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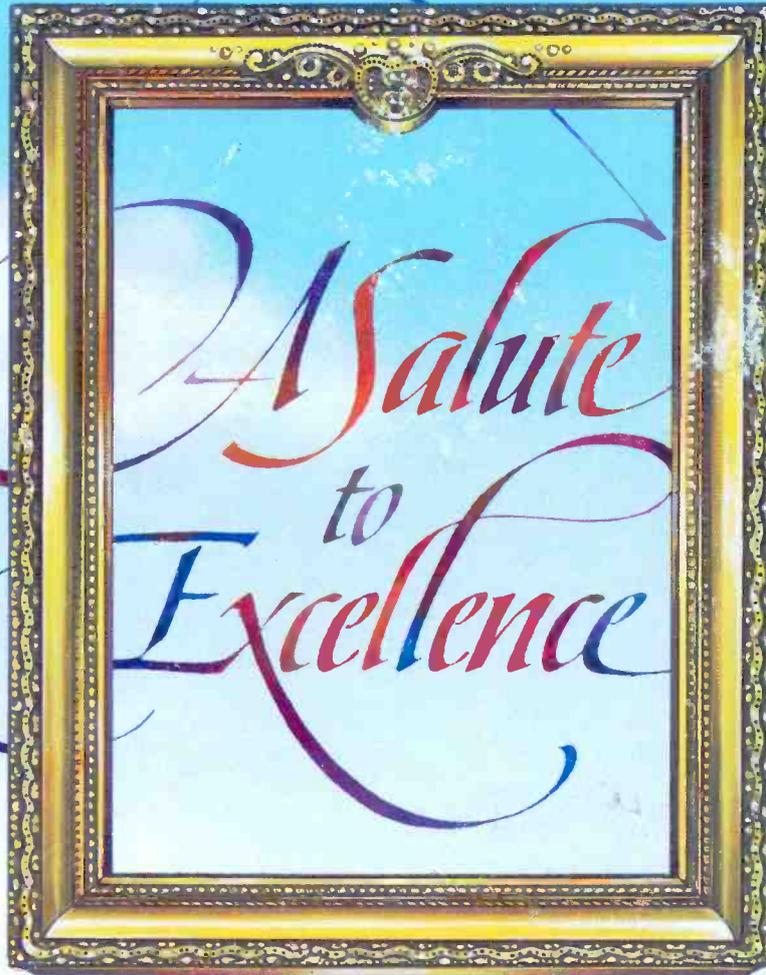
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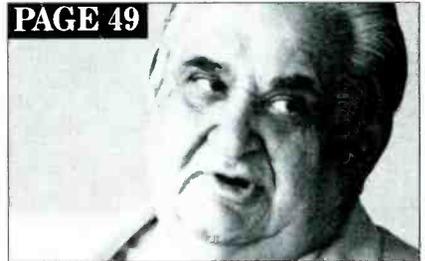


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Celebrating those who set the highest standards in the electronic media.

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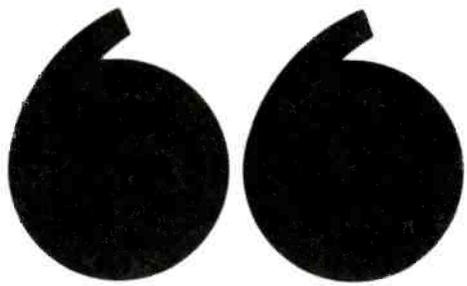
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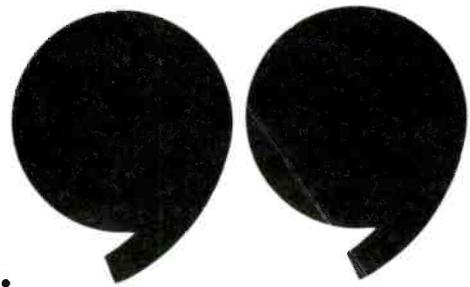
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There is
more
than a
comma's
difference...



NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

"It's often said that there isn't a comma difference between the three network newscasts, but that's not true. In many ways NBC has become a more thoughtful and interesting network in its coverage. It often takes a different direction especially in its special reports. . . . The 'NBC Nightly News' often includes stories of more depth and significance. . . . Serious newswatchers come away with more substance"

Tom Dorsey, Louisville Courier-Journal

'TODAY'

"In Rome it managed to gain unusual access to an institution historically wary of news and television organizations."

E.J. Dionne, Jr., New York Times

AMERICAN ALMANAC

"An NBC winner. Mudd is his usual incisive self."

Lee Winfrey, Philadelphia Inquirer

PRIMETIME NEWS SPECIALS

"*The First Lady* . . . sensitive, delightful, sometimes moving"

Arthur Unger, Christian Science Monitor

"*Portrait of the Press, Warts and All*, by John Chancellor, marks the first time a network has probed the issue with decent objectivity."

Harriet Van Horne, Newsday

"*Women, Work and Babies* is a prime example of the new direction in NBC News. Solidly interesting . . . totally relevant."

Arthur Unger, Christian Science Monitor

"*Vietnam—Lessons of a Lost War* . . . if you see only one television news program make sure this is it."

John Corry, New York Times

NBC NEWS

"Its week-long exploration of the Soviet Union won the Edward Weintal prize for diplomatic reporting . . . NBC sent 'Today' to Rome for a week of broadcasting that were similarly admired. . . . And 'Nightly News' was the first American news program to carry BBC footage of the horrific famine in Ethiopia, a decision that generated enormous viewer reaction."

Eric Mink, Washington Journalism Review



One of the Most Important Stories in the World

EXCELLENCE has a way of benefiting everyone, even the competition. Babe Ruth, in his day, may have clobbered the rival teams, but he filled their ballparks with customers and elevated the stature of all ballplayers. It's the same in every field, of course. Excellence may be its own reward, but it produces dividends as well.

In the field of electronic media, the good apples have been known to redeem the whole barrel. Whenever the broadcast industry is on the griddle in Washington—for exploiting violence, for example, or airing songs with indecent lyrics on radio—it defends itself by reciting its achievements on the high road of programming, as if *Roots*, the Olympics, and coverage of the Kennedy assassination were mainstays of the schedule.

"You can't take excellence to the bank," say the Wall Street sages, who rate media companies strictly on their ability to earn money. Yes, but excellence can buy what all the corporate bottom lines together cannot—an industry's good name.

Last fall, the editors of *Channels* began a search for excellence in television, radio, and cable—and documented it in a series of articles—to discover not just where but also why it exists in an industry that doesn't demand it. To our great surprise, it was not a difficult search. Excellence stands out like a beacon. Last year's articles on five indisputably excellent companies found that, for all their differences, they were alike in having visionary founders, stable managements, and a stubborn refusal to compromise their principles for expedient trendiness. Above all, each had made a choice to be excellent, even while recognizing that others around them were prospering nicely enough on mediocrity.

This year *Channels* has trained its sights on excellence in programming. We looked for beacons—there were many—and made some remarkable finds:

- A nightly prime-time news program that surpasses the vaunted American and British newscasts in providing context for global events.

- An American series that rivals the drama of the British, who do it so well.

- A radio program that has defied all the changes in the medium over the past half century and remains live, unique, and faithful to its audience.

- A television station that still creates local programs and dedicates itself to public service.

- An educational program that helps citizens understand complex public issues without boring them to death.

- Two network program executives who are not enslaved by the crass numbers used to measure success in American television—the Niensens, the bottom line, and the stock digits. They not only excel in their line of work but create a climate in which others may excel, as William S. Paley did in his great days at CBS (see *Ideas and Observations*).

As we come to know excellence better, we find that it is not a value added but something built into the genes of an enterprise. The excellent don't ask if they can take it to the bank; they excel because they cannot abide mediocrity.

We will continue to salute excellence in *Channels*, not just because it represents affirmative criticism, but because we believe excellence to be one of the most important stories in the world. As a society we need to know what is transcendent, because that helps us to know who we are. Excellence is the prelude to greatness, and greatness is the glory of the human race, the best news of all.

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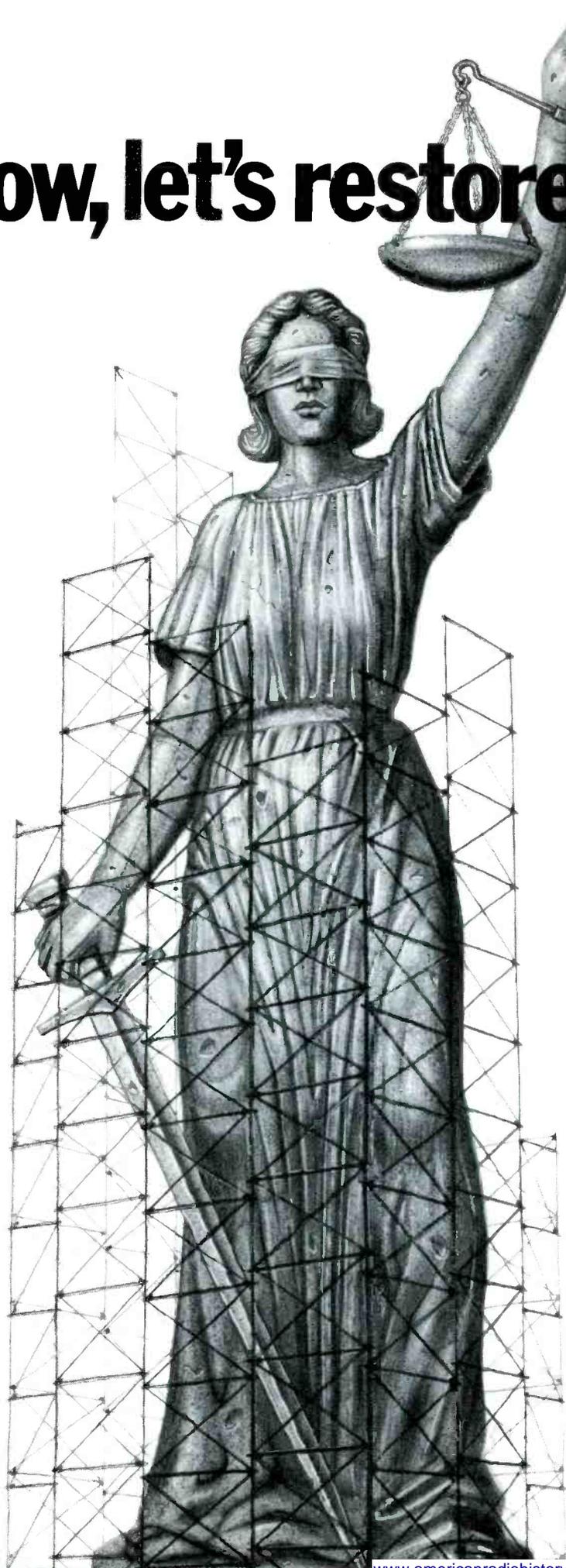
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Now, let's restore Civil Justice.



Year after year, our civil justice system has become slower. More costly. Less fair to the very people it was meant to help.

We all pay the price. Some of us pay in the frustration of waiting for a case to end, or by seeing a settlement eaten away by legal costs. All of us pay in the form of higher taxes and insurance premiums.

Experts agree on the urgent need for civil justice repair. Chief Justice Burger has criticized "the high cost of legal services and the slow pace of justice." Derek Bok, president of Harvard and former dean of Harvard Law, has called our legal system "the most expensive in the world."

A 1984 Rand Corporation study of thousands of asbestos-related lawsuits shows how serious the crisis has become. Cases closed took an average two years and eight months, with 11 percent taking six years. How much money went to asbestos victims? Only 37 percent of the expenses and compensation paid by defendants and insurers. The other 63 percent went to pay litigation costs.

Can anything be done? We think it can.

We're the Insurance Information Institute. Our members, property and casualty insurance companies, are vitally involved in this issue. They've joined with others—doctors, lawyers, government officials, business leaders—in coalitions of concerned citizens. Together, they're developing new solutions. In many states, their ideas are being translated into action.

Our latest report, *The Civil Justice Crisis*, examines the reforms now being proposed. It tells how you can get involved. We'd like you to have a copy, free of charge.



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The Sun Gets into the Act

Twice a year, screens blank out.

ROBERT ABRAHAMS, now a World Communications executive, was working as an engineer for a Los Angeles public-TV station a few years ago when the sun wiped out the station's live coverage of the Pope's U.S. visit. "We knew it was coming," Abrahams says, "but just couldn't stop it." All the station could do was tell viewers it was having temporary technical difficulties.

The culprit that day was a "solar outage," a fact of life in the satellite age. Outages occur predictably at about the time of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. For three weeks in March and again in September the communications satellites, in stationary orbit above the Equator,

pass directly between the sun and the earth. The sun's energy overwhelms the satellites' signals, wiping out their transmissions. Fortunately, the precise alignment of the sun with a particular satellite and any single receiving dish lasts only a few minutes, so the disruption to a given broadcaster, cable system, or owner of a backyard satellite dish is minimal.

The phenomenon is inevitable, but blank screens can be avoided. Companies that distribute syndicated television programming by satellite can predict exactly when each of their client stations will be affected and provide videotapes of the program that will be interrupted. (Live coverage is another story, of course.) Some satellite users, such as

long-distance phone companies and the television networks, can switch to backup satellites, since outages hit only one satellite at a time.

Engineers use computers to determine when an outage will strike, but still there are miscalculations. What was perhaps the most irksome example occurred when solar outages hit a public television program, both coming and going. First, one knocked out a few minutes of the program as it was being recorded at PBS's transmission center in Washington. A few hours later, as the program was being relayed—complete with the gap—via an alternate satellite, another outage clipped a few more minutes off the already abbreviated show.

RICHARD BARBIERI

AIDS in 'Sweeps' Time

NBC is eager to deal with the tragic disease, but not the people it strikes.

NBC's decision to schedule a made-for-television movie about homosexuality and the disease AIDS for November broadcast may seem like a breakthrough. But a close look at the script and the tortured history of the production makes it clear that the network still hasn't figured out how to deal with gay people as characters in television drama. Such perplexity has also been evident at ABC—in *Dynasty* and in an earlier movie about homosexuality.

Producer Perry Lafferty tried for more than a year to get NBC's green light for the movie about AIDS, and in that time writers Ron Cowan and Dan Lipman produced 12 draft scripts. But network executives deemed each too touchy and deferred the project, even though the terrifying disease had already been epidemic among gay men and smaller high-risk groups for almost five years. It wasn't until the mainstream American population began to fear AIDS earlier this year that the film, *An Early Frost*, got the go-ahead, according to sources close to the production. In June NBC issued a sketchy announcement about it and penciled it in for broadcast in January.



Last winter's *Consenting Adult* (Martin Sheen, Marlo Thomas, and Barry Tubb pictured) was about a family learning it has a gay son. The upcoming *An Early Frost* adds AIDS to the same plot.

A month later, the news hit the wires that Rock Hudson had AIDS. Suddenly Lafferty's hot potato was a hot item with hit potential. NBC sped up the production schedule and gave the film a new air date in one of the November "sweeps" weeks, when vital ratings data are gathered.

The script that emerged from the writers' long negotiations with NBC is about a conservative midwestern family forced to come to terms with the news that their son is gay and has AIDS. It focuses on the parents rather than the son, and in that way resembles ABC's earlier movie, *Consenting Adult*, which dealt with a gay

son coming out of the closet. That movie, broadcast last February, focused primarily on the parents as they reacted to their son's announcement with disbelief, pain, and guilt. The son remained a stick figure. Now comes *An Early Frost*, which gives the impression that AIDS is not happening to the gay son, but rather to the American nuclear family.

The networks want to make use of the timely and dramatic subjects of AIDS and homosexuality, but because audience opinions on both subjects are explosive, producers can't seem to find a safe and sure way to do it. This quandary seems to

JACK & LIZ

For The Record



"New Englanders are the toughest news audience in the country. They expect you to know not only what is happening now, but what they know . . . the sense of history, the background. That's why I spend so much time out in the community listening to what people have to say."

"If I have a credo, it is preparedness, hard work and caring. As a journalist that means doing a thorough job. It means a sense of trust, honesty, and commitment. And I think that comes through in my reporting."

"I chose New England. I'm not here because I was born here. I chose New England because of its reverence for things past – for family, education and charity. **Wednesday's Child** is something I wanted to do. Being actively involved in trying to improve things – helping children with special needs, foster parents, children born with birth defects . . . it's my way of saying 'thank you' to New England. It's my way of saying this is where I want my roots."



Jack Williams

"I want viewers to know how events impact on them. It's a very intimate thing that I share with my viewers on every kind of story that I bring them. We are humans and we're talking about humans. I work harder every day than the day before. If I can leave feeling that I gave our viewers a little more information and a little more of a choice on how they deal, or think, or how their lives are influenced . . . then I feel like I've accomplished something."



"I do **Positively New England** because I want to continue to learn more about the area . . . the tra-

dition, the values, the good hard work. Boston is an electric city. It's always alive. It fights, it pulls, it yanks. But, it's loyal. New England is loyal."

"In a lot of ways, Channel 4 is like New England. It's all these people with incredible skills, incredible energy. I think viewers turn to us because over and over we've proven ourselves on the big stories. We go that extra step – and we do it every night."

Liz Walker



EYEWITNESS NEWS

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**Lawrence K. Grossman, president,
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Les Brown, editor-in-chief, Channels.

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* The seminar opens officially on the evening of Friday, November 1 with the keynote address and a wine and cheese reception. On Saturday and Sunday the sessions begin promptly at 9 a.m. and run until 5 p.m. Saturday's session will include a box luncheon.

have most severely crippled the writers of *Dynasty*, whose scripts trap Steven Carrington, one of the rich oil family's sons, in a revolving closet door. Carrington has been gay one month and straight the next since the series began. *Dynasty's* producers are proud that it's the only network show with a long-running gay character, but they've given him only brief periods of gay romance, most of it offscreen. He gets to show affection only by straightening his lover's tie.

Twice homosexuality was introduced

as a titillation, a minor strand among many plotlines. Then, each time, Carrington's boyfriend was quickly removed. The first one was killed off several seasons ago—accidentally, sort of—by Carrington's father. His second boyfriend, by all accounts, died in a terrorist attack on last season's final cliffhanger. At this rate, *Dynasty* will have to keep killing off Steven Carrington's boyfriends until its writers and producers can figure out what to do with a live homosexual.

VITO RUSSO

Microwave-Ready or Not

'Wireless cable' TV services warm up slowly.

TALK about inauspicious beginnings! When it signed up its first customers last December, the Capitol Connection of Arlington, Virginia—the nation's first multichannel microwave broadcast service—did it with all the pride and flourish of a company just starting out. Then, only a few weeks later, the "Connection" abruptly lost three of those precious charter subscribers—in a gangland-style slaying. One could hardly have blamed the Connection's principals for starting to believe in omens; after all, their firm was already losing customers.

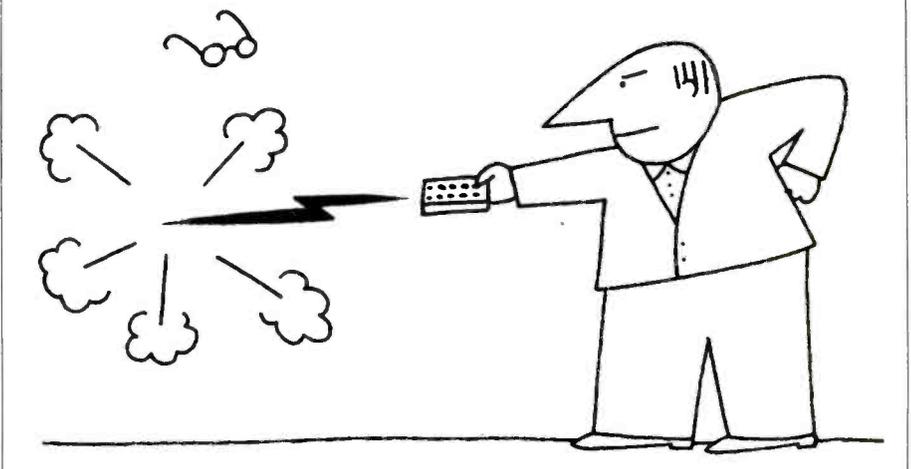
Fortunately, things have improved since then, although perhaps not as much as the company's executives would have liked. After eight months in operation, the four-channel "wireless cable" service has signed up only 730 households,

in part because of shortages of addressable descramblers and the downconverters necessary to show microwave transmissions on standard TV sets.

There are also problems that future microwave operators could face. According to Michael Kelley, director of telecommunications for George Mason University, from which the Connection is leasing its microwave channels, the company has been hampered by the fact that many of the suburban Maryland and Virginia counties within its reach are already wired for cable, and that Washington, D.C., its major potential market, has too many tall trees that interfere with the line of sight needed for microwave reception.

The service's slow start, however, hasn't fazed its president, James Schultz. "The first kid on the block always gets arrows in his back," he says. Arrows not-

A NEW AND DEPLORABLE TREND—ZAPPING COPYWRITERS





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withstanding. Schultz is certain that Washington, with its large number of uncabled, multi-unit dwellings, is an ideal location for courting microwave customers. And Schultz's campaign will undoubtedly be abetted by the enthusiasm of those he has already signed up. "I've got 423 apartments with microwave," says John Walker, owner of the Sixth Street Venture Management Corporation, "and everybody loves it."

Such encomiums were exactly what Schultz and Kelley were hoping for when they started the Connection. The venture was made possible by the FCC's May 1983 decision allowing schools with Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) licenses to lease excess time on their educational channels for commercial use. Kelley, who had been using his university's ITFS channels to transmit CNN and C-SPAN to private companies and government agencies, leased the channels to Schultz, who added SelectTV, Home Team Sports, and Odyssey, a music video service, and began selling the expanded package as the Capitol Connection. For Kelley, the new ser-

vice was a way of bringing in added revenue to expand his university's endowment and underwrite improved ITFS programming; for Schultz, a microwave pioneer, the Connection represented an entrepreneur's dream: the chance to lay the foundation for a delivery medium that he claims will have 2.5 million subscribers in the U.S. by the early 1990s.

Schultz's prediction may already be coming true: A five-channel microwave service recently went on the air in San Francisco, and similar services are set to launch this fall in Milwaukee and New York, with each leasing ITFS channels from local educational institutions. The company in Milwaukee, TVQ, had to overcome a legal challenge by the local cable operator, Warner Amex, to its right to use ITFS channels, and plans to inaugurate a 14-channel package.

The real tidal wave is yet to come: More than 16,000 applications have been filed for the eight former ITFS channels in each U.S. market that the FCC allocated for outright commercial use in that same May 1983 decision. The commis-

sion lottery that will award about a thousand of these multichannel multipoint distribution service (MMDS) licenses is expected soon. And when it comes, the resulting proliferation of these services may well make microwave better known for delivering cable networks than defrosting casseroles.

JEFFREY L. WOLF

Town crier, 1985

Interrupting all channels, police alert cable viewers to an emergency.

AT 10 P.M. one night last July, a shrill sound came over the television sets of some 18,300 cable subscribers in Warminster, Pennsylvania and three adjacent communities. After the warning sounded, the pictures on every channel went blank and police detective Frank Luczak's voice implored: "Please stand by for an emergency message. Warminster police are presently attempting to identify a young male, 12 to 13 years old, described as five feet four inches tall, weighing 100 pounds, with wavy blond hair and blue eyes."

This was the first time police in Warminster had used the emergency "interrupt system" installed last January by Oxford Valley Cablevision as part of a franchise requirement to serve the community. By dialing a coded telephone number, the police were able to tap into the cable company's transmission center and preempt the entire system, including programs coming from independent broadcast stations and national pay-TV networks. The police have agreed not to use this remarkable attention-getting power for anything short of an emergency, which could include out-of-control fires and severe-weather alerts.

Almost immediately after Luczak's announcement, the phones began ringing as two dozen townsfolk called to help. Within 20 minutes, a lead provided by a local soccer coach enabled the police to identify the boy, who had suffered a hypoglycemic attack, and locate his parents. Public response to the interrupt system was generally positive, except for a few subscribers who resented the intrusion into the late innings of a Phillies baseball game.

R.B.



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ABC NEWS 

Seduction of the Indifferent

Public TV shows will try to hook kids on math and the fine arts.

THE PROBLEM is not that kids between the ages of 8 and 12 lack enthusiasm. They have plenty for Duran Duran and soccer. But they don't care much about certain adult things. This worries some of the most adult people among us, the grantsmen who pay for most public-television series, and they are now mobilizing: For example, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Getty Trust (perhaps along with another funder) plan to award as much as \$10 million next year for a new PBS series meant to help kids appreciate the best of the fine arts. The endowment dangled its plan in front of ravening producers months ago. Forty-eight sent in proposals, and two now have funds to make pilots in competition for the grant.

Work is further along on another series, which is supposed to help 8- to 12-year-olds develop "positive attitudes"

toward math. Children's Television Workshop (CTW), which produces *Sesame Street*, plans to shoot five pilot episodes in October, then assess their effectiveness, fine-tune their techniques, and go into full production in February. CTW has lined up multimillion-dollar funding for 13 weeks of a daily series.

The series, as yet unnamed, will marshal new video technology to illustrate mathematical concepts, says executive producer David Connell. It won't attempt a comprehensive survey of its territory from addition to geometry, nor will it teach kids how to do arithmetic. "Math experts tell us: Face it, long division is tedious, boring, not any fun at all," says Connell. (Fifth graders could have told him that.) Now that pocket calculators have been admitted to many classrooms, the producers say, the emphasis can be shifted away from pencilwork to reason-

ing. "We call it a show about math," says Milton Chen, the show's research director, "but what we're really talking about is helping kids think better."

Before Connell can get kids to turn on to math, he has to get them to tune in his new program. Seventeen seasons ago, he chose the kinetic format of TV commercials to hook preschool kids on *Sesame Street*. Now, to hook their older siblings, he plans to use entertaining sketches that parody television itself—sportscasts, game shows, soap operas.

Connell's approach should delight grownups who remember math as laborious computations that were ultimately irrelevant. He contends that, on the contrary, math can actually provide the easiest solutions to many everyday problems kids will face as adults. "It's important to emphasize," he says, "that math is for lazy people." **STEVE BEHRENS**

Hits and Missing

The most watched and the most wanted at the Museum of Broadcasting.

SINCE ITS opening in 1976, more than 70,000 people a year have visited New York City's Museum of Broadcasting, which maintains a library of notable television and radio programs, and allows individuals to watch and listen to tapes on the premises. Following is a list of the shows most requested over the years.

1. *The Ed Sullivan Show* introducing the Beatles, February 9, 1964.
2. *Amos 'n' Andy*, the network premiere, June 28, 1951.
3. *Amos 'n' Andy*, the first non-network broadcast, September 21, 1949.
4. "Classic TV Commercials 1948-58, Part I."
5. *My Name Is Barbra*, Barbra Streisand's special, April 28, 1965.
6. *The Ed Sullivan Show* featuring Elvis Presley, September 9, 1956.
7. "Classic TV Commercials 1948-58, Part II."
8. *Peter Pan*, starring Mary Martin, December 8, 1960.
9. *The Twilight Zone* episode entitled "The Invaders," January 27, 1961.
10. *60 Minutes*, featuring a Mike Wallace

interview with Richard Nixon, October 8, 1968.

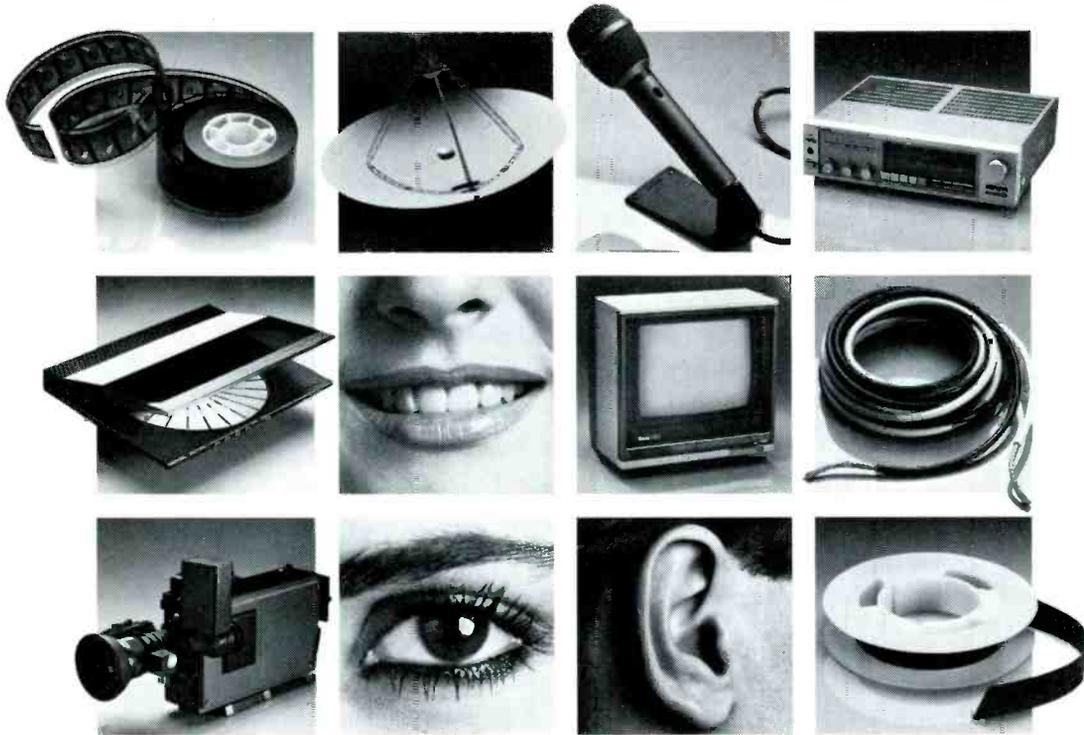
Even though the museum now owns some 25,000 tapes, there are still many gaps in its collection. These are some of the curator's "most-wanted" programs, in no particular order of preference.

- "The Opening of the World's Fair," April 20, 1939. The first commercial broadcast.

- *All in the Family* pilots, 1968-71.
- *Super Bowl I*, January 15, 1967. The game was recorded by two networks and subsequently erased.
- Complete coverage of the Army-McCarthy hearings (1953).
- *Caesar's Hour* (episode 35), October 31, 1955. The only missing episode.
- "Address from the White House," September 30, 1947. The first Presidential television address, given by Harry S. Truman.



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Broadcasting's Vanishing Species

by Les Brown



JOHN EGER, one of America's more worldly broadcast executives, travels about predicting that noncommercial broadcast systems everywhere are destined to go commercial. He warns that countries trying to resist the "twin forces of consumer demand and technology run the risk [of being] left far behind by the changes now sweeping the globe."

His message is that all television systems will eventually accept advertising because the medium is becoming too expensive to subsidize any other way—and their countries will be the better for it, because advertising contributes to a nation's gross national product and is vital to the freedom of its people.

Eger's vision is colored a bit by his own interests. As senior vice president of CBS Worldwide Enterprises he is charged with opening new foreign markets for his company, and as chairman of the International Advertising Association's Global Media Commission he is the point man for spreading the advertising gospel televisionwise. But despite Eger's bias, his forecast may well be right on the money. A number of foreign broadcast systems that have always been supported either by the national treasury or by license fees levied on the consumer appear to be on the verge of conversion.

France is moving toward privatizing television, and Sweden is considering the drastic change of selling commercial time on its state-run networks. Canada's CBC Radio, arguably the best radio service in the world, has begun flirting with the idea of accepting some corporate underwriting, in the manner of PBS, to help meet costs.

But the most ominous news of all is that Great Britain's Tory government has appointed a commission (called the Peacock Commission for the professor who heads it, Alan Peacock) to study the feasibility of supporting the British Broadcasting Corporation at least partly with commercial advertising. This is viewed as the alternative to hiking the license fees paid by households with television sets—a prospect all politicians

dread, knowing how unpopular it would be today in that economically troubled country.

There are many in the tradition-bound United Kingdom who support a breaking of the Beeb's noncommercial tradition and couldn't care less that the BBC has been the world's beacon for public service broadcasting and the role model for many another television system. Some who are free-market enthusiasts deem the BBC a sentimental anachronism in these times of prospectively plentiful television—what with satellites, cable, and home video—and have recommended that the corporation be disbanded and its frequencies turned over to private interests. The debate is lively in the U.K. these days.

These advocates of radical change, who would turn all television over to the beneficence of commerce, are elitists who think of television merely as snack-food for the lowly mob and have no patience with anyone who might argue otherwise. Their counterparts in America are typified by the light-headed chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Mark Fowler, who once declared that TV is just a household appliance, mattering no more than a toaster. They are the champions of the let-'em-eat-cake policy for broadcasting, and, alas, they are the ruling powers today in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

The advocates of radical change regard television as snack food for the lowly mob and won't listen to anyone who argues otherwise.

My own sympathies—it must be obvious—are with those at the opposite extreme who would keep the BBC entirely free of commercials under any circumstance. I say this as one who admires what commercial broadcasting has achieved in many countries and who is profoundly grateful to advertising for making possible the vast range of media that nourish us. Moreover, I believe advertising is itself a form of information that people need and that should not be denied in a free society. Still, I'm alarmed at the movement to kill off the world's non-commercial broadcast systems. Like the nearly extinct species of the natural environment, once they vanish from the broadcast environment they cannot come back again.

Keith Bendis

Noncommercial television is not just ordinary television without advertisements; it is a separate species of the medium, different in spirit from the commercial and pay forms of television, different in aspiration, different in its regard for the viewer, and different in motivation. Commercial television exists to make money one way or another, but noncommercial television exists to make television. Because it is outside the scramble for advertising revenues, it has the latitude to take artistic risks and experiment with new program forms.

The commercial and noncommercial species of television differ as professional athletes differ from Olympians: The professionals strive to turn their statistics into riches; the Olympic amateurs are propelled by a desire for personal achievement and a drive for perfection. We on the sidelines may love professional sports, but take inspiration from the Olympics.

I've never been to West Germany, but I've often heard its television praised for making imaginative programming without regard for ratings. The system is noncommercial. Twice, by chance, I've sat in on meetings with top BBC officials, and each time the chief topic was, Are we good enough? In 30 years of covering commercial television in

America, I've never heard any executive ask that question. More likely they would ask, Are we popular enough? I would be the first to testify that some truly wonderful programs spring from that kind of crassness. Noncommercial television would never have brought forth such marvels as *M*A*S*H* or *Hill Street Blues*; on the other hand, commercial television wouldn't have developed *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Sesame Street*, or *The Forsyte Saga*, father of the mini-series.

But the issue is not whether noncommercial television is better in some way than commercial television. (A powerful case could in fact be made for the latter's superiority, based on the lasting value of its programs: We will still be watching Hawkeye, Lucy, Archie Bunker, and Ralph Kramden in the 21st century but probably not Alistair Cooke.) The issue is whether there ought to be one kind of broadcast television, or two. Clearly, two are preferable, if not actually required, both for realization of the medium's full potential and for the well-being of a free society. The friction and interchange between two systems operating under wholly different professional standards can only benefit the causes of diversity and free expression.

Regrettably, the only guidance America can provide the Peacock Commission is by negative example. Our public television system, for all its merits, is only nominally noncommercial, having long since lost its virginity to commerce. Almost nothing can get on the Public Broadcasting Service without commercial underwriting, the euphemism for corporate sponsorship. Such companies as Mobil, Exxon, Chubb, AT&T, and McDonnell-Douglas effectively pick the shows that will play on PBS, just as sponsoring companies dictated the programming in the early days of commercial television. This goes to the essence of the difference: A truly noncommercial service makes its own decisions about what will be broadcast, while commercial television answers to the wishes and needs of the advertising community. The American networks may protest that they make their own program choices, but why, except in the response to the advertising consensus, are virtually all programs aimed at the young adult market?

The problem with letting public television take advertising is that it gets to be habit-forming.

Advertisers spend their huge amounts of money to make friends, not enemies, and so there is a studious avoidance of controversy in PBS programs with corporate underwriting. Because the established arts are seldom seriously controversial, the corporate money tends to flow toward cultural fare in American public television rather than to public affairs. This is one lesson to be learned from the American experience.

The BBC never learned the more important lesson, which is not to get drawn into the commercial television value system, and so it has itself to blame for being no longer pristine. To justify the license fees that support it, the BBC had to prove itself popular and took the shortcut by bidding aggressively for the American hits. It is the BBC, and not the commercial ITV, that carries *Dallas* and *Dynasty* in prime time, along with a slew of American movies. No wonder the BBC is perceived by some

of its countrymen as having already crossed the line; they see no reason why it shouldn't go the next step in accepting a limited number of commercials in a few time periods.

But the problem with taking any advertising is that it gets to be habit-forming; the fastest way to solve a new financial crisis is to expand the commercial time. The way to get

bigger dollars (or pounds sterling) for the existing spots is to surround them with more popular programs that will attract larger audiences than last year's shows. So begins the commercial spiral. It has no end.

Were the BBC to begin selling commercials on a limited scale, it would only be a matter of time before the whole schedule went up for sale. And if the BBC made the conversion, other foreign systems that have emulated it would surely follow its lead once again.

John Eger may be right about commercial television putting zip into a country's economy, but that might only be for the short term. Ultimately the country with the most to gain will be his—that is, ours—the leading exporter of commercial shows with the largest gross national advertising budget. This gives Eger's message a certain imperialistic nuance.

If in a foreign country it came down to a choice between one broadcast species or the other, rather than having both in coexistence, I would advise hanging in with the noncommercial and take the chance that getting "left far behind by the changes now sweeping the globe" is only so much sales rhetoric. Despite its lack of energy in creating popular hits, noncommercial television has the virtue of preserving nonmaterialistic values—cultural, philosophical, and social—which are the ones that matter to most countries in the long run.

There must be other ways to save the financially stretched BBC than with the easy expedient of advertising. One way that comes to the American mind would be to raise funds through a continuing national lottery. I'm told by English friends that lotteries are not looked upon with favor by the British government. But if that idea is offensive, is it more offensive than letting noncommercial television die? In our part of the civilized world, out of a moral sense and a practical concern for maintaining the ecological balance, we swallow hard and do what we must to prevent the extinction of a species, even if it means stopping construction of a dam that imperils the snail darter. To our credit, we would do no less than have a lottery—if it would help—for the bison or the whooping crane. ■

UNLEASHING THE CABLE MONOPOLY

FACING THE WORLD OF commerce, cable TV has spent the last five years trying its utmost to be exactly like broadcast television in order to attract the same kinds of viewers and advertisers. Facing Washington and the world of policy, however, cable has represented itself as being nothing at all like television but rather as the electronic equivalent of a newspaper, and therefore entitled to the same freedom from government dictates accorded the print media under the First Amendment.

Can any industry really hope to get away with such flagrant hypocrisy? Evidently yes. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has held that cable is more analogous to newspapers than to television, because its technological capability of providing up to 200 channels means there is no scarcity of opportunity for many voices to be heard. The court determined that cable should be freed specifically from federal regulation concerning content, the main effect of which was to knock out the so-termed "must carry" rule.

Instead of flinching, the current deregulation-driven Federal Communications Commission, which didn't invent the rule but inherited it, congratulated the court and declared itself happy to be rid of must-carry.

The rule had required cable systems to retransmit to their subscribers the signals of all local television stations normally received over the air in their communities. In some areas this meant that cable systems with as few as 12 channels sometimes had to carry two or more stations from nearby cities even if they were broadcasting the same network programming. Often this caused a shortage of channels, which effectively excluded satellite networks created expressly for cable.

Cable and the must-carry rule had been a boon to UHF broadcasters, making their weaker signals as easy to receive as those of any VHF station. But now that the court has made local cable operators free to fill their channels with anything that will help them attract the largest television audiences, the consequences may be to put a number of UHF stations out of business and consign some of the lesser public television stations to dank obscurity.

The court's ruling invests the cable operator with extraordinary power over television, and this is likely to bring on seismic changes in the marketplace. One of the ruling's immediate effects could be a sharp curtailment of trading activity in the booming market for TV stations, since the broadcast licenses will lose value if stations become helplessly dependent on cable for much of their exposure. And the death of must-carry—unless the ruling is reversed in the Supreme Court—may also put a crimp in the flourishing program-syndication market if significant numbers of UHF stations should lose their ability to reach viewers via cable.

The decision to scuttle must-carry came from a court that was strong on theory and First Amendment case law and woefully naive about the workings of business. Theoretically,

the court reasoned, cable systems are not monopolies because they will have competition—not only from direct-broadcast satellites (DBS) and Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Services (MMDS) but also from other cable companies that are free to come in and build competing systems in towns where cable exists. The reality, however, is that MMDS has yet to prove itself as an alternative to cable, and DBS has had so many early setbacks that it's almost a dead issue in America today. As for competition from other cable systems, in most situations it just isn't economically feasible—and probably never will be—to construct a second cable operation in a community. So the court effectively has turned every cable system into a de facto monopoly with the power to carry or bury any local television station, and it did so in the name of the First Amendment.

But where the court was especially misguided was in trusting claims that cable is moving inexorably toward fulfilling its technological promise. The court assumed that because cable has the *potential* for 200 channels, in time all systems will expand to 200. Nothing of the sort is likely. Large-capacity systems were pledged wildly a few years ago by companies so avid to win an urban franchise that they promised anything. A number of those ultra-large systems were actually built, and in business terms they turned out to make no sense at all. Of the 40-odd cable networks that existed in 1982, fewer than half have survived. You don't build a skyscraper for a handful of tenants. No one talks about building king-sized systems anymore; if anything, cable has reason to contract, not expand. But the court, in its fantasy, envisions a cable industry striving day by day to add to its channel capacity.

What the court has given cable operators, in fact, is the license for a shakedown. If the ruling is upheld by the Supreme Court, every operator will have the option of charging every local broadcast station a fee for being carried on his system. The station that doesn't pay up would get bumped. If the local ABC affiliate got bumped, for instance, the cable system could still bring in ABC programs from an affiliate in a nearby city.

Five or so years from now, cable operators may have a more compelling reason for keeping the local broadcast stations off their systems. By then, local cable operations will have gotten serious about selling advertising, and it would be lunacy for them to provide outlets for the broadcast stations that compete for the advertising dollar.

When cable starts caring about advertising, and starts getting it, the cable operator will discover he's better off with fewer channels than with more. This is because more channels disperse and dilute his audience. It will be to his advantage to concentrate viewing on as few channels as possible—making a mockery of the court's arguments to protect cable's First Amendment rights.

The court was "had" by its own knee-jerk response to the First Amendment question raised by the cable industry, which was never about the First Amendment in the first place but only about making money. The public does not stand to benefit in any way from the court's decision: the First Amendment gets turned on its head as the special privilege of those who run the wire to the home, and the broadcast industry has one devil of a problem in its future.

LES BROWN

Everyone's Wild About Harry!

Night Court





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All the President's Media

by Michael David and Pat Aufderheide

DURING TWO October weekends in 1981, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators filled the streets of Western Europe's major cities protesting the planned deployment of medium-range missiles in five European countries. Newspapers carried reams of commentary that the United States and its allies were facing the worst political crisis of NATO's history.

Less than a month later, at the National Press Club, President Reagan presented a new European arms-control proposal to an audience of 200 journalists and a battery of television cameras that would carry his speech live to Europe and other parts of the world. For the first time in history, the Chief Executive was making a live telecast from Washington that was timed for foreign broadcast systems rather than the U.S. networks.

The specifics of the proposal have been forgotten by everyone other than the specialists. What remains notable is that with one targeted speech to the European opinion-molders, the President seized the public-relations initiative in Western Europe. He has never lost it. In the months and years since, the missiles have been deployed. The vast armies of anti-nuclear demonstrators in Western Europe have dwindled to platoons, their influence much muted, if not entirely silenced.

Nearly two years after that international *coup de theatre*, the Administration faced another public-relations prob-

lem of immense proportions—the international backlash against the American invasion of Grenada. Its response was to arrange a global satellite videoconference with 40 press questioners at five American embassies in Western Europe. Also on the hookup were then-United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick in New York, two deputy assistant secretaries of state in Washington and, in Barbados, the leaders of two Caribbean governments that endorsed American policy. A single global press conference did not by itself stop the public-relations battering that the United States was absorbing over Grenada, but combined with the quick withdrawal of most American troops, the electronic ploy helped lower the heat considerably.

Through shrewd use of the new communications technologies, the Reagan Administration's foreign policy tacticians have been able to expand in quantum jumps the public-relations component of modern diplomacy. They can reach the media and opinion leaders of virtually all friendly and neutral countries more easily than ever before—without going through such filtering agents as Washington correspondents and diplomats. (Not surprisingly, the broadcast systems of the Soviet Union, its Eastern European allies, China, Syria, Libya, and Iran are closed to these USIA television initiatives. The Soviet bloc is reached by radio through the separately controlled Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe.)

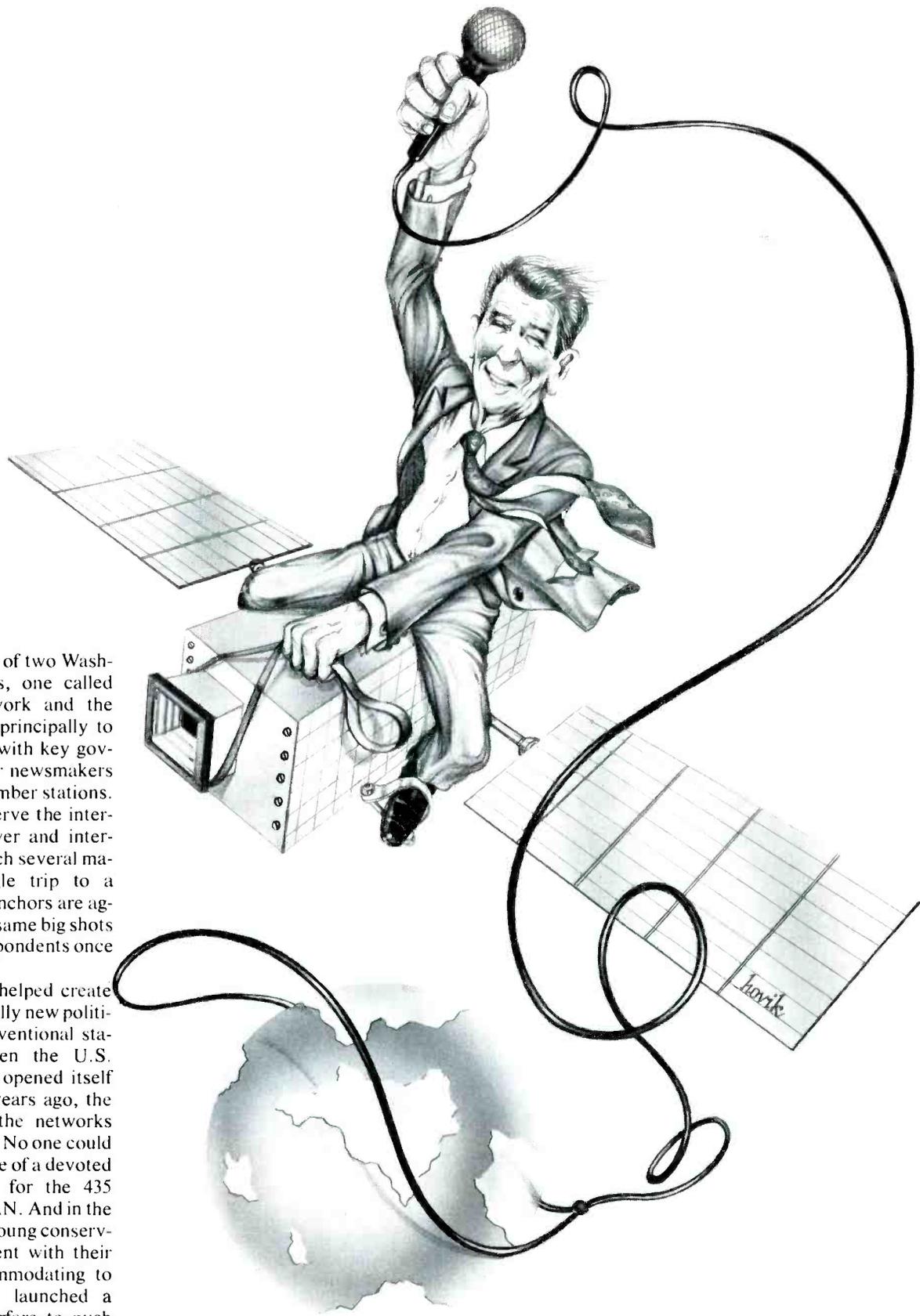
In an earlier time, with similar propagandistic objectives, Metternich and Bismarck frequently wrote or planted editorials in foreign newspapers. The

difference today is that the message can be delivered more swiftly and to a wider public than was possible then and even a decade ago. Moreover, to heighten credibility, it can be delivered in person, electronically.

Of course, it's not just to pursue foreign policy goals that the Administration keeps up with every new turn in technology; for domestic controversies as well, the White House takes advantage of technological opportunities to convey its line directly to the public. So does every candidate for national office today.

During the 1984 Presidential primaries, for the first time since television entered into the process, the candidates' media advisers did not set their plans primarily to meet the needs of the networks. Instead they gave priority to the brief noon and 6 P.M. airport stops that guaranteed the candidates direct live interviews with the anchors of the local television stations. Minicams and ENG microwave technology had made this possible. For the candidates, the setup was beautiful, giving them access to big local news audiences through a dialogue with the star anchors—often people of limited journalistic skills, who tended to serve up softball questions.

Indeed, the ratings races in local news everywhere in the country, which prompt heavy expenditures to promote the anchors, have benefited politicians as much as anyone. The anchor appears to be important, and a true journalist, if he gets to talk one-on-one with the candidates. The importance of raising the stature of the local anchor has



in fact led to the formation of two Washington-based organizations, one called the Local Program Network and the other, Conus. They exist principally to set up satellite interviews with key government officials and other newsmakers for the local anchors of member stations. The concept and format serve the interests of both the interviewer and interviewee. Politicians can reach several major markets with a single trip to a television studio, and the anchors are aggrandized by talking to the same big shots the famous network correspondents once had all to themselves.

New technologies have helped create new audiences and potentially new political forces beyond the conventional stations and networks. When the U.S. House of Representatives opened itself up to live broadcasts six years ago, the main concern was what the networks would do with the material. No one could or did predict the emergence of a devoted cable television audience for the 435 House members, via C-SPAN. And in the past few years, a group of young conservative Republicans, impatient with their leadership being so accommodating to the Democratic majority, launched a form of parliamentary warfare to push their agenda of such issues as prayer in schools. Thanks in large part to their cable exposure, these congressmen, who in earlier times would have been relegated to obscurity, have become an important force in congressional politics.

These examples of government officials and politicians employing technological innovations to spread their messages point up a paradox of the

communications revolution. The technology holds the promise of being highly democratic in giving more people an opportunity to communicate to diverse audiences. But the reality is that government has the money and the sophistication to mobilize the technology for its purposes.

No group has mobilized modern tech-

nology more determinedly for government purposes than the United States Information Agency—the government's overseas propaganda arm. Because the agency's material can by law be distributed only abroad, few Americans are aware how quickly the USIA has transformed communications technology into an important adjunct of diplomacy.

The TV President is using satellites to pitch his policies directly to the masses here and abroad, sidestepping the Washington press corps.

The transformation has not been without controversy, in part because the Reagan Administration has not been subtle about its anti-Soviet objectives. As USIA director Charles Z. Wick recently put it in a speech to some university students, "... this country's ability to articulate foreign policy issues—and its very survival—may well depend on the extent to which you can use and master the tools of mass communications."

For the Administration, the object is to beat the Soviets at the propaganda game. For Wick, the mission is to use every modern tool available to achieve that goal, especially since the United States, by his account, is coming from behind. This USIA chief once confided to his tape recorder, "My own view is that... the Communists know how to use our media better than we do."

The Reagan-Wick objective of beating the Soviets in the propaganda contest is not unlike that of Edward R. Murrow when he ran the

syndication. Murrow was the kind of journalist to whom Winston Churchill would give his time. Wick came into office announcing, "I don't know anything about foreign affairs, and I don't know anything about journalism."

Throughout his time in office, Wick has continued to be controversial and flamboyant, and given to such gaffes as illegally recording his phone calls. But as Wick said in justifying his appointment, "I do know how to make things happen." And to make things happen, Wick & Company have taken advantage of the whole panoply of powerful television technology to beam the Administration's propaganda message to the masses in allied and neutral nations.

Since its first days in office the Administration has been driven by a Cold War view of the propaganda battle. The foreign policy transition team back in 1980-81 emphasized how the Russians were outspending the Americans in propaganda by at least five to one. Instrumental in the team's thinking were advertising

Adelman's predictions of propaganda growth were certainly on the mark. As domestic programs were being cut and curbed, the budget for USIA expanded from \$457 million in 1981 to \$796 million for the current budget year. The agency's film and television division, once a poor relation of the Voice of America and other USIA offshoots, enjoyed an even more dramatic increase, from \$15 million last year to \$28 million. President Reagan's belief in the USIA mission, much akin to his belief in the Pentagon's mission, certainly helped. So too did the longtime personal friendship of Charles and Mary Jane Wick with the President and First Lady.

Even before the President's reelection, his foreign policy team agreed to continue its programs to spread the American message. National Security Council Directive 130 asserted that "strategically targeted information and communications assistance to other countries" should be "an integral part of U.S. national security policy and strategy." Broadcasting and especially television, it mandated, should have the highest priority, "as the most effective means of communicating truth directly to the peoples of the world."

The results of that directive can be seen every weekday morning in a modern but already seedy office building in downtown Washington, where USIA's television operations are headquartered. Inside, the studio setting and atmosphere resemble those of TV stations around the country. From 8 to 10 A.M. every Monday through Friday, USIA transmits by satellite to U.S. embassies in Europe a program service called Worldnet.

A dozen diplomatic posts now pick up the transmission; by the end of the year the number is expected to reach 60. The programming is also available, free of charge, to anyone in Europe with a dish capable of receiving satellite transmissions—mainly broadcast stations and cable systems. With cable expanding in Europe, the potential audience will soon reach 20 million. As one European cable executive remarked, "Those cable systems are hungry for programming and probably will be quite happy to use it."

One of those is Greenwich Cable Systems outside London, a service authorized decades ago to serve 3,000 subscribers in an area with poor TV



In a single visit to the LPN studio, Vice President George Bush can get premium air-time in several major markets, while the anchors back home enjoy the prestige of chatting with a national figure.

USIA for President Kennedy in the Cold War days. The difference is in the style and method of execution. Murrow and most of his successors thought the American message was best transmitted in straight factual reporting; Wick and his ideological colleagues in the present Administration say they too favor balanced reporting but want it coupled with anti-communist and anti-Soviet editorial commentary. Murrow, of course, came from a television news tradition that he had largely created. Wick is a product of the business and entertainment worlds—the William Morris Agency and television

executive Peter Daly, later named ambassador to Ireland, and Kenneth Adelman, who became director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Both advocated a more combative approach in countering Soviet propaganda and selling the message of the Administration. In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Adelman predicted that disseminating the American message abroad would become Washington's "major growth industry" in the coming years, and added, "For better or worse, the masses are the subjects and no longer merely the objects of historic change."

reception. Carried live, the USIA programming reaches a small lunchtime audience and so far has drawn little response, said sales and marketing director Alan Hill. But Worldnet is likely to gain a bigger British audience when the United Kingdom goes full tilt for cable and/or direct broadcast satellite service (DBS).

The daily Worldnet schedule opens with *America Today*, a half-hour TV talk show. After delivering a straight newscast, two anchors bring on guests for interviews. On one typical morning a White House aide discussed Nicaragua, and then a congressional budget committee staffer tried to describe the budget-making process to the foreign audience. No one would mistake the intensity of the questioning as being Ted Koppel-like. And there was, of course, no element of confrontation or debate on Nicaragua.

Next comes a five-minute lesson in American-style English, and then a film, usually about space or science. After that, for exclusive use in embassies, is a taped rebroadcast of the ABC news.

This is the routine fare. The real blockbusters of the USIA productions are the interactive press conferences—satellite linkups of Washington with the foreign news media. These follow no fixed schedule but are being mounted with increasing frequency; there have been more than 100 since the first in November 1983. Vice President George Bush and just about every top foreign policy official in the Administration have appeared.

"Imagine what John Kennedy could have done during the Cuban missile crisis," remarked Alvin Snyder, director of the USIA's film and television service. "Or if we had had this during the Korean Air Lines incident. We could have piped our message all over the world."

President Reagan made his first live appearance on a hookup with the Spacelab shuttle astronauts (one of whom was a West German) and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who was in Athens on an official visit. ("This is one heck of a conference call," the President joked.) The program was aired live in the Federal Republic, and the American Embassy in Bonn estimated some 20 million Germans either tuned in or read about it. Worldnet has since carried two of the President's State of the Union addresses and last fall's Presidential debates.

The debates provided one of the rare appearances for the Democrats. Except for those, as of mid-1985 only three congressional Democrats had taken part in the international press conferences. USIA's Snyder gave the reason: "Worldnet has been the vehicle to explain foreign policy abroad, and that's who's been on—the people who can explain it. They are, most often, Adminis-



The President's National Press Club speech on arms control was historic in being the first ever timed expressly for telecast to Europe rather than to his own electorate.



America's survival may depend on its use of mass communications to articulate foreign policy issues abroad, says USIA director Charles Z. Wick (shown standing, at left, with aide Alvin Snyder).

tration people."

Most of the programs are aimed at Western Europe, but they have been at times directed to other continents. On one occasion there was the simultaneous hookup of five continents. This was a program that preceded the United Nations Women's Conference, and on it the chief U.S. delegate, Maureen Reagan, the President's daughter, took questions from such culturally distinct places as Nairobi, New Delhi, and Bogotá.

The conferences are done with two-way audio and one-way video, which is standard for the form today, even in its commercial use. This means that the participating foreign journalists who gather at the U.S. embassies can see and hear the Washington official, but the official can only hear the questioners. Some foreign reporters are not pleased with the arrangement. British correspondent Jonathan Steele complained in *The Guardian* that the questions were rationed and the

microphones controlled by the embassy staff; moreover, he deplored the lack of eye contact between questioners and officials. This was after a satellite session with Assistant Secretary of State Langhorne Motley, which Steele said provided little more than "the U.S. propaganda line on Central America." Worldnet, he concluded, "serves the cause of an overwhelmingly powerful propaganda machine. It does little for the truth."

John Snow, the Washington correspondent for Britain's Independent Television News (ITN), offers a criticism that even the USIA's television professionals would not dispute: "The technique is hardly new, and the format would never make it on American TV."

As television programs, the satellite conferences are primitive stuff—but the point is not to get the whole broadcast

presented live in Western Europe, it's to have it excerpted for the various national news shows. Rarely are the excerpts identified as USIA-originated. "I wouldn't have thought it necessary," an ITN spokesman huffily told a *London Observer* columnist who raised the question.

Virtually all the news conferences are conducted entirely in English. This does not deter the non-English-speaking broadcasters, who add translations for the news clips. Sometimes the non-political programs turn out to be the most controversial. The foreign press was openly resentful at the session with Donna Tuttle, Undersecretary of Commerce for

Through advanced communications technology, the Reagan team has found new ways of reaching the people without subjecting its message-of-the-moment to critical analysis. The genius of the new media is that they eliminate the middleman, and in the case of the White House the middleman has always been the Washington press corps. Both with Worldnet and the satellite feeds to local American stations, the Administration has been able either to remove completely a journalistic filter or to replace one filter with another.

This transgresses journalistic politics, which may be a matter of minor concern where it involves foreign reporters, but

'If we had this during the Korean Air Lines incident,' contends one USIA official, 'we could have piped our message all over the world.'

Tourism, because the conference turned out to be blatantly promotional. But two of the bigger hits with the overseas press were medical programs—one on hypertension, addressed particularly to the Middle East, the other with artificial heart experts Robert Jarvik and William DeVries.

USIA officials believe the single most effective conference was the one held just after the Soviets announced they were dropping out of the Los Angeles Olympics. A satellite session with Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and Olympics committee president Peter Ueberroth was carried live throughout Asia and much of Africa; the USIA credits this conference with convincing some wavering neutral nations to stay in the games.

But Worldnet's successes on behalf of the Administration could well be offset by the growing irritation of foreign correspondents who are based in Washington. "Maybe they [in the Administration] think it's easier to speak to people who don't know what's going on here," said *Le Monde* Washington correspondent Bernard Guetta. "And maybe it's good for a small news outlet. But I should think their target would be the most influential media."

Exacerbating their disgruntlement are comments like the one by an Italian journalist who, after a satellite session with arms-control director Adelman, wrote: "One doesn't have to go to Washington to enter into contact with the principal representatives of the Administration."

gets a bit more dangerous with the domestic breed.

Last January, the White House announced it would set up its own television studios to facilitate interviews between local stations and top Administration officials, including the President. Protests from professional journalistic organizations stopped that plan cold, but even without studio facilities on the premises the White House is able to use the new outside services—Local Program Network (LPN), Conus, or Viscom's V.I.P. satellite-interview network.

An Administration official can go to the Washington studios of LPN, for instance, and do serial interviews—running five to 10 minutes each—with the anchors of key stations in many of the largest cities, thus handling a batch of interview requests in a single sitting. Members of the station consortium pay several hundred dollars a week for the service, which allows them to lay claim to a news exclusive even though it's a multicity exclusive and may smack of propaganda.

This development heats up the rivalry between network and local-station television news.

Says Lou Adler, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association: "The Administration has no less a right to use facilities to get its message across than any trade association. We all want to present ourselves in the best possible light. It's a good thing if Mr. Reagan becomes more available to journalists

around the country. Too many New York and Washington journalists think people on the other side of the Hudson or Potomac don't know anything."

But NBC News White House correspondent Andrea Mitchell points out that the increase in local interviews via satellite has already been accompanied by diminished access to top officials for national reporters and by fewer Presidential news conferences.

"My main concern," she says, "is that Ronald Reagan is not accessible to the public through the media. The one-on-one interviews with local anchors do not fulfill that obligation. It's valid to ask a local question, but you wouldn't expect a local anchor to spend the time I do studying the intricacies of, say, strategic defense."

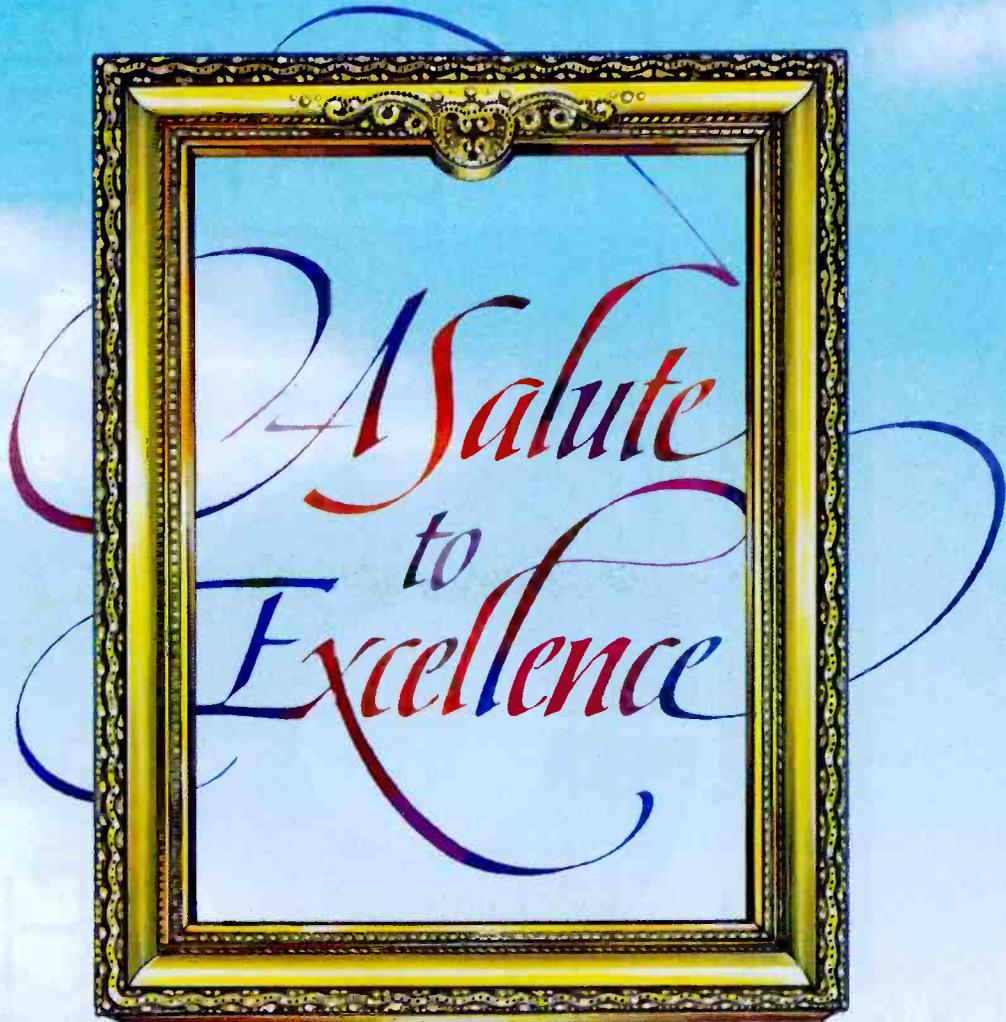
While technology has taken the President personally into the provinces, it also has taken the provinces to Washington. There are now more than 50 local television news bureaus in the capital, or about triple the number that existed at the start of the Reagan Administration. With local news programs becoming big money-makers and expanding their air time, having a Washington correspondent has been both a status symbol for the stations and a way to get new stories. But ever conscious of pacing, local news still demands very short stories and brief sound bites (excerpts from taped interviews), which usually leaves little room for analysis or skepticism. These bureaus have been a joy to congressmen, who use TV's mania for brevity to produce what amount to video press releases. As politicians, what they want mainly is visibility with their constituents, especially visibility as responsible public servants.

Because they too have much to gain from harnessing the new technologies, congressmen of either party are not likely to fret over the fact that, from now on, Presidents will have such new tools at their disposal that they will be able to sidestep the press at will and conduct diplomacy without diplomats.

Reagan now has the ability to control the kinds of media that can put him in direct touch with the people, and congressmen who are enjoying similar advantages are likely to say, "More power to him." More power to the President is an issue to ponder. The new technologies give the Chief Executive a sales apparatus for his policies that no previous President has ever had. If that should prove to upset the American system of checks and balances or in some other way alter our form of government, then we may all wonder one day, in another Administration, why we didn't keep it from happening back when we could. ■

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ANYBODY NAMED BRANDON



Working for different networks, the namesakes share a reputation among Hollywood producers as the best programmers to work with.

W

hen television writers and producers talk about excellence among network program executives, two names pop up with unflagging regularity. Actually, one name.

It happened earlier this year at a *Harper's* forum concerning program quality. Producer Norman Lear and the other panelists were talking about what some of them perceived as a disheartening lack of passion among network personnel.

Recalling that CBS founder William Paley and former president Frank Stanton had infused the network with a degree of "showmanship and consummate theatrical intelligence" that still persisted when he was working there in the 1970s, Lear said, "The closest to that at the networks now, in terms of passion, is Brandon Tartikoff of NBC."

"And I think," said Esther Shapiro, executive producer of *Dynasty*, "that we had it when I was working at ABC with Brandon Stoddard."

"Oh, yes," Lear interjected, "and Brandon Stoddard! Anybody named Brandon!"



ABC's Stoddard

The two Brandons, Stoddard and Tartikoff. Along with their first name and their Yale degrees ('58 and '70, respectively), they share a reputation in Hollywood creative ranks as being among the best of their breed—the executives who oversee the development, production, and scheduling of the entertainment programs that are broadcast on the commercial television networks.

Stoddard, 48, president of ABC Motion Pictures since 1979, doesn't have the day-to-day involvement he once did in the supervision of the network's prime-time dramatic fare, but he



NBC's Tartikoff

still approves ABC's TV movies and mini-series, and his infectious enthusiasm and willingness to take risks (with such acclaimed projects as *Roots*, *Masada*, *Friendly Fire*, *The Day After*, and *Something About Amelia*) remain much appreciated by writers and producers.

"He's open to the creative process more than a lot of other [network] people who come in with a firm, prejudged point of view as to what they want," says veteran producer George Eckstein (*Masada*, *Tail Gunner Joe*). "They expect the producers to execute that vision, whereas

Brandon gives more latitude to the creator to execute his vision. Of all the network executives I've ever worked with, he has been the most contributive and the most supportive."

Tartikoff, 36, president of NBC Entertainment for the last five years, is very much in the thick of the network wars, having engineered NBC's rise to second place in the prime-time ratings last season for the first time in a decade. What speaks even more to his programming prowess is the fact that he did it with shows that have pleased both the audience and the critics—series such as *Hill Street Blues*, *The Cosby Show*, *Cheers*, *St. Elsewhere*, *Family Ties*, *Remington Steele*, and *Miami Vice*, along with such provocative movies as *The Burning Bed* and *Fatal Vision*.

"Brandon is a real risk-taker," observes Stephen J. Cannell, co-creator and executive producer of two other NBC hits, *The A-Team* and *Riptide*. "He has real strong opinions about what he likes, but he's not stubborn. He doesn't have a need to prove he's right. His only interest is in getting the

Lee Margulies writes about television for the Los Angeles Times.

ANYBODY NAMED BRANDON

best show on the air."

Of course, asking television producers and writers to name the best network programming executives is like asking convicts to name their favorite prisons: They can do it, but relative to what?

"A better question is whether network program executives are needed at all," suggests Gary David Goldberg, executive producer and co-creator of the NBC comedy series *Family Ties*. "I think it's fair to ask, 'Would television be any different without them? Would it be any worse?'"

"If there were heaven on earth," says Stan Margulies, producer of *Roots* (with David L. Wolper) and *The Thorn Birds*. "you'd agree on the concept and the budget, and then the network would say, 'OK, go do the project.' You'd go off and do it, and if it worked out well they'd give you another one to do. They wouldn't need 73 people following you every step of the way."

There was such a time. Eckstein recalls that when ABC first got into the "Movie of the Week" business in the late 1960s, Barry Diller was the only network executive involved. "Somehow the pictures got made, and I don't think the quality was any different," he says pointedly.

But times have changed, and ABC, CBS, and NBC are not easily confused with heaven on earth. As costs have risen and competition has intensified, the networks have introduced practices usually associated with manufacturing, assigning program executives to monitor every phase of the production process for "quality control." They "consult" with the producers on the writing of the script; on the hiring of the director, the actors, the

cameraman, and the composer; and even on hairstyles, costumes, and the way the film is edited.

Like it or not—and, clearly, most producers don't—these program executives are part of the television landscape and must be dealt with. "When the expenditures are so high, and when profit is the need, then the people who put up the money are going to have a say," reasons Paul Junger Witt, one of the executive producers of ABC's *Benson* and NBC's *Golden Girls*. "I don't think anyone who thinks clearly would deny they have a right to have their say."

It's what they say and, very often, how they say it, that creates most of the animosity between producers and writers. And that's where they draw the line between good network executives and bad.

"Many of them are inclined to bravado before reflection," complains Len Hill, a former TV movie executive under Stoddard at ABC and now executive producer of ABC's *The Insiders*. "The power is so massive that they confuse their individual strength with the strength of the institution. They think they are Olympians, when they are just on Olympus."

What is it, then, that the good ones do? To be successful, a network program executive obviously must have a strong sense of what the massive television audience will respond to, of how to schedule programs effectively, and of how to promote them. But in developing commercially successful programs that are also satisfying and even possibly enriching, the best of the network programmers exhibit a variety of more subtle qualities.

Stoddard is "one of the few guys who, when you walk into his office, actually listens to you," says Leonard Goldberg, executive producer of *Something About Amelia* and numerous ABC action series. "And he listens to you with a positive look on his face that says, 'Maybe he's brought me something great that I can get excited about.'"

"And he does get excited," notes Steven Bochco, co-creator of *Hill Street Blues*. "He jumps up and says, 'Holy cow!' and he sounds like another writer or producer in the room. I mean, he catches fire!"

Steve Cannell recalls working with Stoddard on a police series called *Stone*: "He had a terrific sense of humor about the work; his attitude was, 'We're going to have some fun and make a great show.' That gets you excited as a writer. You say to yourself, 'I can hardly wait to get started putting the words on paper.'"

Stoddard's attitude is no accident. "Most successful programs, whether in daytime or children's programming or prime time or anywhere, happen because they're fun," he has said. "I really believe that . . . if there has been enthusiasm throughout, it carries onto the screen."

Tartikoff "will laugh when you tell him something funny; he'll commit to a position," says Gary Goldberg. "A lot of guys will give everything they have to sitting on the fence. They'll try to psych it out 15 different ways. Brandon will say, 'That's funny. I like that.'"

Goldberg recalls that when the initial ratings for *Family Ties* were mediocre, Tartikoff called him regularly to assure him that NBC still believed in the series and wanted him to continue doing just what he was doing. "That kind of support is very positive," he says. "It keeps your energy focused on making the show better without worrying about other things."

Tartikoff is not just a fair-weather friend, either, says Bochco. It's easy to maintain a good network/supplier relationship when the show is a hit; the true measure of support comes after there's been a bomb, as NBC and Bochco experienced in 1983 with the short-lived dramatic series *Bay City Blues*, about a minor league baseball team.

"I felt Brandon understood that we all shared that failure," Bochco maintains. "Maybe there

were different perceptions about what that failure meant, but I never got a sense of after-shocks—that I was being punished or judged. That not only makes you feel good, it makes you feel cared about. It also makes you feel more comfortable as you pursue your next project."

"The telling point about any network executive is the amount of freedom you perceive you have to pitch unconventional ideas," says Stan Margulies. "Where it is truly open—where they listen and, more importantly, encourage you to bring in off-the-wall notions—then there's some excitement to it."

That's why Stoddard and ABC wound up with *Roots* in 1977, he says. Margulies and Wolper had been trying to come up with a multi-part, multi-generational story for several years; ABC had provided encouragement in the form of development money for two earlier, aborted efforts. "The network realized we were on to something," he explains. "The other things hadn't worked, but by the time we came in with *Roots*, we knew it was right and they knew it was right."

Three years later came *Masada*, the mini-series about the ancient band of Jews who held off a Roman siege for two years, then killed themselves rather than submit to capture. "It was a tremendous gamble," producer Eckstein recalls. "It was not a soap opera; it did not have any sex, and the violence was minimal. But Brandon was interested because of the quality of the writing and the importance of the subject. It was a gutsy decision."

"You have to know all the rules and regulations, and then you have to be able to break them all," Stoddard has said. "Rules and regulations equal a 28 share. You're never going to do better than a 28 share. Only when you have the courage to try something new, something that hasn't been seen or done before, then you are going to do well."

Tartikoff is "very direct about what he likes and doesn't like," Bochco says. "He jumps in and

Apart from the
enthusiasm
—even passion—they
display for new projects,
the Brandons are respected
for their willingness
to take risks.

has a million suggestions, but he doesn't labor under the assumption that just having had an idea entitles him to impose it. He sees himself as a participant in a process, as opposed to the architect of the process."

Cannell credits Tartikoff with coming up with the idea for *The A-Team*. Gary Goldberg credits him with "making the success of *Family Ties* possible" by encouraging him during the first season to shift the focus from the relationship of the parents to the interaction among all the family members.

As with Stoddard, Tartikoff's supporters say he will fight for the points he believes in, but at the same time is willing to change his mind if the producer or writer advances a persuasive argument for another idea. Cannell recalls that Tartikoff overruled him on a casting decision for the pilot of *The A-Team*, opting for an actor whom Cannell thought was too young for the character of Face. When he saw the finished film, Cannell says, Tartikoff admitted his mistake and ordered the part recast with an older actor (Dirk Benedict).

"Brandon has infused his work and his relationships with a very positive attitude," Paul Junger Witt says. "You walk away from a meeting with him, whether your idea has been accepted or rejected, feeling that you are respected. It's a very welcoming attitude, instead of one of 'show me.'"

Although he once wanted to be a writer and producer, Tartikoff clearly recognizes that he isn't. "It's very easy to have an idea," he has said. "It's another thing to spend the next five years writing episode after episode. For every good idea I've had, there is a morgue of horrible scripts and

embarrassing pilots that came from the same loins."

"Network executives," Margulies observes, "are in the position of first having to satisfy the corporate need for a certain number of series, movies, and mini-series that deliver a certain share. The problem with a lot of them is that there is nothing beyond that; it is their *raison d'être*. The good ones realize what a terrific podium they are speaking from and that substance must be allowed to creep in from time to time."

He and many other producers believe a certain amount of passion is necessary to achieve this goal, but Barney Rosenzweig, executive producer of CBS's *Cagney & Lacey*, disagrees.

"It's almost antithetical to say 'network executive' and 'passion,'" Rosenzweig argues. "If you had passion, you'd go off and do it yourself! If you had passion, why would you sit behind a desk and allow other people to put their names on your ideas? What's needed," he feels, "is good taste and the good judgment to hire people who know what they're doing—and to leave them alone to do it."

Stoddard and Tartikoff don't have perfect records in this regard but, more than most of their peers, have avoided the common pitfall of believing that The Network Always Knows Best.

Instead they seem to approach their work in much the way that Gary Goldberg wishes all network program executives would: as coaches and cheerleaders whose job it is to recruit the right players and then to offer the guidance and encouragement needed to get them to do their best.

"I credit Brandon Tartikoff with turning *Family Ties* around. But," Goldberg notes, not a little sardonically, "if he hadn't had us doing the show, what would he have had to turn around?" ■



A Brandon sampler (clockwise from the top): ABC's Friendly Fire, and The Day After; NBC's Fatal Vision and The Burning Bed.

ON TOP OF THE NEWS IN PRIME TIME



A nightly program that provides context for world events has in four years become an important journalistic institution.

BY MARTIN KNELMAN

Can reruns of *Dallas* and *Three's Company* do what the War of 1812 failed to do—destroy Canada's will for national survival and deliver it into the hands of the Americans? That's only a slight simplification of the view of nationalists north of the border when they argue that English-speaking Canada is being colonized by cable television. The state-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has always had the mandate of holding the country together, reflecting its scattered regions to one another, but CBC television, tarnished by commercials and imported American entertainment series, hasn't enjoyed the same respect as its higher-minded sibling rival, CBC radio.

Now, however, CBC-TV has something to crow about. Its five-nights-a-week, prime-time information hour—a 22-minute newscast called *The National*, followed by a daring 38-minute current affairs program, *The Journal*—has turned out to be a surprising hit. Going head-to-head with popular entertainment shows, the package has doubled



Members of The Journal's senior editorial staff in conference.

the CBC's audience in the crucial 10-to-11-P.M. time slot, creating a formidable journalistic institution in less than four years and giving the CBC a strong new identity and sense of purpose just when it was most sorely needed. It also gives Canada the first hopeful sign in more than a decade that it has a fighting chance to resist American domination of its airwaves. Mark Starowicz, *The Journal's* executive producer, talks only half-jokingly of his mission to "stop the Americans at the border."

It was a rare stroke of boldness for the CBC in early 1982 when

the network moved its flagship newscast, *The National*, back one hour from 11 P.M. to 10 P.M. and coupled it with the all-new *Journal*. The tandem not only took viewers away from the U.S.-produced series on other channels, but also drew some 500,000 Canadians who previously hadn't been watching any television at that hour.

The Journal wins 22 to 25 percent of viewers, remarkably large shares for Canada, where much of the urban population can choose among a dozen or more Canadian and U.S. channels. Over the course of a week, one

third of all English-speaking adult Canadians watch the program.

Already *The Journal's* influence extends beyond Canada because it has become the world's largest producer of television documentaries, exporting many to foreign broadcasters. "*The Journal's* international reporting is superior to anything I've ever seen on any North American network," says Les Crystal, executive producer of PBS's *MacNeill Lehrer NewsHour*, which uses more than 20 *Journal* documentaries a year from such places as Lebanon, Pakistan, Chile, and Ethiopia. Crystal, a former president of NBC News, ranks *The Journal* "among the best in the world."

In a way, the program is the CBC's attempt to revive its great days of current affairs programming. In the 1950s, when Canadian viewers had fewer choices on the dial, CBC television had a huge audience. Current affairs programs were the CBC's greatest achievements between 1952, when the network went on the air, and 1966, when the abrasive *This Hour Has Seven Days* (a precur-

Martin Knelman writes on film, theater, and the media for Toronto Life, Saturday Night, and other publications.

sor of *60 Minutes*) was killed off by CBC management. That the CBC took the risk, 16 years later, of launching *The Journal* was largely due to the policies of CBC vice president Peter Herrndorf, who later left the network.

Behind the CBC's decision to launch *The Journal* lay the notion that if it could create one prime-time hour that revealed the country to itself and saw the rest of the world from a uniquely Canadian viewpoint, the network would be on the way to justifying its existence and continued tax support. But even before the show got on the air, jealousy toward the program was rampant among CBC employees, partly because those working on other programs knew it was eating up big chunks of the CBC budget, and partly because it was getting so much attention. *The Journal's* cocky style presented an irresistible target, and the people who ran it were regarded as brash upstarts.

Executive producer Starowicz, for one, with his driving energy and brusque charm, comes across like the protagonist in an updated electronic version of *The Front Page*. He came to Montreal as a boy with his immigrant Polish parents and developed the temperament of a muckraker. By the age of 25 he had been fired by two major newspapers and investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He became the whiz kid of CBC radio in the 1970s by producing two phenomenally popular programs—*As It Happens*, a nightly show featuring long-distance phone interviews, and *Sunday Morning*, a three-hour magazine featuring audio documentaries.

Moving into television, Starowicz had to put together the people, format, and technology that

would get *The Journal* on the air. He assembled a staff of 136, most of whom work in the program's crowded Toronto headquarters, and was allocated an annual budget of \$14 million (Canadian), or slightly more than \$10 million (U.S.).

What's most striking about the *Journal* unit is its collective youth. Starowicz needed people with limitless energy who would be prepared to give up their private lives for the show—and brought along a number of bright colleagues from CBC radio. "It really was the Children's Crusade," says one observer. "They saw themselves as amateurs learning on the job. To an outsider they seemed arrogant, but they needed the arrogance to keep themselves from being overcome by self-doubt. Without that they couldn't get their show on the air. The first year of anything Mark does is always a disaster, because he's inventing as he goes along. This creates a special electricity: everyone is running scared. They're terrified somebody is going to find them out."

From the start the producers decided to shoot with electronic newsgathering (ENG) equipment rather than film cameras. ENG is highly mobile and there's no waiting for film to be processed. The ENG image looks crisper and more modern than a film image and has the look of live coverage.

The Journal also turned to technology to get interviews without bringing guests to studios or resorting to expensive, extremely cumbersome live television relays. Starowicz and his team solved the problem by reviving the flexible and economic "double-ender" interview technique developed in television's creatively explosive early days by CBS's *See It Now*. In a *Journal* double-ender, interviewer and guest can't see one another. They converse by audio lines while a crew videotapes the guest. Later the pictures go by satellite to Toronto, where, through the magic of electronic editing, the guest's face appears



The Journal
has achieved
a global
influence
through its
documentaries.



on a screen in the studio.

The Journal's dominant on-air figure is host Barbara Frum, who is backed up by a co-host (Mary Lou Finlay, Keith Morrison, or Bill Cameron). Frum is a determined interviewer who, as host of *As It Happens* on CBC radio in the 1970s, became probably the most successful personality in the history of Canadian broadcasting. On *The Journal*, she continues to go after information as if it were a moral crusade. She plots the strategy of each interview and often keeps questioning a guest after the taping has ended. Unlike Ted Koppel of ABC's *Nightline*, she doesn't often have the luxury of long conversations; a typical *Journal* interview lasts only four or five minutes.

Millions of Canadians feel they have a personal relationship with her—that she represents them and asks the questions they'd ask. They write her, phone her, approach her in shops and restaurants. "People talk to me because they feel they know me," Frum says. "It's like a fast friendship system or meeting a lot of cousins you didn't know you had."

Yet others regard Frum as abrasive, maybe because they don't yet feel comfortable with any woman who makes no apology for sounding aggressively intelligent in public. Barbara Frum is not "nice," if the personification of niceness is those fluffy young blondes, with their veneers of hominess, who flourish on

(From top) Feisty executive producer Mark Starowicz oversees a young and vigorous staff of 136; host Barbara Frum; and backup host Mary Lou Finlay.

ON TOP OF THE NEWS
IN PRIME TIME

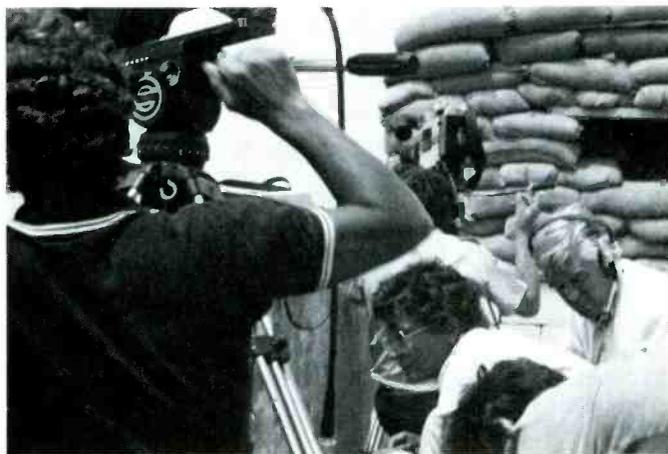
U.S. morning shows.

But *The Journal* is more than a good beyond-the-headlines interview show in the *Nightline* mode, thanks to its documentary unit, known for the excellence of its foreign reportage (about 30 percent of its interview and documentary pieces have non-Canadian topics). Indeed, a few stars have been born in the unit. One was Peter Kent, whose reports from Africa were the high point of the program's first season (after spending the next year as one of the Toronto-based hosts, Kent moved to NBC News). Another star is Ann Medina, whose reports from the Middle East are so riveting and memorable that people who have seen them tend to look at all developments in that region through her eyes. In her reports from Lebanon, she explained the background and various factions more vividly than even the most sophisticated newspaper accounts. She gives viewers not just another forgettable item from the far side of the world, but a self-contained drama with special impact.

The Journal is at its best when it takes dramatic risks, often with long documentaries on subjects that are not topical, such as Vichy France and questionable cancer treatments.

Even the biggest *Journal* boosters know the program has problems. Its arts coverage, once disgraceful, is still uneven. It has never succeeded in covering business as effectively as it covers sports. And *The Journal's* lead item at 10:22 too often seems like a rehash of news presented at 10:00 on *The National*. But the initially venomous press response to the program has subsided, although complaints about *The Journal* are still a favorite

The Journal offers a more dispassionate slant on world events than American TV.



pastime at upscale dinner parties. Most Canadians, in fact, have a special love/hate relationship with the CBC based on the feeling that they own it, and even people who don't like *The Journal* can't stop talking about it.

In less than four years the twin weeknightly programs have become Canada's most important journalistic institution, as influential and authoritative as the country's newspaper of record, Toronto's *Globe and Mail*. *The Journal* is already regarded as setting a standard of excellence. It's where college kids thinking of a journalistic career want to work.

The program has given the CBC a nightly national platform and a chance to cover world events without the pressures faced by American networks. Its cool, detached tone and air of calm neutrality seem definitively Canadian. It has become so much a part of Canada's psychic landscape, it's hard to remember that only four years ago it didn't exist. When you check into a hotel, switch on the TV, and catch that boom-boom theme music, followed by the let's-get-down-to-business facial expression of Barbara Frum—that's how you know you're in Canada.

Buoyed by this success, Mark Starowicz harbors fantasies of even greater triumphs. *Journal* documentaries, already shown in 20 countries outside of Canada, are already offering an alternative, more dispassionate slant on world affairs than the one offered by the American news media. So why couldn't *The Journal* be beamed by satellite to every corner of the planet where there is an English-language audience ready for information without any American bias? Starowicz may no longer be content with stopping the Americans from crossing the border—he may turn out to be a closet imperialist. ■

Star reporter Ann Medina (at top) ducking bullets in Lebanon; interviewing a Saskatchewan farmer; and at a mosque near Cairo.

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television—nonfiction drama.

BY MICHAEL I. MEYERSON

When critics praise television programs for their effective drama, they're usually talking about scriptwriters' fictional creations. But a small production unit at Columbia University, working with "hypotheticals"—a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction—has given us some of the most dramatic moments seen recently on television. Dealing with potentially stultifying legal and political topics, the productions of Media and Society Seminars have created what might be called, borrowing a phrase, a genuine "theater of information."

Some of the programs' most moving scenes occur when well-known figures step out of their calm public personas and reveal a passion usually kept well in hand. NBC correspondent John Chancellor, for example, could barely contain his anger when former Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger asserted that the press could not be trusted to keep secret a surprise military action. Referring to a legendary war correspondent, Schlesinger said, "The age of Ernie Pyle is dead,



Fred W. Friendly briefs The Military and the News Media group.

regrettably."

"I think that's terrible," Chancellor shot back, his voice full of emotion. "I think you ought to talk about all the brave reporters who have covered all these things. . . . The press has different responsibilities in this world, and we're trying to do it as best we can. But to imply that Ernie Pyle was a patriot and the rest of us are not—I won't accept that."

Media and Society Seminars, headed by the noted former CBS News producer Fred W. Friendly, has specialized so far in explicating legal and political issues, particularly those involving

the press. Besides its best-known product, the 13-part 1984 PBS series *The Constitution: That Delicate Balance*, the group has produced the two-part *Anatomy of a Libel Case*, aired by PBS last summer, this year's three-part PBS series *The Military and the News Media*, and three *Eye on the Media* programs for CBS. The producers have plans to expand into new subject territory with an eight-part series on health care, for broadcast a year from now, and a broad 13-part series on ethics.

For each program, the producers assemble 15 to 25 partici-

pants in a semicircle and ask them to respond to questions posed by a moderator, as well as to each other's remarks. This may sound like a recipe for utter boredom, but the results have been anything but lifeless. The participants, including preeminent journalists, attorneys, judges, military and religious leaders, and physicians, are required to confront not only the most difficult issues of their professions, but also the very people who represent opinions diametrically opposed to their own. "Our job," says Friendly, "is to make the agony of the decision-making process so intense that it can only be escaped by thinking."

The programs grew out of a series of Ford Foundation-sponsored private seminars intended to improve understanding between journalists and jurists. Friendly and Stuart Sucherman started the seminars in 1974 with funding from the foundation and various newspapers. To focus the discussion, moderators Arthur Miller and Charles R. Nesson, both Harvard Law School professors, put forth a hypothetical

Michael I. Meyerson teaches at the University of Baltimore Law School.

THE INCREDIBLE THINKING HEADS

problem and asked participants how they would deal with it in real life. The exchange apparently helped improve understanding between the two groups of professionals, according to Friendly. "We were able to keep the judges and journalists talking. No shouting and no speeches."

When Friendly moved from the Ford Foundation to Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism in 1981, the seminars went with him, and their format was adapted for television. Professors Miller and Nelson were cast again as moderators, along with Benno C. Schmidt Jr., dean of Columbia's Law School. Using a kind of dialogue that Friendly calls "a mix of Socrates and Phil Donahue," they use piercing questions to stimulate responses that go deeper than the usual pat answers.

The basis for discussion may be hypothetical situations, but they aren't pulled from thin air. One question was whether reporters should accompany troops on a surprise invasion of the fictional country Sierra Madre—an issue familiar because of the Grenada invasion. In another program, the proposition was that word had leaked to the press that the military was planning to launch a secret spy satellite. Two weeks after the seminar was videotaped, the *Washington Post* broke the story of a secret military cargo on the space shuttle, and the program was hurriedly prepared for broadcast the day after the shuttle launch in January.

Once they've selected the basic hypothetical case, Friendly, Sucherman, and the moderator prepare a "script" of questions—essentially a road map of topics they want to cover. Friendly says he tries to maintain an "agony quotient"—every five to seven minutes, at least one question should cause a panelist to undergo the discomfort of forced introspection.

Using the script's questions, the moderator does dry runs with well-versed stand-ins for the real panelists. Their objectives: to shoot holes in the original script;

to make the final program more credible and incisive.

Media and Society casts each program with exceptional thoroughness. Friendly has long individual talks with the panelists to make sure they understand how the program will work and to guarantee a proper mix of opinions. Panelists have included Morley Safer of *60 Minutes* and William P. Tavoulareas, president of Mobil Oil; Alexander Haig and columnist Sydney Schanberg; Right To Life leader Mildred Jefferson and Phil Donahue. The panelists must be sharp. When they arrive for the actual taping, they don't know what questions to expect.

While the big names receive most of the attention, lesser-known panelists have contributed strong comments based on their experience. For a program on criminal justice, Friendly sought a judge who deals daily with difficult constitutional issues, such as the defendant's right to a fair jury trial. The panelist he selected, on the recommendation of another judge, was R. Eugene Pincham of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois.

The case before the judge and the other panelists involved a man accused of raping a nun and slashing 27 crosses on her body with a knife. (According to Friendly, an especially grotesque crime was selected to "test the limits of the system.") When defense lawyers joked that they wouldn't want to take the case without being guaranteed a large fee, Judge Pincham shook his head almost sorrowfully. Someone asked whether he himself would have represented "the scum of the earth." The judge's reply was eloquent: "He needs representation more so than the elite . . . He needs the best he can



The Seminars' 'hypotheticals' frequently parallel real events.



get. And I think the profession is obligated to give it to him."

It is testimony to the panelists' concise speech and, perhaps even more, to the moderators' effectiveness, that the programs' crisp dialogues have undergone only minimal videotape editing. In two respects, that editing differs from usual television practice: First, the dialogue is kept in original sequence. Second, in cutting down a three-hour seminar to fit a one-hour broadcast, only "macro editing" is done. For example, the editors will use a 28-minute chunk of dialogue that "works," and then reject the next 23 minutes. They do no "micro editing," such as deleting part of a panelist's statement.

These practices were chosen to preserve the seminars' integrity, according to Friendly. And, indeed, a viewer watching the free-wheeling discussion gets the impression that it really happened that way. The producers can choose among pictures from six or seven television cameras trained on different panelists and on the moderator, and never need to fake a reaction shot.

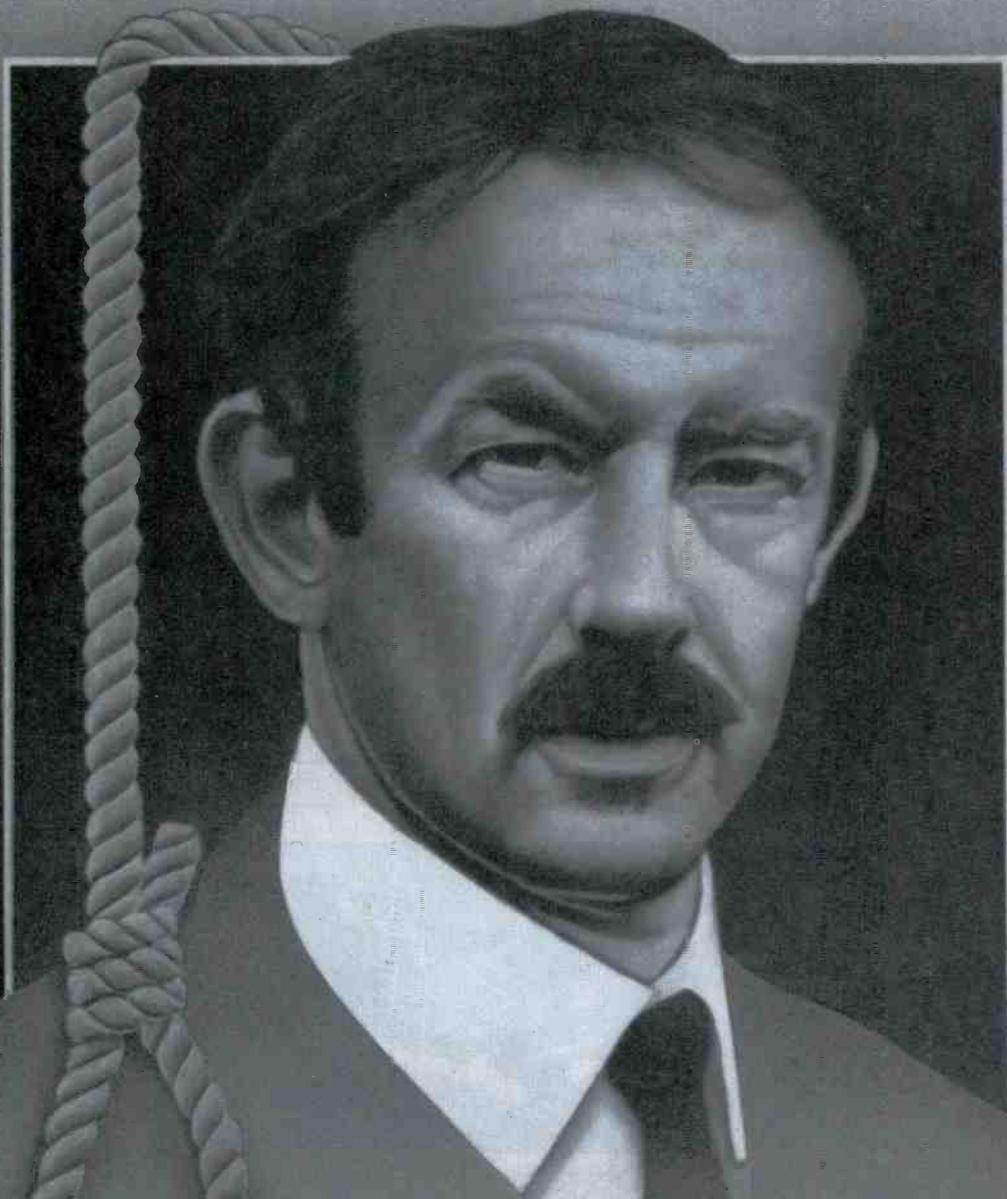
The end products are compelling and informative, as well as credible. The viewer not only learns some facts (what kinds of evidence can be excluded in a trial), but also becomes privy to professional decision-making processes (how a reporter checks out a questionable source).

While the programs of the Media and Society Seminars always deal with complex and controversial topics, they never insult the viewer with facile solutions. The seminars are not meant to change minds but to open them, Friendly says. They have indeed opened minds, not only about the important issues they address, but also about the ability of television to inform, enlighten, and entertain by treating viewers with respect. ■

(Top) Moderator Benno Schmidt; (middle) Judge Patricia M. Wald and Edmund S. Muskie; (bottom) Dan Rather.

MYSTERY!

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THE HEART OF COUNTRY



A single radio program on a small-city station has spawned an enormous industry and turned Nashville into one of the world's cultural capitals.

BY BOB ALLEN

Fiddle in hand, venerable country star Roy Acuff strides onto the Grand Ole Opry stage and launches into his gospel-flavored classic, "The Great Speckled Bird"—the same song he performed nearly 50 years ago in his Opry debut. The crowd, 4,400 strong on this typical Saturday night, responds with hearty applause and an almost blinding spray of flashbulbs as Acuff kicks off yet another evening of the world's longest continuously running live radio show.

The crowd *loves* Acuff and the other singers and pickers milling around on the stage behind him. Many of these fans once huddled around old Philco radios—in backwoods cabins, Depression-era camps, stateside Army barracks, cold Northern cities, even prison cells—to hear the comforting sounds of hillbilly radio on Nashville's WSM. These old-time Opry fans wouldn't mind hearing some of the string-band music that was so popular in the early barn-dance radio days. Others, younger and a little rowdier, would just as soon hear Hank Williams Jr. and his band



The "Queen" of country comedy, Minnie Pearl, and the "King" of country music, Roy Acuff, hold court on the Opry stage.

tear up the place with some "kickass country."

Whatever their preference, the Opry, for them, is the Mother Church of Country Music. It has nurtured an indigenous American music and, in an era obsessed with newness, has kept it remarkably true to its rural origins. This has kept hundreds of thousands of the faithful coming to the Opry House every year. And recently it has been drawing hundreds of thousands more to the new half-hour Opry show on cable television's Nashville Network.

But the Opry is still, after 60 years, first and foremost a radio

show. Listeners in more than 30 states hear the Opry's five-hour broadcasts Friday and Saturday nights on the powerful 50,000-watt WSM. Even the station does not pretend to know exactly how many people listen. Multi-state rating surveys aren't ordinarily done for such clear-channel stations as WSM that, at night, reach far beyond radio's normal range. Anyway, the station says it doesn't need to know or brag about its Opry ratings; it claims to have more advertisers than time to sell.

The half-hour cable segment was added last April to the lineup

of the Nashville Network, which Opryland USA, the Opry's parent company, owns jointly with Group W Satellite Communications. "The Opry has quickly become the most popular half hour on the network," says Lloyd Werner of Group W. "Nielsen told us it reached an average of 486,000 households in June."

This flirtation with a big cable audience has not tempted the Opry to change its formula of music, dance, vaudeville-type humor, and old-time religion. "We have no control over the Opry," says Werner. "We're simply putting a television camera in the Opry House and televising a radio show."

Not that the Opry would allow any such intrusions. It has endured by resisting change, by cultivating an audience that prefers country music the way it used to be. "The Opry is almost like a beacon in a troubled and rather confused world," says Grant Turner, the gentle 73-year-old who has been the show's on-air announcer since 1944.

While most country radio stations have drifted toward pop-

Bob Allen is a writer who specializes in country music.

influenced "crossover" music, the Grand Ole Opry remains one of the few national showcases for genuinely rural entertainment. Superstars Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell, and Loretta Lynn are among the Opry's 60 official members, but they appear infrequently compared to the mainstay members, several dozen generally older and lesser known artists whose work has the rustic values of earlier decades. There is, for example, the broad comedy of Minnie Pearl, the "high, lonesome" bluegrass sound of Bill Monroe, the cowboy songs of Riders in the Sky, Acuff's mountain ballads, and the intricate dancing of the Stoney Mountain Cloggers.

The show's warmth has kept it on the air, says Minnie Pearl, who has been regaling Opry audiences with her guileless humor since 1940. "The people on the Opry have tried to make those people listening believe that they are singing and talking directly to them."

It testifies to the institution's powerful appeal that Richard Nixon journeyed to the Opry in 1974, just five months before his resignation. Joking and playing with Acuff's yo-yo on the Opry stage, the President made a last-ditch bid for support from grassroots America.

Backstage at the Opry on a Saturday night there is almost a family atmosphere. Musicians and fans mingle as the cloggers' wooden heels echo sharply in crowded hallways, and the spirited music of the Crook Brothers' mountain string band spills out through the open door of a dressing room.

In his room, Roy Acuff holds court for a stream of well-wishers. Some can remember his commercial heyday in the '40s

when his popularity rivaled Frank Sinatra's. Two middle-aged women ask if he'll pose for pictures with them. "This is the high point of my life," one whispers as she stands with her arm around Acuff. "I come from North Carolina, so far back in the hills they had to pump in the sunlight. But on Saturday nights we always got the Grand Ole Opry on the radio, and we always heard Roy Acuff."

"You're mighty young to be sayin' that!" Acuff teases the woman, who is at least 50.

The Opry itself, like the artists' and the fans' enthusiasm for it, is spontaneous. The only scripts used are for the live commercials delivered on behalf of longtime advertisers such as Martha White Foods, Coca-Cola, and Beechnut Chewing Tobacco. Each of the roughly 25 performers who appear on a given show performs two or three songs. The overall feeling is something of a cross between a Saturday night hoedown and a Sunday-morning church service.

The Opry's mystique was captured in the early 1970s by a *New Yorker* writer named Garrison Keillor. (His visits later inspired him to start his own live national variety show, *A Prairie Home Companion*, on public radio.) "You listen to the Opry, and pretty soon you have a place in mind—a stage where Uncle Dave [Macon] sang and told jokes and swung the banjo, where the Great Acuff wept and sang 'The Great Speckled Bird,' where Hank Williams made his Opry debut with 'Lovesick Blues' . . . where Cousin Minnie Pearl calls out 'How-dee! I'm just so proud to be here!'—and eventually, you have to go and be there, too."

Go there they do. For three decades, fans went to sit on hard pews in a converted tabernacle, the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville. And they kept going 11 years ago when the Opry moved its home to the acoustically perfect but somewhat sterile \$13.5 million Opry House, centerpiece of a huge entertainment complex, including a hotel and the Opryland theme park. They



After 60 years,
and despite
being televised
on cable, the
Opry is still
mostly a
radio show.



pack the three to eight shows staged every week by the Opry, paying from \$6 to \$10 a ticket. On Friday night and again on Saturday, WSM broadcasts two shows, each two-and-a-half-hours long.

"Roughly a million people a year come to the theme park, and a large percentage of them also go to the Opry. Most come to do both," says Tom Griscom, an Opryland USA vice president. Some 900,000 visitors a year make the pilgrimage, traveling an average of 940 miles, round trip.

This nostalgic appeal to the faithful has kept the Opry largely immune to music industry booms and busts—including the current downturn that, according to *Variety*, has seen country music's share of record sales slip from 16 to 9 percent since the early 1980s.

Since the 1950s, the program has become less and less a national showcase for the week's country hit parade and increasingly something more akin to a shrine for the preservation of the country music of yesteryear.

The Grand Ole Opry was the brainchild of George D. Hay ("the Solemn Old Judge"), a former newspaperman who had gained national prominence as announcer of the widely popular *National Barn Dance* on Chicago radio station WLS. Hay decided to head south when the National Life and Accident Insurance Company of Nashville offered him a job as director of its new station, WSM. Soon after his arrival in 1925, Hay put an 80-year-old fiddler named Uncle Jimmy Thompson on the air for an hour. The response was powerful and, within a month, Hay announced the addition of a Saturday night barn-dance show to WSM's schedule, with "the Judge" himself as emcee. The Opry was born, but it didn't get its playful name until several years later when Hay coined it as a parody of

Ole Standbys: Bill Monroe (top) called his band "The Bluegrass Boys" and thus named a musical genre; Hank Snow; Loretta Lynn; Grandpa Jones.

On the air, the Opry has remained true to its origins but today is far from a humble enterprise.

the "grand opera" broadcasts WSM was receiving from NBC. At first the station's 1,000-watt signal did not reach far beyond the hilly mid-Tennessee region. But National Life soon discovered that free Opry tickets and other souvenirs were natural door-openers for its traveling salesmen. The station moved its prize show to bigger and bigger halls and, in 1932, boosted its AM signal to 50,000 watts. During the Depression the station reached into some of mid-America's most isolated farmlands, where no other stations could be heard.

The Opry owed a lot to other live radio shows that had preceded it, including WLS's *National Barn Dance* and the *Louisiana Hayride* on KWKH in Shreveport. Its musical direction was strongly influenced by one of its first real stars, Uncle Dave Macon, who joined the Opry in 1926. An extraordinary banjo-player and comedian, Macon had a huge repertoire of folk songs, most of which he'd learned from laborers, many of them black, in the late 1800s. But he was also a seasoned vaudeville and minstrel entertainer, and he gave the show a new professional polish. Within a few years its singers' records were competing in the national Top 10 with those of popular urban artists.

In 1939 the NBC radio network began carrying a 30-minute live segment of the Opry that featured its headlining acts. The Opry became a magnet for numerous rising stars as well as millions of listeners. It attracted to Nashville the core of a music industry—agents, publishers, technicians, and promoters—that would transform a quiet, undistinguished Southeastern city into the mecca of country music that has taken the appellation, "Music City, U.S.A."

The program outlived National Life, which was swallowed up by American General Corporation in 1982. A year later, American General sold the Opry and related properties to its present owner, Gaylord Broadcasting of Dallas.

WSM's geographic reach was

curtailed somewhat in 1980 when the Federal Communications Commission gave permission for other broadcasters (750 miles or more from Nashville) to use the same frequencies at night. (So far only one has done so.) But last year the Opry expanded its range when an Oklahoma City station began carrying the broadcast as a sort of network with WSM.

Long-term success in television has eluded the Opry. Although it had a brief run on ABC television in the mid-'50s and occasional shows on PBS, the Opry hasn't had a large or affluent enough audience to interest network television.

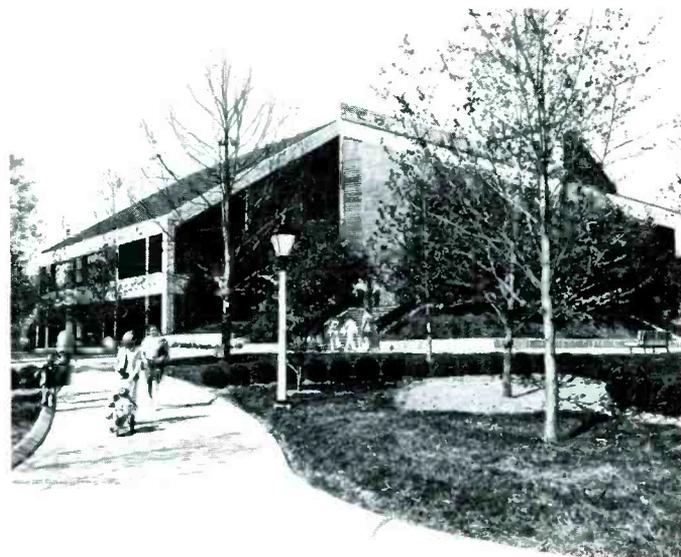
Before joining the partnership to put the Nashville Network on cable television, Group W did some research and found that television was failing to serve the country music audience. The survey showed that a full 25 percent of American adults would watch country music on television or listen on the radio, and another 25 percent would tune in for a Willie Nelson or Johnny Cash special, Lloyd Werner says. "The other 50 percent has never listened to or watched a country music show, and is not prone to do so," he adds. "So country music shows on the networks do not do well on a regular basis."

"But 25 percent of the U.S. population is 50 million people," Werner emphasizes. Seven million are watching the Nashville Network today, and the number is bound to expand as cable does.

With the support of that growing audience, the Opry seems destined to continue on its meandering way, delightfully out of step with changing times and musical trends. It remains an integral part of many Americans' Saturday nights, a symbol of stability as potent as the Statue of Liberty.

As the late George D. Hay once explained: "The principal appeal of the Opry is a homey one. It sends forth the aroma of bacon and eggs frying on a kitchen stove on a bright spring morning." Some things don't change. And that ain't all bad. ■

The Opry's first home, the Ryman Auditorium (nearest), built in 1892, had wooden pews. The 11-year-old Opry House is the center of a theme park and houses a 300-seat TV studio.



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TV THEATER OF THE SUPERB



After more than a dozen years of trying, public television at last has a world-class showcase for drama.

BY JOHN J. O'CONNOR

Nearly a score of years ago, in the seminal Carnegie Commission report, E.B. White envisioned noncommercial television as "our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's, and our Camelot"—as an alternative to the crass commercialism, the sex-and-violence pabulum of traditional TV.

It hasn't exactly turned out that way because of unceasing pressures, some political, most financial. In the area of significant drama, certainly, many of us continue to look to the British and other foreign sources for towering accomplishment. *A Jewel in the Crown* or a *Berlin Alexanderplatz* still walks off, deservedly, with most of the world's prestigious awards.

White yearned for public television that would "arouse our dreams, satisfy our hunger for beauty, take us on journeys . . . restate and clarify the social dilemma and the political pickle." He added: "Once in a while it does, and you get a quick glimpse of its potential."

Those occasions now come frequently on the weekly series



David M. Davis founded American Playhouse in 1980.

American Playhouse, which will begin its fifth season in January. This year alone, for instance, PBS viewers were given fine—in some cases, superb—adaptations of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Katherine Anne Porter's "Noon Wine," Philip Roth's Banff Award-winning *The Ghost Writer* (a rebroadcast from two seasons ago), F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Under the Biltmore Clock," and Kurt Vonnegut's "Displaced Person."

And the roster of *Playhouse* presentations has not been limited to literary adaptations. The season also included *Nightsongs*,

a haunting docudrama-like portrait of New York's Chinatown, and *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*, a three-part examination of the Salem witch trials. Some offerings have flopped, but the peaks have been numerous enough to make the *American Playhouse* record mightily impressive.

Public television has not had an easy time finding a dependable way of bringing quality drama to the screen. Over the past 15 years, several "showcases" have been devised and, for assorted reasons, discarded or severely altered. Jac Venza, a veteran producer at WNET, put together

Theater in America, a once-vital series that now has been absorbed and considerably cut back under the umbrella of *Great Performances*. In the '70s, Barbara Schultz launched *Visions*, an admirable venture that ruffled too many bureaucratic feathers with what was perceived as an overabundance of "ethnic" scripts.

In 1970, Norman Lloyd, now a familiar face as the hospital administrator on *St. Elsewhere*, produced the modest *Hollywood Television Theatre*. Robert Geller, an independent producer, had a brief but feisty run with *American Short Story*. And occasionally public broadcasting would huff and puff and bring forth something on the order of *The Adams Chronicles*.

Enter *American Playhouse*. Announced late in 1980, it was rushed to air in January 1982—with speed and broad support uncharacteristic in the case of a new public television series. David M. Davis, who formerly dispensed millions of Ford Foundation grants to public television, began developing the project two years before its debut and is still its ex-

John J. O'Connor is a television critic for The New York Times.

ecutive director; Lindsay Law is the executive producer, and Miranda Barry the director of program development.

An organizational innovation gave *Playhouse* its support within the balkanized public television system. Davis was first hired for the project jointly by WNET and KCET, the big public television stations in New York and Los Angeles, but that arrangement was soon changed. "Given the politics of public broadcasting, neither CPB nor PBS could go with just a New York-Los Angeles partnership," recalls Davis. "It had to be opened wider." CPB gave the first big grant, not to one or two producing stations, but to a nonprofit consortium overseen by four: Los Angeles's KCET, South Carolina ETV, Boston's WGBH, and New York's WNET.

Funding was also consolidated. For next season, a total of \$8.75 million has been squeezed out of several sources: public television stations (\$4.25 million), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (\$3 million), the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies (\$1 million), and the National Endowment for the Arts (\$500,000). But, as Davis quickly observes, there is no way that a season of 22 programs can be made for that sum. Remember that the cost of production for commercial television is now above \$1 million an hour.

So, in order to put together a \$20 million season, Davis has entered into "commercial partnerships" with outside interests. *Playhouse* has shared production costs with foreign broadcasters, studios, cable networks, independent producers, and private investors. In exchange, the PBS series keeps only partial rights to the programs. Several films partially financed by *Play-*

house were released in theaters by their producers before airing on PBS. They came to PBS with the advantage of more pre-broadcast publicity than public television can usually afford. The arrangement worked neatly with such films as Lynne Littman's *Testament*, the portrait of a family after nuclear war; Gregory Nava's *El Norte*, about two Guatemalan teenagers fleeing to the United States; and producer Robert Young's *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, the story of a historic Texas manhunt.

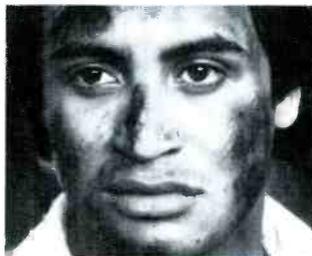
If such arrangements enable *Playhouse* to get on with the business of turning out quality television, more power to it. But the basic approach is troubling. Although there is some overlap between what goes over in a movie house and on television, there are distinct differences.

Television over the years has been developing and refining its own forms, and they should be pursued further with care and imagination. For that reason, it's unsettling to learn that *Playhouse* is now co-producing 10 films aimed for release to movie houses before being broadcast. Lindsay Law emphasizes that these will not be "watered-down made-for-TV movies." But if *Playhouse* does not maintain a balance between its small-screen and big-screen activities, public television will find itself with a series that might more aptly be named *American Movie House*.

When the series has excelled it has been with projects that are quintessential television. Its mini-series have been outstanding—not only the seven-part *Oppenheimer*, with Sam Waterston as the troubled nuclear scientist, but also *The File on Jill Hatch*, a portrait of an American black woman with a white British mother, and the Emmy-winning *Concealed Enemies*, a docudrama about the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers espionage trials. All three projects, as it happens, involved heavy British participation. On another level, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, produced by Robert Geller, was the kind of thoroughly American ex-



Big-time production budgets are gained through innovative deals.



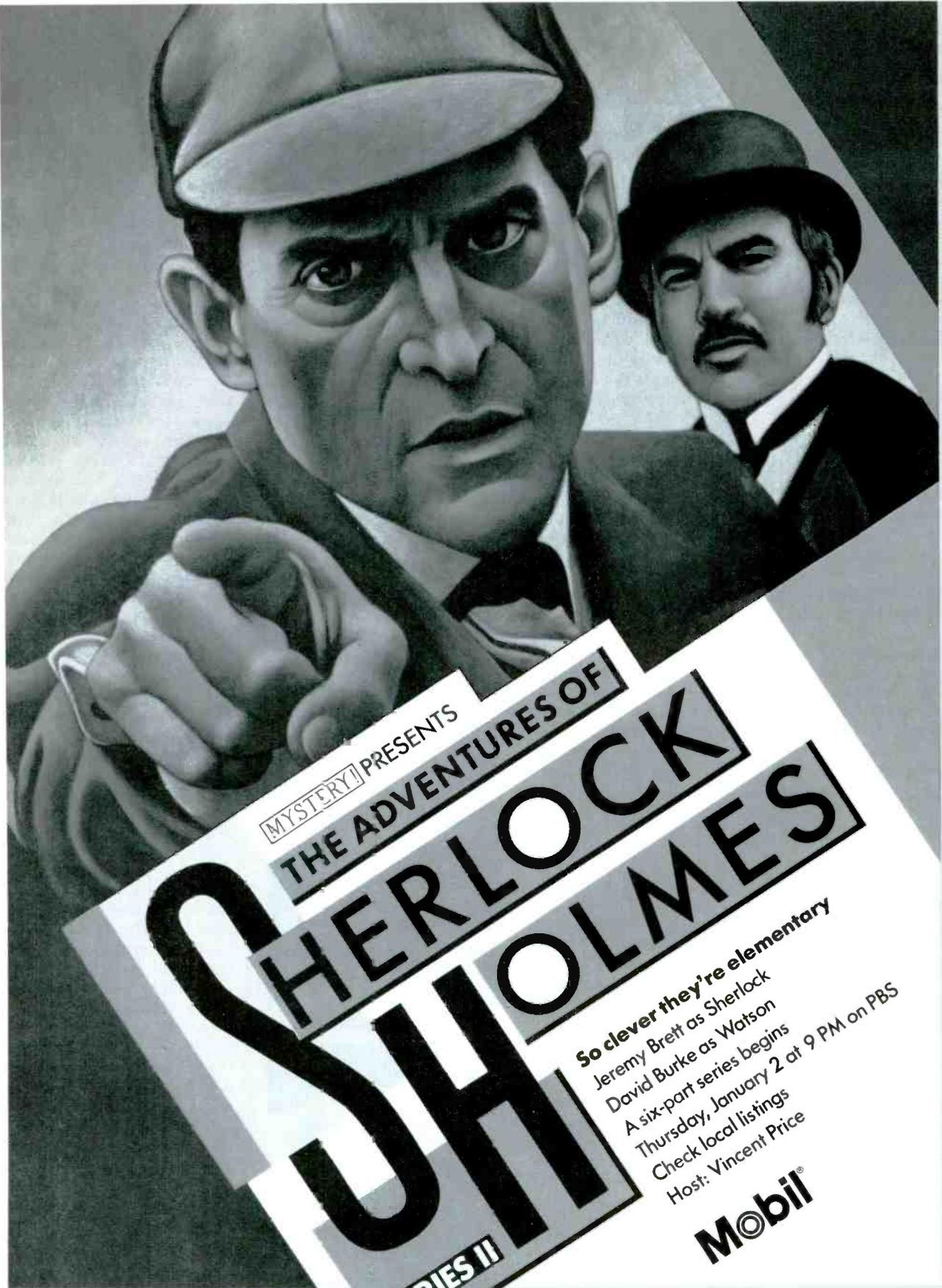
perience—growing up in Harlem in the 1930s—that television too rarely touches, evidently because stories about blacks are not supposed to be popular, despite mounds of evidence to the contrary.

Going through the long list of presentations in *American Playhouse's* first four seasons, one can occasionally be puzzled. Among them, for instance, is *The Europeans*, a misguided interpretation of the Henry James novel. But these are easily eclipsed by splendid performances—Vanessa Redgrave in *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*, Claire Bloom in *The Ghost Writer*, and Constance Cummings in *Wings*—and such adventuresome efforts as *The Killing Floor*, which pictures the early days of the labor movement in the Chicago stockyards.

Several top television writers arrived at a recent public forum in New York with videotaped examples of their work. One was Ernest Kinoy, a veteran whose credits stretch from major Herbert Brodtkin productions (*Sko-kie*) to the forthcoming *Gore Vidal's 'Lincoln'* and a Home Box Office biography of Edward R. Murrow. Revealingly, the tape Kinoy brought along was *The Cafeteria*, an adaptation of an Isaac Bashevis Singer short story that he had done for *American Playhouse*. Clearly, the project had been special for him, as the 1984 broadcast was special for some five million viewers who regularly tune in to the series.

The Cafeteria is not just another TV movie, nor just an exercise concocted by executives with their eyes on audience research findings. It is a sensitive adaptation, a careful distilling of the spirit of a serious writer. That is what *American Playhouse* is about at its best. That is what public television should be about all of the time. Perhaps, despite the money problems and formidable pitfalls for a dramatic anthology, it still can be done. ■

Among *Playhouse's* best: *The Ghost Writer* (top), *A Flash of Green*, *El Norte*, and *Noon Wine*.



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THE PRIDE OF DOROTHY S. BULLITT



The owner of Seattle's first television station has kept it creative and committed to public service.

KING-TV has occupied a special place in its city's communal consciousness since 1949 when it began broadcasting to Seattle and the Puget Sound region. It's damnably difficult to say just why, even for Seattleites who've been watching Channel 5, sometimes with affection, sometimes exasperation, for well-nigh 30 years.

What seems to set KING apart from its local competitors, and from stations in many other cities, is that it doesn't rely on contrived on-air personalities to win audiences. It relies on people just as they are.

Since 1949 the most important of those people has been a lady named Dorothy S. Bullitt. In that year, Mrs. Bullitt, daughter of a lumber baron, was already in middle age and long widowed when she acquired the license of Seattle's first television station, then designated KRSC. The station is now called KING, and the company she and her daughters control, King Broadcasting, also owns three other television stations, seven radio stations, and several small cable systems in



Dorothy Bullitt's character has defined KING-TV since 1949.

four Western states. Mrs. Bullitt is now 92, and has not taken an official role in station management for a decade and a half, but it is a rare day when she is not seen in KING's corporate offices. Her character defines KING as thoroughly now as it did 36 years ago.

Mrs. Bullitt never acted the role of public figure, nor that of tough businesswoman, though she was clearly capable of playing corporate hardball when the need arose: Station hagiography records that she "stole" network affiliation with NBC from the network's longtime radio affiliate KOMO by the simple expedient

of cornering General David Sarnoff in his private railway compartment after a broadcast convention and making her case to him one-on-one.

But business seems never to have been Mrs. Bullitt's primary interest. She must have articulated her basic attitude to her staff many times over the years, because several present employees recall it in very much the same words: "There is no way I can lose money in this business with a network affiliation in a growing city, so this station is going to be something I can be proud of."

Pride, for Mrs. Bullitt, is based

on public service, and KING over the years has devoted more than its share of staff, budget, and air-time to traditional kinds of television public service: documentaries, election coverage, public service announcements, and news.

"In my opinion they adhere more than any other station to the real reason a station has a license," says a New York advertising man who has dealt with KING for decades (but doesn't want to be quoted by name). "And they put their public-service programs on in prime time, not at 2 A.M."

KING's newscasts come in first in Seattle ratings at 11 P.M., a close second at 5 P.M., but at 6:30 the station consciously risks coming in third. Rather than airing standard 6:30 newscasts like the competition's, KING devotes the half hour to in-depth coverage of a maximum of three topics.

As Mrs. Bullitt saw it, it was important for the news operation to be well funded, strongly staffed, and, above all, independent. "Independent," at KING, meant several different things,

Roger Downey is a Seattleite, an Obie-winning translator for the theater, and a contributing editor of the city paper The Weekly.

THE PRIDE OF DOROTHY S. BULLITT

among them independence from the opinions of ownership. It also meant independence from the prevailing winds of public opinion. In 1964, Mrs. Bullitt's son, Stimson, then station manager, took to the airwaves in person to state opposition to United States involvement in Vietnam. The effect—not just on the public or in local broadcast circles—was enormous. Bullitt's lonely editorial was probably largely responsible for the notion that still lingers in some circles that KING is "a left-wing operation."

From a detached point of view, KING looks about as left wing as the American Bar Association, but to some minds unpredictability of any kind is a sign of unsound opinions: and KING, for better or worse, has rarely been predictable. In large part, that's due to the kind of people KING has hired over the years.

In its early days, KING, like all other television stations, had to draw its news staff from the other media; but it continued to do so long after communications degrees had become the common first step to a broadcasting career. In the stormy 1970s, during the managership of Stimson Bullitt, the net was cast even wider. "The theory was: Television was something that could be *learned*; so look for people with good educations and interesting ideas and throw them into the pot," says David Brewster, who was a junior English professor at the University of Washington when tapped to be an assignment editor for KING News. "If they sank, too bad; you gave someone else a chance."

Brewster himself was one of the sinkers—though, after a stint on another KING venture, *Seattle* magazine, he bounced back nicely to become editor-publisher

of Seattle's city paper, *The Weekly*. But others stayed afloat, and their idiosyncrasies, as much as their broadcasting skills or intelligence, colored the station's image ineradicably. Even back in black-and-white days, news anchor Charles Herring would unpredictably depart from his sage, no-nonsense Cronkite-style news-reading to interject flickers of angry-Jehovah judgment or Russell Baker irony. Editorialist Herb Altshull might as easily devote one of his five-minute commentaries to a night at the opera as to goings-on at city hall. Investigative reporter Charles Royer (now running for his third term as Seattle's mayor) brought a trenchant (and sometimes near-libelous) personal edge to his exposés of questionable economic and political practices.

Giving individuals fairly free rein hasn't always been good for the station as a whole. Over the last nine years, there have been (including interim appointments) eight news directors. Some seem to have suffered burnout from trying to ride herd on a staff of argumentative individualists. The instability has shown up on the air, and in the ratings: In recent years, KING's *Evening News* has swung from the top to a poor third and back again, and a visible lack of clear news focus has contributed to the swings. (At the moment, under news director Don Varyu, the trend seems to be upward, and the overall look and pace of the *Evening News* is cleaner and tighter than it's been in a decade—with, so far, no loss in depth.) Individualism goes further at KING than allowing talking heads sometimes to talk like people. So far as outsiders can judge, KING management seems designed to allow room for varying opinions to be heard and for fresh ideas to surface. Instead of filling every time slot with reliable syndicated audience draws, KING gives time to the young program wizard Bob Jones and his production department, which usually has some experimental project on the air or in the works. This season it was *Almost*



KING-TV lets its on-air people be themselves.



Live, a Lettermanesque chat-variety show with tinges of Merv Griffin and Monty Python.

Greg Palmer is one of KING's people who embodies what's special and valuable about the station. Physically ponderous, defiantly balding, more dangerous-looking with a smile on his face than most people would be armed with a club, Palmer is uncategorizable. For a number of years, he served as the news department's all-round culture vulture and humorist, without ever stooping to undignified clowning or Shalit-like fulsomeness.

During the same period, Palmer wrote, directed, and produced (entirely within the news department and on a shoestring budget) the very odd and charming satiric program *The Year (So Far) in Review*. But he is also capable of feature reporting as good as any done today. Standing out among the many reports that accompanied the celebration of the 40th anniversary of D-Day are Palmer's daily reports from Normandy—in particular a few utterly tactful but heart-wrenching minutes spent with a veteran encountered on the beaches looking for the place where his own lifeline crossed the path of world history.

There are other people who've given KING its distinctive on-air character over the years—news anchors such as cool and capable Jean Enersen and Mike James, motherly morning-show host Bea Donovan, sardonic reporter-editorialist Don McGaffin, all the way back to kiddie-show host of the 1950s and '60s Stan Boreson and his imperturbable dog No-Mo. But it's Palmer who exhibits that character at its most concentrated: the sense of breathing, thinking, individual humanity glimpsed through the peephole of the small screen and extending well beyond it. ■

Some of KING's people (from top): Culture-reporter Greg Palmer; Pat Finley and Cliff Lenz; local kids who host Flash; Stan Boreson and his dogs.

MYSTERY! presents Daphne du Maurier's

My Cousin Rachel

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Starring Geraldine Chaplin
To most men she was an angel—of death
A four-part series begins
Thursday, December 5 at 9 PM on PBS
Check local listings
Host: Vincent Price

closed captioned for hearing impaired viewers

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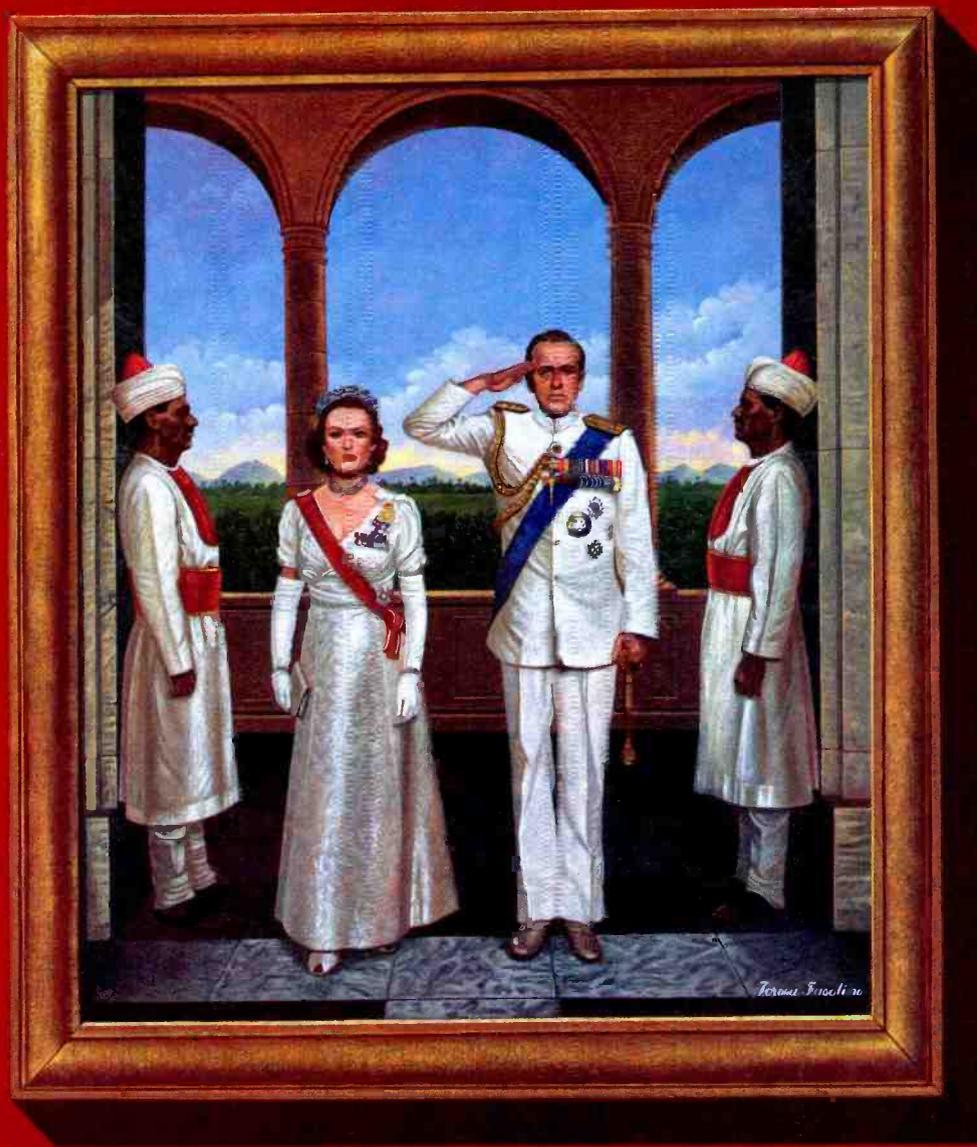


Illustration: Teresa Labalme. Design: L. Marmyagin. A. Kuznetsov. Art: S. B. 1947

Some called
it betrayal—
Others, his
finest hour

A six-part series
starring
Nicol Williamson
Janet Suzman

Begins Sunday 9PM
January 26 on PBS
Check local listings
Host: Alistair Cooke

CC Closed captioned for
hearing impaired viewers

Lord Mountbatten: The Last Viceroy, published by
Pocket Books, is available in local bookstores

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WHAT'S IRVING KAHN

UP TO NOW?

by James Traub

Irving Kahn has believed in new media for half a century. In 1938, at age 20, he made himself a handsome little income promoting big bands on the radio. By the time he was 30, Kahn was running Twentieth Century Fox's new radio and television division. At 40 Kahn had given the world the TelePrompTer and pioneered the pay-TV event. Ten years later he was the biggest cable operator on earth. By 60 he had sold his cable empire, built up another cable operation, and was preparing to sell *that* for about \$100 million. Today, at 67, when most of his chums have retired to Palm Beach, Irving Kahn is preaching the newest new medium—fiber optics. At a time when wise heads have concluded that the future has been oversold, old Irving Kahn passionately touts technology's limitless powers.

Kahn believes in the remorseless laws of technological evolution; he has made a personal fortune acting as their agent. Those who haven't adapted to the fiber-optic revolution, he believes, are speeding toward extinction wearing a silly grin. His old colleagues in the cable industry, sworn to coaxial cable, are, he'll have you know, "courting suicide." "It's like knowing you got a jet in the barn," Kahn says contemptuously, "and instead of building a system to handle a jet, you build one for a horse and buggy." Kahn loved those old horse-and-buggy days, but he believes in jets.

Irving Kahn looks something like a crude cartoon of a plutocrat, or perhaps the reigning king of Hawaii. His weight of almost 300 pounds is concentrated on a very short frame, so that he appears all torso, with neither neck nor shoulders. He has Leonid Brezhnev's thick black



stroke of eyebrow, and Sidney Greenstreet's mighty jowls. Kahn lives to eat, though not, apparently, with his former abandon. At the Four Seasons, the world capital of the power lunch, he gets the sort of treatment that David Rockefeller must receive when he drops in at the bank.

Kahn has always had an extremely sharp mind and infinite faith in his own conclusions. He committed his first entrepreneurial act upon graduation from college when he accepted an offer from the Larry Clinton big band, which was desperate to promote an upcoming concert in New York's prestigious Paramount Theater. In the telling, Kahn converts this event, as he does everything else, into an endlessly wandering anecdote. The gist, however, is that he had the apparently novel idea of buying advertising time on the radio. "We got such a plug," he recalls, "that there were *lines* of people at the Paramount. And I said, 'Hey, this radio business is pretty good.'" Kahn and a partner quickly became publicists for the big bands of Artie Shaw and Guy Lombardo, among others.

Now he had his first medium to champion, and he found his first complacent audience to sell it to. "Right about this time Zanuck [Darryl F. Zanuck, head of Twentieth Century Fox] had made up his mind that radio was the big enemy of the movies. I made the rounds of all the studios, explaining what a great thing radio was. I got turned down by all of them. Strictly to cover my percentages, I walked right in cold to the head guy at Fox. He was such a conservative guy, and I was maybe 19,000 times more of an aggressive, outgoing-type character then." By the time Kahn left he had been hired to promote an upcoming Fox film—

Steve Behrens

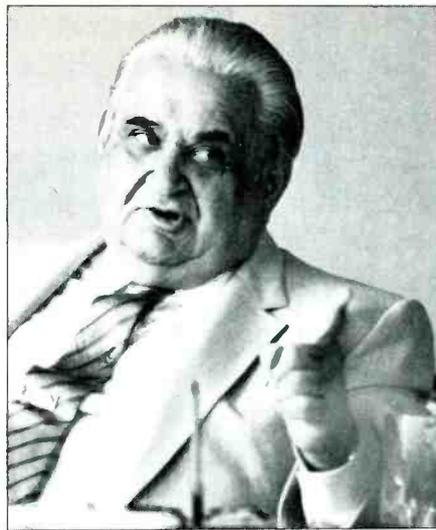
The indomitable promoter invests in the future with the passion of a believer and the agility of an entrepreneur. Today he's onto something tiny that could be very big.

a feat he considers to be one of his first great oratorical victories. The film did well, and 21-year-old Irving Kahn became a Fox publicist.

Kahn spent the next decade learning about movies, about radio, and then about television—the entire world, that is, of entertainment media. He met everyone. He watched a new media begin to eclipse an older one, and speculated about how in the world television would be used. He learned a management style from the imperious, whimsical, but fanatically attentive head of Fox, Spyros Skouras. And toward the end of his Fox days in Manhattan, he lived the life that other men only knew from Cole Porter songs. As a Fox executive he had to keep the studio's stars in the gossip columns. "Every night," he says, his napkin spread across his shirtfront as he huddles over a sensible salad at the Four Seasons, "I would put in an appearance at the Stork Club, El Morocco, the '21' Club. It was a terrific life for a year. But after a year, there was nothing new."

People who look hard enough for something new generally find it, and Kahn didn't have to wait long. One day in 1950 a new idea came walking through the door. "This unemployed actor walks into the office with a roll of butcher paper under his arm and says, 'I got a way to make actors remember their lines.'" What this nameless Edison had dreamt up was a crude version of the TelePrompTer. Kahn thought it was a pretty good idea, so he brought it upstairs to Skouras. The boss was unimpressed—in Irving Kahn's stories everybody resists the future until he whacks them over the head with it—so Kahn, with Skouras's blessing and some cash, found a partner and formed the TelePrompTer Corporation to market the new device.

Kahn had come to believe in another



Kahn preached to his cable colleagues the importance of offering information delivery as well as entertainment. No one listened.

new medium, television, and it was there in its live-broadcast studios that he marketed the TelePrompTer. First he hooked Arthur Godfrey, then Milton Berle—Mr. Television—and the TelePrompTer became standard issue. A few years later, Kahn, or someone else—the distinction tends to get blurred—had the bright idea of going into pay television. Kahn's new organization used an infant technology, large-screen projection, to show sports events in theaters. The company bought the pay rights for so many championship fights that guys with busted noses replaced Linda Darnell and Tyrone Power at the Irving Kahn table at "21."

One good idea always leads to another, as Kahn tells his story. In the late '50s, Kahn was looking for a new way to present pay television when he began to hear about cable. At that time the cable industry consisted largely of TV repairmen running 12-channel coaxial wire along telephone poles and into a few hun-

dred households, yet the idea fired Kahn's ambition. He bought his first system, which consisted of 750 households in Silver City, New Mexico, in 1959. When that one turned out to be a money-maker without anyone lifting a finger, Kahn bought another system, then another, and by the late 1960s TelePrompTer owned 130 cable systems, including one in Manhattan. Kahn estimates that the company was larger than the next five or six competitors.

Kahn is immensely proud of the status he attained. "When I got into cable it was a Mom and Pop deal out in the sticks. And after we got the feel of it not only were we the first to recognize what the possibilities were, but we were the leaders of the industry for 10 years." Kahn lectured the cable industry on its future, arguing that systems should deliver information services and not just entertainment. Along with the other founding members of the National Cable Television Association he fought successfully to keep Ma Bell out of the cable business, and warned that the telephone company, its own protests notwithstanding, constituted cable's greatest enemy. As early as the mid-'70s he prophesied the swift arrival of fiber-optic cable. Nobody listened, of course.

Suddenly, at the height of his powers, Kahn was caught in a compromising position. In 1971 he was hauled before a grand jury to explain why he had paid \$15,000 to several town commissioners in Johnstown, Pennsylvania while he was negotiating to keep the city's cable franchise. Kahn retells this story in excruciating detail, as if still fighting for his reputation before a jury. He was convicted of perjury. Kahn became notorious as the cable operator who got sent to prison. In 1973 and 1974 he served out 20 months of a five-year sentence, a bitterly humiliating experience that was compounded by his loss of control over TelePrompTer, Kahn's own flesh and blood, to rival Jack Kent Cooke. Kahn sold his shares for \$17 million, escaping, with typical timing, just before TelePrompTer's mighty crash.

When he emerged from prison, Kahn gave his first thought to retirement. "I thought I would just go fishing," he says, sitting at his desk behind a sculpture of a marlin poised on the tip of its tail, like a ballet dancer on point. (Kahn loves to

He rumbled into fiber optics with the delicacy of a tank crashing into a sleepy village. And now what sets his mind racing is the power of lasers.

fight marlin from his 65-foot boat, the one luxurious indulgence in his life—besides lunch.) “For 10 days I had a great time but by the 11th day I started walking up the walls.” Kahn decided to put his brain back in gear.

This time he pulled off a real coup. He began to race through southern New Jersey buying up cable systems, or bidding to build new ones, in adjacent towns. He then used a short-haul microwave relay system to link the towns into a single system with a single transmission center. “We literally played checkers,” says a gleeful Kahn, pointing out his conquests on a series of maps. “We got a little town here, a little town there,” and by the time the competition caught on, Kahn had them blocked out. Within a few years he had 55 contiguous systems. Still, it’s not like Kahn to double back on familiar territory. Already his mind, and a small chunk of his money, were elsewhere, and Kahn decided to look around for a buyer.

He found one, strangely enough, in the New York Times Company. To Kahn, still smarting from his recent humiliation, selling off his coup to this arbiter of truth and propriety represented a supreme opportunity for vindication. The Times, on the other hand, must have had its doubts about this endlessly digressive, roly-poly ex-felon. The negotiations dragged on for a year, establishing a high-water mark for patience in Kahn’s career. Finally, in March 1981, the Times bought the systems for an amount somewhere between \$80 million and \$126 million, depending on whom you believe. Kahn received about three quarters of the total, which was not bad for five years’ work.

Over the years, Irving Kahn’s approach has been remarkably progressive. If he could use radio to advertise the big bands, he figured he could use it even more profitably for the movies. He stumbled onto TelePrompTer accidentally, but it was a way into television. Kahn’s belief in television led to his experiments in pay-TV, which in turn led to his curiosity about cable. Corporate managers typically seek stability in a business; Kahn, the textbook entrepreneur, always looked for change. In the mid-’70s Kahn was convinced that fiber-optic technology would soon change cable television beyond recognition. Kahn didn’t know much about fiber optics, but he knew that researchers at Bell Labs and elsewhere had developed a hair-thin glass thread that could conduct light generated by a laser. Because light has a far higher frequency than sound—that is, a far smaller wavelength—the new glass technology could carry thousands of times more information than either copper wire or co-

axial cable (see box, next page). It was also completely experimental and untested, but Irving Kahn, agent for the future, was ready.

Kahn rumbled into fiber optics with the delicacy of a tank crashing into a sleepy village. “I started to look around,” he recalls, “and I got two young Ph.D.’s at Bell Labs who had been responsible for the development of that fiber.” To these young men he promised a piece of the company that he was about to create. Then he created the company. He convinced Insilco, a conglomerate that manufactured cable, among other things, that “if fiber optics came along they would be in the buggy-whip business.” Insilco executives were so impressed that they spun off a new company, Times Fiber, capitalized it to the tune of \$12 million, and gave Kahn 49 percent. In other words, Kahn, whose own investment totaled \$200,000, got \$6 million before earning a nickel.



What Kahn didn’t realize at first—this is the problem with plunging audaciously into the future—was that no one had yet developed a dependable, long-lasting light source to power the new glass cable. The semiconductor laser, a device no larger than a grain of salt, had long since been developed, but no one had managed to mass-produce it. So while Times Fiber continued to produce fiber-optic cable, Kahn decided to plunge into the laser business. He found one of the world’s leading laser specialists, C.J. Hwang, and more or less demanded that Hwang pay him a visit. The scientist recalls that when he arrived in New York from San Francisco, “Irving talked all kinds of big things. He didn’t impress me at all.” It was one of the rare moments when Kahn’s ingenious hype ran into scientific rigor. But Kahn wore down Hwang’s re-

sistance, and entrepreneurial ambition eventually triumphed over mere reason.

For the first few years Kahn seemed to be too far out in front. The new laser company, General Optronics, had so few employees and lost them so often that, Hwang says, “I used to come into the parking lot every morning and count the cars.” Then in 1978 a customer listed on General Optronics’s books as “Apex” bought 100 lasers, the largest order until then. In fact the company was Bell, which wanted to conceal the fact that it had gone elsewhere to purchase the fruits of the very technology it had developed. Telephone companies worldwide began replacing copper wire with fiber optics. So far, according to Kahn, the phone companies have laid a million miles of glass cable, and Kahn’s hazardous plunge into the wild blue yonder of technology looks like another inspired choice. General Optronics now ranks as one of the world’s largest laser firms, though the

‘Once it’s digital I can transmit the picture to any spot in the world at the rate of approximately 40 pages a minute.’ It’s a fabulous idea, right? It’s *got* to happen.

Japanese outproduce everyone else. Kahn, as ever, claims to be an industry leader, but one analyst comments that “Irving Kahn has an inflated view of his company.”

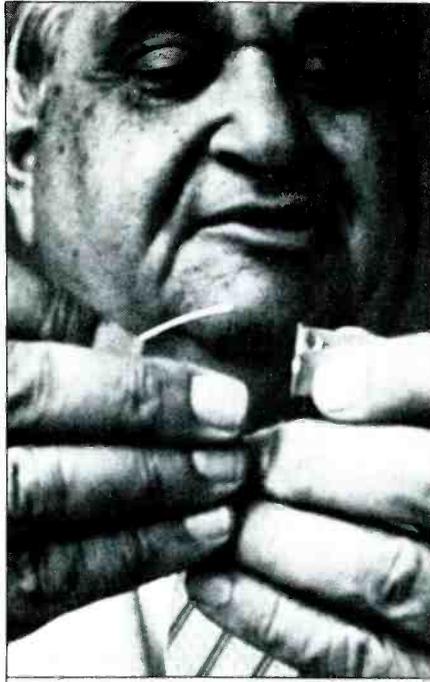
But Kahn wants to talk about ideas, mind-boggling ideas. Lasers have a power and versatility that set the mind racing. “You take an infrared laser scanner,” he begins excitedly, “and the scanner becomes a digitizer. A digitizer takes an analog picture and makes it into digital, okay? Once it’s digital I can transmit it to any spot in the world at the rate of approximately 40 pages a minute.” It’s a fabulous idea, right? It’s *got* to happen. Fortunately, General Optronics has developed a laser printer that can do the job for only \$25,000. “You’re going to have printers hooked up all around the goddamn world that way, and that’s the end

of Fax [the reigning electronic document-transmission system].” So far, General Optronics has taken a complete bath on its printer line.

A few forward-thinking companies have already bought a piece of the future. One of them, J.C. Penney, occupies two skyscrapers several blocks apart in midtown Manhattan. Company officials wanted to connect them for videoconferencing, but underground cable was prohibitively expensive, and Manhattan has no more frequencies available for microwave transmission. So General Optronics built a line-of-sight laser transmission system, installing a transmitter in one 39th-floor window, and a receiver, continuously adjusted to account for the slight sway of the buildings, in another. Kahn envisions Manhattan crisscrossed by beams of infrared light.

At present, General Optronics conducts almost all its business with the telephone companies, which use lasers with fiber optics. The companies are laying fiber-optic networks with the kind of energy that created the railway system in the 19th century. So far they have largely restricted their use of the glass wire to the trunk systems between switchboards, but Kahn is one of the very few who believe that they will soon be bringing fiber optics directly into the home. He recites one of his basic tenets: “Whoever gets that first fiber into the household runs the ballgame.” That is, fiber’s enormous bandwidth, especially with new laser technology, which may transmit as many as 500 million bits of information a second (about 10,000 times the rate possible with copper wire), will make current means of distribution, such as coaxial cable, archaic. A few telephone companies have already begun bidding to construct cable systems just as Kahn predicted, and very few cable firms have the capital, let alone the will, to make their own investments in fiber.

Kahn has a favorite scenario for the extinction of cable as we know it. He argues that with advances in satellite technology a genuinely dish-sized dish will replace today’s antennas. “You put one of those on top of an apartment house, and instead of wiring that house, *fiber* it, and let the entrepreneur, who does not need a city license, offer you a choice of two or three pay services, a news service, and a burglar alarm,” as well as home banking and shopping. With its immense bandwidth, fiber would also bring into the home such new technologies as high-definition television. Kahn concedes that “this is not going to happen overnight,” but theorizes that the change is so imminent that big-city systems now being built will suffer from competition with fiber optics.



THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE FIBER

Lasers can be used to destroy spacecrafts (or so the Defense Department believes), to perform microsurgery, and to transmit information. “Star Wars” researchers have created lasers that emit light frequencies at the farthest explored edge of the spectrum—X-rays. For the slightly more mundane purposes of telecommunications, there are lasers that generate light in the infrared part of the spectrum. These lasers switch on and off as rapidly as 565 million times per second—each pulse conveys one bit of information—and emit light within a very small frequency range to preserve the signal’s clarity.

A laser is a light-emitting crystal grown, like any other crystal, from a chemical solution. The crystals are grown on a solid, wafer-shaped substrate and then diced into tiny chips no larger than a grain of salt—each one a semiconductor laser. If the laser is to be used for telecommunications, it will then be coupled to a small strand of fiber-optic wire, which the user will then splice into his telephone or cable network. With the application of a tiny electrical current, the laser shoots into the fiber a beam of light that carries encoded electrical signals. At the receiving end, the signals are decoded into electrical impulses carrying sound, pictures, or data.

J.T.

Kahn positively gloats over this prospect, though most of the victims would be his old cronies. After all, didn’t he warn them? Dispassionate observers, however, tend to think that Kahn is still talking a lot of big things. Certainly fiber optics will “eventually” replace copper and coaxial wire in the household, but when? Jack Kessler, a fiber-optics industry analyst, predicts that little of the new technology will find its way into homes before the year 2000. Fiber optics are now cost-effective over long distances because the light signal, unlike the radio-wave signal in a coaxial cable, need not be reamplified, at substantial cost, every few thousand feet. Fiber optics’ immense carrying capacity also justifies its use in high-volume telephone trunk systems. But neither of these advantages apply to use in individual homes. It now costs between \$70 and \$150 to wire a subscriber’s home with conventional cable, according to an official at one of General Optronics’ major customers. Doing the same with fiber, he says, would run in the neighborhood of \$250, though the technology is changing so rapidly that any figure is conjectural. A second objection is that cable has already tried to bring information services into the home, and encountered resounding indifference. Kahn ticks off all the services that consumers will want—high-quality shopping, utility-meter reading, banking—but he seems to believe that consumers will clamor for them simply because they’re available. But a brief look at, say, the home-computer business shows this to be a dubious proposition.

Possibly Kahn is both right and wrong. He believes so deeply in new technology that he blurs the difference between what might happen in an ideal world, and what in fact will happen. In the long run cable will surely be dead; but so, as Keynes said, will we all. And yet Kahn’s passionate faith in the future has been the driving force behind his success. The progress of technology is by no means blind or unwilling. It is pressed forward by devotees, even by salesmen. Cable television itself, as Kahn likes to recall, was spread by believers who possessed an almost religious faith. The future catches the skeptics napping. Kahn himself dwells lovingly, endlessly, on the past; and yet he can dismiss it with equanimity: “Take a walk up Broadway from 72nd Street to 110th, and look carefully and see how many Art Deco garages and supermarkets you see. Every one of them used to be a theater. Big palaces. MGM had the Capitol. Fox had the Roxy.” He faithfully recites the roll call of vanished glory. He remembers a thousand names from the golden days. “But,” he says “that’s out of the past.” ■

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LOOKING AT HISTORY, we can hardly be surprised that parents, educators, and our other moral overseers are greatly worried about the damage television is doing to all of us, and particularly to our children. Moralists, by nature, have a tendency to worry about and decry the newest dominant form of popular entertainment. In Plato's ideal state, all imaginative literature was to be banned because of the bad influence it supposedly exercised, although this same literature has been admired ever since its creation as one of the proudest achievements of man.

Smoking, congregating in coffeehouses, dancing—each in its turn was thought to corrupt the young. Neither operas nor music halls escaped severe censure. Even such masterpieces as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* were blamed for having caused a wave of suicides (although in 18th-century Germany no records were kept from which one could have ascertained whether suicides had indeed increased).

Any new form of mass entertainment is viewed with considerable suspicion until it has been around for some time. It usually becomes accepted once people realize that life goes on in the same haphazard way as before. Then a newer entertainment medium becomes the focus of the same concerns. When I was a child, all kinds of evil influences were ascribed to the movies; today these influences are ascribed to television. When I was a young man, the comics were denounced because they supposedly incited the innocents to violence.

Even then, however, it was acknowledged that children were not all that innocent. It was known that they harbor angry, violent, destructive, and even sexual fantasies that are far from innocent. Today as well, those who evaluate the impact of television on children ought to understand truly what children are all about, and not maintain Victorian images of how perfect children would be if only they were not exposed to bad influences, or condemn as evil anything that children greatly enjoy.

Despite all the concern and the innumerable articles about what television does to our children, hard facts are few and difficult to come by. We know as little about the topic as my parents' generation knew about what movies did to us. My

Bruno Bettelheim is a professor of child psychology and the author of The Uses of Enchantment. His next book, Child-rearing, will be published next year by Knopf.

parents worried about children spending so much time in the dark movie palaces—castles where we lost ourselves in dreams as often as our meager finances permitted. At least television does not require the child to leave home or spend most of his allowance on tickets.

One of the movies' attractions, though we were unaware of it, was that they helped us escape from our parents' watchful eyes at home, and from other

prevents them from watching over and over again what is essentially the same program. They are neither bored nor stultified; all of us need to dream the same daydream until we have had our fill of it. In the public debate on the effects of television on children, the fact that TV programs provide material for daydreams is so much taken for granted that it is hardly discussed. There seems little doubt that most of us need to engage in day-

A Child's Garden of Fantasy

BY BRUNO BETTELHEIM

Children have a greater need for daydreams than adults do, and TV provides them abundantly. But the child's healthy escape from reality could be hazardous without a parent's guidance.

children's competition at play. Watching a film, we daydreamed of being as successful in life and love as its hero or heroine. We participated in exciting fantasies that made our humdrum (if not outright unpleasant) existence that much more bearable. We returned to everyday life restored by having seen the movie—often not just once, but a second or even third time, when ushers permitted it.

Our children manage to do the same thing, right in their homes, and no usher

dreams—the more frustrating reality is for us, the greater is our need.

Although we wish to see young children's lives free of troubles, they are in fact filled with disappointment and frustration. Children wish for so much but can arrange so little of their own lives, which are so often dominated by adults unsympathetic to their priorities. That is why children have a much greater need for daydreams than adults do. And because their lives have been relatively lim-

ited they have a greater need for material from which to form daydreams.

In the past, children saturated their imaginations with folk tales, myths, and Bible stories. There was plenty of violence and crime in Old Testament stories and fairy tales. There is a lot of cruelty, enmity within the family, homicide, even patricide and incest in Greek drama and Shakespeare's plays. This suggests that people have always needed a fare of vio-

they restrained their desire to exploit it. But I cannot deny that as long as it is not vicious or cruel—which it very often is—it holds a certain fascination.

Many children not only enjoy aggressive fantasies, but also need them. They need material for aggressive and retaliatory daydreams in which they can vicariously act out their hostile feelings without hurting close relatives. While the very young child may beat up a doll (thinking

ful animals.

For a 1976 study on television violence, violent cartoons were shown to both normal and emotionally impaired children. The latter, being unstable, were expected to be more vulnerable to the cartoons' influence. But after watching the violent scenes, most children in both groups were less chaotic and expressed their aggression, if at all, in a less random fashion than they had displayed before the viewing. Having acted out aggressive feelings vicariously, in fantasy, as they watched, most of these children had less need to act aggressively in reality.

On the other hand, some of the seriously disturbed children became more violent after watching the cartoons. Some youngsters do get ideas about how to act aggressively from what they see on the screen, which they then may attempt in reality. The decisive factors are not the types of events shown on the screen but the child's own personality (which is formed in the home under the parents' influence), and to a much smaller degree the child's present situation.

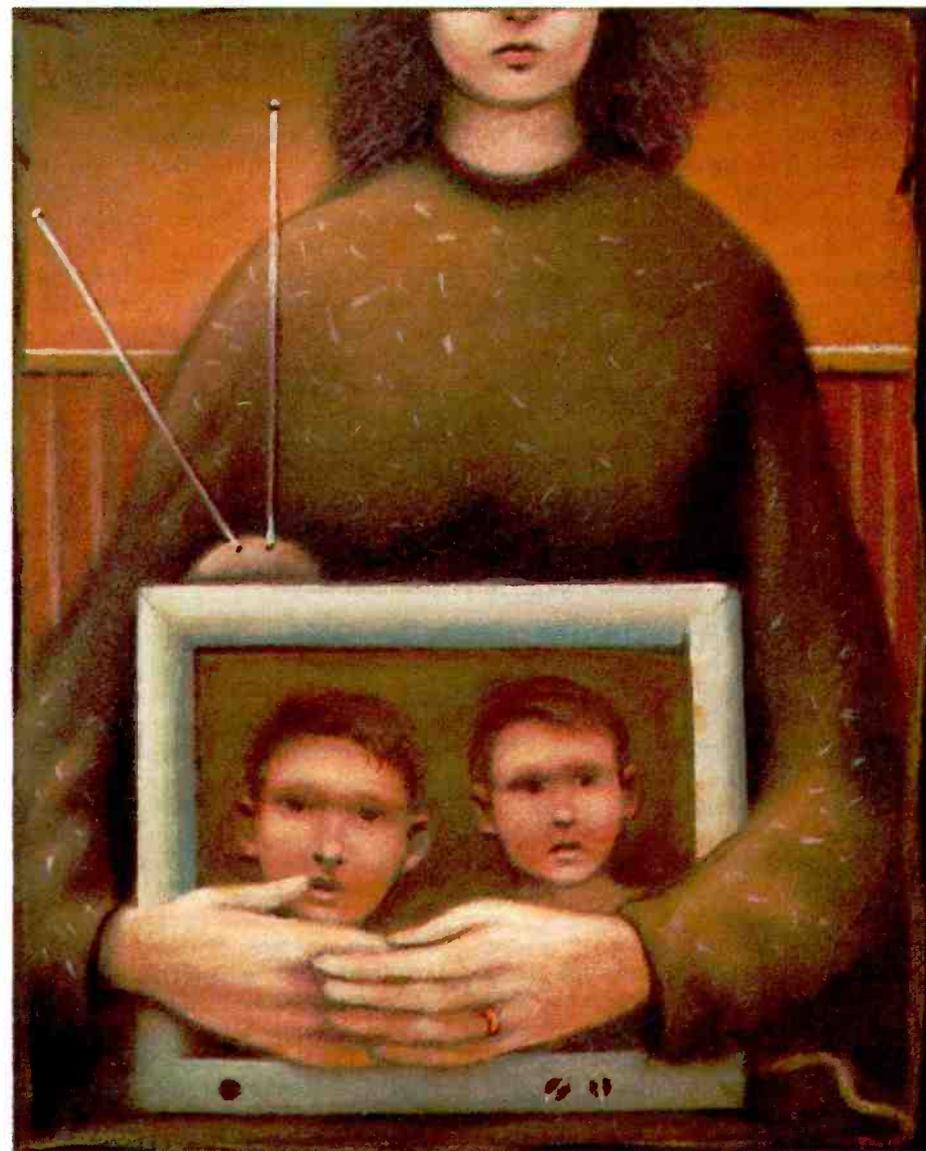
For normal children as well, television offers a wide variety of models to fantasize about and try out, as if for size. Children tend to dress, walk, and talk like the TV characters they admire. Whether this helps or hurts a particular youngster seems to depend on which television figure he emulates. And this is determined much more by his personality and the problems he faces at the moment than by what is shown on the screen.

As Wilbur Schramm and other researchers recognized more than two decades ago, "The chief part television plays in the lives of children depends at least as much on what the child brings to television as on what television brings to the child." And the younger the child is, the more this is so.

In an experiment reported in 1978 in *Child Development* magazine, second graders viewed a program and then were asked to retell its story so that "someone who has not seen it would know what happened." In response the children strung together random occurrences, showing no recall of relationships among the events they had observed. But children several years older were able to recall fairly well what they had seen. Thus, the younger the child, the less responsive he is to the actual content of the program; he responds to it in terms of his inner life.

Only the child whose emotional life is barren, or whose conditions of life are extremely destructive, will "live" in the world of TV programs. Doing so may be preferable to facing his actual life, which could lead him to give up all hope, or to explode into violence against those who

Warren Gebert



lent fantasies as an integral part of popular entertainment.

AMONG THE CONCERNS about television's effects on our children, none is greater than that it may induce them to violence. Probably none has been more thoroughly investigated. I personally dislike watching violence on the screen, and would be favorably impressed with broadcasters if

all the while of the new baby who stands in his way), or lash out at a parent, the slightly older child can no longer afford to express his aggression so directly. In healthy development, the child soon moves to daydreams in which not he, but some imaginary stand-in, discharges his anger against another distant and imaginary figure. That is why it is so gratifying to children when a cartoon shows a helpless little animal, such as a mouse, making a fool of much bigger and more power-

make his life miserable.

In fact, most children seek refuge at times in television-fed fantasy, although they do not permit it to engulf more than a very limited part of their lives. Television is truly an ideal medium for the purpose of fantasizing because it permits the child to return immediately from the fantasy world to real life, and also to escape as quickly into the television world when reality becomes too much to handle. All it takes is turning a switch.

We ought to remember how restricted children's lives have become. It used to be possible to let children roam all by themselves for much of the day, or in the chance company of other children. They used to play somewhere in the neighborhood, in an empty shack, or wander the woods and fields. There they could dream their own daydreams, without parents nearby demanding that they use their

remain predictably the same.

Even such an exceptional program as *All in the Family* was centered around main characters who never changed and never learned, no matter how obvious the lessons of past episodes. In this, as in many other programs of less merit, the good guys learn as little from their experiences as do the bad guys. Even after the most incredible events, characters remain the same as before. But growth and development, and images of such growth, are what the child needs if he is to believe that he himself can grow. He needs to fantasize about how he will change, learn, and become a better person because of what life has taught him.

Not only do television characters fail to learn from their experiences, but no matter how severe their difficulties, their creators always provide them with simple, easy, instantaneous solutions, as simple

knowledge. Some programs do *tell* how slow and difficult progress is, but hearing that said makes little impression on the child when characters on the same program can usually solve the greatest difficulties in 30 or 60 minutes.

Television is, after all, a medium best suited for entertainment; it does not readily lend itself to the balanced judgment, to the consideration of all the pros and cons of an issue. We should not expect of this medium what is contrary to its nature. The information received from television programs will always tend to be one-sided, slanted, and simplified. This is why a young child will not truly learn by watching even the best programs—even those designed for his age. His life experience is too limited. Adults or older adolescents can bring their accumulated life experience to watching television, which permits them to adopt the proper perspective. The child needs adult help to do so.

There is hardly a program from which a child could not learn a great deal, provided some responsible adult does the necessary teaching. Even violent programs are no exception, provided the child is not so anxious or angry that he is completely overwhelmed by what he watches. It is very important for children to develop the right attitudes toward violence, and closing one's eyes to its existence can hardly be considered the most constructive attitude. Every child needs to learn what is wrong with violence, why violence occurs, and how he ought to deal with it in himself and others.

What is necessary is for parents to explore with the child what he, all on his own, made of what he saw and heard. We must let the child tell us what he got from the program, and start from there in helping him sort out which impressions came from within himself and which from the program, which were good and which were not, and why.

This requires, of course, that the adult watch along with the child. Doing so, the parent can no longer use television as an excuse for not spending time with his child. That, I believe, is the real danger of television—a human limitation, not one inherent in the medium. We should blame neither our children nor television if the reason they watch it is that we, their parents, are not very interested in spending time with them. We ought to consider that the more time we spend with them, the less time they will be watching. The more time we devote to talking with them about what they have watched, the more intelligent and discriminating viewers our children will become. The fact remains that our personalities and values will have much more effect than television in shaping our children and their outlook on life. ■

It is very important for children to develop the right attitudes toward violence—and closing one's eyes to its existence can hardly be considered the most constructive attitude.

time more constructively.

Today, for our children's security, we cannot permit them to fend for themselves in that way. Yet, to grow up well, every child needs time and space to be himself. Watching television gives him this chance. Being able to choose the program that will spark and feed his dream has become a way for the modern child to exercise his self-determination, an important experience in growing up.

ODDLY ENOUGH, in the dizzyingly active world of TV fiction, one kind of movement is in short supply: personal growth. The child needs to learn from his experiences and to grow because of them. This is why the child is best served by programs that show how characters' experiences change them—in personality, in outlook on life, in relationships with others, in the ability to cope better with future events. Not only children's programs but also adult programs watched by children should avoid using stock characters who

as those promised by commercials. Using a particular brand of hair spray guarantees success in life and love; ingesting a pill does away with all our worries. Programs and commercials alike mislead the child by making it appear there is, or ought to be, an easy solution to every problem he encounters, and that there must be something wrong with him, his parents, and society, if these so readily available answers are withheld from him.

In this respect even public television's educational programs are misleading. Whether *Sesame Street* or *Nova*, they create the illusion that one will easily and immediately become well educated. And whether the child is promised popularity by toothpaste commercials or knowledge by PBS, he is encouraged to believe that he will succeed effortlessly. He doesn't, of course, and becomes dissatisfied with himself and society.

A large part of the problem is inherent in the medium. To hold viewers' attention, television programs have to simplify matters and cannot follow the arduous process required for a person to gain



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SMUTBUSTERS TAKE AIM AT VIDEO

by Tom McNichol

IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE in the market for an "adult" videocassette, and you wander into one of Jack Messer's Video Store outlets (eight convenient locations in greater Cincinnati), you'll have to be a little discreet about your intentions. After all, four fifths of Messer's customers have come in to pick up a mainstream Hollywood film, and he doesn't want you bumping into them while they're making their selections. So, one of Messer's employees will lead you to "the binder"—the under-the-counter list of what's hot in adult video, Beta or VHS. In June 1984, as a matter of fact, two Fairfield, Ohio police officers did just that—pored through the binder and selected five promising titles, including *Tapestry of Passion*, *French Classmates*, and *Penetration*. The sale wound up costing Messer money: The local district attorney brought obscenity charges against him and put him on trial last January.

The trial, which featured an eight-hour screening of all five cassettes, ended in a hung jury. But for Messer, other retailers, and some cable operators as well, the experience has them glancing over their shoulders at what looks like a galloping posse of conservative church and "decency" groups intent on driving video-porn out of town.

"It's scary," says Messer. "Most of these people have never even seen an X-

Tom McNichol is a Washington, D.C. writer who often covers the media and business.

rated movie, and they're trying to ban them for everyone. I know a lot of dealers who feel like I do—I wouldn't sell them if nobody bought them."

Not all video retailers and cable operators opt to have their day in court when threatened with obscenity charges. In Buffalo, a chain of Rite Aide drug stores withdrew its advertised "Swedish Erotica" cassettes in March following pressure from the Morality in Media group. The same month, Cox Cable Tidewater in Virginia dropped the Playboy Channel after seven obscenity counts were handed down by a Virginia Beach grand jury. Cox offered its 12,500 orphaned subscribers a chance to replace the Playboy Channel with a movie service, Cinemax—not exactly an even swap. And in Phoenix, obscenity charges against two video retailers have led local dealers to set up a defense fund for future cases.

The adult films under attack aren't much different in content from the thinly plotted X-rated films that have been available on 8mm film for decades. What's new is where they're being sold. Once banished to the mail-order ghetto or sleazy downtown movie outlets, adult films are now available on cassette in squeaky-clean video stores comfortably nestled in suburban shopping malls. The spread of sexually explicit material into America's middle-class mainstream through video and cable has led many towns to reexamine their "contemporary community standards" (as the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in *Miller v. California* put it). This year juries in Florida, Ohio, Arizona, and Virginia have been asked to watch and apply their own standards of obscenity to X-rated videocassettes.

"There's nothing sacred about an obscene videotape, just because it's a new medium," says Bill Swindell, national director of Citizens for Decency Through Law, which provides legal assistance to prosecutors cracking down on adult video. "It's the same old obscenity with a brand new set of clothes." Swindell and representatives of other anti-porn groups are seeking support from Washington, where the Reagan Administration and conservative congressmen are rushing to

the forefront of the battle. Their social-issues agenda calls for stronger specific regulation of the mass media while, paradoxically, the Administration and many of its friends on the Right argue for general deregulation.

Jesse Helms, the senator who sought to invade CBS with right-wing investors, has turned his guns on cable, and on public-access channels in particular, for airing "the vilest type of pornography." Helms has introduced a bill that would extend existing federal obscenity laws for broadcast television to cable and pay-TV, as well as to "dial-it" telephone services.

The Justice Department has also rediscovered the pornography issue and has formed the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. The 11-member panel is hearing testimony in six cities and will submit its recommendations next May. Already the commission has been the subject of complaints from video dealers, cable operators, magazine publishers, and civil libertarians who say that it's little more than a rubber stamp for the Administration's tougher stance on enforcement of local obscenity standards. When President Reagan announced plans to establish the commission in May 1984, he made it clear that one of its tasks would be to overturn the findings of a 1970 Presidential commission on pornography, which concluded that pornography has no significant effect on social behavior. (It appears to be axiomatic in Washington that the findings of one federal commission can only be undone by another.) Reagan took direct issue with the 1970 findings. "It's time to take a new look at these conclusions," he said. "And it's time to stop pretending that extreme pornography is a victimless crime."

Although the new commission is looking into sexually explicit material in all media, Attorney General Edwin Meese has singled out cable and cassettes for making "pornography . . . available at home to almost anyone, regardless of age, at the mere touch of a button." Meese's choice to head the commission was Henry Hudson, a smutbuster of some renown in the Washington suburbs. As the prosecutor in Arlington County, Virginia, he supervised repeated "sting" operations several years ago in which police telephoned expensive call girls in Washington and then arrested them when they arrived at staked-out hotel rooms on the Virginia side of the Potomac.

During the first two days of commission hearings this summer in Washington, Hudson led the panel (which includes a priest, a psychologist, a former assistant attorney general, and a child-abuse expert) through a grisly sampling of the

worst the pornography industry has to offer. FBI agent Ken Lanning presented a graphic slide show, beginning with selections from over-the-counter adult magazines and video and quickly segueing into scenes of fetishism, pedophilia, bestiality, sadomasochism, and dismemberment. Later, a vice squad detective from Fairfax County, which adjoins Hudson's home county, treated the commission to another slide show. To the noticeable discomfort of several on the panel and most in the gallery, he described in detail the sights, sounds, and even smells of a suburban adult bookstore featuring 25-cent peep-shows.

The same day, the commission heard testimony from Surgeon General C. Everett Koop that made adult films sound at least as dangerous as cigarette smoking: Pornography poses a "clear and present danger" to American public health, he said. While not going so far as to suggest that adult videocassettes must bear warning labels, Koop made it clear that, in his view, the 1970 pornography commission's conclusions were based on insufficient evidence. By the time journalist Kandy Stroud's testimony laid bare the sexual excesses of rock music lyrics, even the most impartial panel would have found it hard not to recommend tougher anti-porn measures across the board, which many civil libertarians believe the commission is predisposed to do.

"The more you hear Hudson talk, the more it's clear that the commission has already reached its conclusions," says Barry Lynn, legislative counsel for the ACLU, who also testified before the commission. "To them, it's all smut. The writing is going to be on the wall for anyone who wants to sell or buy sexually explicit material."

Throughout the country, video retailers say that adult videocassettes account for 15 to 25 percent of their total sales, with one dealer in four not carrying any X-rated selections at all. Paul Sweeting, associate editor of *Video Market Newsletter*, estimates that adult videos bring in more than \$100 million annually. But Sweeting points out that adult videos have in recent years become a smaller part of the retailer's business.

"There are more feature films to sell now, so there's more incentive for a retailer to drop his adult line if he's under pressure from a prosecutor," says Sweeting. "If adult tapes only make up 15 percent of a retailer's business, he's got to be thinking, 'Is this worth the headache?'"

But other video dealers under pressure have decided to continue selling adult films, in deference to either the First Amendment or their balance sheets. In Phoenix, two video dealers face an ob-

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”



Critics suspect that,
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scenity trial this fall on charges suburban Maricopa County lodged last March. In response, 123 local retailers established the Arizona Video Tape Rights Coalition, which will provide funds for defendants in this and other obscenity cases, and will also meet with lawmakers to argue for less severe penalties.

"It's going to cost us about \$300,000 to defend the obscenity cases we're dealing with now," says Art Lauer, a local video retailer and one of the coalition's founders. "With that kind of money, even if you win, you lose. There are a lot of county attorneys out there who see prosecuting obscenity cases as a good way to fulfill their commitments to certain segments of the community."

Some communities have moved against adult films on cable television, but so far have had little success getting the measures enacted. A cable-porn bill in Illinois died in committee in July, and a similar ordinance in Miami was ruled unconstitutional last spring. But local efforts may be helped along by Senator Helms's Cable-Porn and Dial-Porn Control Act. The bill contains provisions that would establish penalties of up to two years in prison for cable and dial-porn operators convicted of transmitting "obscene, indecent, or profane language"

and increase the maximum fine for obscenity from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

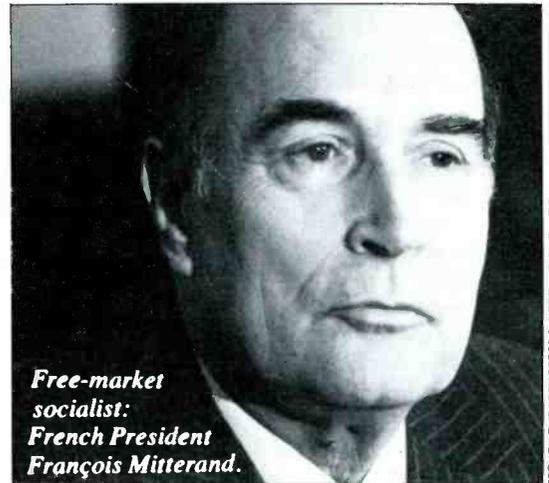
Though few think Helms's bill in its present form is likely to clear the Senate, even its defeat would give local critics of nudity and profanity on cable a rallying point. Similarly, the Commission on Pornography, while limited to recommending changes in federal law, is likely to put the issue squarely in the public eye.

"If the commission does nothing else, it will increase public awareness about how much has changed since the last commission," says Swindell of Citizens for Public Decency Through Law. "A lot of prosecutors aren't aware of the threat that pornography poses to their community."

Video dealers and cable operators, of course, warn of a greater threat in erosion of the community's First Amendment rights. The argument over what is pornographic is nearly as old as sex itself, but not for a decade have the two sides seemed so clearly poised for confrontation. In the larger cities, the video retailers and cable operators will likely prevail, urban community standards being what they are. But in some conservative towns, the only place to see an X-rated movie may soon be at the county courthouse during an obscenity trial. ■

France: A REVOLUTION IN THE MAKING

Paradoxically, the Socialist government has begun opening the airwaves to private enterprise, loosening its hold on the state-run channels.



*Free-market socialist:
French President
François Mitterrand.*

FRENCH EMBASSY PRESS & INFORMATION DIVISION

BY ROGER M. WILLIAMS

Early this year, when the Mitterrand government commissioned a study of the prospects for introducing privately run television in France, an adviser to the prime minister confessed, "The problem is that we do not know how to bring it all together."

The confusion is hardly surprising. In contemporary France, both "all" and "together" are difficult concepts. Start with the fact that, for a resolute democracy, France has allowed its government an extraordinary degree of control over television; since the medium's first appearance, all channels (originally two, now four) have been state dominated. Then add the politically curious fact that socialists (the regime of François Mitterrand), not conservatives, are pushing for a degree of privatization, and then the complexities brought on by President Mitterrand's simultaneous push for other video innovations—a nationwide cable operation and Europe's first direct-broadcast satellite.

All these changes need to be brought into line with the long-prevailing governmental conviction that mass communications should enhance the quality of French life. However noble that ideal, in practice it has meant limiting programming—in both the number of channels available and the amount of foreign (read "American") material they can show.

French television has always been something of a government lapdog. Pre-Gaullist ministers routinely whipped the channels and their staffers into line. DeGaulle himself went several steps further. His administration placed loyal followers in key broadcasting jobs, and his ministers censored any programs that reflected unfavorably on the government. Explained the great man with disarming frankness: "My opponents have much of the press on their side, so I keep television."

DeGaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, up-

held that tradition, complete with the slogan, "French television is the Voice of France." President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing loosened the reins, appointing some independent thinkers to influential positions with the networks and eliminating the most blatant forms of governmental interference in programming. Still, to some officials it seemed improper for the Voice of France to criticize the country. Associates of environmentalist Jacques-Yves Cousteau recall how his film series on industrial wastes in France was kept off the air for years.

When Mitterrand and the socialists took over in 1981, they argued that modern mass communications requires less governmental direction and a degree of decentralization. They therefore pledged to end the state monopolies over radio and television. While that contravenes orthodox leftist thinking, it fits with Mitterrand's perception of the nation's current needs.

Mitterrand's biggest change to date has been the introduction of France's first pay channel, Canal Plus. It took the air last November with a rather tired assortment of old cop and comedy series—most of them American—and even older movies. Subscriptions to the new channel soared initially, but dropped sharply when the prospect of free private television appeared on the horizon.

Preoccupied with financial problems, the management of Canal Plus has thus far escaped significant political interference. Not so the three established channels: TF-1, Antenne-2, and the regionally oriented FR-3. Deep down, Mitterrand seems to share the conservatives' belief that TV is a spoil that belongs to the victors and a medium too important to be left to broadcasters.

Although he established an ostensibly independent High Authority to oversee television, that body has been a good deal less than fully independent. Last fall, it rubber-stamped the appointment of Jean-Claude Héberlé, a Mitterrand supporter

Roger M. Williams, an American journalist working in Paris, has written extensively on media and political topics.

and friend, to head Antenne-2, the best of the national networks. Last April, amid the shock waves from that appointment, Antenne-2 lost through resignation two of its most respected people: news chief Albert Du Roy, and anchorwoman Christine Ockrent, whose nonpartisan, professional presentations had brought her deserved celebrity.

The chief difference between the Mitterand era and those of his predecessors, says a longtime observer of the French media, is that "nowadays political power over them is wielded much more through personal influence than outright manipulation of the news." The wielding can be naively clumsy—the blatant efforts, for example, to secure regular, free, and "unanswered" TV time for Prime Minister Laurent Fabius. The director of TF-1 obligingly offered the smooth Fabius a weekly prime-time spot for the purpose of "explaining" government policies. After protest, that was reduced to 15 minutes a month. Only then was the opposition granted a right of reply.

Meanwhile, Mitterand's cronies in high TV positions have done little to improve the quality of programming on the state-operated channels. Cultural programs tend to be done well; since the French talk as well as they cook, talk shows are particularly good, most notably the Friday night offering, *Apostrophe*. But public affairs programs, including serious documentaries, are often ponderous. On the entertainment side, creativity is so lacking that the smash success of recent years was the series called *Chateauvallon*, a knock-off of *Dallas*, which remains equally popular. *Chateauvallon*'s characters were much less brassy but much more sexually active than those in *Dallas*—a difference that suits French viewers just fine. And *Chateauvallon*'s native origins appealed to intellectuals who fret over what they call the "cultural imperialism" of American imports. (Tragically, a serious auto-accident injury to one of the female stars caused cancellation of the series.)

Foreign programming is a relatively minor problem in the effort to set up France's private television system. Far thornier are such issues as how many channels to authorize, who will operate them, and how much advertising to allow on them. While Mitterand has revealed no firm decisions in these areas, he has indicated that he wants a private system in operation by the end of next year.

The French president is known to favor the establishment of a handful of private networks that will branch into a nationwide grid of 80 to 100 local stations. Applicants are aswarm. Among them are numerous media heavyweights, including Robert Hersant, the nation's most prominent press baron (*Le Figaro*), who wants to establish his own network; Hachette, the largest French publisher; and Compagnie Télévision Luxembourgeoise, which broadcasts from across the border and has considerable influence in France.

They are drawn not only by opportunities to manipulate public opinion but also by the prospect of raking in advertising revenues. The government restricts the ad sales of the state channels, and commercials account for little more than one quarter of their income. That leaves many potential

advertisers hungering for other TV outlets, and it is virtually certain that the new private channels will run lots of commercials. But the admen worry that, as on the state channels, they will not be allowed to interrupt programs.

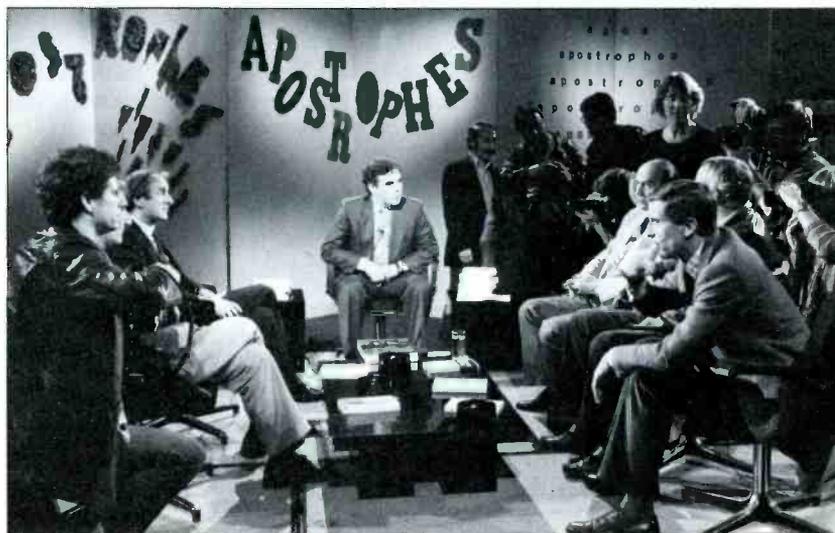
Surprisingly little opposition has been voiced to Mitterand's general plan to privatize. Canal Plus is understandably concerned, however, because private broadcast channels will be able to give away what it is trying to sell. Some leftists are worried also, lest too much propagandizing power land in the hands of Hersant and other conservatives.

To test the track, the government resorted to the familiar expedient of appointing a high-level commission charged with making recommendations. The commission, headed by attorney Jean-Denis Bredin, has called for the creation of two private networks and an unspecified number of local stations. All would be licensed by the government and financed largely or entirely by advertising. The report envisions no change with regard to Canal Plus but recommends the establishment of other pay channels.

In July, Prime Minister Fabius submitted his own plan to Mitterand. Fabius wants four networks. Three would be run by large radio stations, all of them considerably under the influence of Sofirad, a Havas-like government organization. The fourth would be a non-pay version of Canal Plus. In addition, Fabius would split the third state-owned channel, designating half of it as the founda-



Shock waves were created by the appointment of Mitterand crony Jean-Claude Héberlé to head France's best network.

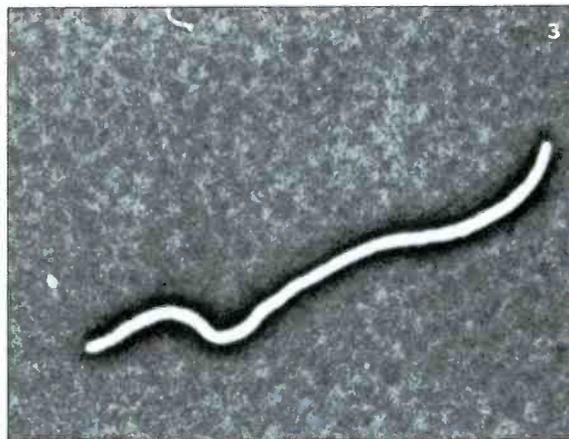
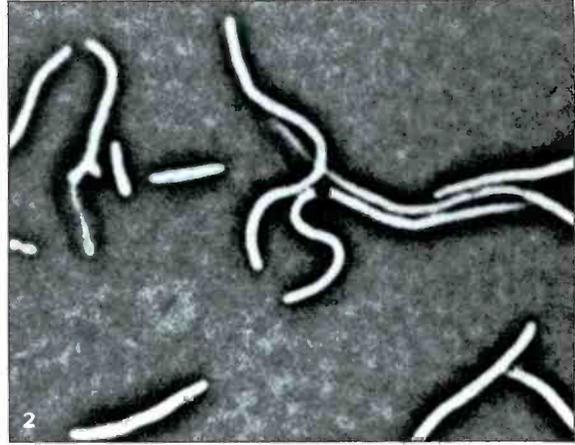
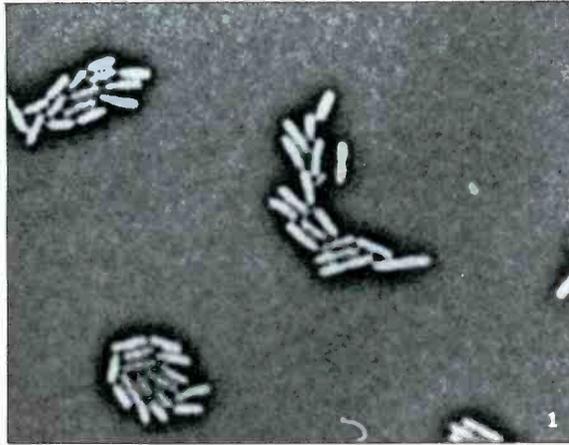


tion for a Europe-wide, satellite-based cultural station.

No one seems to know whether Mitterand will lean toward the Bredin or Fabius plans or his own variation on them. But everybody believes that he'll decide shortly—with a keen eye on the 1986 legislative elections. Faced with strong attacks from the Right and ideological divisions on the Left, he badly needs an issue with broad public appeal—such as expanding the television system. Almost any policy he announces is likely to please the French viewer/voter, who will be able to push those other buttons and see something appear—even if it's only another version of *Dallas*. ■

Apostrophe, one of the premier talk shows. The French care as much about talk as about food.

We've declared total war...



Bacteria in lab dish (1) elongate after addition of piperacillin, a new antibiotic (2); the cell wall of the microorganism weakens (3), then ruptures and dies (4).

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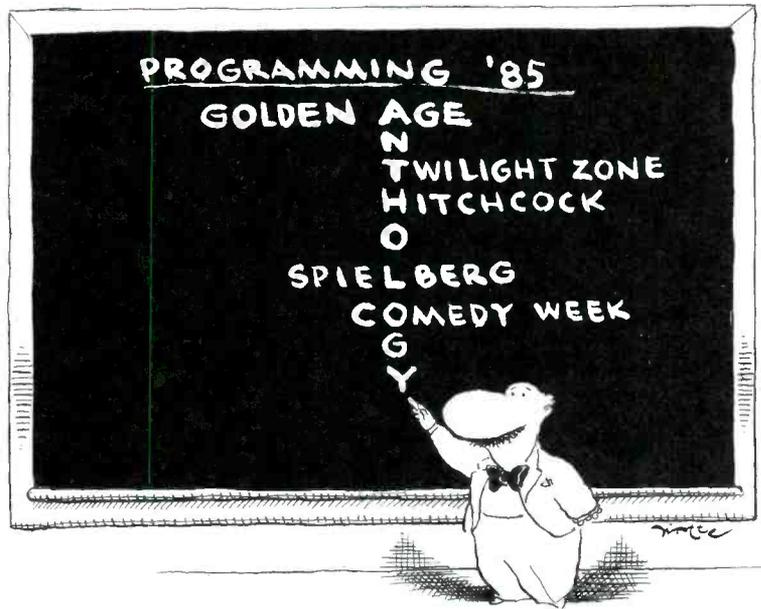
But the war against infectious diseases continues and our search for even newer, more effective medications goes on.



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A Season to Remember Television By

by William A. Henry III



ALTHOUGH it often seems that nothing much ever changes in programming—that, as Fred Allen put it, “Imitation is the sincerest form of television”—in fact each decade of the medium’s life has been dominated by a characteristic form of show. The beginning in the 1940s was, not surprisingly, an age of vaudeville. Milton Berle’s *Texaco Star Theater* and its imitators tossed together a hodgepodge of skits, songs, dances, and standup comedy, ignoring the concept of artistic unity in favor of the kind of variety that audiences savored on radio and in music halls. The 1950s are remembered nowadays primarily through reruns of *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, *Burns and Allen*, and the like, but the decade earned its familiar Homeric epithet as the Golden Age of Television chiefly for its anthology shows, epitomized by *Playhouse 90*, which weekly offered such fare as the debuts of *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, *The Miracle Worker*, *The Days of Wine and Roses*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*. The 1960s, a barren time for television as it vacillated between trying to ignore the social change sweeping the nation and trying to catch up with it, were redeemed by the consciences of a few hour-long episodic dramas, notably *The Defenders*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Ben Casey*, *Mr. Novak*, and especially *East Side, West Side*. The 1970s were the heyday of the sitcom, ranging in tone from the emotionally raw and earnest *All in the Family*, *M*A*S*H*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* to the even louder but not loutish *Laverne & Shirley* and *Happy Days*. Through its first half, the 1980s seems to be the decade of the nighttime soap opera, as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest*, *Knots Landing*, and their countless kin reignite the votive flame of tawdry fantasy after a late-1970s glut of “flawed, human” characters and gritty realism.

Given the copycat propensities of the networks, one might expect this year’s fall schedule to add yet another nighttime soap or two, and it does. One might also expect to see a few

variants of Bill Cosby’s wholesome family sitcom, which is all but indistinguishable from *Father Knows Best*. One might look for attempts to ape the slick, rock-videolike look and pace of *Miami Vice*. In each case, one would be right. There are also a few offbeat shows, some venturesome, some downright weird. The most hyped by critics (an embrace that is, alas, almost surely a kiss of death) is NBC’s *The Golden Girls*, a sweet little glimpse of four sixtyish women who are roommates in Florida (wags call it *Miami Nice*). The casting is good (Beatrice Arthur, Betty White, Rue McClanahan, Estelle Getty), and the producer, Susan Harris, has a track record of successes, including

Soap. The show is well made, but its significance lies in its willingness to be about, and for, an older audience. As the country gets older and as older citizens get richer, advertisers are beginning to recognize the shortcomings of their obsessive demographic appeal to mothers aged under 35. For sheer entertainment, ABC offers a macho private eye, *Spenser*, based on Robert Parker’s best-selling novels and starring a serviceable leading man, Robert Urich, while CBS has a glittering Brit, Edward Woodward, as a James Bond-like agent called *The Equalizer*.

Far more noteworthy than all these revivals of familiar genres, however, is the one unmistakable trend of the season: four shows that collectively constitute the return of a characteristic Golden Age

genre that had been pronounced dead—the anthology. For a decade and more it has been the unchallenged conventional wisdom of the networks that anthologies cannot succeed with today’s audiences. Such shows were never overwhelmingly popular even in the 1950s, and were viable then only because television sets were expensive and thus for a while the audience was generally educated and well-to-do. For the mass audience, the argument goes, anthologies do not offer dependable enough satisfactions.

The basic marketing problem, it seems, is that anthologies do not provide the week-after-week lure of family characters and circumstances. Because each story is self-contained, each story must sell itself to viewers from scratch. Therefore, each

The return of
Twilight Zone
bets that Baby
Boomers crave the
TV of their
youth. But will
nostalgia support
a weekly series?

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Michael Witte

story must have a "hook" that can be summarized in a 10-second promotional ad or two lines of type in *TV Guide*. Compounding those problems is an artistic and logistical one: Casting a series and developing its basic ambiance and story line is hard enough, even with months and millions to lavish, while assembling all the creative elements of a one-shot show every week is almost unimaginable. Finding and honing scripts seems an almost insuperable task in itself—although in the Golden Age producers did it routinely. The effort and risk involved in running an anthology series is akin to that of delivering a made-for-TV movie every week, but on a much lower budget.

To avoid these pitfalls, the networks have, predictably, hedged their bets by scheduling shows that are in some way presold, either on the strength of the producer-director, the host, or the subject matter. Two of the four, moreover, solve the script problem by being in essence faithful remakes, episode by episode, of bygone anthologies that continue to thrive in syndication. All four have been planned meticulously to avoid any potential for artiness and esoterica. There is nothing remotely akin to *Playhouse 90* among these entertainments.

The least well defined is *Steven Spielberg's Amazing Stories*. As Hollywood's foremost current movie producer-director, Spielberg is quite a catch for NBC. All three networks have been trying for years to make a fantasy adventure series that captured the devil-may-care daring, tongue-in-cheek peril, and nonstop action of Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but with the arguable exception of *The A-Team*, none of these attempts has succeeded. Now Spielberg himself will seek to renew his magic, without the luxuries of money and time. He will also have to adjust to the narrative structure of commercial television, which, unlike films, is not cumulative but instead episodic. The best TV writing takes advantage of, rather than fights, the necessity of an interruption for commercials every eight minutes or so. Spielberg's films, which depend so much on pacing and on a delicate ballet of tension and relief, are the antithesis of effective writing for television. Thus the prospect of making a series that retains his style seems daunting at best.

In contrast to ballyhooing Spielberg as Hollywood's most famous living director, NBC will rely on the sales value of an even more renowned filmmaker who is, inconveniently, dead, to promote another anthology, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The absence of Hitchcock should not be an obstacle, however. Although he introduced all of the episodes broadcast during the original series' decade-long run, he directed only about 20, yet the show retained a consistently wry and sardonic tone. Mystery buffs regard many of the episodes as classics, full of the frissons of animal horror that today's literary, self-conscious genre fiction often sacrifices in favor of metaphysical rumination. My personal favorite is *Lamb to the Slaughter*, in which a woman clubs her husband to death with a frozen leg of lamb and then feeds the roasted evidence to the investigating police. NBC tested the appeal of remakes of some other highly regarded Hitchcock episodes in a two-hour special this spring, and scored a ratings coup. The plump director, dead since 1980, still served as host: a new computer technology allowed the network to turn his black-and-white appearance into color

Anthologies involve a risky break with TV rules. Viewers should welcome the fresh air, even if it is circa 1958.

footage. It turned out that his witticisms about the criminals and the sponsors (classes he tended to equate) applied with just as much force to the new versions. In a spiteful counter-programming ploy (one that provides yet another argument for buying a videocassette recorder), NBC plans to run *Hitchcock* this fall in the same Sunday night time slot as the current favorite of mystery lovers, CBS's *Murder She Wrote*.

CBS has had its own revival of a bygone series under way for more than a year, since an anthology of reworked *Twilight Zone* episodes proved to be a hit theatrical film. That success, like the enthusiasm for the three *Star Trek* movies, proved that the huge Baby Boom audience retained a passionate (and commercially exploitable) nostalgia for the television of its youth. It remains to be seen whether that affection is sufficient to build a loyal following week after week. Still, *Twilight Zone* may

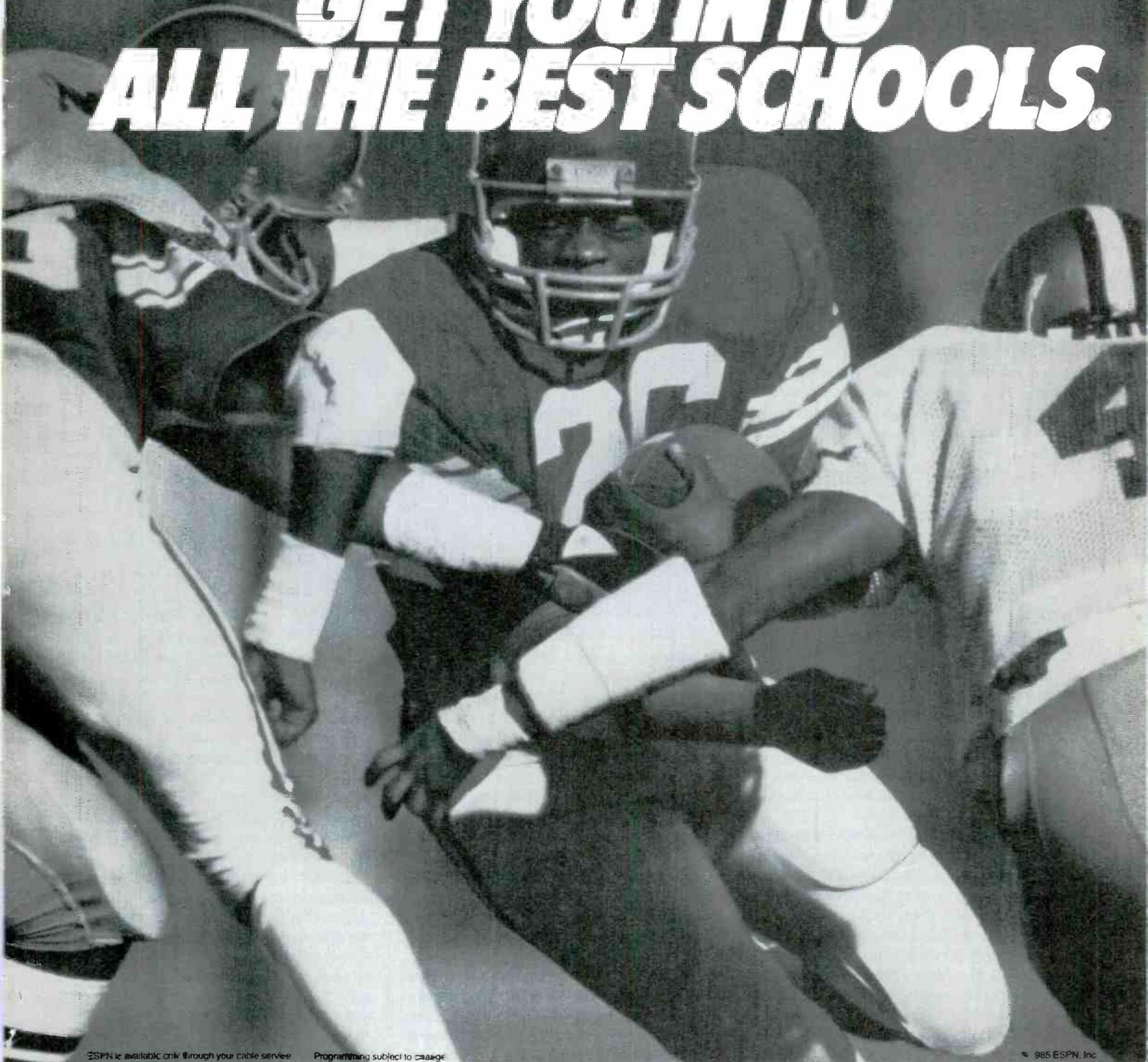
have seemed an especially attractive risk because its writing remains among the best ever done for television. Like the Hitchcock show, it had style and consistency, but it was a far more earnestly moral enterprise—and thus perhaps the more likely to clash with our cynical, rugged-individualist times. Hitchcock liked to let criminals, even murderers, get away with things. He appealed to the

naughty side of human nature. In keeping with the pieties of his era, he would often reveal during his wrapup speech that the wrongdoer had been "apprehended," but in a *TV Guide* interview he dismissed that sort of talk as merely "a necessary gesture to morality." *Twilight Zone*'s producer-author Rod Serling, by contrast, believed in a just universe, and in whatever corner of it a story took place, he made certain that the right thing was done.

The fourth anthology series—produced by Steve Martin and hosted by George Burns—showcases comedy. Unlike the other anthologies, which offer very little potential for developing continuing shows, *Comedy Week* can serve as an audition vehicle for would-be series stars and as a testing ground for pilot episodes. The problem, of course, is the difficulty of maintaining quality week after week.

Despite these pitfalls, and notwithstanding the unoriginality of most of what the anthology series will offer, audiences should welcome the networks' experiment. The wearying sameness of series after series, season after season, has resulted from the reluctance of fearful executives to deviate from the iron rules of programming. Sitcoms, it is said, must be about work or home but not both; otherwise, they simply remind viewers of the competition between those irreconcilably demanding forces in their own lives. Dramatic series must focus on life or death issues and must feature characters who can plausibly be thrust into crises week after week. Short of the supernatural, that has meant that doctor, criminal lawyer, private detective, and policeman were virtually the only acceptable professions for a star character. Variety shows have been declared dead because of the fragmentation of the public's taste in popular music—the virtual disappearance of the "middle of the road" artist. All of these rules make sense, but they all constrain thinking. The current dabbling with anthologies at least suggests that the networks may be opening their hearts and minds to fresh air, even if it is fresh air circa 1958. ■

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Bob Newhart: Prime Time's Bland Eminence

by Michael Pollan

AS BEFITS its unprepossessing star, *Newhart* is the most inconspicuous hit on television. It wins no awards, and almost nobody writes about it. That's probably because the show offers the journalist no easy angles. There's nothing innovative about it, and it's spawned no new stars or imitators. *Newhart* is just there, week after week, going about its quiet business, earning plenty of chuckles and smiles, if seldom a guffaw. Yet the show is far more popular than programs that command many times the attention and it consistently ranks among the top 20 programs in prime time. Evidently *Newhart* is easier to watch than to notice.

Indeed, if you ask people if they've ever seen the Newhart show, they'll probably say sure, then go on to describe a program about a psychologist in Chicago whose neighbor is Roger from *I Dream of Jeannie*. That's the old Newhart show, the one that helped make up CBS's great Saturday night lineup in the '70s along with *All in the Family* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. It's easy to confuse the two. Except for changes in setting and costume, the new Newhart is really a rerun of the old.

Instead of playing a shrink, this time Newhart portrays a prosperous writer of how-to books who has moved from New York City to Vermont to operate a colonial inn with his wife, Joanna (played by Mary Frann). The change of venue has had virtually no effect on Newhart's persona (he's a tad less excitable, if that can be imagined), and the ensemble of urban eccentrics that surrounded him in Chicago has been replaced, almost one for one, by rural counterparts.

The show's comedy works pretty much the same way in the new show as it did in the old. Like the bland hero at the center of a Dickens novel (*Oliver Twist*, say, or *Little Dorrit*), Newhart serves mainly as

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a foil for the oddballs in his company. And, as in the old show, these are sharply drawn by as fine a crew of character actors as you will find on television. Among the best of these are Tom Poston (who played Newhart's college chum on the old show) as George Utley, the dim, morose handyman who ambles through each episode like an old yellow Labrador on an



Exurbanites Joanna (Mary Frann) and Dick Loudon. Like the man himself, the series, Newhart, goes almost unnoticed but consistently ranks in the Top 20.

August afternoon, and Peter Scolari, who plays Michael Harris, the local TV producer and tirelessly aspiring preppie. Michael's head has been turned by Stephanie Vanderkellen (Julia Duffy), a hyper-dramatic princess who distractingly waits on tables at the inn while dreaming about life in a faster lane.

What makes all these characters come off as well as they do is Newhart, the perfect straight man. They get into fixers, and say stupid things—and Newhart reacts, brilliantly. His reactions are among the best on television; he's got the courage Jack Benny had to ride out several long beats of silence and then get a laugh with little more than a quiet, uninflected "oh." In fact, Newhart's comic vocabulary is pretty much limited to that "oh," an "I see," a "hmm," a quick stammer, and a raised eyebrow, all of which he deploys with unerring timing. But his reactions would not earn nearly as many laughs if not for the face they play across. This is television's premier nebbish, a man who, by all rights, should have been

an accountant (which in fact Newhart once was). Balding, going a little slack in the face (he looks more like Hubert Humphrey every year), Newhart reminds you of one of those nonentities who are so accustomed to being forgotten that they continually reintroduce themselves. And the fact that he looks nothing like a celebrity lends a certain credibility to his quiet,

regular-guy sort of comedy.

You might think that such gentle humor would get lost in prime time, but *Newhart* probably stands out precisely because it is so quiet. On a dial crammed with quick-cut action shows, wacky comedies, and over-plotted prime-time soaps, *Newhart* holds out an island of calm. The show must appeal to anyone who thinks television was better back in the '60s and '70s. Indeed, *Newhart* is a throwback to that CBS tradition of hayseed comedy: *Green Acres*, *Petticoat Junction*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Newhart may be slightly more sophisticated than these shows, but like them it derives its humor from the age-old frictions produced when an urban sensibility is introduced into a rural setting (or, in the case of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, the reverse).

There's something nostalgic and comforting about Newhart's television persona and his show's desultory pace. Like the inn, the show has the feel of a refuge, removed from time and bustle. (There are virtually no topical references in the scripts.) *Newhart* has the calming rhythm of a children's program—*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, or *Captain Kangaroo*. In fact Newhart and the Captain have a lot in common. Both are serene, well adjusted to a fault, a little boring, but always dependable. Like the Captain, Newhart surrounds himself with characters who are a little better off in the personality department, but also a little ridiculous. (George Utley, his handyman, with the plaid shirt, coveralls, and funny hats, is a dead ringer for Mr. Greenjeans.)

Also like Captain Kangaroo, Newhart has mastered (or perhaps was born with) that certain characteristic stance that seems to unite all of television's most durable personalities. Johnny Carson, Dick Clark, David Hartman, and almost all the network anchormen have it: that genial, unflappable, and self-effacing mien that seems to offer an unthreatening bridge between ourselves and the larger world. (Why is it that so many of TV's biggest personalities have so little personality?)

These are people with whom we can comfortably identify and from whom we

can learn how to cope with the clowns in our own lives. They make good tutors because they are the most sane fellows on their respective blocks, which is, of course, the way we see ourselves most of the time: not too exciting, fairly bright, and sane. Television's bland eminences teach us the art of playing life's straight men—Eddie Alberts to the world's Eva Gabors, Tom Brokaws to its Nabih Beris. It may entail some sacrifice of personality, they suggest, but we, too, can be the hosts and anchors of our own shows. Pros like Newhart show us how it's done.

TV's Celebration of Itself

by Mark Edmundson

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT, the media's nightly half-hour advertisement for themselves, has just celebrated its 1,000th broadcast, and is now one of the six top productions in syndication. *E.T.*'s popularity is easy to account for when you see the subtle, if inadvertent, duet it plays out with the evening news, the show it follows on many stations' schedules. Watching *E.T.* is like ingesting an efficient temporary bromide for the anxieties the news provokes. It is the evening news as we'd sometimes wish it to



Plastic-dipped: Co-hosts Rob Weller and Mary Hart. "Ken and Barbie finally got their own show."

be, and as such it tells us some disturbing things about the news as it is.

Entertainment Tonight takes up where the network news leaves off. The latter's closing segment is usually a human interest story, a sentimental vignette that attempts to soften the impact of what has

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come before. Thus, the sequence on the Middle American who has made a Vietnam War memorial of his front yard, or on the young female scientist who has spent 10 years teaching a gorilla sign language, shifts the viewers' relationship with the newscast. What had been a parade of events that transcend and perhaps threaten our individuality becomes a manageable encounter with the memorial-builder or the scientist. The security the closing segment can engender often dulls the disquieting effect of the earlier headline stories. This is something we can understand. We're safe again.

Entertainment Tonight is an entire show based on the logic of the closing segment. Its ceaseless rhapsody about "what's coming up next" places us, imaginatively, beyond future news-inspired anxieties, priming us perpetually for a sugary "something ever more about to be." To watch the show is to be kept in a state of pleasing suspension, awaiting the next bit of electronic foreplay. Thus, not only does an interview with Roger Moore plug his upcoming movie, but the anchors hype this preview as the lead-in to an *E.T.* special segment on the new rock-wrestling connection, where Cyndi Lauper meets George (The Animal) Steele.

Another thing about the news's closing segment: It flatters its audience by bringing the broadcast down to a sentimental, subjective level. We're supposed to be charmed and touched by the doings of the plain folk we see there, but we're invited to condescend to them a little, too. (This man salvages old American flags. This woman plays all day with a monkey.) *E.T.* takes this technique of audience flattery and pumps it up almost to its bursting

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point. The anchors address us as if we were ranking media plutocrats, with vital investments in the studios and networks. On Tuesday the weekend box office totals come in: One of the anchors reads off the Top 10 grossers, with relevant figures. A preview of Disney's *Black Cauldron* begins with a fact sheet—running time, production expenses, data of release, director, animator, and voices—all superimposed on a drawing of a very snug, very exclusive screening room. Anything that can be reduced is reduced to a statistic, a profit figure, a ratio. Thus potentates and bottom-liners rule the world. ("Tell me what I need to know about Bismarck," said John F. Kennedy to a visiting historian on a 10-minute drive to the airport.)

Then there are the anchors. At the center of *E.T.*, ministering to our commanding need to stay current, are two attractive young people of surpassing ingenuousness, Rob Weller and Mary Hart. Both wear an unearthly sheen, as if

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they'd been dipped lightly in plastic. "It's like Ken and Barbie finally got their own show," someone has nastily remarked. The anchors meld the disparate *E.T.* seg-

E.T. is pure
bromide—a
cure for the
unwanted anxiety
caused by the
evening news.

ments into some coherence, using word-play, allusions, jokes, anything to give this grab-bag production an illusion of continuity. Which, of course, is precisely what the anchors on the newscasts do.

The men on the anchor desk give an illusion of cohesiveness and control over events. The networks have a vast array of nerve endings "spanning the globe," all converging on the organizing intelligence, the newscaster. No matter how threatening news events may be, they can be processed, ordered, disciplined, and made contributing parts of a unity by the mediating presence of a single person, much like ourselves, sitting at the center of things. Or so they would have us believe. *E.T.*'s ingenuity in connecting its segments shows us that what may seem to be a cohesiveness among reports or events is no more than a fabrication, a production technique. Out there is Chaos, from which the networks must nightly construct new worlds that seem to hold together.

Watching *E.T.* can also teach us something about how the news deploys the latest technology to mediate events, soften their punch. The show commands a *Star Wars* arsenal of super-graphics, animation, spin-frames, split-screens, and inserts, along with every other state-of-the-art video effect. It's all color, light, and sound. The show also calls continual attention to its technical mobility: "From Hollywood we zoom to Cannes and then to the living room of Peter Falk to find out all about . . ." *E.T.* doesn't promote *The Cosby Show* or the latest CBS docudrama so much as it advertises television as *the*

miracle of human achievement. A peculiarly euphoria permeates the show. *E.T.*'s tone expresses nothing more than TV's own image of itself. TV is bright, optimistic, ingenuous, and self-assured. It is "positive" in much the way many of its habitual viewers pride themselves on being "positive people."

The embarrassing excesses of *E.T.* merely draw out the tendencies of the evening news to the point of caricature. The newscast, too, celebrates TV, yet the stakes there are higher. On the news, the "miracle of TV," its status as a human achievement firmly under human control, acts implicitly to offset the anxieties that world events often produce. No problem could be beyond solution by the technicians of TV, or so we as viewers may feel, as the newscast zooms from violence in Philadelphia to famine in Ethiopia. The most tragic world-incident on the evening news is qualified by television's bright, optimistic, ingenuous, and self-assured image of itself. Whatever the ostensible message, the medium itself is "positive." Whatever it puts across is homogenized, compromised, stripped of its particularity and impact. It becomes just more TV, food for the National Combine, the Great American Mixmaster.

But if TV as Mixmaster is nothing more than a useful appliance for ridding the home of unwanted anxiety, then why should we object? Freud, an expert on this matter, thought anxiety was the least useful, if most inescapable, of the painful emotions. But the kind of anxiety that the news can generate is, from a political point of view, desirable. As the German philosopher Martin Heidegger has pointed out, care and anxiety are inseparable. We might think of "care" as an authentic sense that we share fate and responsibility with all others who dwell in the world. (It is the sense that the pop singers tried to fabricate by recording "We Are the World.") The apotheosis of television separates us from contact with what both care and anxiety signify, which we might call "worldliness." Karl Marx once said that history occurs twice, first as tragedy, then as farce. In our moment, it occurs as tragedy in Philadelphia or Ethiopia, and then, in our living rooms, as TV. On *Entertainment Tonight* we find TV in its purest form, celebrating itself and its power to divide us from the burdens (and the dignities) of anxiety and care, putting itself in the place of the world. TV is *E.T.* It is Extra-Terrestrial. ■

Hunters and Gatherers of an Information Age



**No Sense of Place:
The Impact of
Electronic Media
on Social Behavior**
by Joshua
Meyrowitz, Oxford
University Press,
\$22.50

by Robert Kubey

MCLUHAN put his telescope to his ear. 'What a lovely smell,' he said, 'we have here.' So goes A.J.M. Smith's witty attack on Marshall McLuhan's bewildering analysis of the sensory properties of media. Indeed, it was once said that the "Prophet of Media" used his obscurity like a blackjack. In retrospect, McLuhan's legendary imprecision allowed many of his ingenious ideas to gain quick prominence and then, with the exception of an epigram or two, become largely forgotten.

Joshua Meyrowitz is acutely aware of McLuhan's shortcomings and has no intention of following in his footsteps. In *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*, he carefully melds McLuhanism with the work of sociologist Erving Goffman. The result is an intricately articulated and workable theory of how the electronic media are significantly changing people and their relations with one another.

It was Goffman's aim to show how we carefully display different facets of ourselves in different places and social situations. For Goffman, the world is quite literally a stage upon which one performs different roles, depending on whether one is onstage (in a "front region") or backstage (in a "back region"). Meyrowitz has extended Goffman's thinking to consider how the media alter our traditional conceptions of social place and, as a result, our roles and our behavior.

Meyrowitz points out that social "groups" traditionally seemed to differ from each other because their life experiences were so different. But now that we

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share much the same information environment, we are becoming more alike. Even the home no longer isolates a family from the outside world as it is "now a less bounded and unique environment because of family members' access . . . to other places and other people through radio, television, and telephone."

Furthermore, before television we were largely limited to seeing only the "frontstage" performance of those many groups of people different from ourselves. But we have come to understand through television that most of us are pretty much alike "backstage," and that the front region is merely performance.

Meyrowitz uses his theory to argue effectively that the widespread sharing of information via the media helped bring about the social revolution of the '60s—the civil rights movements demanding equality for blacks, women, the aged, and the disabled, and a host of other significant social changes.

Our exposure to intimate views of our political leaders via television, for example, has made it increasingly difficult for them to preserve the kind of mystification that former great leaders enjoyed. Had television existed in earlier centuries, the public would have learned that Lincoln had a high, reedy voice and that Jefferson spoke with a slight speech impediment; it is unlikely that either would have been elected to high office.

While Nixon tried to maintain the traditional separation between front and back regions, according to Meyrowitz, he was ultimately undone by the tape recordings of backstage conversations that even his most ardent supporters could not reconcile with the "onstage" Nixon.

In an attempt to adapt to the new demands of television, Jimmy Carter showed us too much of the back region and not enough of the front. He wore jeans in public and carried his own luggage, but ultimately, failures, minor scandals, and a last-minute mean-spirited change in Presidential demeanor in the heat of the 1980 election could not be reconciled with candidate Carter's early image and promises of complete fidelity.

For Meyrowitz, the new middle region television politics demands a professional actor with decades of experience:

"If Nixon was thesis, and Carter antithesis, then Reagan is synthesis. . . . He is part Nixon, part Carter, an 'imperial' President who chops his own wood."

Meyrowitz also theorizes that the electronic media have brought about a homogenization of childhood and adulthood (notable, for example, in the T-shirts worn by parent and child alike) that recalls life hundreds of years ago, before the spread of literacy. At that time, according to French historian Philippe Aries, children were miniature adults; they drank, gambled, worked, and dressed in the same manner as their parents. Adulthood held few mysteries for them because adult behavior was not hidden, as it has been throughout much of the 20th century.

Meyrowitz takes Aries's work further by showing how the spread of literacy via



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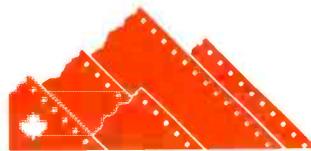
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print media in the 16th and 17th centuries may well have been the primary force shaping our modern conception of childhood as a separate stage of life. Print required that children learn to read to share fully in the adult world, and learning to read required years of schooling and training. In turn, schooling separated the child's world from the adult's. To comprehend television, however, requires no training: "Television undermines the hierarchy of information supported by stages of reading literacy and the age-specific grades of the school system."

Just as TV reveals much about our political leaders, so too does it inform children about the not-so-adult behavior of adults. In the '50s, for example, such programs as *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and many others repeatedly showed adults struggling backstage to manage their frontstage behavior for children. As a result, children grew up prepared to question adult authority.

"Through electronic media," Meyrowitz says, "young children see politicians disgraced, police officers and teachers strike for higher pay, parents accused of

battering their children. . . . The result is not only that they grow up fast, but that they grow up having an image of society and roles that differs markedly from that held by children of earlier generations."

Meyrowitz then applies his theory to the blurring of distinctions between the sexes and the rise of the women's movement. Whereas men always had access to the world outside the home, many women until recently were relatively isolated at home. These differing social worlds preserved the distinctions between men and women. But television has brought the same outside world to both sexes. And, by exposing backstage behaviors that once lay hidden behind the traditional sex roles, television has eased the pressure on both sexes to maintain restrictive front-region feminine and macho personas.

Meyrowitz concludes his 416-page work with a compelling comparison of modern mass-mediated society and the primitive nomadic hunters and gatherers who, like ourselves, "have no sense of place." He argues that the electronic media have restored us to a state wherein

most people share much the same information environment: "One way to characterize ourselves, then, is as 'hunters and gatherers of an information age.'"

In his effort to be thorough, Meyrowitz is occasionally long-winded in documenting recent trends (although some readers will enjoy these sections). And like an overzealous psychoanalyst who understands all behavior in terms of impulses and complexes, Meyrowitz tries on occasion to fit too much data to his theory. But even here he covers himself in an introductory section by explaining that his focus is the electronic media. He makes no pretense of explicating all the other possible sources of recent social change.

With *No Sense of Place*, exciting possibilities are born in the field of mass-communications research. Its sweeping coverage also offers insights for historians, sociologists, psychologists, and political scientists, and it will reward the serious lay reader as well. It is, in short, among the most important books on media yet written; a masterful piece of scholarship. What interests me is what Joshua Meyrowitz will do for an encore. ■

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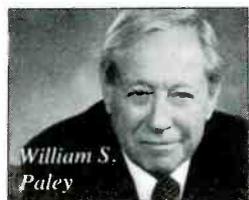
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IDEAS & OBSERVATIONS

PALEY'S GRACES



William S. Paley

From a paper presented by Richard Dyer MacCann at the University of Iowa Symposium and Conference on Television Criticism, held last April.

It is not stretching the facts to say that audiences were able to hear the New York Philharmonic on radio and see *Playhouse 90* on television in the late 1950s because William S. Paley, years before, had become bored with the cigar business. Thanks to his father's success and his own enterprise, he had some money of his own, and he chose to spend it on a new game. Like Citizen Kane, who thought it would be fun to run a newspaper, Paley thought it would be fun to run a radio network. The Columbia Broadcasting System became the reflection of a hard-working man with considerable

taste and a capacity for growth.

Of course he was middle class. And of course he loved to compete. He wanted to get better ratings than NBC, and he won those ratings over the years, in radio and television. This game-playing had a lot to do with what he got on the air. But Paley also had a clear idea of priorities. When one of his executives proposed that CBS adopt the stance of the "class network" and consciously cut down its audience, Paley rejected the idea at once. Broadcasting had to be a popular medium. He was certain of that. With the profits from this kind of democratic

transaction, he would then find interesting things to do—like the New York Philharmonic—that would also mean prestige and some risky leadership of public taste.

Similarly, with the winnings from Jack Benny and other stars, he put money in the purse for public affairs, news, and whatever else, like documentaries, Edward R. Murrow might want to do. . . . Paley was unquestionably the decision-maker who gave [his executives] room to work, and we cannot be aware of this and at the same time deny that Paley and CBS have made a difference in our lives. □

PRESIDENTIAL TECHNOLOGY

From an article by David Burnham in *Election Communications and the Campaign of 1992*, a book recently published by the American Bar Association. A chapter entitled "Five Scenarios of the 1992 Elections" included this piece by the author of *The Rise of the Computer State*.

November 3, 1992. The election is finally over. After a full year of 18-hour workdays, sheer habit got me up before dawn even though I had fallen asleep only an hour and a half earlier. There are, of course, no more schedules to worry about, no more speeches to write, no more polls to order, no more money to raise, no more deals to cut. With nothing to do, but with a mind and body not yet able to slow down, I am sitting in front of the terminal, trying to sort out some of the incredible events of the past year.

Looking back, it is clear that from the very beginning we all secretly knew there was almost no chance that we could actually defeat President Bronson and the fully mobilized federal government.

From the start of the campaign, we understood that if we were to have a chance of winning we would have to contact and motivate the millions of Americans that were unemployed. This task, however, proved to be far more difficult than we had anticipated. One surprising problem was that a significant percentage of our natural constituents no longer possessed the essential instrument of modern campaigning: the telephone. This was partly because many of them had been unemployed for many years and partly because the fundamental cost of such equipment had skyrocketed since the breakup of AT&T in the early 1980s. . . .

The considerable gap in the degree to which our different constituents were plugged into the world was especially noticeable because of the rapidly growing importance of

electronic marketing in politics. The President and his campaign committee . . . had done the polling necessary to identify every census tract . . . whose majority of residents favored one or more aspects of the President's program or were open to discussion about these matters. They, of course, had run dozens of different government and industrial data bases against each other and developed a master list of the name, address, telephone number, age, education, car ownership, political affiliation, and other information about every individual living in each of the census tracts that had been identified as favorable or receptive to the President's cause. . . .

The new technology also helped the incumbent in another important and totally unexpected way. Just six weeks ago, starving peasants living near Acapulco, Mexico, in a blind rage, seized a charter airline containing 153 American tourists just before it was scheduled to take off for New York. Three of the tourists, a Chicago businessman, his wife, and their little girl, were killed when they panicked and tried to flee the plane. The U.S. was enraged by the deaths.

President Bronson took advantage of the situation to give a dramatic nationally televised speech that ended with his employing the two-way capability of the sets (now operating in 60 percent of the nation's homes) to seek the nation's opinion about what he should do. With passions running high across the country, the President asked the viewers whether he should (1) limit his immediate response to diplomatic negotiations, (2) send in a

Marine expeditionary force, or (3) take some otherwise unspecified "stronger action." Not surprisingly, considering the manner in which the question was framed, 55 percent of the viewers ticked off the second option. This number was instantly flashed back to viewers.

From what we know, President Bronson's advisors were deliberately steering the country toward the action the President already had ordered the military to follow. The evidence supporting this assumption is very simple: Exactly 15 minutes after the computers informed the nation that 55 percent of the viewers favored option number two, a helicopter-borne team of Marines surrounded the plane, killed 25 peasants, and escaped aboard two Air Force transport planes.

In addition to undermining the system of checks and balances that has distinguished our government since its founding, the Mexican plebiscite proved the end of what we by then clearly understood to be a hopeless campaign challenge. . . .

Now apathy is apparent. The defeat of my candidate is not important. But as I sit at my terminal in my small office just off Pennsylvania Avenue, it appears that the events of the last few months strongly suggest that our society has moved a long way down the road toward a kind of glossy and accepting despotism. Will we wake up? Does sufficient institutional power reside within the Congress, the press, and the courts to challenge the computer-enhanced power of the White House and its instruments throughout the government? □

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