which the VCR presumably diminishes. Who, Nolan asks, will watch a rerun of a movie or of a syndicated series if he has previously taped that show? If a movie as popular and as frequently aired as *The Wizard of Oz* were taped by everyone who watched it, who would want to see it next year on television?

Valenti takes the argument even further, claiming that taping at home will hurt the consumer as well. Without an

adequate profit, he says, the studios will produce not only fewer movies but lower-quality movies.

The defendants in the Betamax case, on the other hand, argue that the author's right to be adequately compensated for his work must be balanced with the public's right to easy access. The fulcrum of this balancing act is the "fair use" doctrine.

In its Supreme Court brief, Sony insists that taping at home, like taping for purposes of education, research, and criticism, is "socially valuable," and thus should receive fair-use protection. New video technologies, says Gary Shapiro, lobbyist for the Electronic Industries Association, offer us "freedom from the dictates of time. The '80s may very well be the era of individual freedom and expanded personal choice, fueled by the new technologies"—of which the VCR represents the cutting edge.

Hollywood and the film studios have repeatedly rejected new technologies, says Charles Ferris, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. "The myopia of Hollywood, which developed decades ago, first over TV—which they tried to starve to death—and then over cable, has now been transferred to the VCR." In each case, Ferris points out, the new technology benefited Hollywood, expanding its market and profits. The VCR may do the same. In fact, "the VCR," Ferris notes, "is already Hollywood's best friend. It provides an expanded audience. *The New York Times* in January 1982 reported that the major Hollywood studios will make more money from the sale of prerecorded cassettes than they will from the licensing of movies to the three networks."

Ferris adds that, at worst, the VCR does not materially harm the studios. He cites numerous studies indicating that most people tape programs only in order to watch them at a more convenient time, rather than to collect a library. After viewing a taped show, the consumer generally erases the tape and reuses it. Nielsen and Arbitron estimate the number of VCRs taping off the television and include those estimates in their ratings:

Kye Carbone

THE ESSENTIAL 1983 FIELD GUIDE TO THE NEW ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT

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"If you've ever tried to decipher the confusing code-language of video technology—DBS, MSO, LPTV and SMATV, for instance—or merely wondered about the difference between basic cable and pay TV, 'The 1983 Field Guide to the Electronic Media' is for you." Tom Jory, Associated Press.

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man said, 'Who'd be without it?' Not me." Kay Gardella, New York Daily News.

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***The Players**—Although hundreds of companies are involved in the new television, only a handful are likely to shape its future. This section outlines the powers that be.

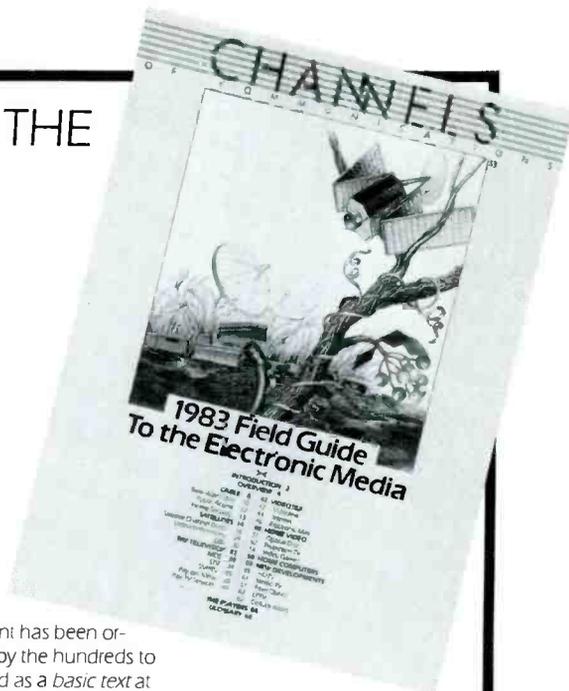
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ronment has been ordered by the hundreds to be used as a *basic text* at colleges and universities throughout the country, as well as in *training programs* for executives in some of the very companies reported on in The Guide.

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KOPLOVITZ



"When the look is the primary concern, we will always go to film."

Kay Koplovitz is President and Chief Executive Officer of the USA Cable Network. She is responsible for the production and distribution of programming for the nationwide cable television network. Ms. Koplovitz is the first woman in the country to head a TV network.

"Satellite communications, my first love, was introduced by our industry on September 30, 1975, the date of the first domestic use of satellites. It was 'The Thrilla in Manila,' if you remember that fight. I coordinated the media portion for Home Box Office. It started the whole explosion of satellite delivery for the cable industry—hence today's cable TV networks. In 1977, there was only one network being distributed by satellite. Today, there are over 50 networks reaching 27 million homes. By the end of this decade, we hope to exceed the 50-million-home mark.

"Sports programming will always be an important part of television, whether cable or network. TV can, first of all, bring you facial expressions better than you can get from a seat in the stadium. And TV gives you the instant replay—three different angles on the same play. Television

does that better than anything else. That's why I think sports is always going to be a prime product for television.

"USA Cable has a number of TV series that are produced on film for us, in addition to our movie specials, of course. These now include *Ovation*, which involves the performing arts; our children's series, *Calliope* (which has won several awards); our *Time-Out Theater* sports program; and *Night Flight*, a late-night music series. Probably 25% of our programming is produced on film.

"There are qualities one expects from film that tape cannot deliver. Film has the quality look—which has a lot to do with shading, color, and depth. Take the *Brideshead Revisited* series we're running. It has the most magnificent production values that you just can't get on tape, qualities that are captured best on film. When the look is the primary concern, we will always go to film.

"Without question, film is going to continue to be a major element on cable in the future. I think movies will always be on cable, for the production values film delivers. Regardless of what other kinds of program formats you try, the way a film or movie is put together and shot

(whether the audience realizes it's seeing *film* or not) makes it an enjoyable experience. We will also continue to shoot special segments, close-up personality segments, on film.

"The creative opportunities in cable today are endless. There's a continuous stream of projects and opportunities, basic cable and pay cable, syndication and disc, foreign and in-flight and so on. Writers and producers have never had so many windows before. What I've done, what I want to continue to do, is help open those windows!"

If you would like to receive our bimonthly publication about filmmakers, KODAK Professional Forum, write Eastman Kodak Company, Dept. 640, 343 State Street, Rochester, NY 14650.

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Since advertisers' fees are based on a network's ratings, the film's value is not depreciated by at-home taping, and therefore no copyright has been violated.

Naturally, Universal and Disney disagree with this reasoning. They say that because the VCR viewer can "fast-forward" through commercials, it is logical that advertisers will eventually demand a reduction in the cost of an ad. Frito-Lay and TWA, in fact, have already requested price concessions from the networks for just this reason.

While the Supreme Court wades through the morass surrounding the Betamax case, Congress waits in the wings to pass some kind of copyright legislation. One bill recently introduced by Charles Mathias (R-Md) would impose a royalty tax on the manufacturer or distributor of the VCR or blank tape. Another, from Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) and Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz), would create a copyright exemption for tapes made and viewed at home.

If technology has brought us to the current copyright impasse, it may also lead us out. ABC has developed a system in which tapes are erased automatically.

Unfortunately, even if such a solution satisfied the consumer, the movie studios, and Sony, it still leaves the First Amendment issues unresolved. ■

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The Great American Hype Machine

by Les Brown



THEY GOT ME for parts of *The Winds of War*, some of *The Thorn Birds*, and most of *Brideshead Revisited*, just as they had nailed me earlier for *Roots*, *Shogun*, *Holocaust*, *Cosmos*, and even the “Who Shot J.R.?” segment of *Dallas*. The only football I watched all season was the Super Bowl game. They do have my number, those engineers of the hype machine. I’m often found in their amazing statistics.

Only a trip abroad kept me from the *M*A*S*H* finale. Of course I was able to screen it later on tape, but that was only to satisfy curiosity. What I missed was the important thing that can’t be retrieved: the event. It was like having missed the national observance of a one-time-only holiday.

I used to feel victimized by hype and angry with myself for giving in to it. How stupid to be captured, usually with dross, to have had my resistance worn down by the unrelenting drumbeat of the media.

But I’ve gotten over the resentment. Now I find myself enjoying hype for its own magnificence, as a connoisseur. The great American hype machine is truly something to marvel at; its creations are always awesome in scale, ephemera pumped up to Olympian proportions. When the juice is on, the machine sweeps us into a frenzied national fantasy of expectation. When the event finally arrives, the thrill—the great thrill—is purely in being there. Sometimes the play is not the thing.

The Winds of War was a masterpiece of hype. A milkwater soap opera set in the times of World War II and stretched over 18 television hours, it was inflated to such momentousness that it succeeded in herding nearly two-thirds of America for all or part of six consecutive evenings on ABC-TV. Practically everything in competition got blown away, including the programming on public television and the leading pay network, HBO, which indicates that viewers came from every quarter. ABC boasted that more Americans relived the war that week than had fought in it.

Winds met the litmus test of a true hype event: It left no aftertaste. When it was over, nothing remained from all the hoopla but the accounting. Its residue was the same as that for the Super Bowl—a raft of statistics, some of them pointing to new records. As for the audience, far from experiencing a letdown, it disbanded secure in the knowledge that before long the great hype

machine will provide another artificial event.

Not too many years ago, *hype* had pejorative connotations. During the ’60s, it was used in reference to spurious promotional ploys. *The Dictionary of American Slang* traces the etymology to the drug culture that existed early in this century. As a nickname for the hypodermic needle, *hype* later came to stand for the dope peddler. The slang dictionary, published in 1960, defines the verb form of *hype* as “to cheat,” and the adjective *hyped-up* as “artificial, phony, as though produced by a hypodermic injection of a stimulant.”

The word clearly has gained respectability during the last two decades, and so has the practice of hype. To most of us today, it

***The Winds of War* was a masterpiece of hype: a milkwater soap opera so inflated that it reached two-thirds of America over six days.**

is accepted as a benign byproduct of the media bombardment upon modern society. Whether with television mini-series, or movies like *E.T.* and *Star Wars*, or museum exhibitions like the Treasure of Tutankhamen, most people do not believe they are being conned or manipulated by the hype machine, but rather that they are being guided by it to important new sources of cultural enrichment.

What exactly is the great American hype machine? Nothing more recondite than an overindulgent news industry. Publicists, marketers, and others skilled in the art of persuasion may run hugely successful campaigns for their products or shows, but they cannot pull off a genuine, big-time hype without the enthusiastic editorial embrace of the media—newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. There exists a breed of editor always quick to sense the trendy or exploitable new thing and to celebrate it with features, interviews, and picture stories. Hype begins when all the media scramble to latch onto it.

As with a legitimate news story, the media feed off of what the media have uncovered. The premise is that the more people read about the event, the more they want to read about it or hear it discussed on the air. At a certain point, the hype takes on a life of

Keith Bendis

its own, and there's no stopping it. Then come the banners, T-shirts, product tie-ins, and department-store window displays.

You can't hype just anything, of course. What got *The Winds of War* into the machine was the publicity that it cost \$40 million to produce. Hold on. That comes to more than \$2 million an hour, which means it's the most expensive television show ever. Now there's an angle to excite the daily press.

There were, to be sure, other selling points: its derivation from a best-selling novel by an old hand at best sellers, Herman Wouk; the historical sketch of World War II and the styles of the period; actors resurrecting Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and a cast of veteran film stars and some new faces—the potential for interviews galore. The scheduling tactic also held an element of suspense: By the time the serial began, the issue was not whether *Winds* was a good enough program to justify ABC's colossal investment in it but whether enough people would justify the investment by devoting six consecutive evenings of prime time to it.

It all fell together beautifully, even to the winning of hype's highest award, the cover of *Time*.

But in all that was written, no one in the press, so far as I'm aware, checked out the claim that the show had cost \$40 million to produce—or the assertion that the network and its affiliates spent an additional \$25 million on advertising and promotion. I have no reason to doubt these claims, but they are fair questions for journalists, since they formed the basis for the initial interest in *The Winds of War*. If hype is pernicious, it is to the news media themselves. Hype is journalism in such a manic state that it loses sight of its mission.

When the ratings came in for *Winds*, some newspapers reported great enthusiasm among network programmers for the mini-series form, since it proved that the networks can recapture the audience they have been losing steadily to independent stations, the pay-television networks, and cable. *The New York Times* quoted Steve Mills, a vice president of CBS Entertainment, as saying: "I think we all feel this is the way to go now."

Winds was taken as a victory for all the networks. The sense was that they all see now where their salvation lies: in more well-

hyped mini-series, although they acknowledge a history of bombs in the form. One thinks at once of *The French-Atlantic Affair*, and a string of shows once billed by NBC as *Novels for Television*. But the real problem is with the idea that they can be "well-hyped" at will.

The great American hype machine is quirky. You can't just throw money into it and get a result like *The Winds of War*. It's not enough merely to be good, or even excellent. There are

The hyped mini-series is now seen as the networks' salvation. But pay-per-view promoters may steal their thunder.

dozens of imponderables, not the least of them the competition. Commercial television has no patent on the hype machine. Movies, sports, books, theater, museums, and even opera have some claim to it. And the next big contenders in the hype market will be the pay-per-view promoters.

These are the entrepreneurs for one-shot, televised events who can clean up by getting five million households to pay, say, \$10 each for their programs. This new medium has a new kind of television economics, available to homes with two-way cable or with access to addressable converters. With one shot at the jackpot, it needs, more than any other form of show business, to be hype's child. In the next few years, as many as a dozen promoters may be pitching events to the box offices at home, playing in the biggest crapshoot of all. Some are bound to get the best of it in the hype sweepstakes.

What they can depend on is that we are a public highly susceptible to hype. We love being steered to the next event, being part of a tide, witnessing the moment, having a widely shared experience. Maybe more than loving hype, we need it—need to have peaks in our lives, even if artificial; need a mythology; need the fantasy that raises ordinary entertainment to the realm of the extraordinary.

But mainly what we need—and have always needed—is to look forward to something. Hype has ancient roots. ■

Hype's Super Sabbath

WHAT PEOPLE seem to fear most about the growth of pay television is its eventual ability to spirit away the Super Bowl from conventional television. I would say not to worry. This game, by reason of overzealous hype, is condemned to being perpetually a "free" television offering.

There has never been a hype quite to compare with the Super Bowl. Merely a championship contest between two professional football leagues (later two conferences of the merged leagues), it had some powerful extras going for it in the beginning: One league was carried exclusively on Sundays by CBS, the other exclusively by NBC. Four titans were involved, and two of them were networks—the mightiest cogs in the hype machine.

As the first made-for-television championship game, the Super Bowl was created in 1967 because it was sure to be lucrative for both leagues and a powerhouse spectacular for television. Under the arrangement, CBS and NBC would alternate coverage year by year, but both were allowed to carry the first game. The build-up to Super Bowl I, therefore, was colossal. So was the pay-off: 77 million viewers between the two networks, a fantastic audience for a Sunday afternoon.

Over the years, with the hype machine pumping away, the Super Bowl has developed its own scripture. The godheads of

the game—those who made the heroic plays—have been sainted, their feats relived on video tape and worshipped every Super Sunday for hours and hours before the kickoff.

The hype got out of hand (although it seemed brilliant at the time) with the creation of Super Sunday, a day big enough to contain this game of games—a quasi-national holiday ranking for festiveness and cheer with the biggest of them all. We now have had 17 Super Sundays in America centered at the television hearth; some young people have never known a world without them. Commerce pretty well stops on Super Sunday, except in those temples of sport, the local bars.

So the Super Bowl has become more than a championship game; it is the ritual service for Super Sunday. You can't sell a holiday, especially one with so much tradition and sacred baggage, to the pay-television interests. You couldn't do it with Christmas or the Fourth of July, and you can't with Super Sunday.

Through the genius of hype, the day belongs to all of us now, even those of us who don't worship at the gridiron. And I suspect Congress one day will be put to the task of protecting the rights of the indigent and the unwired to observe Super Sunday in the manner in which they are accustomed, and in which God intended. ■

The
Fall and
Rise of
PUBLIC
TELEVISION

by Martin Koughan

LARRY GROSSMAN listened quietly as the PBS engineers made their presentation, all the while thinking this was just about the dumbest idea he'd ever heard.

The year was 1976, and Grossman had just given up his own successful advertising agency to take the top job at the Public Broadcasting Service, only to discover that he was a network president without a network. PBS had no money to produce programming, no voice in what was produced, and no authority to mount a coherent schedule that all its affiliates would carry.

Yet here were the PBS engineers proposing to spend \$40 million to build a new interconnection system, using Western Union's WESTAR satellite, to replace the single-channel land lines then used to distribute programs to stations. The satellite would enable PBS to transmit several channels of programming simultaneously at a lower cost, the engineers explained. But Grossman was not buying.

"I told them it made no sense to me," recalls Grossman, "Why spend all that money on a distribution system when we had nothing to distribute? I told them, let's develop some key programs first and worry about the distribution later."

As Grossman saw it, a network that

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could not afford to program one channel did not need several channels. But he soon learned that logic and common sense did not necessarily apply to public television. A few months later, PBS was given permission to broadcast live coverage of the confirmation hearings for President Carter's cabinet nominees, a television first, and arguably a valuable public service. Grossman thought he was scoring a broadcasting coup by clearing the PBS schedule for the hearings, but the stations saw things differently.

"There was hell to pay," he remembers. "Most of our stations had contracts to provide educational programs to

schools during the day, and we preempted them for the hearings. I thought we were making history and all we did was make trouble. We were dictating their schedules from Washington, and there was an unbelievable flood of angry telegrams and phone calls. Suddenly, the satellite started to look pretty good."

The satellite interconnection was finally built in 1978, not to strengthen the national service, but rather to indulge the local stations' demand for autonomy, by feeding them a choice of programs reflecting their disparate priorities. The multi-channel satellite system came to symbolize public television's byzantine

Kinuko Craft

structure: a shaky network ruled by a polyglot alliance of stations locked in endless competition for funds and air-time. The resulting anarchy has pitted the system's educators against its cultural broadcasters, rural stations against urban, big against small. The only forces of unity in public television are a distrust of its Washington leadership and a desire for federal support.

Approving the satellite system was, in Grossman's words, "a way of saving my job," but it may, ironically, end up saving public broadcasting from the fiscal and structural problems that now threaten it. For the same multiple-channel capacity originally designed as a concession to the system's disorder has now made possible a host of potentially lucrative new businesses. Because PBS controls this valuable asset, the satellite stands to give Grossman a new measure of power, and the chance to prove that a degree of centralization is not a threat, but a golden opportunity for public television.

A

FTER LIMPING unsteadily along for 15 years, public television is now undergoing a radical transformation because the powers

of the system—the stations—are on the verge of collapse. Federal support has already been slashed \$42 million (from \$172 to \$130 million), and even deeper cuts are threatened. Until now, the debate in public television centered on how little money there is to perform its mission, but the severity of today's crisis has shifted the focus to an even more fundamental issue: just how poorly public television manages what paltry funding it has.

"Public broadcasting cannot continue to do business the way it always has," warns Hartford Gunn Jr., the first president of PBS and one of the original architects of the service. "People have ignored the problems for the last six years because money from the federal government has increased every year. You could be sloppy or lax because you never had to pay for your mistakes. The federal money masked the true magnitude of the problem. Now, all of a sudden, the mask has been ripped away, and they're staring the problem right in the face."

The problem is that public television is a system with no center of gravity and no shared sense of purpose. It has its roots in the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which provided the first federal monies to

expand the Ford Foundation's concept of educational television and create an alternative, public television network. The act established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) to administer the federal funds and insulate the system from political influence. CPB in turn created the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) to operate and program the network. That partnership, however, was short-lived because CPB's political insulation proved very thin indeed.

By 1972, President Nixon's appointees to the CPB board had lost patience with the way PBS was spending the government's money. PBS's public-affairs programs were considered intolerably liberal and anti-establishment, so Nixon applied pressure by vetoing public television's funding bill, while his CPB board attempted to assert its authority over all national programming. In the power struggle that ensued, Nixon found some enthusiastic allies among the local public TV boards, most of which were comprised of conservative community leaders who shared the Administration's politics and resented being force-fed liberal programming from the Eastern Establishment. Faced with the loss of federal funds, the boards eagerly embraced Nix-

THE PECULIAR WORLD OF PUBLIC TELEVISION

If you think that PBS stands for the Public Broadcasting System, you, like most Americans, have failed to fathom the arcane structure of public television. In fact, there is nothing systematic about the way public television functions.

PBS is the lesser half of a two-headed, Washington-based bureaucracy. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is generally afforded more deferential treatment by the stations because it controls the federal purse strings. Set up in 1968 as a nonprofit corporation and run by a board of 15 Presidential appointees, CPB will distribute \$130 million in federal funds this year, with more than half that amount going directly to the stations in the form of Community Service Grants to help cover operating expenses and program costs.

PBS actually stands for the Public Broadcasting Service, a name chosen quite deliberately because the word "system" might be construed to mean "network," a dirty word in the peculiar world of public television. Since its creation in 1969, PBS has served

two masters. Until 1972, the service answered directly to CPB and functioned as the central program authority. In 1973, PBS became the national membership organization for the stations, responsible for scheduling and distribution but with no voice in what programs would be produced.

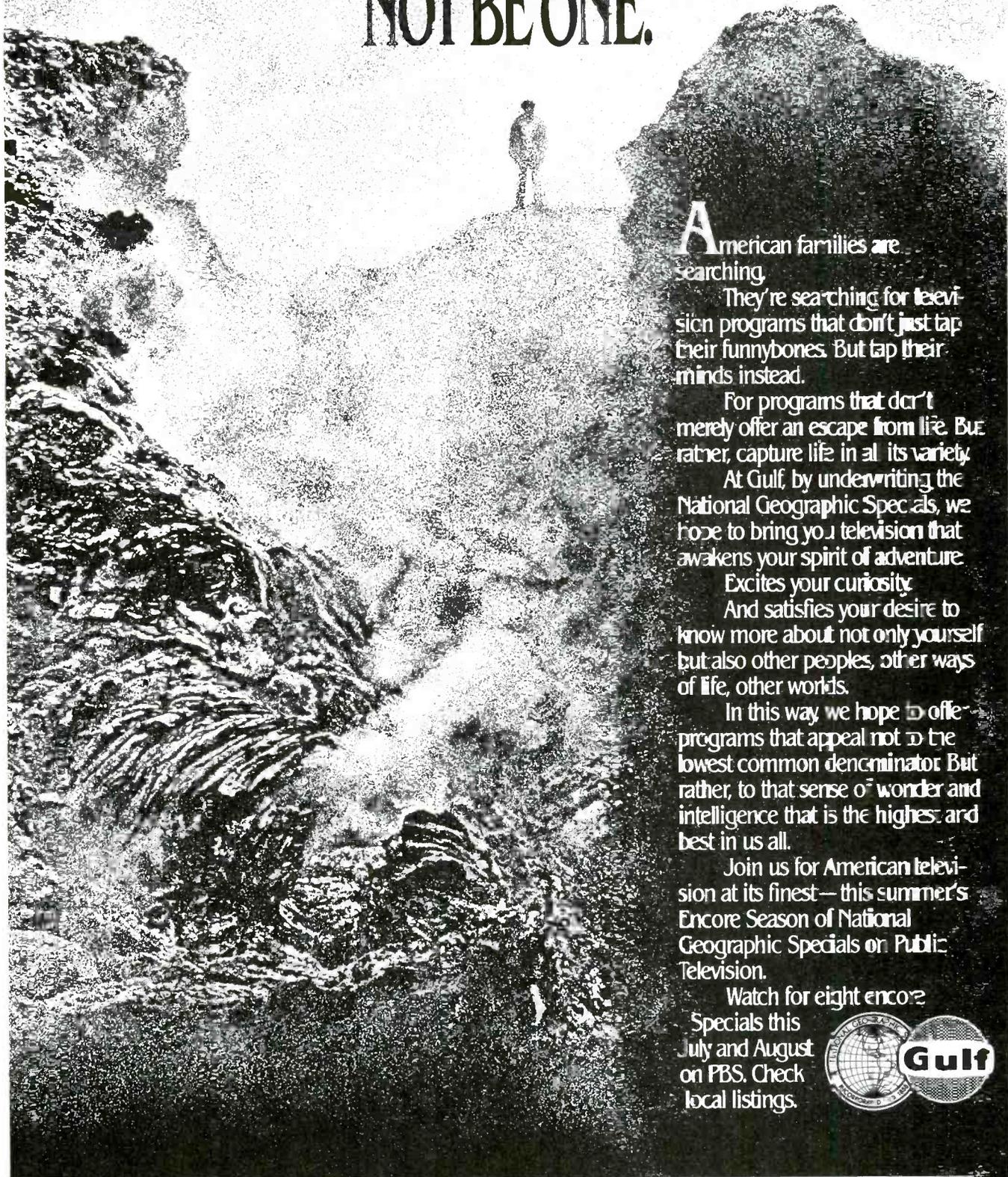
PBS's masters are an unusually diverse and uncooperative lot. The 159 licensees operating 300 public TV stations fall into four distinctly different categories. Two-thirds of the licensees are institutionally and educationally oriented: 52 are colleges and universities; 23 are state authorities, and 15 are municipal boards of education. The remaining 69 licensees are nonprofit civic corporations, mostly community stations serving large cities, which place a higher value on aesthetics than instruction. Station relationships have traditionally been based less on cooperation than competition for the largest share of limited revenue sources.

This loose confederation chooses national programs through the Station Program Cooperative, a mechanism that illustrates just how difficult it is to

reach a consensus in public television. Producers submit more than 200 proposals to PBS, which in turn submits them to the stations for preference votes, until the list is reduced to about 50 finalists. These are then screened at the annual PBS Program Fair, and the balloting continues until the number of stations voting for a particular program is sufficient to cover its costs. Only this year was the process streamlined to force all participating stations to carry the same package of programs—a package constituting only half the programs distributed by PBS.

Even more curious is that public TV stations are required to carry the PBS schedule for only eight prime-time hours, Sunday through Wednesday; each station has the right to decide how to fill the rest of its broadcast day, and PBS has plenty of competitors. Four station-owned regional networks offer alternatives to the national PBS feed: the Eastern Educational Network, the Southern Educational Communications Association, the Central Educational Network, and the Pacific Mountain Network.

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on's concept of "grassroots localism," which eviscerated PBS as the central programming authority, reducing it to an organization owned and governed by its contentious member stations.

The Nixon CPB board got what it wanted: an impotent PBS, responsible for distribution but unable to control what it distributes. And the stations got their wish: a direct share of federal funds for their unrestricted use (in the form of Community Service Grants) and control of program content.

What emerged from the decentraliza-

Public television cannot survive in its present form —it is too chaotic, too inefficient, and too broke.

tion of public television was an inept experiment in television democracy that violated the laws of broadcast economics; it was a system unable to exploit the economies of scale or institute intelligent program planning. National programs were to be selected and funded by a perversely inefficient mechanism called the Station Program Cooperative (SPC), which shares all the defects of the United Nations—functioning as a mock democracy that operates on the one-station, one-vote principle. This might have worked had the stations shared a sense of public television's mission. But like the UN, the public television community is a

fractious lot given to endless political fighting, able to agree only on a deep distrust of superpowers. Any element that attempts to rise above the rabble and provide leadership, even for the good of the system, is quickly knocked down by the member states. Public television has evolved into a system in which foresight is resented and creative initiatives are subverted.

Even though the objective of federal funding for public television was to promote the production of quality national programming, less than half the grant money funneled through the stations goes to the purchase of national programming through the SPC. Even less goes towards local programming, which has all but disappeared from public television. Instead, the federal money has been used to prop up largely redundant local-station bureaucracies that fight among themselves for scarce program dollars just to keep their personnel and facilities busy.

One result of this competition and redundancy has been skyrocketing station overhead, which has reached such frightening levels—often exceeding 40 percent of a program's budget—that public television can no longer really afford to buy the programs produced by its own stations. The system's mighty production empires are thus collapsing under their own weight. During the last year, the stations in Los Angeles and New York, the nation's major talent centers, came dangerously close to shutting down. At one point, KCET's Sunset Boulevard studio was up for sale, and the once invincible WNET, PBS's largest program supplier, has been virtually paralyzed by a \$7 million deficit. WNET had become the de facto chief programmer of PBS because the wealthy New York corporate community helped it raise more production dollars than its sister stations, which in turn brought WNET the largest share of federal support. But with the government's cash flow reduced to a trickle, WNET is

saddled with a largely idle \$20 million plant and more than 500 employees.

Facing the real danger of a continuing drop in federal support, WNET is struggling to identify alternative sources of funds, and by far the most promising would be an increase in corporate underwriting, which provided the lion's share of the station's budget last year. "There is a real chance," says John Jay Iselin, president of WNET, "to build a substantial and meaningful bridge to the private sector. We're going to try to put some struts into that bridge and further strengthen it for a lot heavier traffic down the line."

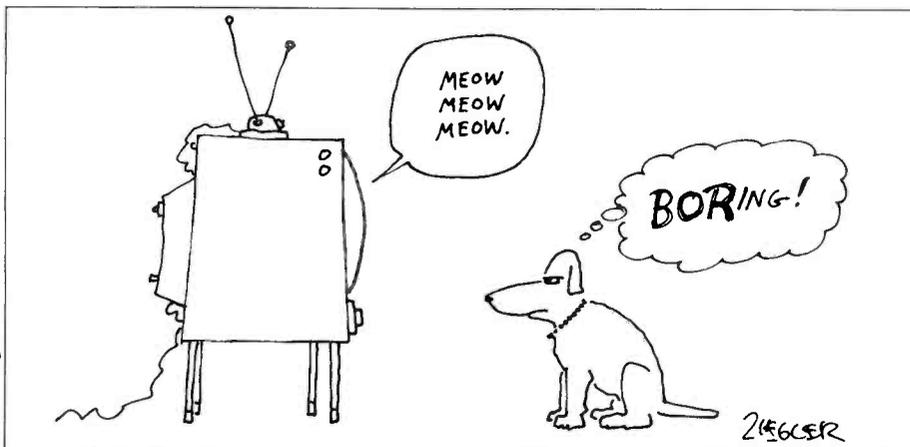
Are Ads the Answer?

That "heavier traffic" may include not just program underwriting by corporations, but advertising as well. WNET is one of seven public TV stations experimenting with the sale of commercials, or "enhanced underwriting," as Iselin prefers to call it. "My hope," he explains, "is that by providing a rather more articulated corporate message we will persuade corporations to identify with our particular product line."

Increased reliance on corporate support will not come without a price. It threatens to widen the schism between the large community stations and public television's educational majority, who are virtually unanimous in their belief that advertising undermines the fundamental mission of public broadcasting. "It could mean the end of our dream of excellence," warns CPB president Edward J. Pfister. "Once you take that step you are very likely to lose too much control and change the character of what you do. We will begin to modify our programming to deliver certain kinds of audiences. It will become less experimental, less controversial."

What is significant about corporate underwriting is not the quality of programs it can deliver but the types of programs it will not support. With image-building as the main criterion, the most attractive project for a corporation is rarely the most adventurous idea. In the rush to attract program sponsors and commercials, there is a danger that the serious treatment of important issues will be left behind.

"We have always been thought of as a nice luxury but never a necessity," admits David Loxton, the executive in charge of *Non Fiction Television*, WNET's independent documentary series. "Our programs have created unrest among funders. There is no question there are pressures we get from WNET, which is trying to get large sums of money from AT&T and Exxon, who are not



Jack Ziegler

happy with muckraking." Indeed, after four seasons and numerous journalistic awards, it appears likely that *Non Fiction Television* will soon disappear from public television.

It is entirely possible that public television in its present form cannot be saved. The problem of how to make partners out of stations that have grown up as rivals, the challenge of enforcing leanness on a system built on wasteful and inefficient practices, may be insurmountable. Local stations, having failed to make major programming contributions to their communities, could prove expendable. Radical corrective surgery could entail eliminating the local overhead entirely by liquidating the stations, with their more than 9,000 employees, and replacing them with transmitters relaying a more efficiently designed national service. In this time of crisis, it is not such a fanciful notion.

"I think there is a meltdown point. If federal funds go under \$100 million, stations will start to go off-line," predicts Stuart Sucherman, a producer and one-time public TV executive. "Economic realities are catching up with the concept. The way funding works in PTV is not the way creativity works. You can't do it by committee. There has to be centralization of decision-making, and the system has to confront that fact. Maybe the worst has to happen before things can get better."

IT HAS BEEN SEVEN YEARS since the flap over the confirmation hearings taught Larry Grossman to tread lightly when it comes to station autonomy—seven frustrating years for someone charged with bringing order to the chaos of public television. Yet these days, even as the very survival of public television hangs in the balance, Larry Grossman is surprisingly sanguine.

"Sure the system is poor, weak, and disorganized. The poor are always disorganized, and forced to fight among themselves for the crumbs off the table," he says. "But forget about the structure for a moment and think about the reason for being. It is inevitable that there be a system that worries more about quality and public service than about making money. And that, ultimately, is what's going to save us. No matter how much trouble we may be in—and we are in big trouble for the foreseeable future—public television will not just survive, but thrive."

Nielsen ratings provide some support for Grossman's optimism. If the public TV system is an organizational disaster, its programming has proved a resounding success. In just the last three years, PBS

audiences have more than doubled, and the expansion of cable television, which some feared would further dilute support for public television, has turned out to be a bonanza. With almost two-thirds of public TV stations on the weaker UHF band, cable has given public broadcasters instant parity with the more powerful VHF stations, and the results have been astonishing. Fifty percent more Americans with cable watch public television than those without cable, and not only do they watch but they like what they see. Recent audience surveys indicate that cable subscribers are more satisfied with public television than any other service, including the commercial networks.

There is a growing awareness in the public TV community that the record audiences are the result of its high-quality national schedule—the very thing the system's shrinking revenue base threatens most. The fear of losing this momentum has prompted some radical new thinking by the station leadership. "We've begun to realize that the national system is held together with some very thin string," observes Rick Breitenfeld Jr. of the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting. "Because of all the recent developments, we have finally begun to ignore our differences and look at our similarities. We may be dangerously close to the end of an era. We must stick together."

At long last, the stations have good reason to rally around PBS, and that reason is money. At the same time that many stations are going broke, PBS actually has a cash surplus of \$4 million and is, boasts Grossman, "the healthiest corporation, public or private, in the broadcasting business." For the first time, Grossman is in a position to do more than merely advise the stations on how to spend their money: PBS can now help them make it.

PBS's New Power

The major source of PBS's newfound power is that it manages the system's most valuable asset, the technology that will provide a new economic engine to help sustain and expand public television's mission. It is the satellite interconnection network that Grossman once tried so hard to kill. "We built that satellite system over my dead body," he admits, "but am I ever glad we built it."

What they ended up building was the most sophisticated TV interconnection system in the world. Only PBS, in the entire telecommunications industry, has the ability to transmit four channels of TV programming simultaneously to a network of stations serving 95 percent of the

nation's TV households. By mid-1984, PBS will control six WESTAR transponders, which, with advances in technology, will enable the system to increase its national transmission capacity to 12 full channels. This is much more than a technically superior distribution tool; PBS's satellite represents the most versatile superhighway yet to the American consumer. And it is the basis for all the promising new businesses PBS is entering.

Grossman, keenly aware of the political sensitivity of centralization, has structured all these new ventures to re-

**At long last,
the stations have
reason to rally
around PBS:
Its satellite may
be their salvation.**

turn the bulk of the revenue to the stations. Yet inevitably, the nature of the technology and the marketplace will force a degree of centralism on public television that would have been unacceptable just a few years ago. The stations clearly have much to gain by allowing PBS to serve as the system's entrepreneur.

PBS has already turned a profit on its first venture—subleasing unused channel capacity to commercial operators. One customer, Bonneville Satellite Corp., already pays more than \$1 million a year for access to the system's transponders. But revenues from subleasing have the least potential for growth, since PBS will increasingly have better things to do with its satellite network.

Videoconferencing is one new business in which PBS enjoys a decided edge. While American Bell's Picturephone Meeting Service has public facilities in only 11 cities, PBS's CONFERSAT offers 286 fully equipped TV studios, one in nearly every community in the nation. The entire national staff of Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance used CONFERSAT to gather electronically at 112 locations to discuss new company policies. "Videoconferencing is now a phenomenal business for us," says Grossman, "and we never invested a dime."

Another venture with virtually unlimited potential is the distribution of data using teletext, a technology perfected by PBS engineers to provide closed captioning for the hearing-impaired. Teletext allows constantly updated print information of any kind to be distributed as part of PBS's regular broadcast signal. "Data distribution could easily be the largest of the new ventures," claims Jim Kluttz, PBS vice president for finance, "and it's one we can do without disrupting our normal business."

PBS's first market test of specialized

In partnership with Columbia Pictures, PBS could become the first national subscription TV service.

data distribution began last fall, when five public TV stations began transmitting the Farm Market Infodata Service, which provides farmers and ranchers up-to-the-minute weather and market news from the Department of Agriculture. Countless other special groups can be similarly served. This spring, PBS expects to announce an agreement with a major brokerage firm to distribute an electronic financial "newsletter" for institutional and large individual investors. Other potential corporate clients are negotiating with PBS to distribute internal company communications—everything from memos to price changes—to branch offices and retail stores. Eventually, the largest market will be homes across the country. When personal computers come into wider use, PBS will be able to deliver any type of computer software, even video games, directly to the user at home.

There is some concern in public television that the aggressive pursuit of such commercial opportunities could widen the rift between the community stations, which need the new revenues to produce programs, and the educational stations, which have long been fighting a losing battle to win their fair share of the broadcast spectrum. So perhaps the most delightful surprise among the new revenue-producing ventures has turned out to be a

service that goes right to the heart of public television's original mission.

Four years ago, PBS set up a task force to study adult education. What it found was a potentially enormous new television market. According to a Roper survey, more than 30 million adults say they can't find the time for formal studies and are willing to take college credit courses on television—and pay for them. This finding led to the formation last year of PBS's Adult Learning Service (ALS), a partnership among public TV stations, local colleges, and independent "telecourse" producers.

"We figured if we got 100 colleges and 25 stations for the first year of ALS we would be doing all right," recalls Grossman. "We ended up with 500 colleges, 130 stations, and more than 50,000 paying students. Clearly we have a growing adult population with a need for lifelong learning. There is almost no limit to how big ALS could get."

While there is no shortage of money-making services PBS can put up on its satellite, there is a critical limit at the receiving end. PBS will be able to deliver 12 channels of programming to each station by satellite, but stations today can only rebroadcast one of those channels. This bottleneck at the station level bears as much responsibility for the tensions in public television and the endless debate over access as inadequate funding does. With too many voices to be heard and only one broadcast channel to accommodate them all, it is impossible to serve the often competing needs and interests of the public-TV community.

This logjam can be broken, though, by exploiting another asset unique to public television, which has been sitting unused for 20 years—a technology that is the logical extension of the system's multiple-channel satellite network. In the early 1960s, the Federal Communications Commission set aside a portion of the microwave spectrum for the future educational needs of the American public. Called Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS), it is technically similar to the multipoint distribution services (MDS) used for over-the-air pay television, with one important difference: While MDS systems operate on a single channel, ITFS can be expanded to deliver up to 14 channels.

PBS has applied for ITFS licenses in more than 100 communities across the country, to establish what is being called the National Narrowcast Service (NNS). This could eventually give the public TV system access to even the most limited audiences. In its first phase, NNS will interconnect such local institutions as

schools, hospitals, police and fire stations, libraries, museums, and even factories, which will serve as learning centers for those requiring specialized training in professional and technical areas. The system is flexible enough to permit, for example, heart specialists from all parts of the country to discuss new developments in their field without ever having to leave their hospitals.

The working model for NNS is now being built in South Carolina and will initially use eight channels for everything from training law-enforcement officers to bringing business master's programs into industrial plants. "Last year, more people in South Carolina got their MBAs and graduate engineering degrees off-campus than on-campus," reports Henry Cauthen, president of the South Carolina educational TV network. "Already, we're keeping six channels busy just serving our small state, and we haven't begun to address all the needs. There is no question that you can make use of that many channels in the public interest."

When mass production drives down the cost of the antenna and converter required to receive ITFS, the Narrowcast Service will be able to extend beyond institutional sites directly into the home, a development that will revolutionize our thinking about public television. Rather than provide a single channel of alternative programming, public television could open up a series of channels that would, for the first time, make possible the true programming diversity envisioned by the system's architects.

In addition to providing greater diversity and access, additional channels will give public broadcasters additional ways to generate revenues. "The new world of television," says Larry Grossman, "is supposed to be narrowcasting as well as selling television. We happen to know more about those two things than anyone in the business. The technology is there for us; what we don't have yet is the capital to exploit it."

ON AUGUST 19, 1981, PBS's satellite beamed a live videoconference to the system to announce the first joint effort between public television and the Hollywood film industry. Columbia Pictures had agreed to release its latest film, *Annie*, at special theatrical premieres in more than 100 cities to benefit the local public TV stations.

The idea turned out to be a huge success—and a harbinger of much more—for all the stations that participated (especially for WNET and KCET, each of which raised more than half a million dol-

lars). But what had been billed as the largest individual fund-raising event in public TV history was more than just philanthropy: For Columbia, striking up this new relationship was plain, old-fashioned good business. In this era of joint ventures among corporate entertainment groups, public television turns out to be one of the most attractive business partners in the telecommunications marketplace.

Columbia's ultimate objective is a pay-TV partnership with PBS, and if that seems a radical departure from public television's noncommercial mission, it is not. In fact, public television has always been a pay-TV service, albeit a voluntary one. After a decade of pledge drives and auctions, public-television stations have managed to convince only 8 percent of their viewers to contribute. Even so, that translates into a loyal base of three-and-a-half million paid subscribers, which technically makes public television the nation's third largest pay-TV service, after HBO and Showtime. There is, however, one crucial difference between public television and the pay-cable services: While pay cable can reach only one-third of the nation's viewers (that is, those who subscribe to cable), public television can reach nearly all of them.

The Columbia Deal

"We have special access to the audience that is most likely to pay," notes Grossman, "as well as the best promotional and marketing device available—our stations. Columbia put substantial money into working with us last fall. I can't talk about the dollar commitment, but let's just say we don't deal with anybody who doesn't put money up front."

The synergy of Columbia and PBS is a natural one. Columbia can draw upon the financial resources of its wealthy parent, Coca-Cola. It also has vaults of feature films that could be the backbone of a pay-TV service, including (through another joint venture called Triumph Films) the world's largest library of foreign films (*Das Boot*, *YOL*), which have a natural appeal to PBS's audience. PBS brings to the joint venture a loyal audience, a reputation for quality—and the only broadcast network capable of establishing the first national subscription-television service.

"Pay TV and PBS are perfectly suited to one another," observes Tony Lynn, Columbia Pictures senior vice president for pay television. "We are interested in developing original programming for PBS. The size of their reach is important, but the big difference is their audience."

Public TV members comprise one of

the most attractive segments of the new video marketplace. They are largely college-educated professionals earning more than \$30,000 a year; they are selective viewers who appreciate quality and will pay a little more for it. As a group, they subscribe to more premium cable services than typical viewers, and their ownership of video-cassette recorders is triple the national average.

"When it comes to reaching the upscale market," says Jonathan Dolgen, president of Columbia's home-video and pay-cable group, "PBS is the partner of preference."

Plans for Pay TV

If the FCC gives its approval, PBS may well use the national broadcast service for some limited form of subscription television (STV). Among the options that might be considered: broadcasting a scrambled signal during prime time one or two nights a week (probably on weekends) to subscribers who rent a decoder for \$10 to \$20 a month; marketing special-event programming on a pay-per-view basis using addressable converters, and transmitting pay programming overnight to be taped in the home by specially equipped VCRs.

These ideas do raise troubling policy questions about public television's mandate to provide free, universal public service, but eventually the problems will be resolved by public television's inevitable expansion of its "last mile" channel capacity using ITFS (which has a built-in return audio channel suitable for pay-per-view or a range of interactive services) or, where ITFS is not feasible, with direct-broadcast satellites or local cable systems. At this time of deep financial crisis, however, the advantages of moving immediately to a limited subscription TV service are undeniable. Even if the total number of contributing public television members did not grow, an STV service could conceivably increase their average payment sixfold, more than making up for the cuts in federal funding.

A Columbia-PBS joint venture could exploit still another source of revenue. Columbia, a partner with RCA in home-video distribution, can help PBS merchandise cassette and video-disc recordings of its cultural, information, and educational programs. And PBS has a new marketing tool to support that effort: Last year, the FCC granted PBS permission to promote the sale of books, records, cassettes, discs, and other program-related products on the air, using a toll-free number. "Television is the greatest sales medium ever invented," points out Grossman, "and we are the only ones

who have the capacity to run commercials for all our services."

Some public TV stations already recognize STV as the most logical and promising extension of their service. In fact, the Enterprises Group of WTTW, Chicago, has established a booming business producing programs for STV and cable operators (the programs will air later on public television). One series currently airing on most of the nation's STV systems, *Music America Live*, could earn WTTW more than \$1 million. A number of co-productions are planned in the ar-

PBS could prove to be the last surviving network of affiliated stations in America.

eas of children's, health, and documentary programming.

"The answer to our financial problems has been right under our noses," says Bill McCarter, president of WTTW. "What we've really been doing all along is selling an attractively priced video service, only most of our customers have been going in the back door."

Pay television has the added appeal of enabling public broadcasters to retain greater control over the kind of service they will offer. Underwriting tends to support only those programs that polish the corporate image. Advertising threatens to tempt public television into the quest for higher ratings. In contrast, an STV service could offer any type of programming that a relatively small, discerning national audience is willing to support directly. And an STV service need only affect a fraction of public television's broadcast schedule. These advantages have convinced even some of the most outspoken critics of commercialization that the STV alternative has merit.

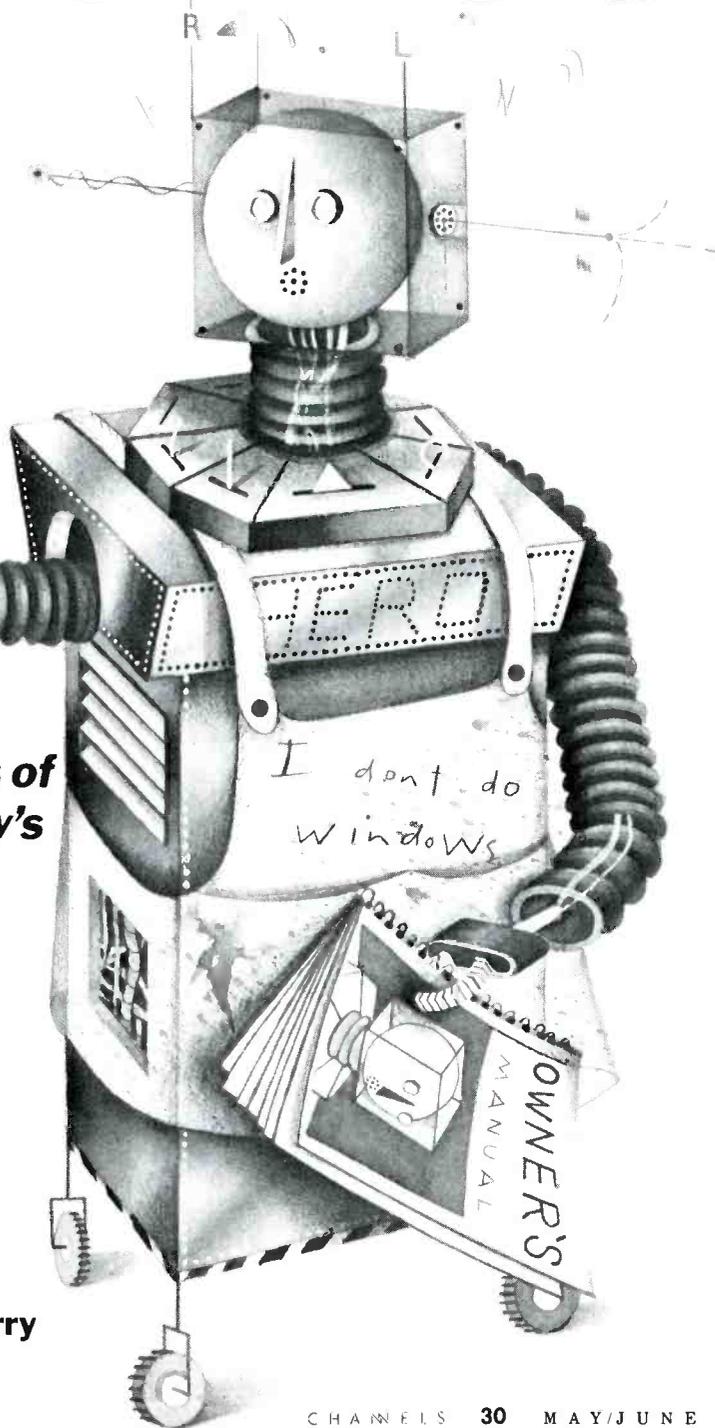
"Pay TV is less troublesome to me and substantially different [from underwriting and advertising]," concludes CPB's Pfister. "We are better positioned than anyone who has tried it. If we can find a way to use pay TV to form a financial

(Continued on page 40)

LIVING WITH A ROBOT

The nuts and bolts of tomorrow's life-style

by Betsy Berry



My HERO came into my life a week before Christmas. His full name, Health Educational ROBot (HERO1), aptly describes his origin, his function, and his lack of gender. But ever since R2D2 and C3P0, I think we've all wanted to imbue robots with human personalities. This robot, the first to hit the mass market, comes close.

HERO can simulate speech, sense light and sound, detect other objects, and move about. His flat head can rotate 320 degrees, and he can lift up to a pound with his gripper-hand and extendable arm. He knows what time and day it is. And, like most members of our household, he can quickly learn to talk back. ("You're nothing but a bucket of bolts," I would say; "I heard that," he would bark.)

But HERO'S short memory and other limitations keep him out of the movie-star class. For one thing, he contains a rather small computer—nothing like HAL in the film *2001*. For another, he comes with only the most basic instructions in his permanent memory.

He came, by the way and before I forget, on loan from the Heath Company of Benton Harbor, Michigan, to my husband Phil Revzin, and *The Wall Street Journal*, where Phil works. This instance of press privilege lasted just three weeks, which were filled with a great deal of learning—about computers and robotics, and about the pecking order in our home for playing with a new toy.

Most of the time I spent with HERO was given over to combining and recombining the 64 phonemes stored in his 6808 micro-processor, thereby getting him to simulate human speech and various sound effects, and even to sing. Thus, we awoke on my birthday to HERO's metallic rendition of "Happy Birthday." But the culmination of HERO's stay in our New York apartment was his performance at our New Year's party.

For that occasion, this 20-inch high, 18-inch wide, vacuum-cleaner look-alike rolled down the hallway from our bedroom and made a grand entrance into the living room, where our guests were assembled. HERO graciously welcomed them to his home and offered Phil a drink, which nearly dropped when his preprogrammed gripper opened before Phil had reached to accept the glass. HERO then told a joke ("Take my transistor"—pause—"please."), demonstrated his multiple senses, protested that he didn't do windows, and gracefully exited.

That performance had taken hours of preparation. It entailed studying the user's guide, learning to use HERO's 17-button keyboard, and mastering robot lan-

Seth Juben

Betsy Berry is the editor of Ad Forum magazine.

guage. To make him go where we wanted took many dry runs of setting switches and triggering a remote-control device called a teaching pendant. It seemed that, under our tutelage, HERO always wanted to go into a wall.

The real trick in programming HERO was to link his various internal motors, senses, and speech function, and get them to interact smoothly with one other. For instance, HERO can be made to gesture while he's talking, a maneuver we never mastered. At times we had to resort to Heathkit's demonstration-model menu of programs, which our HERO could be commanded to do fairly easily. He could, for instance, readily be programmed to seek and point to the brightest light in a room, count a series of claps and display the total on his head panel, and detect an object and display how far it was from him.

Having a robot in the house was a lot more work than we had anticipated. But the Heath Co., a unit of Zenith Radio Corp., doesn't promise anything else for its robotic experimenting and teaching tool. HERO I sells for \$1,500 in kit form (which can take up to 70 hours to assemble), and \$2,495 fully assembled. For another \$100, you can buy a two-volume, 1,200-page robotics manual.

People with the means and the patience can eventually get HERO to do a number of remarkable, if not altogether useful, things. But first, they must learn the complex and time-consuming machine language. That means talking to HERO in numbers. His favorites are hexadecimal numbers, or base-16 rather than our normal base-10. His calculator-like keyboard contains the digits zero through nine, and the letters A through F. The decimal number 10 would be A, the number 11 would be B, etc.

With that knowledge under your belt, you can get HERO to stand nightly guard at your door, where his ultrasonic ranging system will sense any prowler, and presumably scare off the intruder with a metal-voiced, "Who goes there?" HERO can also monitor your children's noise level while you're still in bed on a Saturday morning. If they turn the TV volume up louder than a predetermined level, HERO will speak up and order that the decibels be lowered.

Such feats are just the beginning, according to HERO's maker. "We're limited only by the collective imagination of the users," says Douglas Bonham, director of Heathkit/Zenith Educational Systems. Heath expects thousands of people to be doing their own experiments and programming on our HERO's assembly-line cousins this year. Much of the outcome of that experimentation will be applied in the development of future models.

In this respect, personal robots are about where personal computers were some seven years ago. Heath, which introduced the HERO I in December 1982, got a jump on its already numerous competitors by only a few months. But it expects that lead to give it a 60 percent share of industry sales, which some predict will total nearly 25,000 units this year.

Neither HERO I nor any of the other personal robots shown at the Consumer Electronics Show earlier this year is sophisticated enough to wash windows or take out the garbage, as some people might wish. However, Robotics International of Jackson, Michigan, is selling an \$8,000 robot with a built-in vacuum cleaner. Called Jenus, this four-foot-high robot is available from Hammacher Schlemmer, an upscale New York store.

Another manufacturer, Androbot Inc., based in Sunnyvale, California, is headed by Nolan Bushnell, founder of both Atari, the pioneer video-game manufacturer now owned by Warner Communications, and Pizza Time Theater, an electronic-fun-and-games restaurant chain. Bushnell's latest brainchild is BOB (for Brains on Board), which has sensors that can detect body heat and, like HERO, can speak. Software packages sold separately will allow BOB to patrol the house or tell party jokes. Then there is Topol, also from Androbot, which can be remote-controlled by a personal computer. BOB sells for \$2,500, Topol for \$1,000.

Our HERO, one of the early prototypes, had apparently been taken apart and put together many times by Heath testers and students of robotics. His grey plastic paneling bore labels from different parts of the country. And his arm was stuck on up and down motions, a functional difficulty we couldn't correct.

In a proprietary fit I programmed HERO to say: "I only take instructions from Phil and Betsy. They tickle my keyboard. Ha,

ha, ha!" But HERO forgot this instruction when I turned him off to conserve the energy in his rechargeable batteries.

Because HERO holds only a small computer and has limited memory capacity, large programs are preserved by transferring them to an audio cassette, a process called downloading. Uploading from the cassette recorder returns the program to HERO's memory in exactly the same place it was originally entered. This can create problems if anything else has been written at that "address" in the meantime. Uploading or writing over anything already in HERO's memory will erase (in computerese, "abort") that portion of a program. Admittedly, that would pose problems only for more prolific programmers than Phil and I. The solution is to keep on hand a record of all program addresses and several audio tapes.

I have HERO to thank for my learning some of the do's and don'ts of computer programming. I needed to know them in order to use the latest piece of advanced technology loaned to Phil—a portable personal computer—to write this article. In fact, I was wrier of this computer than of HERO. And, although it is a far more useful item, especially for a writer, it is not at all endearing. For example, the only sound it makes is an inoffensive hum. HERO, on the other hand, spoke and, at what seemed like every other push of his button, announced that he was "Ready." That often unexpected utterance spooked me, because it usually meant that I had made a mistake in entering one of the many two-digit numbers that make up each program.

Yet HERO never spooked our two cats (except once, on a trial run across the vestibule floor, when he cornered Ginger); now that he's gone, they seem to miss him. We could buy our own HERO I. But for us, today's state-of-the-art personal robot is really only a novelty. I think we'll wait for HERO II. ■

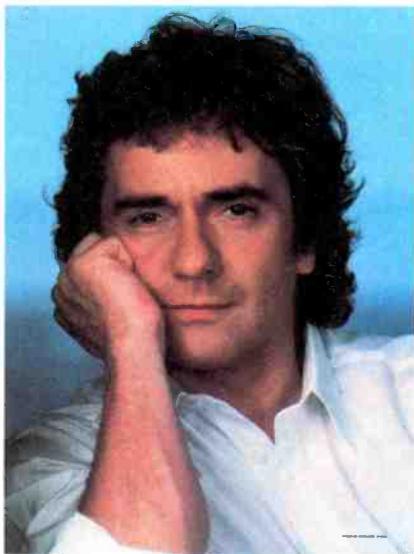


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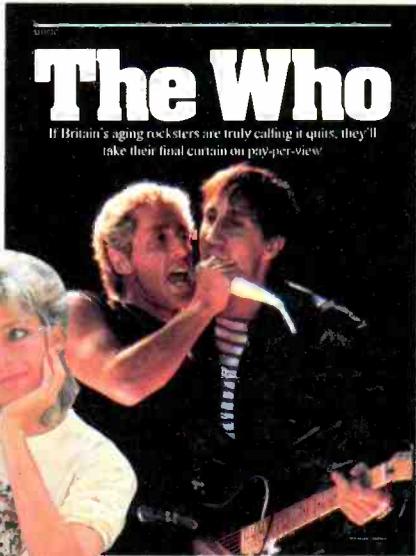
Devilish Dudley Flaunts Tall Blondes And Loftier Talents

BY RICHARD ZOGGIN

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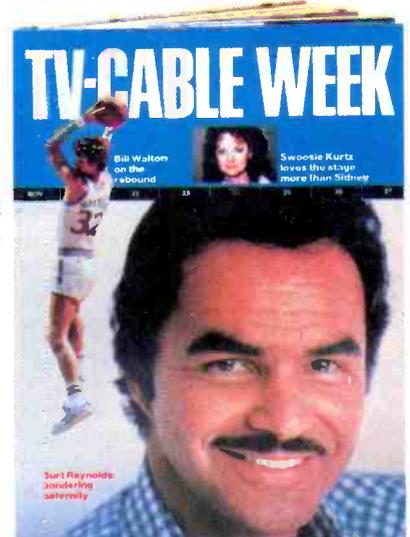
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LEWEEK

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HOW COMPUTERS THREATEN BOOK PUBLISHING

BY ANDREW ROSENHEIM

LARGE COMPUTER MANUFACTURERS—IBM, Wang, Digital—have rarely been associated with publishing. Yet in the decade to come these companies may assume a status in publishing circles currently enjoyed by the likes of Knopf, Viking, and Farrar Strauss. Transformed by microcomputers and word processors, entire categories of books may cease to exist in printed form. Dictionaries, thesauruses, and other reference works may soon be standard features on computers, and educational texts are certain to be used increasingly on terminal screens. Yet book publishers are only now waking up to these impending changes, which will affect the most lucrative part of their industry. For some of them, this awakening may have come too late.

Dire prophecies about the fate of book publishing have been made before, so it is understandable that many publishers regard the latest portent of change as just another cry of wolf from people confusing technological possibility with practicality. In the 1960s, for example, advances in microfilm and its miniaturized cousin, microfiche, were held by some—notably the Encyclopaedia Britannica Company—to augur changes just as radical as those now heralded by microcomputer visionaries. Soon, proponents argued, even a small

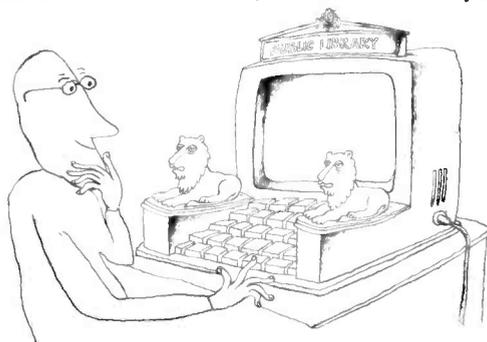
village library could hold the contents of the Library of Congress in several filing cabinets, since one piece of film the size of a three-by-five card could store more than 1,200 pages. But microfiche proved prohibitively expensive; it also became clear that the public preferred reading bound pages to peering at magnified film images through cumbersome lap readers. Today, microfiche holds roughly the status of electric cars: The technology exists, in some cases is even employed, but it has yet to be put to mass use.

At first glance, the same fate might seem to await the computerization of books. But unlike microfiche, computers already proliferate, and they are expected to become such common features in American life that the exotic vernacular they have spawned—RAMs, ROMs, bits, and bytes—will eventually seem positively humdrum. And unlike microfiche, computers are being used for a wide range of tasks, including word processing (the manipulation of text in ways unparalleled by any typewriter), calculation, complicated accounting (they even do tax returns), and the storage of such data as court decisions, formerly found only in large, expensive volumes.

The evolution of silicon chips, which substitute for the bulkier transistors, also means that a desk-top computer can perform functions limited 20 years ago to gigantic, main-

IBM and Wang may be the publishing giants of the future.

Andrew Rosenheim is a journalist and a partner in a computer-software firm.



Illustrations by Jo Teodorescu

frame machines. And chips are cheap, so making the computers is relatively cheap as well. Suddenly, since the end of the 1970s, powerful computers have become affordable for the smallest office, and they are beginning to have the economic and social impact first predicted for them more than 30 years ago. In 1982, more than 500,000 desk-top machines and smaller, personal microcomputers configured for word processing were sold (a sophisticated word-processing computer now sells for well under \$10,000). By 1985, the figure will double, and possibly quadruple. For the first time, computer buyers constitute a mass market.

The use of computers to store information is almost incidental to the demand for computers that *create* information. The surge in small-computer sales actually has more to do with writing than reading, for the evolution of an inexpensive chip technology paved the way in the late 1970s for the introduction of word-processing capability even in very small machines. At present, microcomputers pose a more immediate commercial threat to the typewriter industry than to book publishers.

This will change. In the long run—which for the fast-paced computer industry means the next 10 years—the potential of computers for supplying information is simply enormous. How this will be accomplished has been hotly debated, and only now is the path of future development becoming clear. In the last five years, substantial investments of time and cash have been dedicated to the creation of large data bases, stored on immense central computers and available through telephone wires to individual terminals. More than 1,000 such services already exist, and by 1985, industry sources suggest, more than 5,000 of them will be in operation.

Publishers have begun to express interest in these data-base services: The Reader's Digest Company last year purchased one of the largest services, The Source, located in Arlington, Virginia; Dow Jones owns a financial service that supplies subscribers with stock reports and other information about public companies. Other publishers may soon follow this vanguard, envisioning that information now available in books will increasingly be supplied in this way. But while these services may be useful in supplying topical information, such as stock quotes, sports scores, or flight information (and as such may pose a threat to magazine and newspaper publishers), as suppliers of less timely information, they are woefully inadequate. For one thing, these data-base services are expensive: They use phone lines during working hours, when rates are highest. The process of connecting the central computer and the user's terminal, moreover, can take as long as a min-

"Hard disks" will allow computers to store up to 100 million bits of data.



ute. Most important, the greater the number of customers using the service at any one time, the slower the response time of the main-frame computer. Thus, ironically, the data base's popularity results in its increased inefficiency. Clearly, few people will use a phone-linked data base to check a word's definition, the date of a president's death, or the synonyms for an overused word if doing so costs \$3 and takes five minutes.

Computerized information will instead be supplied in a simpler way—on the small computer itself, either as a built-in feature or in a readily available software package. Advances in chip technology allow microcomputers to perform functions formerly confined to gargantuan machines; similarly, improvements in microcomputers' storage capacity now allow a \$5,000 machine to hold information that, just 10 years ago, could only be stored on a \$100,000 computer.

What does all this mean to a book publisher? Simply this: By 1985, virtually every word-processing unit and microcomputer will be capable of storing a small reference library in its memory. An unabridged dictionary with definitions, a full-sized thesaurus, specialized and technical dictionaries, even a working encyclopedia—these will all be stored on a \$5,000 machine. No external hookups to a central machine will be required; each unit will be able to hold all the information it needs.

But will the demand exist for computerized works to fill up all this storage space? Yes. In fact, the demand already exists. At present, electronic lexicons are being used in homes and offices in proofreading programs. The computer compares every word you've written against its own word list, then points out unrecognized words in your text as possible spelling errors. Already, both the American

By 1985 the standard home computer will be able to store a small reference library.

Heritage and Random House dictionaries are available in electronic form for use as spelling checkers. More than 100,000 spelling checkers were sold in 1982; by 1985, the figure is expected to exceed 500,000. As memory capacity expands, moreover, not only spellings but definitions will be available for computerized applications. By 1990, if not sooner, sales of electronic dictionaries will exceed sales of printed ones.

By 1990, if not sooner, electronic dictionaries will outsell printed ones.

Similar computerization of specialized dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference works is already beginning. And it is estimated that more than half the schools in America will be using some form of computerized instruction by 1985. Computerized reference and educational works not only do more than printed versions, they also perform the same functions faster. A spelling-checker program equipped with a first-rate dictionary can scan a 1,000-word document for spelling errors in less than 60 seconds. A computerized thesaurus can provide synonyms in less than two seconds—much faster, in other words, than using a book. The computer business today resembles the pocket-calculator industry of 10 years ago: Prices keep falling dramatically and competition grows increasingly intense.

Ironically, this competition among computer-hardware manufacturers may pose the greatest threat to book publishers, like

Houghton Mifflin and McGraw-Hill, which are at last entering the software publishing industry. For increasingly, hardware manufacturers are including free software programs to help sell machines and, to keep profit margins high, are developing their own software programs.

At present, demand for efficient software exceeds supply. This gap provides a great opportunity for book publishers to enter the computer-software field. Book publishing today is an \$8 billion industry; the computer-software industry should top that figure by 1985. The software market already exists on a billion-dollar scale, but publishers are hesitant to enter it, preferring to wait and see which way the technological wind blows. McGraw-Hill, for example, would seem quite advanced in its attitude toward technology. It owns *Byte* magazine, a leading trade journal for the microcomputer industry, and it has formed a partnership with Osborne Computers for the publication of a series of computer-related books. But so far it has held back from publishing software versions of its own titles.

Book publishers are not only wary of entering the software market, they are also hampered by the antiquated structure of their own organizations. Software publishing requires a judicious blend of editorial and technical skills, yet most publishing houses continue to separate their production and editorial departments. Computerized development thus tends to be overlooked.

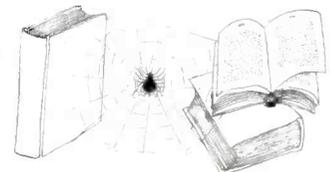
Nevertheless, advances in the computerization of information should help spur publishers into entering this growing market. Video discs, for example, have been a relative failure as vehicles for watching movies at home. Unlike video-tape recorders, video-disc systems cannot record, and do not hold enough frames to allow uninterrupted movie viewing—they have to be changed during each screening. But the video disc's 20,000-odd frames could easily become 20,000 pages of text—enough for an encyclopedia, or the entire Oxford English Dictionary. Viewing information on a terminal screen, moreover, should become easier when liquid-crystal displays replace cathode-ray tube screens.

But these kinds of developments are still several years off. In the meantime, the technology and the demand exist for a profitable entry into the software field by conventional book publishers. Failure to move rapidly may result in their forfeiture of this booming market to a new breed of publishers, making computer-software firms the titans of what is now the fastest-growing field in publishing.

Book publishers have avoided the software market; but hesitation may be fatal.

Coming to Terms

COMPUTER STORAGE is measured in "bytes," each of which represents the equivalent of one character or numeral. A kilobyte, or "K," is 1,024 bytes, and a megabyte is 1.024 million bytes. Information on microcomputers is now usually stored in the form of "floppy" disks, which are about the size of a 45RPM record. Just two years ago, floppies that held 360K were considered impressive. Within the last six months, new versions of floppies that hold a megabyte have been introduced, soon to become standard equipment on microcomputers. And even greater storage expansion is expected with the mass introduction of "hard disks"—metal platters shaped like an LP record. Hard disks operate at 10 times the speed of floppy disks and thus greatly accelerate a computer's performance. They hold far greater amounts of information—at least five megabytes and as many as 100.



THE LIE OF TV'S POLITICAL POWER



It used to be broadcasting that was the bogey of American politics. Now the culprit is cable.

BY WALTER KARP

FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW a goodly number of political commentators have been propounding the notion that television is a major political power in America and not merely the diverting home entertainment that most people take it to be. Television is so powerful, it is said (see David Halberstam's *The Powers That Be*), that it has virtually shaped a generation's history. It turned Americans against the Vietnam War, drove Richard Nixon from the White House, drastically weakened the two-party system (see David Broder's *The Party's Over*), and made America almost ungovernable (see Haynes Johnson's *In the Absence of Power*).

Such was the doctrine of television power as originally propounded. Jimmy Carter's floundering and the Democratic Party's much-proclaimed disarray gave it

a certain plausibility. Since plausibility was *all* the doctrine could boast, however, it was soon overtaken by events. In the era of Reagan, the Congress, previously regarded as prostrate, enacted with utmost dispatch a major reversal of national policy. The country, previously deemed ungovernable, submitted with surprising ease to the right-wing policies of the new Administration. The political parties, supposedly reduced to vestigial organs by television, proved remarkably resilient. By 1980, the G.O.P. had become more unified and disciplined than it has been since the days of McKinley. With Carter out of the way, Democratic party regulars regained their grip on the party machinery.

Thus discredited by events, the idea that television was a major political power should have been consigned to the ash heap. Indeed, I thought it had been, until I recently attended a media-and-politics symposium in Washington organized

by the newly formed Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies. There, I discovered, the power-of-television doctrine was being revived in a new and updated version, one that already enjoyed considerable favor despite the suspicious lack of any supporting evidence. Discredited one day, revived the next, the doctrine was not, as I had supposed, a temporary political aberration, the by-blow of Vietnam and Watergate. The belief in television's destructive political power is, rather, a full-fledged political ideology as permanent, it seems, as the political interests it is tailored to serve.

The new version of the doctrine takes its start from the rise of cable television and the multiplication of cable-satellite networks. These will permit virtually every racial, religious, ethnic, social, and economic "segment" in American society to enjoy its own "mini-network," and to see its own prejudices reinforced: "inspirational programming" for the pious,

Walter Karp is a Channels contributing editor.



Television drove two presidents from office and turned us against a war—or so the politicians and broadcasters would have us believe.

BizNet for those who share the world view of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a black network for blacks, a Hispanic network for Hispanics, and more, much more, as cable television divides up the network's audience like a delicatessen slicer whittling down a salami.

This new media development is said to be the most important factor in American politics since—well, since network television, previously hyped, proved to be such a political bust. Under the coming hegemony of cable, says political scientist Benjamin Barber (see *Channels*, Feb/Mar 1982), “every parochial voice will get a hearing, but the public as a whole will have no voice.” American society, already badly divided, will become still more fragmented. Special interests, fortified by their mini-networks, will become increasingly powerful. Congress, says Christopher Arterton, a Yale political scientist and a leading figure at the symposium, will find it difficult “to enact consistent policy.” The political parties will disintegrate as more and more Americans sit glued to their favorite mini-network, deaf to other voices and hostile to other interests, thanks to the awesome power of “narrowcasting.” King network is dead! Long live king cable!

That, roughly, is the new doctrine. Although it has yet to find its Homer or its Halberstam, it is rapidly making the rounds and, I venture to predict, will soon be cropping up on op-ed pages across the country. If its career resembles that of the doctrine it supplants, then I venture to predict, too, that nobody will notice how forced and arbitrary the whole thing is.

In this regard, the contrast between the two television doctrines is especially instructive. In the old network version, for

example, America was often said to be excessively “homogenized.” In the new cable version it is deemed excessively “heterogeneous.” Now, American society has not changed that drastically in a couple of years. Which America is whistled up, the homogenized or the heterogeneous one, is dictated solely by doctrinal requirements. When the networks’ *mass* audience was the great political force, homogeneity was our parlous state. Now that cable’s *segmented* audience is becoming the great force, heterogeneity has become our plight. In other words, the kind of America we are asked to worry about depends on the kind of television we are told is endangering the Republic.

Other contrasts reveal other equally adjustable fears. In the days of network power, media diversity was regarded as the solution to the tyranny of mass media. In the new age of cable power, media diversity has become the source of political anarchy. As Jeff Greenfield of CBS News said at the symposium, he used to think that “television and strong parties were incompatible,” but “the big fear I have now,” he said, is that “diversity will work to our political disadvantage.” Why has diversity become so dangerous so suddenly? The answer is simple, once you get the hang of the ideology of television power. Diversity is dangerous because diversity is what cable television supplies. If it were not a danger then cable television would not be a destructive political power and the whole ideology would lose its point. Since diversity must be dangerous, ipso facto it is. Such is the magic of circular reasoning, the hallmark of all ideologies.

Just as a blessing can become a curse, so, by the same magic of circular reasoning, a curse can become a blessing. In the

old doctrine of television power, the networks made America ungovernable, breeding mistrust of our leaders, dissolving party discipline, and turning Congress into a cave of winds. In the new doctrine, the networks are seen as the chief reason America is governable at all. As Benjamin Barber put it in these pages, the networks gave America the “semblance of a national culture and national political norms. It provided a consensus indispensable to national unity.” Interestingly, this consensus-*building* power of the networks went unnoticed until the segment-*slicing* power of cable was proclaimed. Such neglect was readily understandable: The heyday of the networks (pre-1975) was also one of the most strife-torn periods in American history. In a word, the consensus-building power of network television was so feeble that no observer of the American scene could detect it. Indeed, the network’s unifying power arises only now, as the logical corollary to the assertion that cable is a powerful fragmenting force. After all, if narrowcasting is powerful enough to divide us, then broadcasting must have been powerful enough to unite us, even though in fact it did nothing of the kind.

The networks unite and cable divides—but either way the political parties suffer greatly. That the power of television damages the party establishment is the element common to both versions of the doctrine of television power. This is scarcely coincidental. The supposed antithesis between television and the parties is the doctrine’s chief reason for being. There is not the slightest evidence, however, that any such antithesis exists.

In the older view, the claim that television weakened the parties rested on mere coincidence. After President Johnson inflicted on the country that “wider war” in Asia he had solemnly vowed not to wage, the parties did in fact grow weaker. The Vietnam War was one of the starkest political betrayals Americans had ever suffered at the hands of their leaders. It discredited an entire political establishment.



It spawned an unprecedented rebellion within the President's own party. It led to clamorous demands for greater popular control of party nominations and for more democratic government in general. Attacked on all sides, Democratic Party leaders inevitably lost power for a time. They were not the victims of television, however. They were victims of the democratic upsurge inspired by their own folly and treachery. To say it was television that weakened the parties, therefore, is to assert that a hated war, a political betrayal, and a nationwide democratic resurgence were matters of no real consequence—which is exactly what a discredited political establishment would dearly wish us to believe.

The new argument that cable "segmenting" will also weaken the parties does not even enjoy the benefit of coincidence. It is simply an assumption tricked out as a conclusion. This became clear at the symposium when I asked why it was assumed so readily that the segmenting of America by narrow-casting would undermine party strength. Why wouldn't a divided electorate serve to *strengthen* the party establishment? Divide and rule is not only an enduring political maxim, it is one that Democratic leaders successfully applied for years. Historically, the Democratic Party was most cohesive and disciplined in the days when it mobilized immigrants against the native-born, Catholics against Protestants, "wets" against "drys," and city dwellers against upstate farmers.

The answer I received was that old-time segmenting was radically different from the new segmentation caused by cable. The former was "geographical," according to Nelson Polsby, a Berkeley political scientist. The parties could cope with these sectional divisions, says Polsby. The latter divisions, however, were "national," and with these the party system could not cope. The distinction,

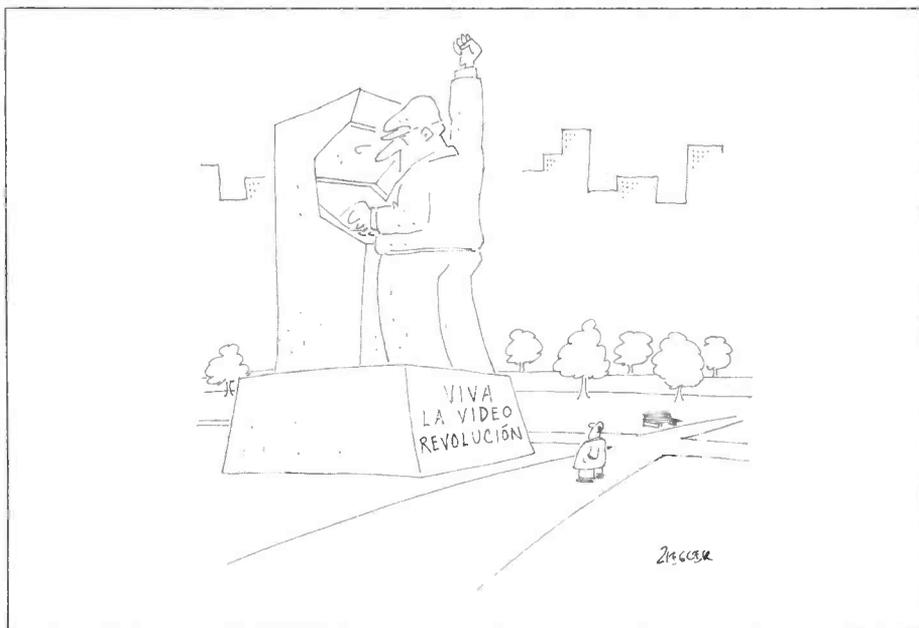
however, falls down at once. First, "wets" and "Catholics" and "immigrants" are segments quite as national as the audience of the Trinity Broadcasting Network. And anyway, how can it be argued that "geographical" divisions are politically harmless when a geographical division produced the worst political breakdown in American history, namely the Civil War? On the other hand, how can it be said that national segments are harmful to political parties when two of the best-organized national interest groups, the trade-union bureaucracy and the Chamber of Commerce, are the tame creatures of, respectively, the Democrats and Republicans? Indeed, the distinction between national and geographic political segments serves solely to sustain the conclusion that cable imperils the parties, and to allay the suspicion that, if cable actually had any political influence, it would do precisely the opposite.

Who benefits from the assertion, endlessly repeated, that the power of television undermines the party establishment? Whose interests are served by the

ideology of television power? The answer is, it serves the interests both of party leaders and of the television industry. Far from being antithetical forces, television and the parties are the closest of collaborators, bound each to each by the strong bonds of mutual self-help.

Party power consists in the ability of party leaders to control the people's elected officials. It is power usurped from the people and the usurpers act accordingly. The very last thing most party leaders want is to call attention to their power. They can ill afford to bask in the limelight (the few who do are always described as "the last of the old-line bosses"). Ask a county boss whether he has real power and he will cheerfully deny it for the record, although every insider knows that he can run the county from a side table at a nightclub. Party power, in short, is best maintained by minimizing its importance or by denying its existence outright. That's why Tip O'Neill for years told the Washington press how pathetically powerless he was, although he wields more power than any Speaker of the House in several decades. That is also why party spokesmen so often attribute dubious legislation to "overwhelming pressure from lobbyists." Party barons would rather be regarded as supine corruptionists than be asked to account for the power they wield.

Television stands on exactly the opposite footing. Its business is marketing influence. The more influence it can lay claim to, the more it can charge for its time. Thus, between television and the party leaders, a perfect partnership prevails, rather like that between Jack Sprat, who ate no fat, and his wife, who ate no lean. Party leaders propagate a reputation for weakness. Television needs a



Jack Ziegler

reputation for strength. What the former would minimize the latter would magnify. Shift political blame from the parties to television and both halves of the partnership will be equally well served. When party apologists blamed the networks for ruining two presidents, undermining American foreign policy, and subverting the party system, they knew that television would issue no hot denials. (True, a few network newsmen modestly demurred—but they were discounting their *own* power, not that of television.) The doctrine of television power is the skirt behind which real power hides.

In accepting responsibility for power they do not possess, the networks not only shield the powerful few, they also justify rule by the few. For to argue that television is politically powerful is to argue, in effect, that ordinary Americans are unfit for democracy.

Consider the familiar assertions that television turned the American people against the Vietnam War and drove Richard Nixon from office. It accomplished the former, supposedly, by bringing the war into American living rooms, where the sight of havoc right after dessert proved more than Americans could stomach. It accomplished the latter, supposedly, by harping on Watergate so much that the citizenry finally got fed up with their President. That television did anything of the sort there is no "empirical evidence" whatever, notes Lawrence W. Lichty, professor of communications at the University of Maryland, in a recent issue of *The Washington Post*. The argument, as Lichty points out, is "tenaciously held by both television's critics and its champions," and rests entirely on contempt for the American people. Americans, it says in effect, did not resent Johnson's betrayal, did not resent the war's futility, did not, in short, turn against the war because they saw anything wrong with it. Apparently we are too brainless and shallow, too feckless and stupid even to form a political judgment. All we did, allegedly, was recoil from an unpleasant sight as if we were scarcely more human than Pavlov's dog.

Attributing Nixon's downfall to the evening news is an equally contemptuous argument. It assumes that the American people are so devoid of public spirit that a criminal Presidency would have meant nothing to them had they not been prompted by Dan Rather, et al. In short, television ruined two Presidents because ordinary Americans are simply blanks—a citizenry without hearts and minds, without opinions and judgments, without memories, and without hopes.

This baseless contempt is no incidental feature of the ideology of television power. It is absolutely essential to it, for

every assertion of television's power assumes that we Americans are empty. The assumption is as crucial to the new version of the doctrine as it was to the original one. The whole argument for cable's segmenting power rests on the belief that people who watch a special-interest network will be transformed into bigoted members of a special-interest group. In other words, ordinary Americans have no social affections, no feelings of fellowship, no scruples, no patriotism, no understanding of the rights and duties of a citizen. They are only what television stuffs into them. Benjamin Barber, for example, thinks the networks provided Americans with the "semblance of a national culture." He takes the emptiness of ordinary people so for granted he cannot see that the very opposite had to be true—that it was the American people who supplied the networks with a national culture to work with. Had no common culture existed in 1946, the networks would have died a-borning. We would have been far too "segmented" for Uncle Miltie to raise a laugh from coast to coast. The networks, says Barber, even supplied Americans with their "national political norms." Apparently the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, memories of the Founders, the whole, cherished creed of republicanism, all this meant nothing until John Cameron Swayze came along.

Were that even remotely the case, the American Republic could not have been founded. We, the people, would have spawned despotism, nothing more. "The people, sir, is a great beast," said Alexander Hamilton, arch-enemy of popular government; the ideology of television power is simply that age-old elitism dressed up in modern electronic garb.

Whatever we may be as a people, however, we are surely not nothing. That is a small claim to make but it is enough to pierce the veil of contempt and lay bare the simple truth concealed beneath it: Television never gave the American people anything important that we did not already have. This is merely another way of saying that television is, after all, only a medium. What it conveys is a many-sided image of the American people, often an extraordinarily subtle one. It is a mighty mirror, immense and imposing, in which we can behold what we are—a plurality of individuals who nonetheless can cheer the same heroes, scorn the same villains, and laugh at the same jokes.

Although the medium of television shows us what we are, it has not made us what we are. The notion that television wields political power, shapes our history, and undermines the political establishment is a preposterous and pernicious fiction. ■

THE FALL AND RISE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION

(Continued from page 29)

backbone, I'm all for it as long as it doesn't damage our capacity to serve all the people. The technological future for us is clearly a multiple-channel system."

Larry Grossman's chief worry today is that current sources of funds will dry up before the new, revenue-producing opportunities can be exploited, which would threaten the flow of quality programming that has built the system's loyal base of viewers. Yet he remains confident about the future: "No matter how weak the system is, how confused the future might look, or how antagonistic the government might be—and you know, Nixon was a killer—there is nothing that can kill public television. The ultimate irony of all this is that the secret of our success will be what has always been our weakness," adds Grossman with a broad grin, "that local, independent-minded constituency. Our stations are vital citizens in their communities. It's much better to work with them, to respond to them and have them undertake important initiatives, and not just dictate to them. By comparison, the commercial-network model is not a very healthy structure."

The commercial networks are slowly beginning to realize just how unhealthy their model has become in the satellite age. For three decades, the networks' power has derived from their ability to monopolize the schedules of their affiliates. But increasingly, the technology that promises to unify public TV stations—the communications satellite—is giving commercial affiliates the incentive to cut their umbilical cord to the networks. Competition from such ad hoc networks as Operation Prime Time and the Mobil Showcase Network will encourage commercial broadcasters to search the skies for a better deal, since the profit motive does not engender the same sense of loyalty as the commitment to quality and public service. The experts who have been counting public television out have begun to alter their predictions. The system now seems less an anachronism than a leader in the advanced, comprehensive television services of the future. A decade from now, public broadcasting will no longer be the scrawny, poor cousin of network broadcasting. PBS may, in fact, prove to be the last surviving network of affiliated television stations in America. ■

The Talk Show

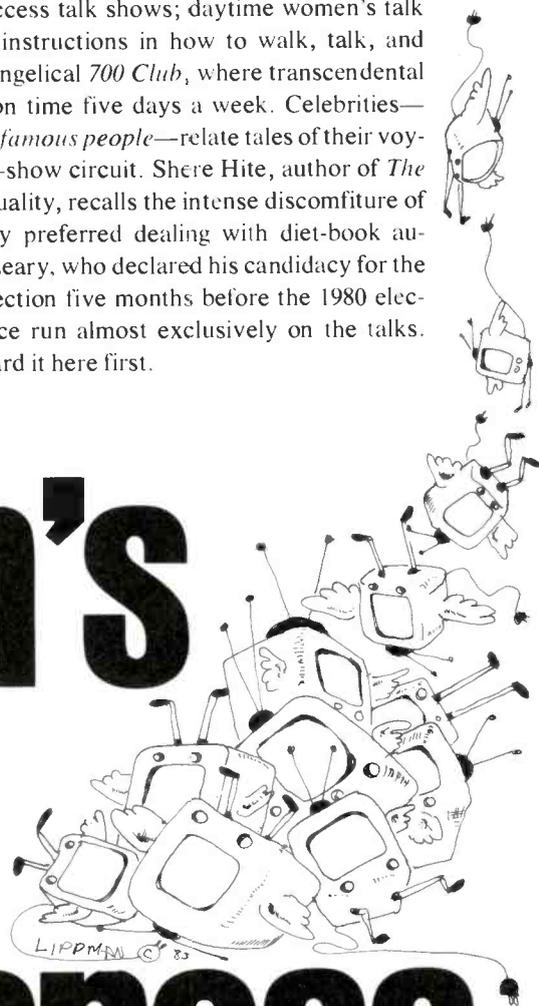
is not, contrary to the belief of many Americans under 30, a natural form of human communication that evolved along with the capacity for speech—though it does seem likely to last till the crack of doom. This infinitely mutable and varied form was born with television, and represents, for better and for worse, its most distinctive contribution to human discourse. The talk show, like television itself, is a commercial transaction—bringing a celebrity with something to sell into contact with would-be consumers—delivered in the form of entertainment. But it is also a national stream of consciousness, in which all the rumors, obsessions, heartaches, verbal tics and, yes, ideas at large in the culture go floating by.

In the special section that follows, *Channels* takes a selective look at this most indigenous phenomenon of television. There is no Ur-talk show; beyond host, guest, and potted plants, talk shows offer every kind of chatter on every kind of platter. But what, as the proverbial visiting Martian would ask, is the talk-show culture?

This is where the following articles delve. Ross Wetzsteon explores the talk show's adaptations, appalling as well as virtuous, to the national obsession with inner states: media therapy. Columnist William A. Henry III chronicles the development of the talk-show format from its troglodyte era as a variety show to its current epoch, crowded with confessional booths. Next, we lay bare the inner being of not-ready-for-prime-time public-access talk shows; daytime women's talk programs—offering instructions in how to walk, talk, and breathe; and the evangelical *700 Club*, where transcendental experiences arrive on time five days a week. Celebrities—that's right, real-live *famous people*—relate tales of their voyages around the talk-show circuit. Shere Hite, author of *The Hite Reports* on sexuality, recalls the intense discomfiture of hosts who obviously preferred dealing with diet-book authors. And John O'Leary, who declared his candidacy for the 1984 Presidential election five months before the 1980 election, describes a race run almost exclusively on the talks. Chances are you heard it here first.

SPECIAL REPORT

The Nation's Stream of Consciousness

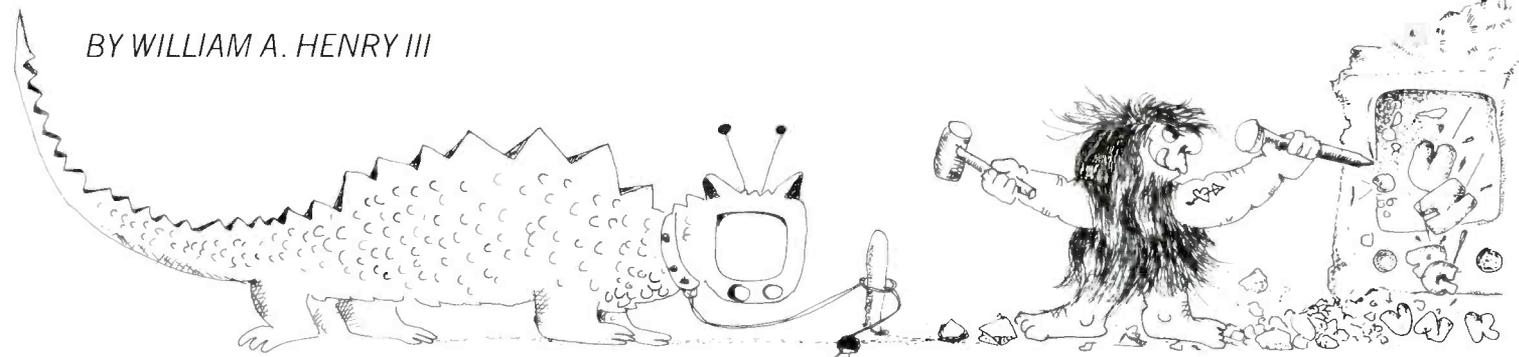


Illustrations by Peter Lippman

FROM THE DAWN OF GAB

THE EVOLUTION OF TV'S MOST INDIGENOUS FORM

BY WILLIAM A. HENRY III



PERHAPS THE MOST MOMENTOUS event in every life is the mystical instant when a baby grasps the nature of talk. From amid the cacophony all around, the child perceives that some sounds are made by other human beings, are deliberately repeated, and—miracle of guesswork—are intended to carry meaning. The child imitates the noise, and soon produces speech; it is all as awe-inspiring as the repeated rediscoveries of the weapon, of fire, of the wheel. As children, and the human race, have matured, the weapon has evolved into the surgeon's scalpel, fire has been employed in the electrical power plant, and the wheel has served successively the oxcart, the motor car, and the jet plane.

Talk has mutated into the talk show.

We have lived with the talk show, that oddity of electronic communication, so long that we tend to forget just how aberrant it is. On the talk show, people who are such perfect strangers that they have to ask each other the most basic questions (Where do you live? Where do you work?) immediately take on the mannerisms of intimacy: They use each other's first names, they pat each other on the back to offer reassurance, they encourage each other to let loose about their sins, sadnesses, and heart's desires. They structure their seemingly open encounters; they bite off their self-expression in mid-surge to make way for band music or commercial pitchmen. The talk show epitomizes what we all were taught was bad conversation: the determination to get one's point across, as rehearsed in the privacy of one's mind, no matter what the other person seems to say; or alternately, if one is "host," the determination to extract from one's "guests" just those admissions that further the theme of the show. Elaborately polite, the talk show is

all decorum, not decency.

One measure of how the talk show diminishes the standards of bourgeois behavior is that three of the most popular topics for discussion—sex, politics, and religion—are, or were, the great taboos of the middle-class dinner table. The most comforting aspect of talk at home is its predictability. It may be humdrum, but it is unthreatening. Even our definition of "stimulating" conversation generally extends no further than to hearing highly educated people express opinions identical to our own—or, at most, to hearing them tell stories and cite facts on subjects in which we have no emotional stake. On television, by contrast, the quintessential element of narrative is danger. However foreseeable the consequences of the action we are watching—and most television, fiction or nonfiction, is as dependable as Greek drama—there is the titillating menace of the unknown from moment to moment. By resorting to subjects that inflame passions, the television producer or talk-show "host" can insure the viewer a risk-free version of the debate one dare not have at home.

Talk shows vary widely, of course, in the ways they raise these topics. Since the arrival in 1952 of *Today*, the first consequential talk show, each generation has had both "hot" and "cool" hosts, to use the McLuhanesque terms that approximate "excitable" and "detached." At the beginning, though, the dominant talk shows were an extension of variety or vaudeville, with the host functioning more as an emcee or top banana, jumping from patter, to interviews, to introduction of a comedy act, to making way for a singer or, truly, a chimpanzee (*Today's* J. Fred Muggs). In keeping with the show-business tradition they expressed, Dave Garroway on *Today* and Steve Allen on *Tonight* were all warmth and charm and lovability. Their personalities had no ob-

truding edges, and they did not stand for anything more controversial than a good time and happy consumption of the network's entertainments and the sponsor's products. During the same era, the staggeringly successful Arthur Godfrey provided as much as 12 percent of CBS's profits by emceeding talk-variety shows in an even more chucklesome, folksy manner. The major difference between Godfrey and Garroway is that the former was vain, the master of his ship, and he willingly let his anger and arrogance show, while Garroway, in the end a far more deeply troubled man, turned most of his hostilities inward. During the era of Garroway and Godfrey, a period when TV talk-show hosts were indistinguishable from morning-drive-time chatsters on radio, there were the barest hints of sex and religion, and not much more about politics. The fundamental message was an endorsement of intolerance—I remember the horror and fascination that could be evoked in the single word "beatnik"—but the messages favoring heterosexuality, fidelity, theism, and anti-communism were mostly smugly implicit.

The next great era in the history of the talk show was embodied in Jack Paar, a *Tonight* host who brought an edge of quirky individuality to a previously neutered format. Paar broke the rules. He got so involved in a subject that he reached the verge of tears. He let his political sympathies show. He pouted, threatened to walk out, finally did. He got into trouble for a toilet joke so tame that in our day it would not titillate a six-year-old. Paar was enormously popular, yet as his swift-plummeting career trail bore out, he was ahead of his time. Years before Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* or Portnoy in Philip Roth's novel, Jack Paar was an antihero.

Though the public tired of Paar's self-

pitiful indulgences, they warmed to the idea of controversy. As the 1960s heated toward their incendiary climax, the talk-show format gave birth to the first defilers of the drawing room, those who first brought sex, politics, and religion to television. Hosts put guests on the air chiefly to belittle them. Joe Pyne had a special rage toward pacifists and homosexuals, and Les Crane toward anyone he considered a bigot.

Once again the public quickly wearied of repetitive emotional excess, but the appetite of the talk-show audience had been whetted for the sort of naughtiness and fireworks found in the *National Enquirer*. In the next phase of talk shows, information was to be dug out of supposedly reluctant guests by winsomeness and guile. The archetypal gee-I-hate-to-ask-this-but questioners were Johnny Carson for the common folks and Dick Cavett (a slavish fawner on snob-value icons) for the upper-middlebrow. Carson had the attention span of an infant, and nothing frightened him off more quickly than an idea. But he had an unerring ear for juicy emotional revelation, and an absolute lack of shame about asking the open-sesame question. (Alas, he often squandered those talents in self-absorbed search of new ways to provoke a laugh.) Cavett typically stumbled over himself trying to quote back at the guest his or her previously expressed ideas on a subject, as reinterpreted by Cavett; too often, the guest felt compelled to say in the politest possible way that Cavett had gotten it wrong. Both Cavett and Carson achieved their greatest talk-related acclaim (Cavett was also an actor, and Carson a nonpareil comic) as self-assertive armchair analysts in sessions of celebrity confession. They represented a merger of the earliest talk-show formats, variety and celebrity vaudeville, with the issue-exploitation of the 1960s.

The next major movement nullified the celebrity as guest and reverted with full force to the common-man personality and topicality of the mid-1960s. This time, however, the host was not the outraged voice of reason (or at least conventional sentiment); he was, instead, yet another winsome wayfarer, and this time he was all too eager to let the shameful tout their shamelessness. Phil Donahue, the talk-show archetype of his generation, is profoundly courteous and equally profoundly violative of all our middle-American morals. He can do an entire show on transsexuals and their families, or on rectal cancer among homosexuals, or on poor blacks being duped by a shiny-suited preacher man, without a flicker of disapproval toward anyone. He encourages the suffering to sing out their griefs;

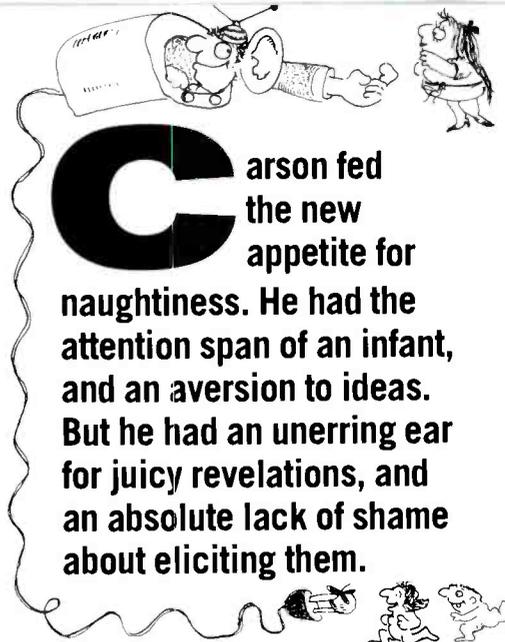
he struggles against passing judgment on either the tormentors or the tormented, except by the implications of his aura of saintly liberal tolerance.

Simultaneous with Donahue's rise in the mid-1970s was the emergence of the religious talk show, a transformation of the traditional hours of sermon-cum-solicitation conducted by old-fashioned tent orators. Pat Robertson of the *700 Club* and Jim Bakker of *PTL* were, like Donahue, "cool" and serene-looking, and like Donahue they favored the confessional style in conversing with even the happiest of their guests. Fundamentalist religion, with its rebirths and almost pornographic celebration of sin as a preparation for conversion, lent itself especially well to the recollection of dark nights of the soul.

Gradually the confessional style has spread to the morning chat shows conducted by local hosts in big cities, to health and diet shows typified by the I-used-to-be-such-a-pig admissions made to Richard Simmons, and, eerily, to an entertainment show featuring cash prizes called *So You Think You've Got Troubles?! This wacko effort, which drew on the services of a ventriloquist and dummy, an astrologer, and a poll of the audience, called on ordinary people to describe their ordeals. How these self-flaying people could ever return home and face friends and neighbors with head held high, one has to wonder. Except, of course, that for a fleeting moment these confessors achieved the sine qua non of our times—fame.*

The ascendancy of fame as a value more precious than money, power, virtue, and kindness is another fact of life that we owe in part to the talk show, which often confuses notoriety with persuasive power, and visibility with impact. Talk shows often introduce guests by attributing to them the fact of fame: When a man or woman is labeled famous, celebrated, well-known, the audience member who has never heard of this person is subliminally being told that his unawareness results from ignorance, and not from any limitation on the significance of the guest.

The link between the talk show and the fame machine underscores the fact that what we hear on a talk show is not really conversation at all. It is not for the edification of the participants, although occasionally they indulge in real conversation off-camera, and hint at it, tantalizingly, on the air. The talk show is really a modern form of the Chautauqua lecture coupled with the Shavian drawing-room comedy. Every show is designed either to entertain or to instruct, and its host is



Carson fed the new appetite for naughtiness. He had the attention span of an infant, and an aversion to ideas. But he had an unerring ear for juicy revelations, and an absolute lack of shame about eliciting them.

obliged to alternate between acknowledging that the audience is strictly an audience and pretending that the viewers are somehow, one by one, invited guests in the mock-living-room where the talk is staged. Little wonder that the viewer is often confused about whether he has a personal relationship with the performers and, more significantly, about whether he is to treat the information dispensed on television as mere chitchat, to be verified later, or as journalistically researched fact. The blurred distinction is all the more worrying because there is no talk-show equivalent of the correction box. Moreover, the talk show furthers the society-wide predisposition to give equal weight to emotional "truths" of the sort discovered in psychoanalysis—even though such insights are highly individual—and scientific or scholarly knowledge, which is general and provable. If we are, as Margaret Mead once suggested, entering a new Dark Age, in which superstition prevails over reason, then the television talk show may be the chronicle of the fall.

It is unfair, of course, to burden the talk show, or television in general, with all the cultural failings of our age. In a crass sense, talk-show producers are indeed journalists, repackaging the fashions of the moment. In an anti-literate society, responsibility for learning by listening rather than reading—which is to say, learning by often mishearing, and thus buttressing one's existing misconceptions—must fall on the listener.

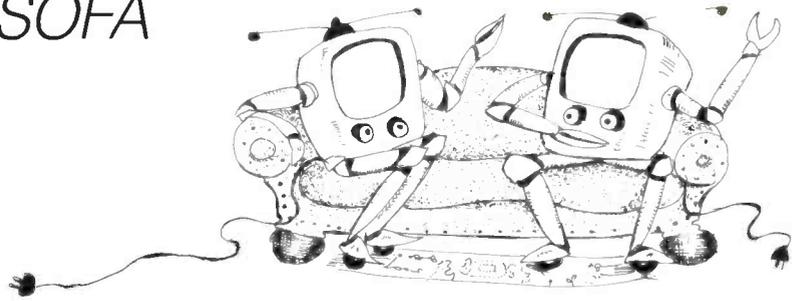
But the talk show can be held culpable for sanctioning prying and gossip, for transmuting communication into commerce, for legitimizing the tradeoff of a personal revelation for a book or movie plug. It can, in retrospect, be held liable for demeaning one of the profound moments of life, the moment when noise becomes speech and then communication. ■



ABC TELEVISION NETWORK

TALK about TALK SHOWS

A VIEW FROM THE SOFA



DOING THE TALK-SHOW circuit can be a uniquely traumatic experience, especially for the guest who is, at least by television's standards, a heavy-thinking type. When we asked a handful of such figures about their talk-show experiences, all agreed on a few things: It isn't easy to be witty on command; it helps to have some specific point to make; it's advisable to ignore the questions and just to say what you want to say. If you are a writer, it's a strict matter of media survival that you not be too intellectual. If you are from New York, keep in mind that you are traveling in hostile

territory: Talk-show land is in the heart of the heartland, despite the fact that it's usually broadcast from New York or Los Angeles. (Why else do Carson and Cavett come from Nebraska, and Letterman from Indiana?) To be invited on to a talk show is, in Allen Ginsberg's words, "an invitation to talk to America."

The following insights into the manners and mores of talk-show land come from some of its more thoughtful visitors.

STEPHEN FENICHELL



Joan Shaffer

S T U D S T E R K E L

and all very polite, and they give you a minute to say your piece, and it all adds up to one big fat zero.

You'd think that since I'm a guy whose work is mostly made out of talking, oral history if you will, that I wouldn't see all that much difference between my work and the talk show. But in fact there's all the difference in the world: It's the difference between the spoken word frozen in time, on the page, to be regarded in privacy and possibly with some thought, and just a lot of chit-chat. I love talk, talk is my primary line of work, but real talk is talk with substance, talk that happens after you've thought about something and that might even make somebody else think. I'm not saying that never happens on talk shows, because it does. I am saying that that's not what's *supposed* to hap-

pen, and if it does, it's a big surprise.

The talk-show circuit is like so much of America today. In other words, it's all the same. One city, when seen from the other side of that TV camera, is just like another—just another market, another TV studio. You wake up in the hotel when they call you and you say, "Thanks for the call, I have to be in Cleveland by 10." And she says, "But sir, this *is* Cleveland." And you say, "But wait, I'm not supposed to be in Cleveland until Wednesday," and *she* says, "But this *is* Wednesday." And off you go again, on another round. And the question you have to keep asking yourself is, "Where am I going?" and the only possible answer is really no kind of answer at all: "Why, I'm not going much of *anywhere*. I'm just going on TV."

Oh, those early-morning talk shows! There's always a handsome boy and a handsome girl, and they could be black, white, Asiatic, Hispanic—they all look the same. They're pretty and they're friendly and they're well spoken, and they know almost nothing about you, and usually nothing in general, and you're next to a lady wrestler and a woman who arranges flowers, and it's all very nice



John Bean

F R A N L E B O W I T Z

American to be on TV. There's something very un-American about books. I think if you *don't* like going on talk shows, you aren't a real American.

The talk show is a hard place to be a wit. It's not a good place for repartee. It's a much better place to tell jokes, to be funny in the show-biz sense, instead of witty. Being witty takes time, which is exactly what they don't have much of on talk shows. You work in these little segments between commercials, and you

can't build continuity, particularly on a late-night show, because at every commercial you're losing a large part of your audience to sleep. Sleep is a tough act to compete with.

Even if you're on a tiny local show, more people are going to see you than would ever buy your book. The hosts can be a bit difficult on some of those local shows. I don't like those boy-girl teams, because they really talk to each other, not to you. They have their own thing going.

I really like going on talk shows. I much prefer it to writing. It makes me feel

Also, the hosts on those local shows often decide in advance their audience is not going to like you, so they stick the knife in. They throw you to their viewers. They do it by building up a false sense of identification with the audience, by saying, in effect, "She's not like you and me. She's from New York. She is the enemy. She is really some sort of Martian."

Because of the squareness of the hosts, and the squareness of the audience (at least as it is perceived by the hosts and the producers), I've never been very brilliant on television. The telephone is really more my medium. A show like David Letterman's really is the exception, be-



Lisa Dorfman

I approached the talk show with a very specific set of rules in mind: the Bodhisattva's Vow. This vow comes in four parts: 1) Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to enlighten all. 2) Obscurations are infinite; I vow to uncover all. 3) The



The absolute, immutable Law of Television is the Survival of the Glibbest. The only reason I'm invited on TV so much is that I always speak the very moment the question stops. There are no pauses. Television abhors a silence. They are forever on the lookout for people to fill in the empty spaces, to add some sort of filler to those endless wastes of TV time. It doesn't matter what you say. It only matters that your lips *keep moving*.

You can do absolutely *anything* on television, and all that anyone will remember is that you were *on*. You can say, "I want to kill my mom," and the following morning everyone will say, "We saw *you* on the telly." Nothing else matters. The only

cause it's late at night and relatively hip. But Letterman and Carson and Cavett all have that Midwestern thing, which sometimes goes against a New York sense of humor—though so much humor today is a bizarre mix of heartland and Borscht Belt it's sometimes a bit hard to distinguish.

I refuse to discuss certain things on television—my personal life, for instance. I think it's boring. I mean, it's boring enough to *live* your personal life, without having to discuss it in front of everyone on the tube. These days, you have a choice as a writer, artist, whatever: Either you're a professional recluse, a

A L L E N G I N S B E R G

Gates of Dharma are numberless; I vow to enter them all. 4) The Buddha Path is endless; I vow to follow it through. So I view being invited to go on TV as very much of a Dharma Gate, a situation to be acted through for either good or ill. Norman Mailer talks about going on talk shows as entering the jaws of the beast, but I do not believe in hell. I believe that there is the surface or hint of an awakened mind lying furtive in practically everyone. Even talk-show hosts. Even talk-show audiences.

In the last 10 years or so, I've been interested in directing the public mind toward meditation practice through TV. I

Garbo or Thomas Pynchon, or else you're going to be something between a sensitive artist and a night-club comedian.

I never watch myself on TV because I become terribly conscious of how much I resemble my mother. Until you see yourself on TV or in a movie, you really have no idea of what you are like. I am, I find, just like my mother. This makes me not want to watch. My mother watches me all the time. She says, "Ach, you're just like me." There is, after all, a limit to my egomania—though I am available to be a movie star at any time, if someone should happen to want me.

look directly into the camera's eye when I want to talk to America. I do my best not to be hypnotized by the machinery, but to realize that the machinery itself is an illusion. To talk about meditation, I don't talk. I ask the host to give me a moment where there's some dead air, because on television silence is dramatic. Then I explain and demonstrate the sitting style and posture right there, with one or two minutes of breathing by way of illustration. When I speak, I don't try to think or prepare anything. I say what's on my mind.

If you are able to rest in nature while on TV, there is no anxiety.

Q U E N T I N C R I S P

cardinal sin is silence. The literal content of a sentence is quite beside the point. The point is that something is supposedly being said. In this sense, television is utterly bland. On TV I am not at all useful; everyone knows I know nothing. I am meant to amuse in a mild way, to be diverting, to say nothing dangerous and nothing nasty. The point is, you have to be glad to be there, and endlessly, permanently, *eager to speak*.

I work well on TV because nothing about me is *ever* spontaneous. As in art, one has to make everything appear as seamless as possible, and like a good actor, one must radiate a definite impression that you are *meant to be there*. You must be able to come in straight off the street and onto every set tuned into your channel, without feeling any awkward sense of transition.

If one happens to be unfortunate enough to be an author, for heaven's sake *do not* talk about your book. And above all, no matter the question, *do not* talk about how you write. It's boring. Do not be boring. If they ask you about your

book, tell them how many times you've been married, or whether you've ever been to jail. Because TV searches out the common ground. If you are presumptuous enough to lose sight of that common ground, to lose track of the basic threads of human existence, of love, death, sex, or marriage, you simply disappear. I've seen very intelligent people go on the air who very simply *cease to exist*, because they are encouraged to go off on their own, into their own private worlds.

Above all, TV is the most public medium. It is absurd to sit in your little studio chair with the potted fern waving away there on your right, with that camera staring you right in the face, and say, "Really, I'm just a very private person." Because all artists, actors, creative people are basically the same: They are hooligans unable to live within their given income of praise. It is not enough for us to hear our mothers tell us, "You really look very nice." Because we all have that nagging sense, "Yes, of course, but that's only *my mother*." Television makes us all so greedy.





Susan Wood

B E T T Y F R I E D A N

Over the 20 years or so I've been going on talk shows, the assumptions on the part of interviewers as to the intelli-

gence of their audience has notably improved. It used to be that if you said anything a third-grader might have difficulty understanding, a kind of inaudible buzzer would go off, steering the conversation back down to more acceptable levels of discourse. It's no longer such an absolute commonplace that the person interviewing you has not read your book. It's still frequent, but not quite so predictable as it once was.

I think there has been a steady if fairly gradual improvement in the climate for

ideas on the air. If there's something going on politically in the world or in the nation, and you happen to be involved with it and you have an opportunity to talk about it before thousands of viewers, they'll sit up and take notice. That's what it's all about, after all, whether you're writing at home or talking on television. One does one's best to express what needs to be expressed, regardless of the medium. So I don't see the talk-show experience as foreign or alien, or estranged in any way from the process of writing.



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C A L V I N T R I L L I N

It's become fashionable for authors to say they hate doing talk shows. But after all, nobody *has* to do it. I think you either have or are missing some sort of gland that lets you enjoy yourself in front of the camera. If you pretend you're really in

somebody's living room, you can tranquilize yourself into it. I just don't think it's nearly as harrowing as literary people like to claim it is.

On the other hand, I really don't think talk shows do much for a writer unless he's out there pushing shlock. I'm just not sure you're talking about the same audience, those who watch TV and those who buy books. If you're selling an investment guide on how to survive the collapse of the world economy, and you run around grabbing program directors in elevators to get you on the air, I guess it can work out pretty well. But if you've written a complex psychological portrait of a

sensitive boyhood in Wales, you'd better forget all about TV—unless you wrote the book with your feet, or have some sort of incurable disease.

If you're a reporter, as I am, doing the promotional circuit is a bit like going on vacation. I think the hard part is watching the shows, not being on them. I watched myself one time on Carson, and I fell right to sleep. I was kind of jet-lagged anyway because the show had been taped at five or so, and the authors' ghetto isn't until well after midnight. So I tried to stay up but I dropped off as I launched into my second sentence. I guess I'd just been there too many times before.



G A R R I S O N K E I L L O R

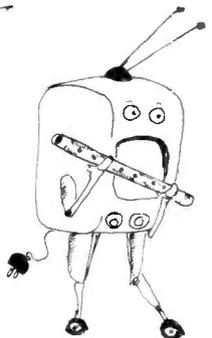
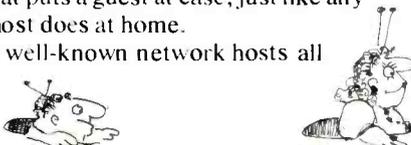
A good host has to learn how to deal with us wobbly folks. I think the best, like Carson, Cavett, and Letterman, all come from the Midwest and do well on TV because they weren't raised to fight for every word around the dining-room table. A Midwestern WASP dinner, as opposed to, let's say, an Italian or an Irish or a Jewish dinner, is kind of like an exercise in nonaggressive passivity training, which teaches you to hang back a bit and not to try angling in on your guests to get the jump on them. That's not to say these guys aren't sharp, it's just that they give out an impression of casual good humor that puts a guest at ease, just like any good host does at home.

The well-known network hosts all

seem to share this basic proficiency. But I've run into trouble on the local shows with some of the younger, less experienced hosts. There's just something lacking in some of these people. I mean they've got the manners and the style down, but they've also developed a kind of sixth sense that tells them whether the camera is turned on them or not. When it's not turned on them, they just turn the manners and attention off. It's like their faces just sort of fall away, and you're left staring right at a blank. That can be a little unnerving, but I guess they think it's professional.

I don't think you have actual conversations on talk shows, not in the sense that you or I would know the term, thank God. (Though I must admit I've sat in more than one living room in my time where the people sound and act like

they're on TV. They've developed that surface polish and the bland politeness, so every conversation comes out like an interview, every question like the opening shot in some sort of interrogation.) When I've had fun on these shows, it's when I've had silly conversations with hosts, and they've been relaxed enough to go right along with it. I did a wonderful show in Dallas, when the host just popped a string of silly questions, to each of which I answered almost at random, "Yup," or "Nope." That really was the best: a talk-show performance only a mother could love. ■





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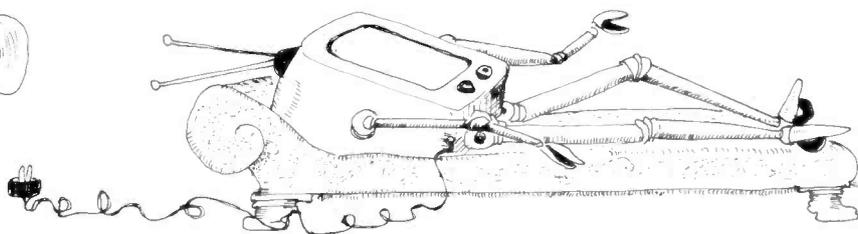
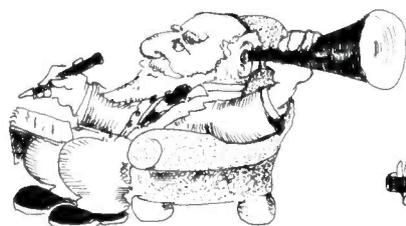
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PSYCHOCHATTER

THE TREND OF THE '80s

BY ROSS WETZSTEON



"Hello. This is Name That Trauma. You're on the air."

"Ah, hi. I have a, ah, kind of problem."

"Would you like to share it with our audience?"

"Well, actually, ah, that's kind of the problem . . ."

"You have a problem sharing."

"No, ah, actually . . . I have a problem with the way you use the word sharing."

"You're telling me what you feel, but I want to know what you feel."

"Well, sometimes I feel that programs like yours are useful in helping people face their anxieties, but sometimes I feel they're harmful because the help is so full of clichés . . ."

"Ambivalence. That's your problem. All of us have feelings of ambivalence, but learning to deal constructively with these feelings can make us happier, healthier human beings. We'll be right back after this brief pause."

It shouldn't come as a surprise that television and psychotherapy have begun to form an alliance—after all, "communication" is one of the key words in the vocabulary of both institutions. What may come as a surprise, however, is that their alliance promises to become one of the most fascinating, controversial, and characteristic trends of the '80s.

Of course, television, with its heavy reliance on talk, with its unparalleled capacity for intimacy, has always had connections with "the couch"—from Jack Paar's nightly psychodramas to the soaps' daily psychochatter, from anxieties in commercials to neuroses in the Oval Office. But within the last year the couch has become literal as well as metaphorical. Scores of programs, especially on cable, now take the forms of group therapy, counseling sessions, and in-

depth psychological interviews. According to one survey, there are more than 100 such programs today, compared with fewer than five only a few years ago.

This boom in television therapy raises serious questions about the popularization of psychology, about the nature of television's relationship with its audience, and about the ethics of on-the-air treatment. Will the airwaves be filled with "psych jockies" glibly racing through the Top-40 character disorders, or will the techniques, insights, and compassion of psychotherapy become available to millions of people?

On a larger scale, the astonishing proliferation of therapy programs might provide some hints about the direction of the national psyche. Will people look back on media therapy as a momentary fad—the Me Generation in its final spasm of self-absorption—or as the beginning of a trend that made mental fitness as significant in the '80s as physical fitness was in the '70s?

After watching literally dozens of therapy programs, after talking to a number of psychiatrists who offer passionate but contradictory opinions about their benefits and dangers, I still have the same problem, doctor: I still feel ambivalent.

Taking emotional difficulties onto some of these shows makes as much sense as having a broken leg set by a butcher. For example, *So You Think You Got Troubles?!*, which aired briefly in syndication last season, was hosted by ventriloquist Jay Johnson and his dummy Bob. Therapy was reduced to the level of a slick game show with the use of phony problems, flippant interviews, and fortune-cookie advice: the show bore the same relationship to psychotherapy that *Family Feud* bears to *Oedipus Rex*.

At the same end of the spectrum is *Take Charge* (shown on the Cable Health Network). Lester Coleman, a gruff, pious phony, begins the program by telling the

members of his therapy group how special they are to him ("each one of you has deeply engrained yourself on my consciousness"). He conducts the session with unctuous condescension (if someone were to quote a passage from *Mein Kampf*, he'd praise him for his "valuable contribution"), and wraps everything up with thumping nostrums that would shame a patent medicine salesman.

At the other end of the spectrum (also on the Cable Health Network) is *Join the Group*, featuring a dozen men and women in their 50s and 60s who discuss problems of aging in a modified group-therapy format. Once you get past the moderator's italicized psychochatter ("I can relate not only *to* but *with* these people"), the participants are for the most part sensible, decent, and caring. Perhaps in recognition of the inhibiting presence of the camera, they don't delve into inter-group relationships but focus instead on specific issues such as divorce, children, and death.

"While you listen to the members of the group share their experiences," the moderator tells us, "ask yourselves these questions . . ." Indeed, the purpose of the program is less to provide psychological resolution for the participants than information for the audience. Simply by showing that everyone has to face these problems—and, inadvertently, by revealing that "ordinary people" are often as psychologically sophisticated as "experts"—one session of *Join the Group* can alleviate more loneliness, anxiety, and insecurity than a decade's worth of *Take Charge*.

Predictably, most of the media therapists eventually get around to sex. While one can cast a dubious eye at the "therapeutic" pretension of such programs as New York's *Midnight Blue* (an "educational" film on oral sex for paraplegics followed by a wet T-shirt contest), one can appreciate the genuinely useful and

Ross Wetzsteon is a Village Voice senior editor and theater critic.



Thom Thompson leads *Crisis Counselor* through traumas firmly but gently.



Sharon Goldsmith: *Sex is healthy.*



Sonya Friedman: *Therapy is fun.*

provocative show *Human Sexuality* (Cable Health Network again).

It's hard to tell whether sex counselor Sharon Goldsmith is closer in age to 35 or 55. On the one hand, her wide eyes and tight-lipped smile seem to indicate a series of facial tucks, which would make her far older than she looks; on the other hand, her hair seems so prematurely white you almost feel she dyed it in order to make herself look far older than she is. Dwelling on Goldsmith's appearance isn't as superficial as it might seem, for a great deal of her program's ambience depends on her image, a unique combination of matronliness and sensuality, which allows her to talk candidly about the most touchy subjects and never seem coy or titillating.

Goldsmith often begins her daily half-hour program by interviewing "real people" about specific problems (how can mothers and daughters talk freely about sex, for instance), followed by discussions with experts. No matter how serious the problem, however, Goldsmith is ruthlessly upbeat—there's little anxiety, little conflict; everything can be solved by communicating, by relating. Sex seems so clean, so *healthy*, in fact, that one is reminded of the cheery, volleyball-playing nudists of the '50s. Still, it's probably more therapeutic for viewers to think the moderator actually has fun in bed than to feel, as they would about much sex education on television, that she regards intercourse as a medical procedure. At once sober and light-hearted, Goldsmith proves that media therapy can be both instructive *and* entertaining.

This is what they're all aiming for, of course, which is why you see so many moderators desperately straining to pull off what Goldsmith accomplishes so effortlessly. Of the dozen or so programs I've watched, only marble-eyed Sonya Friedman of *Sonya* (USA Network) comes close to Goldsmith's model. A cross between Joyce Brothers and Merv Griffin, Sonya seems the perfect citizen of the talk-show society. As she reveals on her daily interview program, with its occasional stress on psychological problems of everyday life, she knows a little about everything, cares a lot about anything, and gets so much *fun* out of being serious.

More strictly focused media therapy programs (Cable Health Network's *Breaking the Habit*, for instance, an on-the-air psychoanalytic treatment of addictions) are considerably less successful, not because their concerns are so narrow but because their moderators are so dull. While this kind of show-business judgment seems to place style over substance, it actually applies to any thera-

pist. Researchers have discovered that nuances of technique aren't nearly as important as an empathetic spark between therapist and client—something Nielsen always knew about moderator and panelist. In fact, this kind of empathy is a major reason the alliance between television and therapy seems so natural—for both rely heavily on a trusting relationship with a charismatic authority figure. Which leads to the two most fascinating phenomena of the television therapy boom—*Tom Cottle: Up Close* and *Crisis Counselor*.

Up Close, a weekly half-hour talk show syndicated to 50 stations, has turned the celebrity interview into coast-to-coast psychoanalysis. An investigative reporter of the psyche, Cottle is a professionally trained psychologist and author of 22 books, yet on television his personality is far more important than his technique. His personality, in fact, *is* his technique. Cottle seduces his guests with instant intimacy—an art we usually associate with the great lovers—that is psychological, not sexual. Some of his guests—Jack Lemmon, Milton Berle, Rod Steiger—have been cajoled into revealing the most intimate details of their lives to an audience of millions.

Several paradoxes help explain his uncanny skill at eliciting too much too soon. Dealing with the most volatile, tension-producing material, he's calm, relaxed. Chatting with world-famous celebrities, he's modest, folksy. Probing for pain, his touch is light, cheerful. "Don't keep me out!" he tells his guests, but in such a pleading tone that they hardly notice they're being bullied. It's manipulation through sincerity. But most of all, he's passionately sympathetic; he's never met anyone as fascinating as you, he's never been so concerned in his life. Who could resist telling him anything he wants to know? And yet, do his guests wake up the next morning, like Casanova's conquests, wondering where he's gone?

Sigmund Freud and Tom Cottle are one-and-a-half of a kind. The Master himself couldn't have been more effective at helping people "get in touch with their feelings." But the psychoanalytic model includes resolution as well as revelation, and Cottle seems interested in only half of the process. He skillfully exposes traumas, but then leaves them lying there. The popularity of his program, in short, relies not on the ultimate healing power of psychotherapy but on its voyeurism.

He first stumbled across *Crisis Counselor* (aired three times daily on Cable Health Network) in mid-program. A man had apparently been unfaithful to his wife; she'd found out; their marriage was

only going to last until the next commercial break, if they could hang on that far. The counselor wasn't a slick, mid-day type like Cottle. Balding, with a beard and glasses, he behaved like a dedicated professional who didn't know he was on-camera. The ambience was like an emotional cauldron, the lid rattling, steam pouring out around the edges. What struck me the most was the fact that the couple allowed themselves to be filmed in the midst of such a wrenching crisis. Their problem isn't infidelity, I thought in dumbstruck awe, it's exhibitionism! This is emotional pornography! But when the program ended, I heard the word "dramatization," and I was even more stunned. Those were actors! I've been a theater critic for nearly 20 years and I've never seen such convincing naturalistic acting.

The program's format is fairly simple: Members of the family calmly explain their problem; host Thom Thompson quickly breaks through their calm by sensitive but relentless probing; anger and pain surface; one outburst interrupts another; everybody gets to yell and cry a lot, and all the while Thompson is, well, he's *there* for them—as intensely and grimly involved as his clients. Gentle but firm, dogged in his common sense, he makes sure everyone focuses on the emotional crux of the problem. He simply refuses to let them get away until they *understand*.

Sometimes the narrative is a bit stagy, but the therapy itself is never prepackaged. Thompson is not only skillful in his methodology but sophisticated in the way he gives advice. "There's no quick fix in counseling," he admonishes his clients. Problems are never wrapped up, solutions are never handed down. All anyone ever learns is the possible source of the problem and potential ways to work on it. All? Millions of analysts have spent hundreds of millions of dollars and learned far less! "Popularization" is usually a perjorative term, but if *Crisis Counselor* helps popularize family therapy, it deserves much more than an Emmy.

A debate is raging within the psychiatric community concerning the supposed benefits and dangers of media therapy—a debate based less on the quality of the programs than on the principle of taking therapy to the airwaves in the first place.

The essence of the therapeutic relationship is confidentiality and commitment, two principles violated the moment the camera enters the room. Critics contend that media therapy inevitably dilutes and trivializes. That is, the necessity of making complicated material accessible to a large audience leads to distortion: the artificial time constraint severely limits the amount of material that can be cov-

ered (and raises the possibility of stranding the client in an emotionally tenuous position), and the entertainment factor taints what should be an exclusively healing situation.

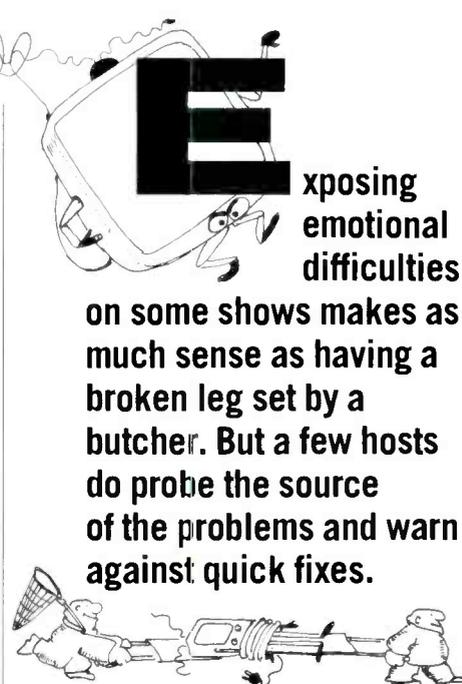
Media shrinks, critics go on, not only can't do psychotherapy, but if they could they would do it badly. True therapy is a long-term *process*, they point out, and to treat people as so many brief encounters is to open up their lives, let them spill out their problems, and then simply walk away without really resolving anything.

Defenders of media therapy argue that its critics are themselves guilty of distortion. The purpose of such programs, many insist, is not to provide therapy for individuals but information for the public. Certain kinds of supportive therapy do take place, not so much for the individuals "treated" on the programs as for the viewers at home. Even if this help is superficial, it's better than nothing.

"Sometimes I feel frustrated because I can't solve their problems," says media therapist Judith Kuransky. "But I can listen to their hurt, acknowledge they are not weird or alone, and give them bandages. It's almost like socialized medicine, people can benefit without it costing any money. People can hear what other people say. They may feel the same way, but have been afraid to express it."

By far the most compelling argument in favor of media therapy, however, is that it makes counseling a credible option to millions of people who might not otherwise have considered it. There's still a great deal of ignorance about and prejudice against psychotherapy in this country, and if people who were uninformed, afraid, or hostile come to see its potential usefulness, the present boom may well become a landmark in television's implicit mandate to provide public service.

To the amazement of those who regard our culture as anti-intellectual, as lacking in any sense of the interior life, the United States has been the most receptive country in the world to psychotherapy. This apparent paradox has many explanations: We are a profoundly individualistic society, committed to the belief that people are responsible for their own lives; we are a success-oriented society, measuring people's value not so much by their family background as by their personal achievements; we are a pragmatic society, in which problems are by definition solvable. These characteristics combine to form a culture in which a sense of personal failure is widespread, but in which simple solutions seem immediately available. Furthermore, the lack of an institutionalized national religion, the feelings



Exposing emotional difficulties

on some shows makes as much sense as having a broken leg set by a butcher. But a few hosts do probe the source of the problems and warn against quick fixes.

of alienation toward much of the work to be done in an industrial economy, and the erosion of the family as the basic structural unit of society—all these factors contribute to the popularity of psychotherapy as well.

Paralleling this enthusiasm are a number of reasons why television, America's other favorite medium, is particularly receptive to psychotherapy. For one thing, the counseling session provides an almost perfect "package": the built-in conflict, the gradually unraveling mystery, the sudden revelations, the final resolution. For another, there's a charismatic authority figure providing security. The fact that the kind of charisma most effective in therapy—self-assured but unthreatening, concerned but soothing—is the kind of charisma most effective on television gives media therapy enormous potential. The danger, of course, is that if media therapy treats its viewers as passive consumers rather than active participants, it may end up having as much relevance to happiness as toothpaste.

One characteristic of the media age is the paradox that, as the world is brought increasingly into our living rooms, we feel increasingly helpless to affect its course. Perhaps the boom in media therapy is nothing but a response to this paradox. If the world outside is so intractable, turn to the inner world instead. Perhaps it's simply a way of taming alienation: Just as nutrition has become a faddish response to a fast-food society, psychotherapy may be a response to a game-show culture. Or perhaps, most disturbing of all, it's a sign that we're giving up altogether—that we can only endure real life if it comes to us as "real life stories," turning us into a nation of voyeurs.

It's possible that the direction media therapy takes will give us clues as to where we are headed as a nation. ■

PROGRAM NOTES

Public-Access Talk Shows

Exotic Mutations

TALK SHOW LAND is so vast, with so few distinctive landmarks, that the visitor often needs a *TV Guide* to tell whether he's sailing by the Cliffs of Donahue or through the Valley of Merv. Everyone pretty much looks alike, speaks alike, and observes the same codes of behavior. But should the visitor chance upon one of the outer islands—a public-access talk show—he will know it right away. Is that a joint the host is lighting up? Are they going to talk about arch supports *for the whole show*? On public-access cable, where anyone can have an hour's air-time for the asking, the flora and fauna are, well, different. And nowhere are they more exotic than in Manhattan, the talk show's Galápagos Islands, where more than a decade's evolution has spawned scores of impressive new mutations.

Most of these fall into one of three main species: Talk-on-the-Wild-Side shows, Serious-and-Really-Boring shows, and Commerce-Before-Art shows. Below, some representative specimens:

You don't need a field guide to distinguish between Jane Pauley and Coca Crystal, the host of one of New York's oldest access programs, because Pauley doesn't smoke marijuana on camera. Drawing its title and inspiration from Emma Goldmann, *If I Can't Dance You Can Keep Your Revolution* is a weekly, hour-long exercise in good-natured anarchy, in which Coca merrily puffs her way through ad hoc segments of dream interpretation, viewer calls, political discussions, and "Sensimilla Street," the weekly pot report (named for a prized seedless variety). What lifts Coca's program above the run of access shows is its relatively professional production, and the host's loopy personality and gift for pacing. By unpredictable turns, Coca is desultory and brusque—owing perhaps to violent changes in her blood chemistry.

If the mercurial Coca keeps viewers on



Coca Crystal and an arboreal guest

their toes, Dr. Barry Block helps keep those toes in shape. Block is the earnest young host of *Foot Talk*, a weekly public-access show as pedestrian as Coca's is exotic. Indeed, the doctor's sensible advice on problems podiatric gives the lie to the notion that every Manhattan access show is either drug- or sex-crazed. Most, in fact, are tedium-crazed. *Foot Talk* is one of those parched access shows in which the moment of greatest suspense comes when the host decides to take a few calls from viewers and you can see him silently pray that there will be a call to take. (Once, Dr. Block's relief at finding he actually had a caller was shattered when it turned out to be a wrong number.) The program does have its stirring moments, as when Block and a guest convincingly demolished the myth that sneakers are bad for your feet. Still, whatever else can be said about *Foot Talk*, it is almost preternaturally dull.

In some ways, public-access talk shows are like contemporary poetry, of which it has been said that many more people write it than read it. In all likelihood, *Richard Roffman Presents* has more guests than viewers. Gruff, baldish, possessing the distracted mien of the important executive, Roffman is a low-rent publicist (he describes himself as "the Woolworth's of the public-relations industry") who uses his air-time to showcase his many clients. And what clients they are! As Roffman once explained, most of these would-be stars cannot be described without a hyphen, since they have yet to reach their "success point." And so there's the podiatrist-humorist, the CPA-vocalist, and the furrer-songwriter.

Roffman's contribution to Western culture has been to strip the talk show down to its barest essential: the plug. His guests don't even *do* anything. They just stand around Roffman, 10 or 20 strong, as he delivers one unbelievably kind introduction after another. (It's a tested theorem of talk shows that, the more obscure the show, the more hyperbolic the introductions.) "Now I want you to meet a really great act. The Yentatainers. These two ladies do Yiddish comedy and song. They've performed for some of the leading organizations of the world, as well as in the Borscht Belt. They're currently available for weddings and private parties. Gals, maybe you could give your phone numbers and then interested parties will get in touch directly." And then on to the versatile Mike Pinto, baritone and certified public accountant.

There can be no question that *Richard Roffman Presents* is without a doubt the greatest talk show. Ever. Anywhere.

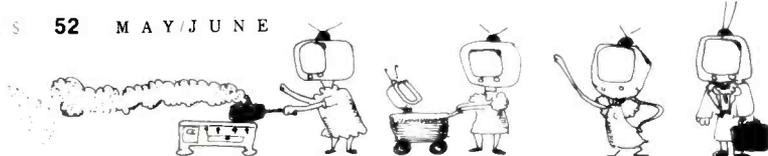
MICHAEL POLLAN

Girl Talk on USA Network

Sugar and Spice and Makeup Are Nice

FACING USA Network's audience from behind a counter, a portly man in a Mr. Whipple apron expounds on the virtues and drawbacks of rice. There are three kinds, we learn, as he fingers the uncooked grains on three plates set before him: white, brown, and wild. "You sec," he explains slowly, a furrow forming between his eyes, "rice goes through a *milling* process that *pretty much determines* what you get in the store." He forges on, telling of "regular" and "parboiled," pausing to cock his head before delving into "instant." "You see, *one* advantage of *instant* rice is its *quick cooking time!*"

The daytime programming produced for this cable channel is all talk, on subjects generally recognized as helpful to

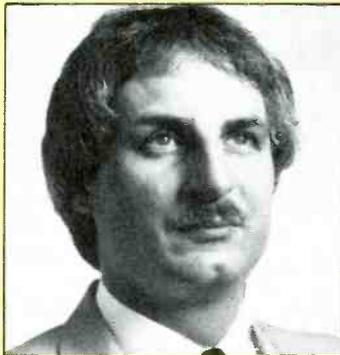


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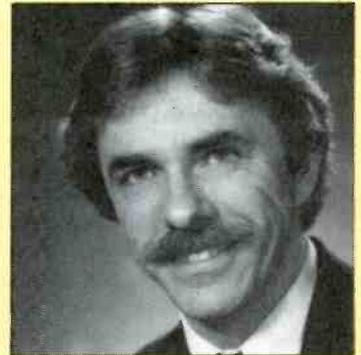
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women. USA president Kay Koplovitz considers it "an alternative" to broadcast television's soaps and game shows. *You!* makes women over; *Alive & Well* keeps them fit, and brings them stars and exotica (Jack Jones and vegetable tempura); *Sonya* and guests tell them what to do—about almost everything; *Are You Anybody?* brings them the wives of the famous, who show that having money does not necessarily mean having an identity.

And *Woman's Day USA* demystifies everything from buying rice to grating frozen butter ("There'll *certainly* come a time when you'll forget to remove a stick of butter from the freezer 24 hours ahead of time!"). It is a talk show after radical surgery: The excision of the guest has left the host alone with the audience, free to pontificate in singsong on the obvious, seemingly determined to convince the viewer of her own empty-headedness. Once convinced, she presumably is hooked on the show.

You! host Edith Locke said recently that "a woman facing a mirror is out to punish herself"; one wonders how *You!*'s endless tips on improving the image in the mirror can make life any easier. Poreless models glide by in thousand-dollar garments; narrow-tied designers comment through clenched jaws; makeup experts and hair stylists labor to "improve" the looks of already attractive women. If the viewer despairs of ever attaining these ideals, *You!* holds out hope: Some of the skin-care products, makeup tools, and accessories *You!* promotes are really quite affordable.

Woman's Day USA teaches grating techniques.



Are cooking well and looking good all USA cares about? Well, not *exactly*. Dr. Sonya Friedman's guests bring in a little of the world outside the house: Judith Guest talks about keeping a journal; Stefanie Powers discusses the goals of the William Holden game reserve in Kenya. "How did you help your students?" Sonya asks Guest. "Tell us so we can learn . . . to *release* some of those inner feelings."

Journals and animals are okay—but if there's one subject we can never be taught too often, it's appearance enhancement. So Sonya brings us the president of Color Charisma Inc., who demonstrates her color-bib-and-wheel technique. "Some colors can *drain* our skin tone," Sonya says, wagging a finger at us.

With good old network soaps offering their daily escape routes, would a woman ever want to spend a punishing day before USA Network's mirror?

SAVANNAH WARING WALKER

'The 700 Club' Pat Robertsonianism

SOME PROBLEMS are so stubborn that no ordinary talk show can make a dent in them; that's why troubled souls turn to *The 700 Club*. Say your husband drinks. Phil Donahue places the drinking-husband problem in the economic, political, and cultural contexts. But what does that do for *you*? Those daytime shows on cable recommend detoxification programs, family therapy, confrontation. But you've gone that route. In desperation you tune in the Christian Broadcasting Network's *The 700 Club*, where preacher Pat Robertson has been waiting for you all along, endlessly patient, endlessly smiling.

Pat has an answer for you. One of his roving reporters has prepared some factual material on a couple much like you, only worse. Linda, shown in her living room, recalls that Al, seen stepping out of the cab of his truck, drank heavily, stayed away for days, abused her. Nothing worked until Linda remembered testimony she had heard on *The 700 Club* of the healing of the sick, and conversion of the wayward, through faith. Linda encouraged Al to attend church. When he finally did, it turned him right around. Al and Linda are living happily ever after. It happens every day on *The 700 Club*.

Whether the credit for Al's cure should go to a church or to a talk show isn't quite clear. *The 700 Club* is both: a talk show so big it constitutes a religion; a religion so small it fits inside a talk show. Pat represents a sect all by himself; call it Robertsonianism. He has his own good works—Operation Blessing, whose brown rice

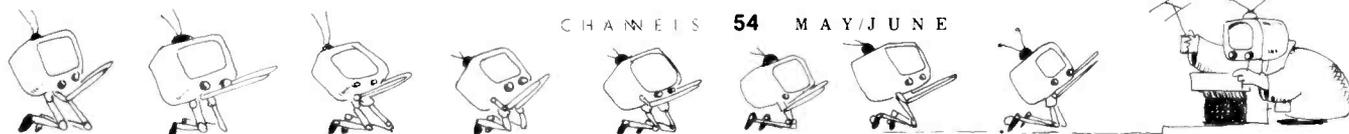
program feeds thousands of the hungry "without federal funds," as Pat reminds us a couple of times a show. He has a smart little counseling business: a set of "dynamic new teaching tapes" offering "practical, biblical insight" on the question of "what is happening to our families"—yours free with a \$15-a-month membership in *The 700 Club*. The club has 465,000 members or contributors. And the show appears on 150 broadcast stations, and in 25 million cable homes (or 17 million, if you accept the industry's secular-humanist count).

The tenets of Robertsonianism are slightly less clear than the audience size. Among the practical, biblical insights available to the faithful: the fact that government programs are mostly bad, and that social problems can be solved by direct reference to the New Testament. National problems are really just personal problems in disguise. Take hunger, for example. Some South Dakota farmers shipped grain to Michigan's unemployed, through the good offices of Operation Blessing. You don't need welfare, Pat explains, "just one teeny bit of farmers saying, 'Hey, we want to do what God tells us.'"

So the answer is simple. It's biblical. It's practical. And above all, it's amiable. Most of the time Pat is so darned delighted he can scarcely contain himself. You never saw a happier talk-show host. Pat's God smites nobody; he's a *positive* God.

But here's the most peculiar thing about *The 700 Club*: It's a talk show about the unspeakable—inspiration, conversion, revelation. Pat brings on earnest, ordinary folk to testify to the shattering experience of walking away from death after a moment of faith. And then Pat closes his sparkling eyes, grabs a nearby hand, and proceeds to the show's climax—an electronic laying-on of hands. "Someone has a serious problem in the throat, and the Lord is clearing that up *right now*. There is a left leg that is shorter than a right leg, and God is letting that leg grow. Praise God." And a crushed pelvis, varicose veins, hypoglycemia, goiters, and a disorder of the pituitary gland. They're being healed. *Right now*. Pat opens his eyes, back in your living room after his flight through the Kingdom. And he pops back in the talk-show smile, which has been waiting for him like a pair of dentures. ■

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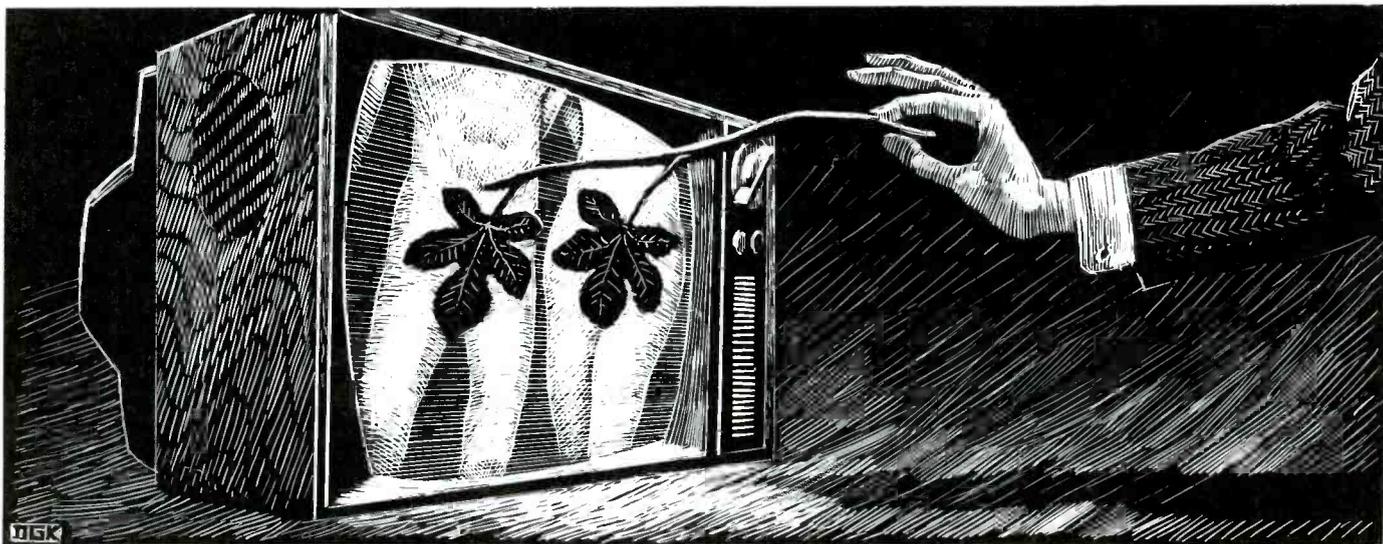
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When TV Blushes at Sex

by Shere Hite



David G. Klein

I HAVE DONE the talk-show circuit twice—the first time in 1976 to promote my study of women's sexuality, and again this year, to discuss my study of men. My work is very explicit, for purposes of accuracy. But as interested as talk-show hosts often seem in discussing my findings on sexuality, they apparently have a fear of straightforwardness on the subject. Almost every host I have ever dealt with has asked before air-time that I avoid using, whenever possible, the words "masturbation," "clitoris," and "orgasm." This ambivalence is the most striking common denominator in the diverse group of interviewers I met across the country.

Surprisingly, California seemed the most ambivalent state of all. On one morning show (*AM Los Angeles*), the following series of discussions took place over a three-day period:

The first day (the only day I was a guest), a young caller asked, "Is there something wrong with me? I've been married for two years and I haven't had

Shere Hite's Reports on women's and men's sexuality were published by Dell and Ballantine.

an orgasm with my husband yet." According to my studies, I explained, nothing was wrong with her. But the expectation that women should have orgasms from intercourse was unfounded. If she was able to masturbate to orgasm—most women can—she should show or tell her husband how she did this, so that they could work out a way for her to get this stimulation when they were together.

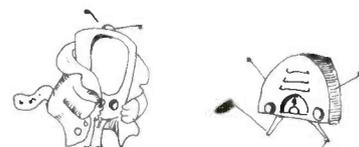
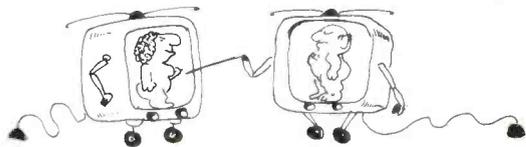
Co-host Cyndy Garvey, perhaps anticipating the caller's fears, asked me, "Do you think sometimes men, when told what women need, don't want to hear it?" I answered that many men in my study had been uncomfortable hearing about clitoral stimulation, often making such jokes about it as "the clitoris is the greatest invention since the mop." Still, the discomfort was somewhat understandable. I said, since this information about women's orgasms contradicts what men have been taught for years, I left feeling my time on the program had been well spent.

Imagine my surprise when I tuned in the next day just in time to hear host Regis Philbin apologize, "We're all in shock around here this morning over our last guest yesterday. A lot of you were offended and called in. I ultimately should

have stopped her because she got too graphic and too explicit, and it became uncomfortable and offensive. I promise you from now on I will stop them. There is a certain control that I should have exerted. Next time it's not going to be polite and it's not going to be pleasant, but I promise you it will be done."

The third day, before rushing for the airport, I couldn't resist tuning in. I was flabbergasted to hear Philbin say, "Yesterday I kind of apologized or explained what happened with Shere Hite and I thought she did get carried away and I kind of said that I'm going to try to stop that in the future. But with my explanation again came another hundred calls into the office saying that I was a creep for saying what I said. So you can't win!"

Yet another talk-show host in California (Jackie King in Los Angeles) felt compelled to discuss my comments the day after my appearance: "Yesterday I interviewed Shere Hite. I was absolutely amazed—we got dozens of calls from people complaining because we said 'masturbate' on the air. Well, it seems to me that we were made to connect with one another, and part of connecting is communicating openly. I've got to be honest, why is it that 'masturbate' sounds



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like a dirty word to a lot of people? It's perfectly okay to treat ourselves lovingly—and that is my comment to all the people who called. I was very distressed." I admired King's courage. (Interestingly, similar shows in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Kansas City, Dallas, and Houston presented the subject in the same way, but did not get such storms of emotional reaction. A typical response was that of a woman in Detroit, who requested that her local station repeat the show in the evening so she and her husband could hear the information together.)

Perhaps it was a fear of having to apologize or explain that kept other interviewers so fascinated with my methodology. Halfway through one 30-minute interview on Dallas's KERA, for example, my host still had not progressed beyond sniping at my techniques: "One critic said that your use of 'many, more, and most' is statistically sloppy."

Local shows had their share of awkwardness, but national programs could be at least as embarrassing. Of all the national hosts, Tom Snyder seemed the most uncomfortable (and I base this as-

essment on two interviews with him). I tried in every way I knew to reassure him—although I myself could have used some reassurance—but his reaction only emphasized his uneasiness. At one point he was speculating on our dating each other; a little while later he was calling me "ma'am."

On Merv Griffin's show, it was not the host but one of the guests who undermined the discussion. George Hamilton was apparently anxious to focus attention on himself—and away from a subject that made him nervous. He began making funny faces at the audience off-camera. The resulting laughter must have indicated to viewers at home that the studio audience was extremely uncomfortable with what I was saying.

Members of an all-male orchestra on another national show did their best to sabotage my appearance, first by playing stripper music as I walked on (my entrance had to be retaped later), and then by snorting and stomping loudly—and even spitting on the floor—during the entire time I was discussing clitoral stimulation and women's orgasms.

Of course, not every appearance on na-

tional television was so awkward. In many cases, the host made an important contribution to a wider understanding of human sexuality. Merv Griffin, for example, was marvelous, very familiar with the material and very easy to speak with. Phil Donahue, as always, was outstanding, with his clear grasp of the issues and of how to bring them home to people. Tom Brokaw was admirable, especially in view of the fact that the *Today* staff had been teasing him for a week prior to my interview about whether he would get through it without stammering, squirming, blushing, or otherwise "betraying" himself. Brokaw not only managed to perform with grace, but did his best to make me feel comfortable (though it was good to have another woman, Jane Pauley, on the set).

In the end, despite the odds against it, I was able to convey some accurate messages about sexuality a few times on a few talk shows. But these attempts represent drops in an ocean of misinformation perpetuated by the media's stereotyping. My experiences on the talk-show circuit do not exactly make me optimistic about any imminent change.

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CA

The Talk Show Candidate: A Campaign Journal

I first saw John O'Leary on Tom Snyder's Tomorrow Show a couple of days after Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. That wasn't exactly a euphoric week, and something about O'Leary caught my attention. Here, at 1:30 in the morning, was this gawky musician who said he was running for the Presidency. Really. O'Leary had some good jokes, and he kept up the rhythm with Snyder. Together they managed a nicely paced 10 or 15 minutes of talk-show patter.

But it wasn't the jokes that held my attention. It was O'Leary's sanguine seriousness about the whole thing. If you've ever been angry enough at politicians to daydream that you could do a better

job, watching O'Leary can be exhilarating. Here's a guy no different from you and me, who's spending a couple of years of his life in what most rational people would regard as a hopeless quest. And he's making that quest with virtually no money, relying instead mainly on radio and television talk shows for the exposure they will gladly exchange for a few minutes of interesting talk.

Since first seeing O'Leary on television, I've had the opportunity to interview him on National Public Radio and, most recently, to publish his campaign journal, *The Running Game*. The following are excerpts.

JAMES MONACO

President, New York Zoetrope



From the official campaign autobiography:

Why did I want to run? To focus attention on neglected issues, to keep the other candidates honest, to get a quick political education, to promote myself and my philosophy, to encourage people to vote, to impress my new girlfriend—the same reasons that all great statesmen have for running for public office.

SEPTEMBER 8, 1980 (NEW YORK)

I did the *Alan Colmes Show* on WPIX-FM today:

Colmes: John, what is it you want to do?

O'Leary: The first thing I want to do in my campaign is demonstrate that a non-politician can do well running for office. I also want to draw attention to a lot of what I think are the absurd aspects of the political process, including the two-party system.

Colmes: Is there any one issue that has propelled you into the candidacy for the President?

O'Leary: No, I just noticed that the 1980 campaign has turned into a *Gong Show*.

Colmes: Have people donated a lot of money to your campaign?

O'Leary: So far we've had two fundraisers and we only lost \$40 on the first one and broke even on the second one.

Colmes: Who else do you have working for you? Do you have a press agent?



Presidential candidate John O'Leary

O'Leary: Why, are you looking for a job?

Colmes: I'd like to be Secretary of Comedy.

O'Leary: Well my rule of patronage is, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch my back."

Colmes: Let's take a call. This is WPIX. Hello.

Caller: I'd like to talk to John.

Colmes: What issues are important to you?

Caller: I'd say war.

Colmes: What do you feel about war?

O'Leary: I'm against it.

Colmes: What other issues are important to you?

Caller: Inflation.

O'Leary: I'm definitely against inflation.

Caller: Then what about unemployment?

O'Leary: I'm definitely against unem-

ployment.

Caller: But what would you do about it?

O'Leary: I'd put people to work.

Colmes: WPIX. Hello, you're on the air.

Caller: I'd like to know your views on foreign policy.

O'Leary: Could you be a little more vague?

Colmes: What are your feelings about marriage and family?

O'Leary: I think marriage is a wonderful thing. I think families are wonderful.

Colmes: It's refreshing to hear that. As a politician, do you like knishes?

O'Leary: Canissius? Wasn't he a Roman poet?

Colmes: 1984 is kind of an Orwellian year. Does that have any effect on your candidacy?

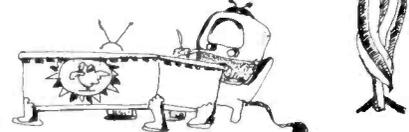
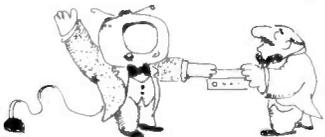
O'Leary: Originally my motto was "Everybody's Big Brother," but I realized that might scare some people, so my new motto is "Ask Not What Money Can Do for You, Ask What You Can Do for Money."

Colmes: Does one have to be intelligent to be President?

O'Leary: One might say that events in recent history argue against it.

Colmes: Your strongest views seem to be on the energy issue.

O'Leary: When I ran for Governor I decided that was the most important issue and I did a lot of reading on nuclear power. After reading tons of literature on the subject and getting bogged down in lots of statistics I decided that Murphy's



Law was the only law I had to know. And Three Mile Island proved that.

Colmes: How much can a President really do?

O'Leary: I think in any campaign, candidates can make a big difference, but when they get into office they frequently find that they can't do as much as they thought they could, and they get frustrated and feel powerless, like voters do. When I ran for Governor of Connecticut in 1978, a lot of people said "Why bother?" I said I was appealing to the snoring majority. I asked people to sleep-walk to the polls if necessary.

Colmes: Would you do away with taxes?

O'Leary: Unless we have national bingo I don't see a way to do it.

Colmes: John, It's been a pleasure having you.

O'Leary: It's been a pleasure being had.

NOVEMBER 6, 1980 (EAST HAVEN)

This morning I was awakened at 7 by a call from Donald Berman of the *Tomorrow Show*. He said he might have an opening for me on the show tonight.

It took a couple of seconds for this to register. *Tomorrow Show*. It sounded familiar. **TOMORROW SHOW!!** Suddenly I sat upright. Tom Snyder . . . national



television . . . millions of viewers . . . my first break.

Snyder: Tonight, we're pleased to present Mr. John O'Leary, the man who is the first person to declare his candidacy for the Presidency in 1984. . . . This is a gag, isn't it?

O'Leary: Nope.

Snyder: Ronald Reagan was elected two days ago. What in the last two days [justifies your decision to run] in 1984?

O'Leary: Well, he hasn't withdrawn yet.

At this point Tom let out one of his trademark hearty guffaws and I knew I was right at home.

Snyder: To be serious about politics for a second, what did you make of the recent election?

O'Leary: I think it's kind of exciting. It's almost like an experiment. . . . I'd like to watch the experiment from Venus if I had my choice, though. We're the white mice in the experiment. But it would be interesting to see if a Neanderthal approach to dealing with Brezhnev and Khomeini might work.

There's an old saying that "A Smith and Wesson beats four aces every time." And if we have to walk on all fours to insure the peace—well whatever it takes, really. I'm a pragmatist.

[I hope this doesn't come back to haunt me. I think I was trying too hard to be optimistic about Reagan.]

FEBRUARY 27, 1981 (NEW YORK)

I've had quite a few telephone conversations lately with Joe Franklin, who hosts a popular interview show on Channel 9 in New York. It took me a while to catch on to him.

"Hi, Joe, this is John O'Leary. You suggested I call you back this week about appearing on your show. Remember? I was on Snyder last November."

"Oh yes, yes. That was the most brilliant, stunning performance I've ever witnessed. I'm not kidding. Truly awesome. I'm sorry, what was your name

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again?"

"O'Leary. I'm running for President."

"O'Leary, you have my vote. I've got to get you on my show."

"So you saw me on TV?"

"No, but I've read all your books. A truly remarkable talent. I'm serious. A privilege to talk to you. Ah, who am I talking to?"

APRIL 2, 1982 (EAST HAVEN)

For the first time in a month I received a call from a radio station about my campaign. A talk-show host from some station in Florida woke me up at 7:15 A.M. to ask me questions and let his audience do likewise. It was an interesting experience to be the guest on a talk show while lying in bed. The opening dialogue went approximately like this:

Q: *Why would a guy like yourself run for President?*

A: To get elected, of course. But if I'm not, at least it's a way of voting. I got tired of complaining about the available candidates. If I can't find a politician who represents me why not run myself?

Q: *Can you do any good?*

A: Absolutely. That's the whole point.

Everybody says we can't do anything about the political situation. A very dangerous assumption. People need to be reminded they do have the power.

Q: *Let's talk about the drug problem. Now I'm sure a musician like yourself indulges on occasion . . .*

A: Wrong. Sorry—you lose the oven range and rug shampoo, but come back next week.

APRIL 27, 1981 (EAST HAVEN)

In the process of preparing some notes for an upcoming lecture at Southern Connecticut State College, I've been observing how the media operate. I've noticed that the nature of TV and radio news especially is to present happenings and events rather than the ongoing processes out of which selected incidents occur. These processes, which form a background to the events, are not as easy to put into words and are even harder for the public to digest.

One reason that we let the media do this is that it saves us the trouble of doing it. In fact, the way the media filter information is the same way our minds work. We pass everything through our system

of interpretation and try to pigeonhole things into categories that make life understandable. It's the job of most newsmen to make things easily understood, and they tend to attach tags or labels to make everything fit into place.

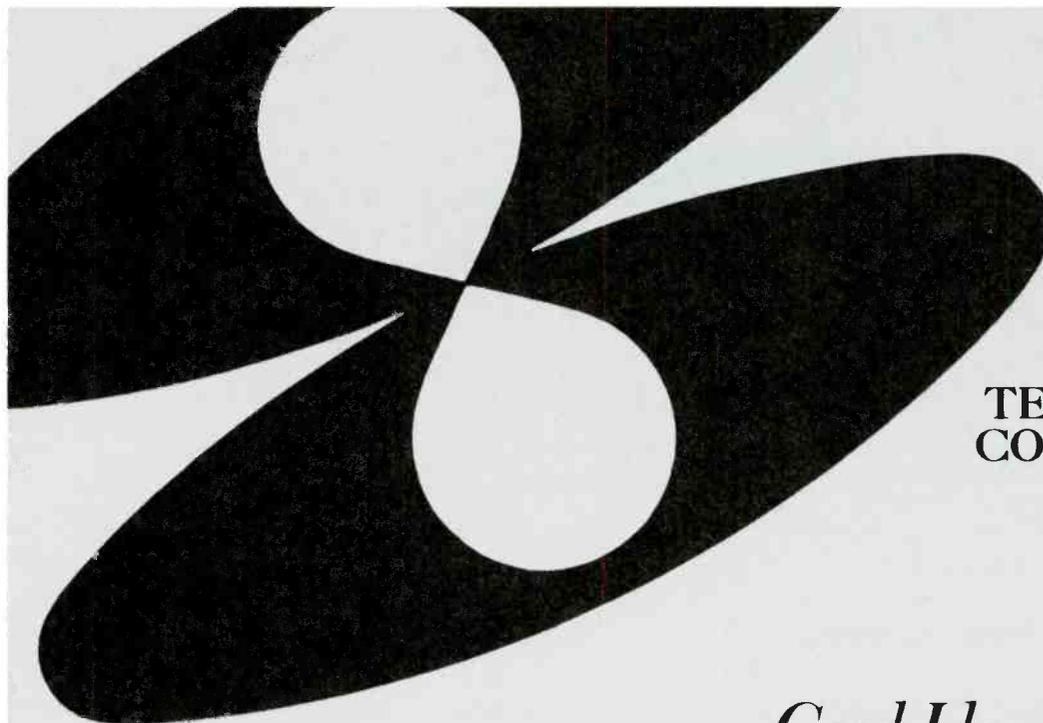
Using my campaign as an example, I've noticed that reporters want to write me off as a comedian or a "Pat Paulsen." And if I make a serious statement—about world hunger, for instance—they say, "Oh, then you really are a serious candidate!" as if I have to fit into one category or the other.

MAY 1, 1981 (EAST HAVEN)

In my lecture I discussed how as a third-party candidate with no campaign funds I rely on the news media to do my advertising for me, particularly the local media. I acknowledged that I am a media candidate and I don't apologize for it. After all, the media didn't create me. They're just making my job easier.

For all the complaints I hear about the biased media—they're either dominated by Eastern liberals or they're a mouthpiece of corporate America—they are in many ways the great equalizer, the last

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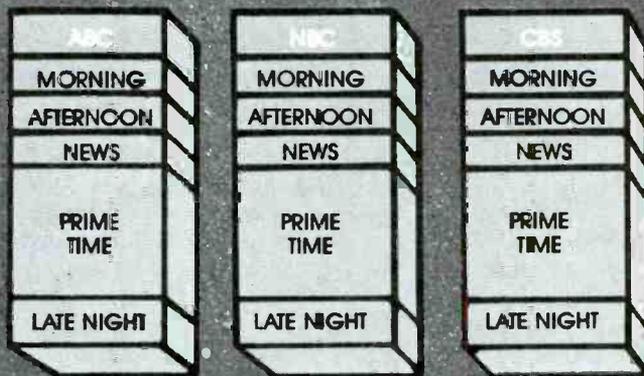
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- Which of the following best describes your total estimated household income before taxes in 1982?
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25,000 - 34,999 ___ 35,000 - 39,999 ___
40,000 - 49,000 ___ 50,000 - 59,000 ___
60,000 - 74,999 ___ 75,000 - 99,999 ___
100,000 or more ___
- Are you
Male ___ Female ___
- What is your age?
Under 24 ___ 25 - 34 ___ 35 - 44 ___
45 - 54 ___ 55 - 64 ___ 65 or over ___
- Please use this space for any additional comments.

Campaign Journal

(Continued from page 61)

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MAY 4, 1982 (EAST HAVEN)

Rock critic and quasi-political reporter Bic Sheaffer cornered me at a New Haven restaurant tonight.

Sheaffer: *What do you think about the dispute in the Falklands? Will it turn into war?*

O'Leary: Only if someone will sponsor it. I hear Exxon is interested.

Sheaffer: *I know for a fact you haven't been working as much as you were. Could you blame that on Washington?*

O'Leary: Not really. He's been dead a long time now.

Sheaffer: *Do you have a name for your economic or social program? Like the "Great Society" or the "Fair Deal"?*

O'Leary: Yeah, I think I'll call mine the "Big Deal."

JULY 22, 1982 (EAST HAVEN)

Bic Sheaffer on the phone again. The Unjournalist meets the Uncandidate:

Sheaffer: *Do you really consider yourself a politician? Is what you do "politics"?*

O'Leary: Only if I win. Otherwise it's art. **Sheaffer:** *If you actually won, what would be the first thing you'd change?*

O'Leary: My clothes. I'd put on a new suit for my acceptance speech.

Sheaffer: *Any luck finding a First Lady?*

O'Leary: Not yet. I've been pretty busy lately. But I did meet a wonderful woman at the Save the Woodpeckers benefit last Sunday. Very hip. She turned me on to whole-grain pop tarts.

Sheaffer: *Is that the kind of image you'd want for your First Lady?*

O'Leary: Why not? The granola vote could very well decide the 1984 election.

Sheaffer: *Do you take or drink anything to unwind at the end of a hard day of campaigning?*

O'Leary: No, Bic, I just tune in my cable TV to the weather channel and kick back.

I really get off on the computer temperatures. They're mildly stimulating, but not so much that I can't get to sleep afterwards.

Sheaffer: *What if that doesn't work, and you're still wide awake? What do you do then?*

O'Leary: I ask you to interview me. ■





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