

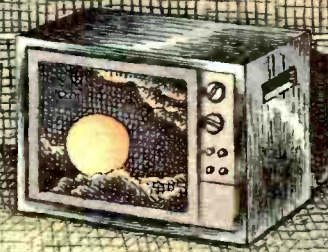
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CHILDREN'S

OF COMMUNICATION



What Harm to the Children?
by Robert Coles

ONLY ONE TELEVISION CHANNEL SEES THE WORLD THROUGH ALL THESE EYES.

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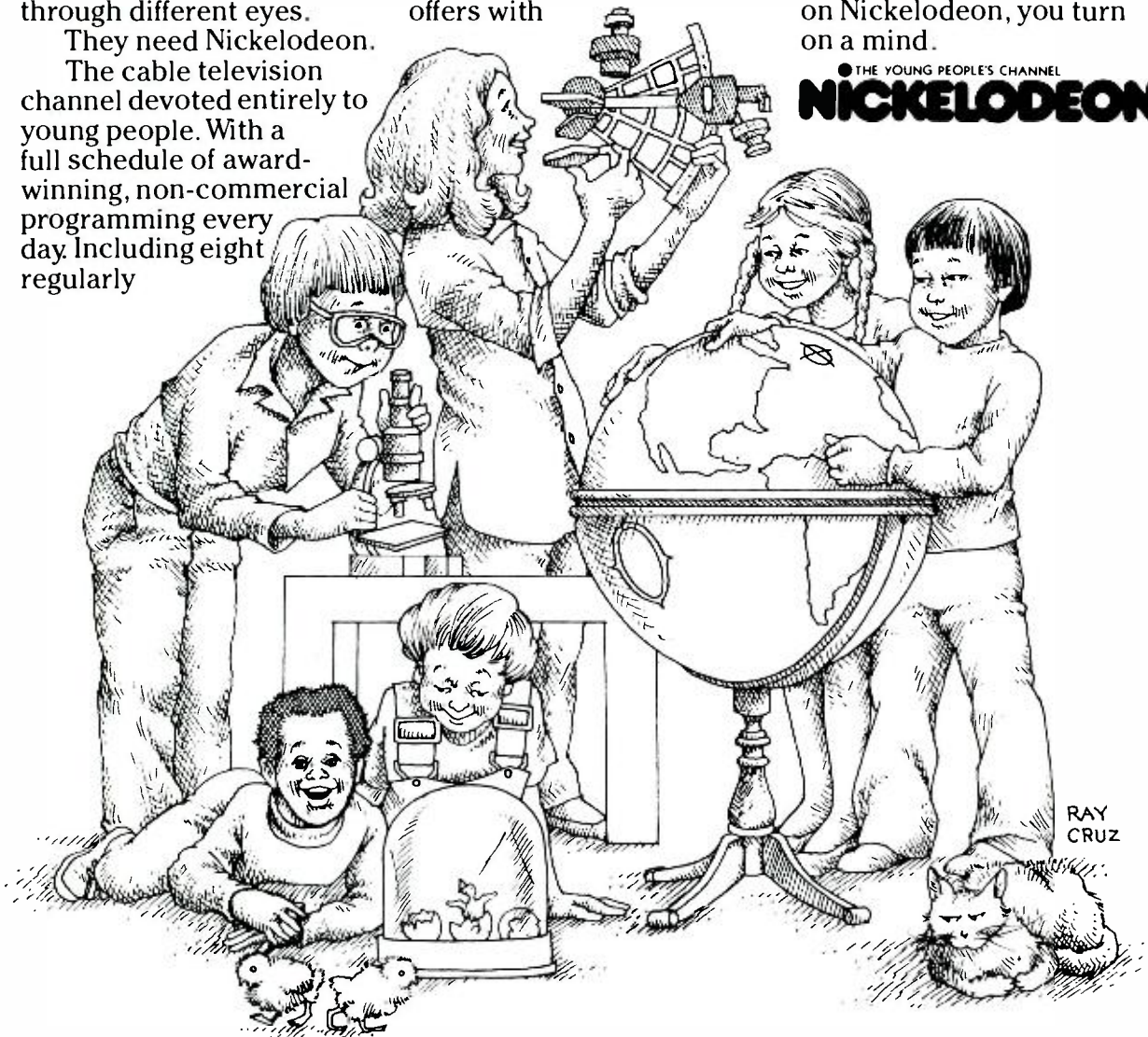
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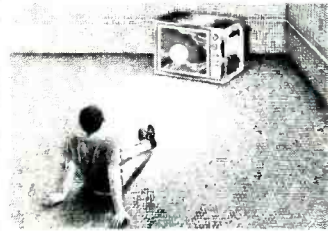
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Call your cable TV company
TURN ON NICKELODEON. AND TURN ON A MIND.

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Page 27

What Harm to the Children?

by Robert Coles

A noted child psychiatrist examines how television affects the young in the context of a prevailing loneliness at home.

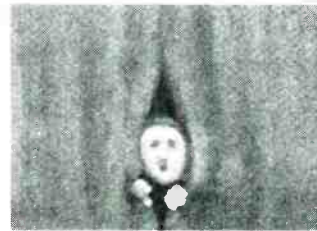


Page 32

When News Gets Lost in the Stars

by Ron Powers

Talent agents have found that selling anchormen can be lucrative. Are their contracts preempting news judgment?

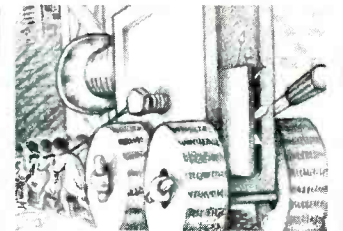


Page 38

The Twists in Two-Way Cable

by David Burnham

Two-way cable, modeled on Qube, transforms television into a whole new communications system; it also may invade and alter our personal lives.



Page 46

Diplomat Without Portfolio

by Michael D. Mosettig

Technology has put foreign affairs on the electronic stage. But what the public sees on television often differs substantially from the reality.

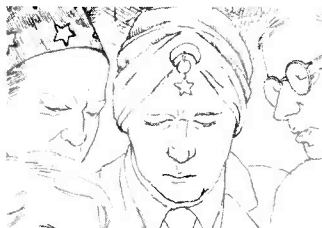


Page 52

Blackout

by Ira Mothner

Some blacks trying to put new stations on the air have run up against shootings, threats, and vandalism, as well as harassment by the law.



Page 58

When Wall Street Talks . . .

by Christine Doudna

A few financial analysts wield far more power at the networks than all the country's television critics. And their interest is strictly the bottom line.



Page 62

Mank and the One-of-a-Kind Network

by Nicholas von Hoffman

Frank Mankiewicz, a knight in the Kennedys' Camelot, took on NPR and has made it the only full-service radio network in America.



Page 68

The Citizens Movement Takes a Turn

by Susan Witty

While social-action groups that flourished in the seventies struggle for funds, their conservative counterparts are thriving.

ISSUES AND IDEAS

Letters _____ Page 5

CrossCurrents _____ Page 8
Essays and Observations

On Air _____ Page 12
Commentary by Daniel Schorr, William Henry III, and Jeff Greenfield

At Issue _____ Page 18
Contrasting Views on Advertiser Boycotts:
Interviews with Norman Lear and the Rev. Donald Wildmon

DEPARTMENTS

The Public Eye _____ Page 23
"Overstepping the Delicate Line" by Les Brown

CRITICISM AND REPORTS

Book Reviews _____ Page 74

TV in America _____ Page 76
Regional Reports from Newspaper Columnists

TV Guidance _____ Page 80
"The Rules at Our House" by Marvin Kitman

Editor's Note

C H A N N E L S

WHAT DO YOU THINK of television—is it good or bad?" Charlie Rose asked his studio-audience during the warm-up before a taping of his syndicated television talk show.

"I don't watch television," one woman said, startled by the microphone thrust at her—"except your show, of course." "It's all garbage," another commented, exempting the soap operas, her passion. Another said, "It just gets worse and worse all the time."

No one had a good word for television. "Do these reactions surprise you?" Charlie Rose asked me (that day's guest on the program). They didn't, I answered, because people have been saying these very things for at least as long as I've been covering television, more than a quarter-century.

If the television industry ignores comments like these, it's because the discontent is never reflected in the statistics broadcasters live by. People gripe about television and sometimes are enraged by it. Yet the viewing levels, according to the Nielsens, rise year after year.

Something else is happening now, though: Groups of people are growing militant in their anger. They think television is ruining the country and have set out to do something about it. But their strategy has disturbed other groups of people, because it suggests repression and book burning. And so the rise of one force determined to clean up television has caused an opposing force to grow.

We used to think of television as an instrument unifying the country, providing common viewing experiences to people of every region and socio-economic class; instead, it is at the heart of a bitter and divisive national issue. This is not just another tempest in television land; nor is it a mere dispute over tastes that only devoted television viewers need worry about.

It is a clash over American values and principles, with consequences for all people, even the ones with no time for the picture tube. What happens when these opposing forces meet—in the courtrooms, perhaps, or on the hustings—may affect our nation even as much as the events in Poland and El Salvador threaten to.

On the one side are the Coalition for Better Television, the Moral Majority, and followers of the fundamentalist "electronic church," sometimes called the Religious New Right; on the other are People for the American Way, Action for Children's Television, representatives of the mainline religions, and various keepers of the First Amendment. The battle till now has been fought with rhetoric, but it will certainly heat up when the Coalition for Better Television begins boycotting network advertisers whose spots appear in programs it has deemed "unwholesome."

This clash of ideological forces is focal in the current issue of *Channels*. "At Issue" has leaders of the opposing camps—the Reverend Donald Wildmon, who created the Coalition for Better Television, and television producer Norman Lear, who organized People for the American Way—express their viewpoints in the manner of a debate. "The Public Eye" considers moral questions related to the fundamentalist uprising. A feature article by Susan Witty, "The Citizens Movement Takes a Turn," examines the current state of public interest groups in broadcasting, from which, paradoxically, the Moral Majority and the Coalition for Better Television have sprung.

Disliking television, thinking it garbage, deploring its excesses—feelings like these have been simmering harmlessly a long time in American society. The pot has finally boiled over, and what has spilled out will not easily be mopped up. —L. B.

Patrick's View

Cartoonists have proven the most trenchant observers of people in relation to television. *Channels* intends, with each issue, to feature a single cartoonist as commentator, threading his or her works through the magazine.

We begin with Patrick McDonnell, whose endearing figures should be familiar to most readers and especially to followers of Russell Baker's "Sunday Observer" in *The New York Times Magazine*, which McDonnell illustrates.

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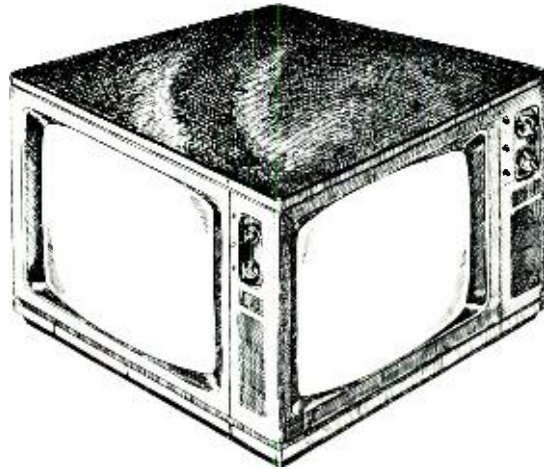
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April 15, 1981

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Stingers of the Stung

There's a curious irony in Jonathan Black's "The Stung" in your first issue: His story is almost a parody of his theme.

Black manages to accomplish precisely what he accuses *60 Minutes* of doing—undertaking the story with a predetermined conclusion and ignoring the available facts or viewpoints that might detract from the outcome.

Black's theme is that *60 Minutes*' "need to maintain the loyalty of forty million viewers" has caused it to engage in "theatricality or slanted editing." He exhumes a handful of well-ventilated lawsuits or controversies and persists, despite evidence to the contrary, in attributing each of them to a desire for "hype," for "impact," in short, for ratings.

If facts or logic intervene, as they do in the cases Black uses as examples, he blithely ignores them. Thus, for example, he goes on at length about a \$25 million lawsuit by Billie Young, a Long Island publisher. What he omits is the fact that Young's lawyer has withdrawn and that she has made no effort to pursue the case for more than a year, information made known to Black. Perhaps he ignored it because no grounds exist for a lawsuit.

Nor does Black serve his readers' interest in his treatment of our Illinois Power story. In limiting his discussion to two factual errors (omitting to state that they were corrected on the air) and a self-admitted error in judgment in not reporting that a critic of the utility had falsified his credentials, Black creates a wholly erroneous impression of the essential question of the report, which was and remains whether the cost overruns and delays in the construction of Illinois Power's first nuclear plant were out of control. He was fully aware that in the year and a half since our story, the overruns have risen another \$400 million to \$1.7 billion, the schedule has been delayed another nine months at least, and Illinois Power has sought another rate hike request, this time for 23 percent, all this in the face of assertions by the company (included in our report) that costs were finally under control. Was our story right and useful?

Some of Black's conclusions simply defy logic and evidence to the contrary. He suggests we would not have included the facts about the Illinois Power critic's credentials despite our assertion to the contrary because "the case against IP would have been badly weakened." Had Black taken the trouble to look at other *60 Minutes* stories, he would have found it a practice of *60 Minutes* to include relevant adverse material about "whistle-

blowers," whether it strengthens or weakens the story.

Similarly, Black questions whether our omission of the fact that Garn Baum, who is suing the Mormon Church, had employed the services of five lawyers over a period of time was inadvertent, as we claimed. "Allusion to Baum's attorneys clearly would have eroded the segment's thrust," Black states. Maybe, but what erodes a segment's thrust and a series' credibility even more is the necessity of doing an on-the-air correction, which is precisely what we did in this case. Does Black truly believe that we would willingly or knowingly omit relevant information if it meant calling attention to it later on? Or did Black neglect to mention on-the-air corrections because it might have eroded the thrust of his story?

One could go on and on. In its thirteen years on the air, *60 Minutes* has reported more than 1,000 stories, many of them investigative and controversial in nature. That so few have resulted in litigation is in itself remarkable; the fact that no claimant has made a successful case is even more so. Yes, we have in a handful of stories made factual mistakes, and we're

not proud of that. We have also corrected them on the air promptly and prominently. No doubt we have made mistakes in judgment as well; it would be surprising if we had not over the course of thirteen years. Those mistakes were made because of haste, not "hype"; because of differences over relevance, not "catering to our crudest entertainment reflexes"; because of oversight, not ratings.

ROBERT CHANDLER
Administration Senior
Vice President,
CBS News
New York City

Although he comes along a little late in the game, I would be the last one to deny Jonathan Black a chance to get in on "open season on *60 Minutes*." I would only remind him and your readers that *60 Minutes* is produced under the aegis of CBS News, the news organization with the highest journalistic standards in the world.

DON HEWITT
Executive Producer
60 Minutes
New York City

A Plan to Restructure the System

First, I enjoyed the first edition of *Channels*. It is a most welcome addition to the debate on issues of great importance. I believe "The Public Eye" ["Where Are We? (And How We Got There)"], for example, has done a signal service in raising the issue of deregulation. The matter is now before the Congress, and if decided incorrectly, can plague us for the rest of the century. I think it important, therefore, to set forth my strong disagreement with the opinion expressed by Les Brown in that column.

We do not, I'm sure, disagree on the desirability of allowing the new video technology and services their chance in the marketplace. A new magazine would not be told by the government that it cannot obtain second-class mailing privileges because it will adversely affect existing magazines. The government is not wise enough to make such judgments, and even if it were, this would be a policy wholly inconsistent with the First Amendment. We agree that this nation has staked its all on a marketplace of ideas.

Second, I agree that the broadcast marketplace cannot be relied upon fully to serve the public interest. We now have about 9,000 radio stations, with many more in the offing. But even though we have a radio of abundance, if one wants to

hear gavel-to-gavel coverage of great issues like the Panama Canal debate, news magazines like *All Things Considered*, serious drama like Shakespeare, or new programming for children or the blind, etc., such programming will not be found on commercial stations but only on public radio. Similarly, there is no assurance that some future of commercial/pay-television abundance will obviate the need for public television.

This brings me to our area of disagreement—what to do with the present broadcast system. There are three main approaches: (1) maintain the present system; (2) deregulate by simply eliminating the public trustee concept, and (3) deregulate and in lieu of the public trustee concept, substitute a spectrum fee to be used to make up for market deficiencies (e.g., for public radio). Brown would apparently opt for (1); I strongly favor (3) and am afraid that we will end up with (2), if the interested public groups do not get their act together now.

As to (1), Brown is trying to preserve a scheme that has been very largely a failure over a half-century. First, the public trustee scheme does not affect entertainment programming—the most important element often representing 90 percent of the broadcaster's schedule. As to local and informational programming,

the process is a charade. The Federal Communications Commission has never denied a renewal for failure to present sufficient local or informational programming—a remarkable performance. Its record on promise versus performance, the comparative hearing, the comparative renewal, etc., has been consistently labeled as stultifying. And this record of ineffectiveness has been accompanied by considerable First Amendment costs. I cannot here detail those costs, but will rely on the lengthy submissions I made to Congress in this respect, as head of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

If the FCC disappeared tomorrow, you would have great difficulty discerning any difference when you clicked on your radio. Or take television: The networks clearly dominate this medium; if there were no FCC, you would never know this from watching network television because it would be virtually unaffected.

Of course, the present scheme has some pluses, but I believe that on the whole, the record must be labeled a failure. And if Brown argues that it is time to reform the regulatory process, I would answer that such reform is unlikely in these times, and more important, after a half-century of trying to make entities act against their interest by labeling them public trustee and using behavioral approaches, surely it is time to try other structural alternatives.

While deregulation is at the heart of that new approach, I regard (2)—simply deregulating—as an unwarranted “giveaway” to the broadcasters. They volunteered to be public trustees. If they are now relieved of that obligation, why should the government place them on Channel X and enjoin anyone else from using that channel? Why not auction the channels?

I favor (3) because it rationalizes the present situation in a politically feasible and sound way. It is simply too disruptive to auction the channels at this stage, even though that is the only sound way to establish market value. The obvious alternative is, then, to assign a lease fee for the use of the spectrum that is not disruptive and that garners funds that can be used to make up for market deficiencies.

If, for example, the fee were 1 to 2 percent of gross revenues in a twenty-five-year contract with the broadcaster, the sums from commercial radio would be roughly from \$25 million to \$50 million. National Public Radio now receives \$14 million from the federal government, and that sum is under considerable strain in light of the Administration’s budgetary aims. Clearly the lease fee could contrib-

ute most substantially to public radio and minority ownership of radio stations, now abysmally low. The structure of the system would then be working for us: The commercial broadcaster would be acting as it is truly motivated, as would the public broadcaster. And if this approach scheme worked for radio, it could then be employed for television in the mid-1980s.

This is not “blue sky.” The issue is a current, pressing one. The FCC moves to deregulate broadcasting as fast as it can, and Congress—at least the Senate—seems to be heading in the same direction. Those who dig in and urge retention of the present system are, in my judgment, fighting a losing cause because the system is too flawed and ineffectual to be defended. The real issue in this decade is between (2) and (3)—between deregulation that is a giveaway to the broadcaster and deregulation that provides a reasonable spectrum fee to be used by the Congress to repair market deficiencies.

HENRY GELLER
Director
Duke University Washington Center
for Public Policy Research
Washington, D.C.

Your “Public Eye,” headed “Where Are We? (And How We Got There)” [*Channels*, April-May], was illuminating. Illuminating and a little sad.

The sadness comes from witnessing someone with your background and intelligence being so fearful of your fellow-Americans who constitute “the marketplace.” You have no confidence in the essence of democracy—the right of the majority to make choices. You say, “. . . I reject the idea that what most people choose to buy bears any relationship to the public interest.” Your use of the word “buy” in this case is a substitute for “tune in” or “listen to.” So what most people want to listen to is not what should govern, in your view. A regulatory bureaucracy in Washington should decide that for all of America, you suggest.

Your indictment of market forces as having “a bad track record” overlooks the fact that the pressures of the marketplace established and maintained the system that, all factors considered, gives the citizen of the United States the highest standard of living in the world. It’s easy to rattle off some of the failures of the marketplace, but much easier to see all around us the benefits of the system. That is, if one wants to look.

ABE J. VORON
Executive Vice President
National Radio Broadcasters Association
Washington, D. C.

Amplifying the ABCs

We want to comment on the article in your April-May issue of *Channels* called “Teaching the ABCs.” There are several errors in what was printed.

First, the video tapes that supplement the teacher-lesson plans required about one year to produce (after almost two years of research), *not*, as your reporter stated, “three days.”

Secondly, there are three published reports so far in scientific journals with statistics of a more complex nature than the percentages your reporter mentioned, indicating that the children learned the material taught in the lessons and could generalize somewhat from it.

Finally, your reporter states that ABC Video Enterprises will reap the profits—only partially true. Yale University will receive part of the royalties for research and for scholarships—and there has been no personal profit on our part from this project. The award of the license for tape distribution by ABC was done only after negotiations with other distributors.

DOROTHY G. SINGER, ED.D.
JEROME L. SINGER, PH.D.
Co-directors
Family Television Research and
Consultation Center
Yale University

(The facts disputed here are contained in materials given out at the news conference that inspired our brief essay. Those materials include a detailed report by the Singers on their own project).

Channels Open to Praise

I’d like to congratulate you on putting together a quality publication that addresses some of the most important issues facing our society. As one of the public officials involved in the debate over our national telecommunications policies, I know your new magazine will be extremely helpful in our attempt to update the nation’s communications laws. I look forward to reading *Channels* regularly.

TIMOTHY E. WIRTH
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Telecommunications,
Consumer Protection and Finance
U.S. House of Representatives

(We’re pleased to say that Channels has received numerous letters of praise for its premiere issue. For reasons that we trust are evident, we’ve chosen this letter to speak for them all.) ■

Cheers,
Channels!

Warner Amex Cable Communications Inc. welcomes this
new voice in the world of telecommunications.



Landscapes

DRIVING THROUGH the flatlands of the Middle West some weeks ago, we found ourselves admiring what we used to consider a blight on the skylines of our hamlets and housing projects—those forests of rooftop antennas. Our appreciation was probably more sentimental than aesthetic, for it struck us that those metal fish-skeleton structures, as familiar in the countryside as telephone poles, will be gone in the next ten years. Gone the way of copper weather vanes, maybe to be found again by people of the next generation in musty antique shops, relics of Television I.

Our consciousness of rooftop antennas was stirred by the mushrooming of a new environmental eyesore—the earth station, symbol of Television II. An earth station is a white parabolic dish tilted toward the sky to receive satellite signals. In driving, we found them in front of motels that promise guests free pay-cable movies, in the parking lots of cable transmission centers, and on nondescript land near large business corporations.

Cable television will make the rooftop antenna obsolete by the end of the decade, while dish antennas will proliferate, many of them on rural rooftops, to receive direct-to-home satellite transmissions. The American landscape is changing in somewhat the way it did when barns gave way to garages and carports. And as the physical landscape changes, so does the electronic landscape.

The only thing innocuous about the dish antennas is their appearance. As the earth's link to the various communications satellites in geostationary orbit 22,300 miles above the equator, they are key components in the reinvention of television. Without them there is no HBO or Showtime, no Cable News Network, no superstations, no instantaneous broadcasts of news from abroad on the commercial networks. In addition to television and radio signals, they bring down telephonic voice transmissions from the satellites and a range of data for business

use. And they—not cable, as many believe—pose the greatest survival threat to the networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC. For they are capable of liberating commercial stations from network dominance, allowing them to deal directly with program producers.

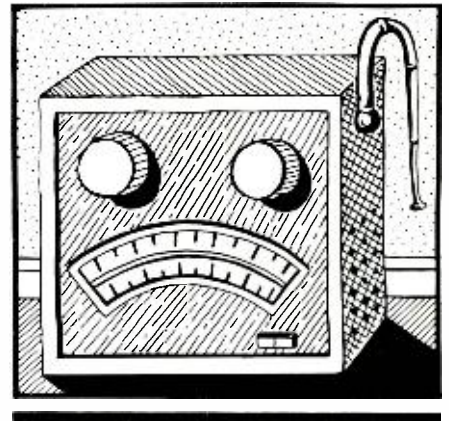
For thirty years the three major networks have tied together their systems of affiliated stations by the long lines and local loops of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Only one signal at a time can travel along these terrestrial routes, usually the one sent out by the network. A local station either accepts the network transmission or substitutes something from its own supply of syndicated programming. Most often, economics favor taking the network "feed." The networks derive their strength from the stations' limited options.

Satellites, however, expand the options. A single satellite may carry from twelve to twenty-four different television transmissions simultaneously, and every one of them may be brought down by the dish antenna. When every commercial station in America becomes equipped with satellite-receiving gear, a variety of new limited networks—some operating a few hours a day, some a few hours a week—become possible. They will bid against the commercial networks for a station's air-time. Conceivably, too, the Hollywood studios and independent production companies will elect to send out their own programs by satellite, sell the advertising themselves, and negotiate the clearance of time with individual stations around the country. With satellites, opportunities to bypass the networks abound. The satellites are already in place, but the earth stations are not—at least not yet in significant numbers.

If local broadcasters have not been rushing to liberate themselves, perhaps it is because most are not eager to alter the present television system, under which they have prospered handsomely.

Recently the Federal Communications Commission authorized satellites that would broadcast directly to small dish antennas mounted on rooftops or even on

window ledges. Comsat proposes to provide direct satellite service, initially with three channels of programming, by 1985. Television activity in the sky will create an invasion on the American landscape of bubble-like architectural shapes, large and small. We may, by the nineties, find ourselves missing the hen-scratched roofscapes that belonged to a simple time when only three networks and a handful of local stations fed our sets.



Radio Static

RADIO DOES NOT quite get off scot-free in today's technological upheavals. The Federal Communications Commission during the Carter Administration determined to make more of everything available in the electronic media, and its plan for radio was to squeeze more stations onto the AM dial. Naturally, this does not sit well with the broadcast industry, never known for its love of competition. And so a controversy now rages in Washington over something called the 9-kHz policy.

This refers to nine-kilohertz spacing between stations on the AM dial, instead of the ten-kilohertz spacing rule followed since 1928. It means that most stations will have to move over a tad, to make room for twelve new channels. Most other countries have 9-kHz spacing, and the FCC reasoned that if the United States adopted it, opportunities for minorities to own broadcast stations would increase substantially. Twelve ad-

ditional stations in every radio market would tot up to hundreds of new frequencies around the nation.

Although the FCC has already adopted the 9-kHz policy, it cannot be put into effect without agreement from other countries in this hemisphere. Their compliance will insure compatible systems and avoid static in radio reception. The issue will be decided this November in Rio de Janeiro at a Western Hemisphere regional meeting of the World Administrative Radio Conference. But meanwhile, with a new administration in Washington, the policy may yet be reconsidered at home, and a heavy lobbying effort to that end is underway.

The National Association of Broadcasters argues that 9-kHz spacing would be a "drastic mistake," causing signal interference, poorer sound quality, and great expense to radio broadcasters, many of whom are barely making ends meet today. Moreover, it maintains, the radio band is already overcrowded in the larger cities, so that most new frequencies will be available in sparsely populated areas that cannot economically support them. As NAB president Vincent Wasilewski put it, "The FCC unwittingly plans to create chaos on the radio dial . . . while providing little or no offsetting public benefit."

The NAB estimates the total engineering expense for the conversion to 9 kHz at \$40 million, not including the nontechnical costs of changing all brochures, letterheads, and promotional materials with the new frequency designations. According to the association, the total cost per station would come to \$255,000—a severe hardship to the typical radio station with an annual pre-tax profit of \$19,000. Many stations will be forced out of business.

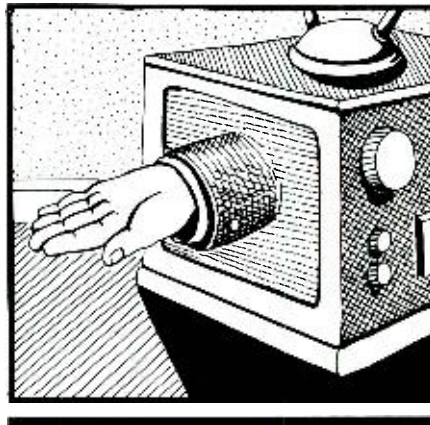
Further, it notes, AM listening has slipped during the last ten years because of competition from the superior sound quality of FM. To downgrade the quality of AM signals further would accelerate the decline.

The NAB characterizes the radio industry as "essentially a small business." More than 200 individual companies in America have larger revenues than the *entire* radio industry. In 1978, more than

a third of all radio stations reported a year-end deficit. The market, contends the NAB, simply cannot absorb more competition.

Activist citizens groups have scant sympathy for the association's portrayal of radio's plight. The Reverend Everett C. Parker, who directs the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, says of the NAB's arguments, "It just brings tears to my eyes when I see the poor monopolies begging government to let them keep the business to themselves."

Parker's assessment of his opposition: "They own the air—lock, stock, and barrel. We have to do everything to fight their control if minorities and women are ever going to be heard. Expanding the dial can only help."



The New Fraternity

IN THE MID-SEVENTIES, while he was still president of CBS Inc., Arthur R. Taylor led the aggressive national campaign to beat down the broadcasting industry's new menace, pay cable. That campaign is perhaps best remembered today for its symbol, the line-drawing of a sad-faced boy with outstretched palm, asking, "Daddy, can I have a dollar to buy 'Gunsmoke'?" The cartoon appeared in ads and leaflets, epitomizing the campaign's prophecy that if pay cable grows, it will siphon off conventional television's programming and charge people for what they had been receiving free.

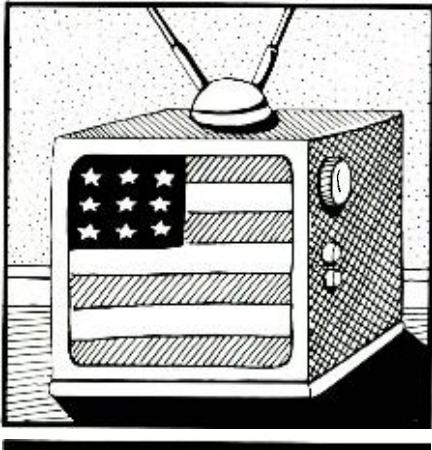
Today, Taylor is in a position to say I told you so, although he probably wouldn't because he is the one doing the siphoning. Having involuntarily left the vineyards of commercial broadcasting, he now heads one of the newest pay-cable ventures, Rockefeller Center Television, which is preparing a network of programming described as high-quality entertainment. To receive it, cable subscribers will pay a monthly fee over what they pay for the cable service itself. A large portion of the network's fare, when all rights issues are finally resolved, will come from the British Broadcasting Corporation. So to start with, Taylor's Bluebird Network, as it is tentatively called, will take material that might have gone to the Public Broadcasting Service.

But who would be more likely to siphon programs for cable than those who once worked at high levels in conventional television?

As it happens, Taylor is a relative latecomer to the other side of the fence. He was preceded in cable networking by at least three former colleagues at CBS and a couple of NBC executives. John A. Schneider, once a notch down from Taylor in the CBS hierarchy as president of the broadcast group, now runs the network division of Warner Amex Cable, which includes The Movie Channel, Nickelodeon, and a new all-music television network. Robert Wussler once headed the CBS television network and currently is executive vice president of Ted Turner's operations—WTBS, the Atlanta superstation, and the Cable News Network. Mike Dann, a former program chief at CBS, is consultant to the cultural Alpha Network, the first of the ABC cable networks.

In the new fraternity of expatriates, NBC is represented by Mike Weinblatt, former network president who now heads Showtime, the pay-cable network that competes with Home Box Office. And Chet Simmons, ex-president of NBC Sports, has become president of ESPN, the twenty-four-hour sports network for cable.

The old boys are up to something new, which makes one wonder how new it really will be.



A Day at the Hearth

IT WAS THE WORST of television and the best of television, and we had all experienced something like it before. The President had been shot in mid-afternoon. A nation sat at the television hearth watching for flickers of news and held in thrall by familiar talking heads at their practiced art of backing and filling. We heard the President was unharmed and then we heard he had been hit; we heard his press secretary, James Brady, was dead and then we heard the retraction. We heard about open-heart surgery and then learned it was open-chest. Through it all, the real drama took place off the television screen, in our homes and shops and offices, fed by these meager, slow-coming, and often confusing details.

More than unseemly, it was pointless for anything else to be on television that afternoon. Yet interminable stretches passed, with nothing to get from the tube but Frank Reynolds, Roger Mudd, and Dan Rather restating yet again the sketchy facts. For relief, there were cutaways to reporters with almost nothing of substance to report. And of course there was that bit of tape, the news clip that caught the shooting whole, shown in slow motion and in blow-up, again, then again. It was like watching film on a loop repeating itself, like watching the Yule log on New York's WPIX Christmas Eve, an incessant rerun of flames licking wood, pretending they are making pro-

gress. Except that we were on an emotional precipice. The coverage all afternoon was solemn and tedious, yet riveting—a rare case of great television that was not by any conventional standard good television.

Reluctantly, we left the office at the close of business, and about an hour later at home there it was again, the same loop, and reporters chasing what often proved to be false leads. Television was doing what it does uniquely, showing us the news process with all its warts.

How comforting that they were still on the screen, Rather, Mudd, Reynolds, Ted Koppel, John Chancellor, Edwin Newman, Fred Graham—those good fellows—keeping us company through the vigil. How comforting to be plugged in (as we could not be with video cassettes), to know that we would know the next development only seconds after the White House and the anchormen did. How much more comforting than the nights, not so many years ago, of the U-2 affair and the Pueblo incident, when television went to regular programming in prime time, leaving us to wonder and worry (against the canned laughter) until the late news whether we were going to war or enlarging a war.

This time, some faulted NBC for giving up the watch at George Washington University Hospital for the collegiate basketball championship game, to preserve its investment of millions of dollars in prime time. But by then the information crisis was pretty well over. Dr. Dennis S. O'Leary—the surprise television star of the day—had set us at ease with amiable, straightforward answers in the early evening news conference. This man genuinely made us feel we were still a good and decent country. His kind seems always to emerge, miraculously, in dreadful times.

One had the sense that this was a shared experience—a common concern, politics aside—for all Americans. That is, until the jarring news a day or so later that the television audience for all or any part of the coverage, afternoon or evening, was estimated at 130 million people. This meant that more than ninety million Americans hadn't tuned in at all. Many of these, we presumed, listened on radio

instead, and a few million had to be small children or people who had no access whatever to a television set. But who were those other millions who had no interest whatever in the shooting of a President? Was this to them in the nature of a rerun, something they could take or leave alone? Were they at the movies or in a disco? And how many of them, we wondered, had stopped everything to watch the show that told who shot J. R.?

Prestel-Digitation

AMR. AND MRS. BRENNAN of London, devoted theater-goers, decided last year to mix business with pleasure, and christened "Brennan's Theatre Guide." Not appearing in any newspaper or on any of the three British television networks, the guide has nevertheless become a smash hit—among subscribers to a televised information service called Prestel.

The Brennans rightly assumed that their computerized opinions, constantly updated and available at the touch of a few buttons, would be useful to people who hadn't bothered saving old newspaper theater reviews—or to traveling businessmen who hadn't seen them. The Brennans' Prestel subscribers, who now number more than 10,000, pay a few pence a minute to find and read the reviews—and for a little extra, can even use their Prestel console to book tickets for some shows.

The Brennans' story was told recently at a Prestel demonstration in midtown Manhattan. The audience of business professionals, many of them prospective Prestel clients, seemed encouraged that an information-retrieval technology essentially as old as the first computer had inspired such an original and profitable scheme.

And the Prestel spokesman seemed as optimistic as his audience. He was selling the product effectively, with facts and figures to support his anecdotes.

British Prestel gains subscribers at the rate of 400 a month, said the spokesman as the images on his Prestel screen flipped by. Each subscriber buys or rents

a special television set and keypad that provide instant access, by means of regular telephone lines, to information stored in the system's computers. If a subscriber's house or business is wired for telephones, it is wired for Prestel. Viewers can pick and choose their way through "pages" of information and advertisements appearing on the screen as they press successive buttons.

Information from approximately 450 sources — ranging from provincial newspapers to Lloyd's of London — stocks the system's computer banks. So far, the pages of information total 180,000, and demand for space is so great that there's even a page black market. Six European countries and Hong Kong now have Prestel, and a terminal will be built this fall in the northeastern United States so that Prestel International (an all-business version) can infiltrate North America.

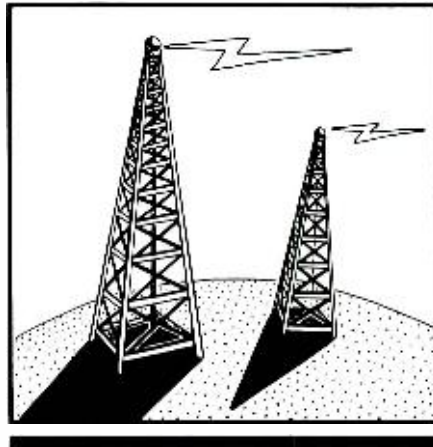
Ultimately, the system's equipment costs will drop from their \$2,000 high, and ideas like the Brennans' will truly become legion. But information retrieval as a commercial venture is new enough that most of Prestel's sources are still testing prototypes. Dow Jones, for instance, is broadcasting daily extracts of *The Wall Street Journal's* front page in an attempt to widen readership. "The *Journal* is now available in Europe a day before you could actually buy a copy," the spokesman said, "and in Australia it's available *two* days early."

American Express card-holders can reserve hotel rooms in big cities all over the world with their keypads and television screens — and get an American Express advertising pitch into the bargain. Indeed, even small local shops have expanded their operations and "made themselves national," as the demonstrator put it, by filling some pages on Prestel with promotional information.

Impressed by the demonstration, one member of the audience — from an American university with an overseas program in Italy — asked if Prestel could give students at his school's home base access to lectures as they happened in Europe.

When the spokesman said the idea was feasible, the man all but shouted, "Then I want your card!" His enthusiasm, echoed

elsewhere in the room, was perhaps a harbinger of Prestel's fortunes next fall. "Infiltration" may take no time at all.



A Low-Power High

WITH ALL THE WORRY about the new technologies and their threats to the status quo, who would have thought that the first real assault on a broadcaster's comfort might come from a technology as old as broadcasting itself?

Established television outlets, coping well enough today with cable and subscription television, are about to be hit with competition from a new class of television station — low-powered facilities beaming their signals over relatively short distances. In its determination to expand viewing alternatives, among other things, the Federal Communications Commission last September proposed the creation of hundreds of such small stations as a "secondary" use of the airwaves. The commission's staff envisioned opening four or more channels in each market to low-power stations using as little as one-sixtieth the wattage of a full-power facility. There was a storm of response. By the time the FCC called a moratorium on applications in mid-April, it had been deluged with 5,000 requests for frequencies in communities from Manhattan to Mesa, Arizona.

Low-power facilities are not exactly new in the scheme of frequency allocations. They have been licensed heretofore as translator stations, used primar-

ily to relay the signals of urban broadcasters into rural areas too sparsely populated to support full-power stations of their own. Under the old rules, translators were prohibited from airing more than thirty seconds of local programming an hour without a waiver from the FCC. But the commission intends now to license them as fully independent stations.

This could mean that ethnic sections of a city — the barrios of Los Angeles, for example, or New York's Harlem — would have stations of their own, operating in the electronic shadows of the big metropolitan stations. They are more affordable to minorities than full-power stations; according to estimates, twenty low-power stations can be constructed for the \$2 million it costs today to set up a single UHF station.

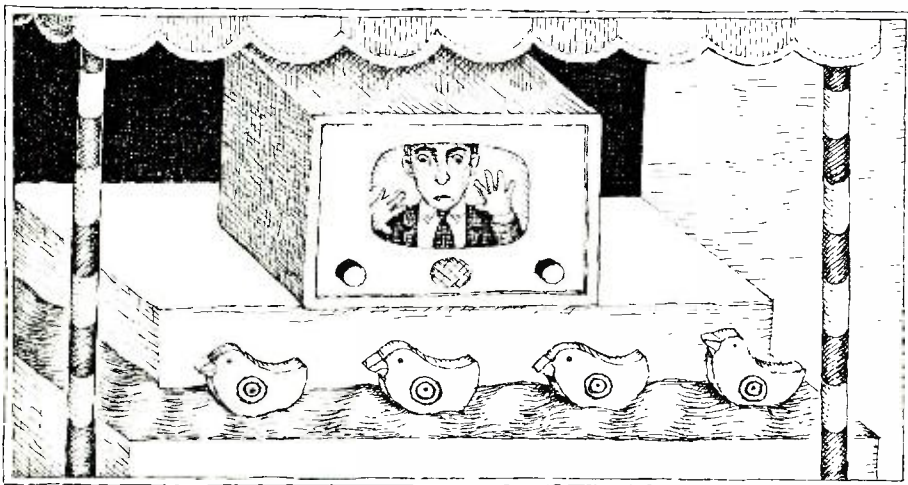
ABC and NBC are among the companies that have applied for low-power stations. Others are seeking the frequencies for pay-television services. A company based in Prescott, Arizona, with financing from Allstate Insurance Company, has applied for 141 low-powered stations and intends to interconnect them by satellite. Its plan is to create a new national network to promote American small-town values. * Also in the picture are a number of non-profit organizations with public-service programming in mind.

The FCC has a lot of sorting out to do. There are multiple applicants for all but thirty-five available frequencies, so the commission will have to establish procedures for judging competing applications. It will also have to set low-power guidelines. Meanwhile, official rules are still pending to authorize the new class of television station. These must be decided through the agency's normal hearings-and-comment procedure.

No matter who ends up with the licenses, the FCC, even in the new administration, appears determined to get low-power television on the air. Says a Washington broadcast consultant: "The whole process is moving fast, blindingly fast — faster than anything bureaucracy ever does." ■

* This plan is detailed in a "TV in America" article on page 77.

Illustrations by Bob Pullin



Choices for a Resentful Public

by Daniel Schorr

THE EXPERIENCE WAS NOT NEW. The news media were under the gun in the auditorium of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, early April of this year. Even figures from hateful Big Government were scoring points against the Big Press.

As keynote, John Connally drew applause from a preponderantly student audience with his portrayal of a semi-monopoly—the media—relentlessly undermining American self-confidence with a diet of “negative” information. Jody Powell and Hodding Carter, though representing an administration Texans had rejected more decisively than the voters of any other large state, were still warmly received as they targeted press “bias,” “arrogance,” and “irresponsibility.”

The wry title for the symposium reflected the climate: “Can the First Amendment Survive a Free Press?” A typical question from the floor was about the suspicious uniformity of the lead stories on the network news broadcasts.

Trying to defend a world I never made, I explained that we television journalists are more manipulated than manipulating, more sinned against than sinning. It

didn’t go over. As I have come to learn, the medium in which I work is resented by an increasing number of Americans—resented though they feel enthralled by it, resented *because* they feel enthralled by it, in a way close to the original meaning of “enthralled.”

From dozens of such encounters in recent years I have observed a protest movement welling up against a communications industry perceived as having too much control over the viewer’s consciousness—his news agenda, his buying habits, and some of his primal instincts. The protest finds expression in forms as diverse as a heavy libel penalty against the *National Enquirer* and a crusade by the Moral Majority to clean up television. For all its biblical roots, the Moral Majority will not forgive us our press passes.

It was not merely an aberration of Nixon times when Vice President Agnew won nationwide plaudits in 1970 for attacking television journalism as a “tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men.” Since then Chief Justice Warren Burger has denounced “the big media empires,” former Undersecretary of State George Ball has accused television of playing the hostage crisis “like a soap opera,” and

even an exile from Soviet repression like Solzhenitsyn has found America to be in the grip of “hasty, immature, superficial, misleading media.”

Many of the feelings once reserved for bureaucracy are now vented on media concentrations: accusations of intrusiveness, insensitivity, and arrogance. The ubiquitous mobile camera, indifferent to the physical pain of accident victims and to the psychic pain of those in trouble, has come to be regarded as the agent of the news media—as Big Brother.

But the television reporter is probably more a journalistic little David than a Goliath. Driven from office by enterprising journalism, President Carter’s budget director, Bert Lance, came home to a Georgian welcome that featured signs reading, “Media—Who’s Next?” More recently, Philadelphia television station KYW, confronting ex-Mayor Frank Rizzo in a camera stake-out over his personal use of tax-paid policemen, found itself deluged with telephone calls charging harassment.

Television networks are quick to deny that their increasingly sophisticated capacity for swift reporting of election results and projections has any measurable impact on West Coast voting. But whatever the merits of the dispute, it is undeniably true that West Coast voters *feel* partially disenfranchised by the news media. The television industry was unwilling to make any concession to the concerns of the California voters by holding back results in the East. On the other hand, Jerry Nachman, news director of San Francisco radio station KCBS, proposed to black out a network newscast so that the audience would not learn, before the delayed airing of the climactic *Dallas* episode, who had shot J.R.

As often happens, technology, a contribution to the problem, offers its own solution. The video-tape recorder has already, for many thousands, ended the tyranny of having to view programs at required times. The growth of multi-channel cable systems offering satellite and local services is likely to erode network domination and present a variety of new choices. “Choices” may indeed become the slogan of the eighties. Sony Be-

tamax magazine advertisements stress "an almost infinite possibility of choices." Charles Ferris, former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, foresees an era of "new choices for the American consumer."

Americans have come to feel suffocated and dominated by manipulative media empires appealing to their lowest instincts in a savage struggle for ratings points, dictating what they should see and when. More choices may not always mean better choices, but they may restore to Americans a sense of control over their own lives.

Daniel Schorr was a CBS News correspondent for twenty-five years and is now a senior correspondent for the Cable News Network. He is the author of Clearing the Air.

The Video 'Revolution' And Human Nature

by William A. Henry III

YOU COME HOME from a hard day at the office. You shrug off your jacket, kick off your shoes, wonder aloud about dinner, and start planning how to unwind for the evening.

You could sit down with a small-print catalogue of 3,000 video cassettes available for sale at the local dealers. You could comparison-shop between that catalogue and the listing for 1,800 video disks. You could turn on the television to

the directory channel and try to choose an evening's viewing from among the other 119 channels. Or you could study the printed viewer guide if all the flickering white type on the directory channel made your eyes hurt.

After you narrowed your choice down to the seven or so programs you wanted to watch sooner or later, all of them running on recycling loops throughout the month, you could program the home computer with your work and social schedules and have it tell you which show you could watch now without losing the chance to see the others later. Until your selection started you could play a video game or tap into the news headlines (it would require only nine typed responses) from the video-data stream fed by telephone wires into your set.

Or you could give the whole thing up as more work than it's worth, go upstairs to bed, and open a book.

The foregoing scenario of the "home entertainment center" after the "video revolution" has been presented by stock-market visionaries, company salesmen, and gadget freaks as the ultimate liberation of the mass mind. I suspect that instead, it may be a massive boondoggle based on a gross misunderstanding of human nature.

People like a limited field of choice. Ask a child which of two things he'd like to do and he will answer promptly. Ask him which of seven and he will fall silent. Ask an adult in a restaurant which of ten desserts he'd like and he'll tell you to come back in a few minutes. Take him for the first time to a Chinese restaurant with a six-page menu and he'll mutter all night.

It's always hard to sort out cause and effect. But I guess we may have developed three networks (four including PBS) not only because of economic and technological limitations, but also because



that is about the maximum number of options most people want to consider. The public's taste seems to be maturing, and in the process fragmenting, as people define more precisely what they want to watch. But if three or four copycat networks are not enough, if people grouse (and not all that often) that there's nothing they want to watch on four channels, it does not necessarily follow that they are asking for, say, eight dozen.

To some extent, visions of the future are known to be pipe dreams anyway. There is not, and there probably will not be, enough unduplicated programming to fill all those channels, nor the economics to justify them, nor the audience to view them. Even the most hooked can watch only so many hours of television a day. And the most hooked often aren't watching, strictly speaking. They are using the set as companion or background noise. Almost any mass-appeal channel will serve the purpose. The hooked can't be bothered to turn the dial every half-hour, Nielsen and network researchers tell us. They surely won't be poring over catalogues to figure out what to see (or rather hear) next in their twelve-hour television day.

Our society already suffers from an information glut. Print and especially television news flood us with unassimilated facts. Advertising wizards, who are usually ahead of the rest in the word-business, recognized that reality a while ago and started to emphasize feelings rather than statistics. How will the hassled, over-informed public react when asked to study and memorize a viewing schedule, each hour of which is more complicated than an anatomy chart?

There are subtler questions, too. How much of the public's pleasure in watching television is tied to the fact that almost everyone else is watching the same things at the same time—and thus can find a natural topic of conversation at the office, supermarket, or laundromat the next day? From my observation, television has surpassed the weather as the great unifying subject of American chitchat. The video revolution would diminish, if not eliminate, that unity.

The revolution would also diminish, if not wreck, the star system. What would we do for heroes, sex objects, surrogate friends, if we did not share nationally recognizable performers or roles? Less lavish productions made for smaller audiences might or might not fulfill our individual needs for fantasy as effectively. But it may be important to our fantasies to know they are shared by others, that we are worshipping at a popular altar.

The video revolution would also have profoundly disruptive effects on major American institutions—advertisers and their corporate clients, politics and government—which would likely fight anything obstructing their ease of access to the common people.

But they may not have to fight after all. I suspect most of the public likes television reasonably well as it is. There is bound to be an upscale market for disks and cassettes (though thus far it is for porno and movies, the latter a limited product and the former reaching a limited audience). There is evident enthusiasm in places like Columbus, Ohio, for the add-on services cable can offer. Yet despite Warner Communications' massive investment there (they don't call it losses, they call it research and development), cable channels outdraw the networks only with major movies, prime local sports events, and two or three televised town meetings per year. Jimmied and unreliable as the Nielsen numbers may be, they reflect a reality we all can affirm. A great many people watch a lot of network television and most get a lot of pleasure from it, or at least enough pleasure not to pursue anything more active. They don't read books or take courses in Chinese. Why, then, will they want television to change so that they have to read a viewer guide as thick as a book, or program a computer in a language as alien as Chinese? They might as likely throw out the dog and the slippers.

William A. Henry III, who writes national news for Time magazine, received the 1980 Pulitzer Prize for criticism as television critic of The Boston Globe.

Pornography at Home Has Ancient Roots

by Jeff Greenfield

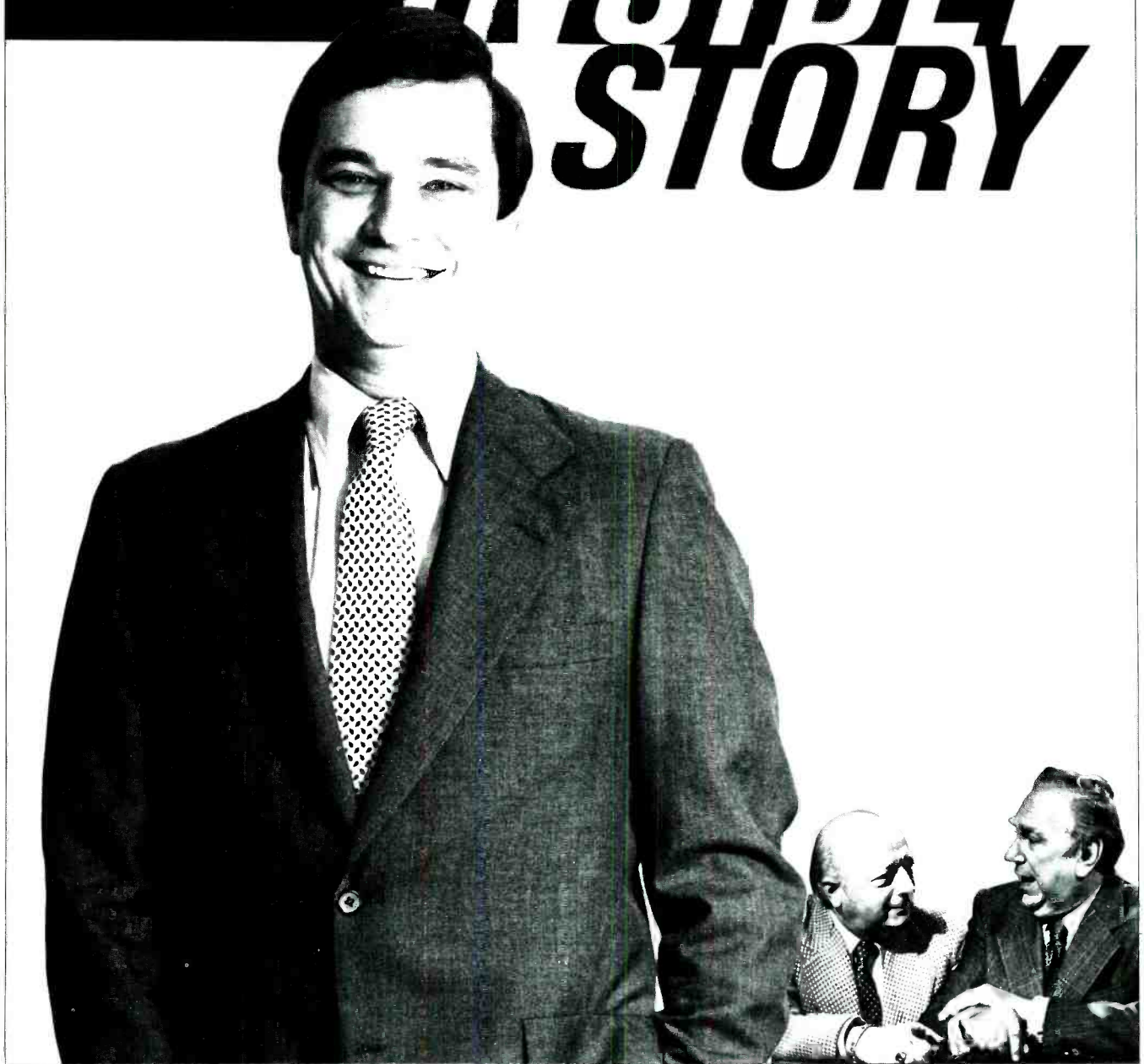
ON NEW YORK'S CABLE systems, you can watch the publisher of *Screw* magazine interview a porno-movie star about her favorite stunts, and watch not-quite-X-rated excerpts from her latest *oeuvre*. In Allentown, Pennsylvania, you can watch hardcore X-rated movies late at night on television; you can do the same in Anchorage, Alaska.

A new pay-cable service called Rainbow is being offered to cable operators around the country. It combines high-culture offerings with R-rated, sexually oriented movies—*Eroica* one night, *erotica* the next.

There is, predictably, a good deal of outrage at the sexually explicit material offered on cable systems across America. Some of it comes from people angered at the corruption of morals. ("Pornovision!" Texas Reverend George Gosser calls it. "It should be swept off the screen like you'd sweep dirt out of the house!") Some of it comes from broadcasters worried about the competition threatened by cable companies, which are neither federally licensed nor subscribers to the National Association of Broadcasters' code. Recently ABC Television president Fred Pierce urged cable operators to join "the coalition of restraint." He said, "The community should require cable operators to discharge the same code of responsibility expected of broadcasters."

But permit my dissent. The explosion of outlets promised, and increasingly delivered, by cable television means a good deal of material that either bores or offends a mass audience can be profitably

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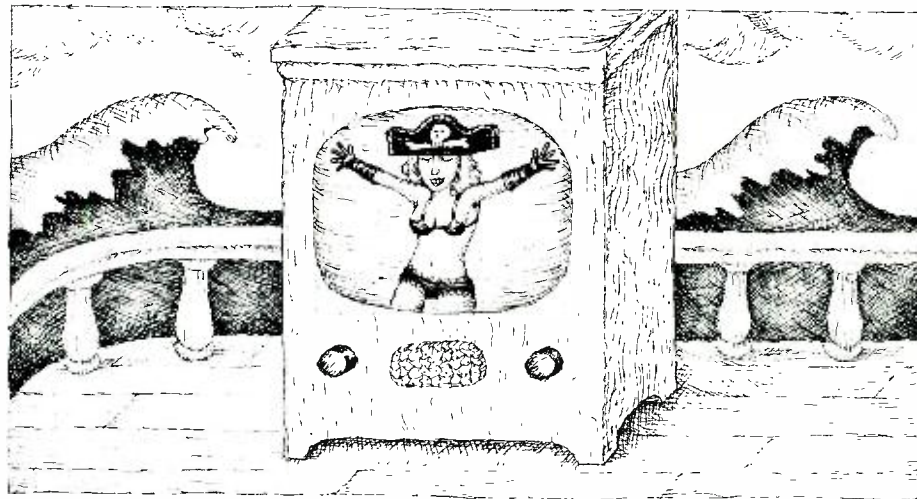
offered to much smaller audiences. In these smaller groups are people who want sexually stimulating material. It may not be the most ennobling programming; it may even say something dispiriting about people who pay \$3.50 for an hour and a half of voyeuristic sex. But if properly controlled, it should not be whistled off the home screen.

Some perspective, please. There is no medium of communication that has not been used to turn people on. Japanese silk screens, Pompeian wall mosaics, Grecian urns, poetry, songs, scrolls, books, movies, records—all have been used for erotic arousal because the sexual curiosity of human beings is evidently limitless. It is about as shocking to discover that people want to watch pornography on television as it is to discover that Polaroid cameras were not used exclusively for the photographing of family picnics. Indeed, the brisk sale of porno video cassettes priced at \$100 suggests how “healthy” the market is. For some viewers, a trip to the local dirty movie emporium is a much heavier cost than the excessive price of a video tape.

Nor is this the only evidence of the demand for spicy material on television. Last spring, the operator of an X-rated theater in Columbus, Ohio, was accused of screening an obscene movie called *Captain Lust*. He wanted to prove that the movie did not offend community standards. So he subpoenaed the records of QUBE, Columbus’s ambitious cable system, which showed, among other things, a less explicit version of the same movie. The records showed that of 30,000 QUBE subscribers, more than 10,000 of them had paid extra to watch *Captain Lust*.

One over-the-air pay-television system, Universal Subscription Television, says its R-rated movie service, Private Screenings, was a major reason its subscription list more than doubled in less than a year.

Nor is it at all clear that the public is exactly up in arms at the prospect of pornography flooding its living rooms. Although local franchise hearings—where the right to operate cable systems is de-



cided by city councils—are often attended by anti-porn activists, the opinion of a community may be essentially libertarian. In Mesquite, Texas, where the issue went to a referendum, the vote was about two-to-one *against* programming restrictions.

Does this mean there is no legitimate interest in limiting such material? No. When it comes to parental control over this programming, cable companies do have some obligations to fulfill. Fortunately, they can easily put physical control over explicit sexual material into the hands of the subscribers.

For example, the Twin-Counties Trans-Video System, serving Allentown, Pennsylvania, requires that a converter be installed in the home receiving adult programming. Beyond that, movies must be ordered by telephone; the subscriber must give his own code number, as well as the listed number of the movie from a special guidebook. In four years of operation, there has been *no* recorded instance of an accidental showing. Even more simple is the use of a “lock-box,” which gives only the keyholder access to adult channels. A parent going out for the night can shut off the channel. (Although this will probably result in a surge of activity at the junior high-school’s sheet-metal shop, it may teach some vocational skills

to our young people.)

It would seem sensible, as cable technology grows, to move all explicit programming—from *Midnight Blue* to *Ugly George* and *Deep Throat*—to limited-access channels, and to make sure that all such programming is listed in the appropriate cable company’s programming guide. This would give parents clear dominance over potentially offensive material. Beyond this limit, however, we are back to the same libertarian notions governing the private use of pornography—use that even this conservative Supreme Court has held to be clearly protected under the First Amendment.

It’s probably true that Vladimir Zworykin did not imagine Marilyn Chambers or Harry Reems cavorting in our living rooms when he developed the iconoscopic camera, anymore than Gutenberg could have imagined *Hustler* magazine. That is not the point. Once we insure that parents can control sexually explicit television, we are beyond the point of a legitimate public interest in limiting pornography. We are in the area of taste. And as to *de gustibus*, there is still *non disputandum*. ■

Jeff Greenfield is television critic for CBS News and author of Television: The First Fifty Years.



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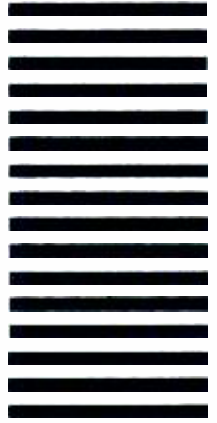
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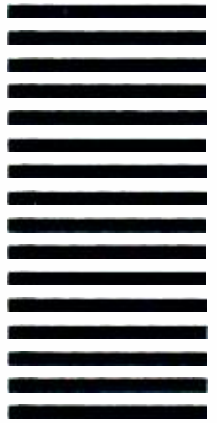
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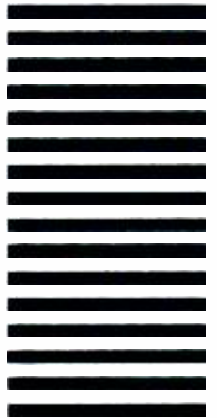
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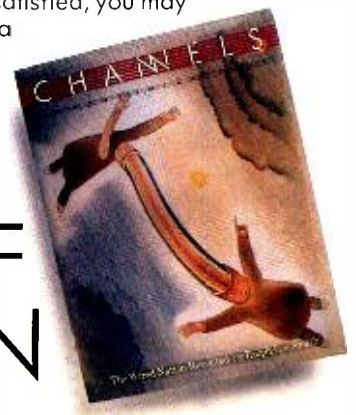
Channels is published by the nonprofit Media Commentary Council, created by the Markle Foundation to help us understand the communications revolution.

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BC104

A NEW VISION OF TELEVISION

NORMAN LEAR

People for the American Way

'In this country we must maintain a climate in which people are free to think the way they wish.'

Interview by Susan Witty

Illustrations by Vivienne Fleisher



Q: What prompted you to start *People for the American Way*?

I had made an arrangement with Universal to write and direct a feature called *Religion* [that was to satirize the Religious New Right]. And after about a year of researching the script, the subject became less amusing and much more serious to me. Not that something serious isn't subject to satire, it's even more subject to it, but I began to feel I wanted to counter it directly, rather than indirectly through a single film. I also thought it was important to do it quickly.

Q: How did you proceed?

I felt my concern [about the methods and message of the right-wing electronic pulpit] would be shared by the mainline churches, and that whatever I did should reflect their concerns as well as my own secular ones. So I traveled around the country and met with mainline church leaders, and I found that indeed they were dreadfully concerned, not just in terms of Scripture but also in terms of the effect on their congregations and on the country.

Q: So the organization began with you?

It began with me, but very quickly it was not me, it was all these church leaders. They were waiting to be threaded together, not quite knowing how to go about it. Initially the idea grew out of my own ear for the dissonance in the Religious New Right. There's a jarring, divisive tone that they strike, and it caught my ear.

Q: What are the tactics of *People for the American Way*?

First, an understanding that those

people attracted to the likes of the Moral Majority are confused, and for good reason. They are confused because we live in very difficult times; the problems today are the most complex problems this nation has ever faced. And the Religious New Right offers simple solutions to people who desperately need some leadership and some solutions. So one of our major priorities is a long-due respect and affection for the mass of Americans. The Establishment makes its decisions, consciously or unconsciously, based on the belief that, as H. L. Mencken quipped, nobody ever lost money underestimating the intelligence of the American people. And *People for the American Way* does not believe that. We care about those people who have been, for the most part confusedly, attracted to the Moral Majority kind of thinking.

Q: What kind of thinking is that?

What the press has not sufficiently covered is the amount of school textbook censoring that's taking place; the number of library associations that are being pressured to remove certain authors from the shelves; the movements in states across the country to do away with child-abuse laws. These activities are all being carried out in the name of God, Christ, and country. And those who lead these activities would have any citizen who differs believe that he will lose contact with the Almighty if he disagrees. So *People for the American Way* affirms, "you have a right to disagree, you're no less pro-American. In fact you're quite pro-American to have your own view and care about it."

Q: How do you convince the "confused" of

the truth of that message?

Our first spots [sixty-second television commercials first aired in October] were designed simply to say, "Don't let anybody tell you you're not a good American or are a bad Christian because you disagree with them politically." The point was that this is a pluralistic society. The goal isn't to bring about a nation of "the hell with what anybody else thinks, this is *my* thought," but to work for a nation of people who believe what they will after seeking and receiving the information they need, and who then seek consensus. Not pluralistic anarchism, but pluralistic community.

Q: Are you planning more spots?

The second generation will affirm the same idea, but they will be totally different. They'll be thirty-second spots, and they will consist of a series of cuts of different Americans—male, female, black, white, Asian—talking about things like how they like their eggs. Somebody says, "I like my eggs soft-boiled." Somebody else says, "Soft-boiled? That's icky." Somebody else says, "I like them over hard." "Over hard? But then you don't get the yellow runny." "Runny yellow? I don't like runny yellow." A fry cook finishes it by saying, "Eggs, I fry 'em all day. I hate the sight of them." Then you cut to a well-known individual who says something like, "Diversity, freedom of opinion, the right to express your own thought, that's the American way. Brought to you by *People for the American Way*."

We will do that with eggs, with modern music, and with television. People love to argue about music, television, and how they like their eggs.

Interspersed with those commercials will be commercials made from old newsreel and television footage of Congressional leaders—Everett Dirksen, Robert Taft, however far back we go—arguing about specific issues, always winding up with, "Hey, in this society, diversity and the right to hold your own opinion matter."

Q: Has there been any resistance on the part of broadcasters to airing your spots?

The networks would not run the original television spots, so we had to go to independent stations across the country. Some of those refused to run them, but most did not.

Q: Why did the networks refuse to run them?

They have a one-line credo that goes something like, "We cannot accept paid advertising that is or threatens to be controversial." (Continued on Page 20)

THE REV. DONALD WILDMON

The Coalition for Better Television

'All we're saying to advertisers is, if you bring us good-quality programs we'll buy your products.'

Interview by Christine Doudna



Q: How did you go about setting up the Coalition for Better Television—and why?

There are more than 300 groups in the coalition. The way we did it was simply invite various groups to participate. The why was that we were disturbed and concerned with the blatant exploitation of sex, violence, and profanity on television.

Q: What is your method of changing the nature of television? Is it essentially to boycott the sponsors for controversial shows?

We believe in selective viewing and selective buying. The networks can show what they want to show. The advertiser can sponsor what he wants to sponsor. The viewer can view any of the options made available to him by the networks—and only the networks can tell him what he may watch. But the consumer can spend his money where he wants to. Our aim is to let the advertiser know that we're going to make our purchasing decisions based on his sponsorship decisions.

Q: Is that not a form of censorship?

Censorship has existed since man learned to communicate. It can't keep from existing. If you're saying, is that a form of expression prohibited by the First Amendment? The answer to that is quite clearly no. If you read the First Amendment, it says Congress shall pass no law concerning the freedom of speech or of the press. We're not asking for a single law to be passed.

Q: Isn't that un-American—to encourage a boycott that would effectively inhibit the free expression of opinion, or in

this case, programming?

Un-American? You mean it's un-American for me to spend my money the way I want to? Nobody's limiting freedom of expression. The networks can show anything they want to. All we're saying to advertisers is, if you bring us good-quality programs, we'll buy your products. And if you don't, we won't. That's as American as apple pie. The same thing is—if you make a good car, I'll buy it.

Q: How do you decide whether programming is good? Your organization is monitoring programs to let people know what you think is right.

Yes, we're monitoring programs to see what the programs are and what advertisers sponsor them. When we get ready to make our decision to purchase or not purchase, we want some hard facts to base it on. We intend to make known the companies selected, and we intend that people will join us.

Q: But who are you to be passing judgment on behalf of the millions of American viewers?

We're such a small group that we will not be effective—and the networks haven't anything to worry about. I don't know what all the hullabaloo is about.

Q: So you're surprised by the networks' response to your criticisms?

No, I'm not surprised the least bit. They have reason to be worried. They have alienated a great percentage of the people in this country.

Q: You think the networks are giving people television they don't want?

They're giving a group of people televi-

sion they want. They're not giving another group the television that they want.

Q: What programs do you find particularly offensive?

It's not programs per se, it's the value system that's constantly being depicted on television that concerns us—the value system that says sex is to be shared in a snickering way between two people who aren't married, or in a violent way. It's a value system that says violence is a legitimate method of achieving one's goal, of resolving differences. It's a system that says profanity is an approved way of enforcing what one has to say.

Q: How do you account for the popularity of these shows?

Some people are watching them. *Dallas*, for example, pulls a Nielsen rating of twenty or twenty-five. That means 25 percent of all the households in the country are watching *Dallas*. But you know what else that says? It says 75 percent aren't watching.

Q: Does this mean you don't have confidence in the American people to decide what's best for themselves?

We are part of the American people. What we're practicing is democracy. Democracy existed before they started peddling sex and violence on television, and it'll go on existing. I thought this was the American way, to use Norman Lear's phrase. If you're concerned, you get involved. . . . The American way also includes the Thirteenth Amendment, you know; it says involuntary servitude shall not exist in this country. That, in essence, says I've got the right to spend my money where I want to.

Q: Don't you defend to the death the right of any American to say whatever he believes, even if you disagree with him?

Absolutely. But I don't defend to the death the right to make another person pay for something. If you want to pay for it—if you like sex and violence, vulgarity—pay for it. We're dealing with a public medium. You pay for commercial television when you buy the product advertised. Television has always worked on the concept of economic support of the program. The attitude of the networks is one of complete arrogance. It's rude, indifferent, uncaring. They say, "Write us letters." We've sent letters and letters. I know one man who sent a million letters. But things have gone right on getting worse. We didn't make the rules, we're only playing by the rules handed down.

Q: In Advertising Age magazine, a re-
(Continued on next page)



NORMAN LEAR

(Continued from Page 18)

Q: *Do you support issue advertising?*

People for the American Way is interested in the climate and not the individual issue. The organization consists of conservative church leaders, liberal church leaders, and moderate church leaders, so we run the gamut of opinions on issues. What we agree upon totally is that in this country we must maintain a climate in which people are free to think the way they wish; that all religions and both sides of every issue benefit from that.

Q: *In what way do you think the Moral Majority and the Coalition for Better Television are different from ACT or NOW, or any group that wants to influence programs?*

ACT, for example, wants to change television, and they work very hard at it. But they don't want to pressure sponsors to remove shows from the air, because they think that a secondary boycott is a form of censorship. And they certainly don't want to inspire government to do this. It's one thing to tell your family or your neighbors that they shouldn't watch a certain show because you think it's bad. It's quite another thing to try to get the show off the air and deny those people who care to watch their right to watch it.

Q: *Will People for the American Way be doing anything in addition to the commercials?*

We will be setting up speakers' tours for members of our board, just the way publishing tours are organized—where a writer goes out and appears on all the talk shows and news shows in every city he visits.

Q: *What will they be speaking about?*

Whatever the issues are in that community—book burning, library intrusions, whatever. Or they'll be speaking about religion and American politics, depending on the specialty of the individual speaker.

We'll also be producing a ninety-minute show, *Religion and Politics in America*, which will be a discussion between two of our board members and two members of the Religious New Right, whomever they choose. It will be ninety uninterrupted minutes. We plan to air it widely, and to do it a second time if there's more to be discussed.

Then there's the possibility of developing our own electronic ministry, which would deliver a different religious experience from a different church each week. You'd visit a Southern Baptist church one week, a Lutheran the next, a High Episcopal the third week, a synagogue the fourth, and so on. Ninety percent of the religious shows on television are evangelical fundamentalists, and there is no national mainline church experience.

Q: *Aren't you replicating the tactics of the Religious New Right?*

They say they learned their methods from the left. So if we are now going to replicate what they are doing, we're basically going back, by their own defini-

'We care about those people who have been, for the most part confusedly, attracted to the Moral Majority kind of thinking.'

tion, to what we were doing before they took it away. One of the things I hope we'll help to achieve is the reestablishment of the perception of the flag as belonging to everyone. The flag of this country belongs to the right at the moment. But the flag doesn't really belong to any "them" and it doesn't belong to any "we." It belongs to all of us. And my hope is that People for the American Way can help bring back the flag to all of us. ■



THE REV. DONALD WILDMON

(Continued from Page 19)

cent article predicts that the advertising rates on so-called "clean shows" may go up as much as 25 percent.

A morality tax. In essence, the networks are saying, we'll show you filth—at a discount. If you want clean, family-oriented, wholesome programs, we're going to put a morality tax on it.

Q: *The danger here, of course, is that it isn't just filth, as you put it, that's in jeopardy. If advertisers get anxious about where they put their dollars, they'll not want to touch anything controversial—even good, quality programming. And freedom of expression is restricted.*

It's not ideas that are coming into our homes, it's products. Let me respond in the words of Mr. James Rosenfeld, president of CBS. Mr. Rosenfeld said they would not refuse to show any program, even if every advertiser withdrew, because there were always advertisers waiting in the wings to help sponsor the program. And furthermore, that if every advertiser backed out, as a sense of public duty they would air the program without advertisers. So I don't think it's a grave danger at all because the man said it's not.

Q: *But you don't have to watch television.*

Most people don't buy that set not to watch it. They'd like to have something to watch.

Q: *Don't you think, if you get the networks to respond, you would simply drive greater numbers of viewers to the even more-exploitive sexuality that can be seen on cable?*

I don't think we're going to drive any viewers away at all. The latest Nielsen

figures reflect that the networks have lost 7 percent of the viewing audience in the last year, and they have done that themselves. They're going to lose more—not just because of cable but because they're continually driving people away. They think America is made up of a bunch of hedonistic, amoral, or immoral people, who love nothing better than to sit down and snicker about sex jokes or see a gunfight or rape or robbery. I sometimes wonder if they really think anybody lives west of the Hudson.

Q: *You think people in New York are the only people interested in sex and violence?*

I think they think Tupelo is in the middle of Africa somewhere. They have been caught up in the system so long they think this is what life really is. Surely somewhere, there's goodness and kindness and compassion and love and consideration and all the other virtues man has embraced for centuries. I found it interesting that ABC ran a documentary on the killing of the whales but they've been silent on the killing of babies—unborn babies. That's a controversial issue. They have totally ignored the concern of millions of Americans. The networks have insulted the American public to the point where there's a tremendous amount of disgust in the public. And the public is asking for a handle. Up to this point they had no handle. All they could do was turn it off. If they weren't one of 1,140 Nielsen families, then turning it off didn't really make much difference.

Q: *What about the route of license renewal?*

How many stations do you know that have lost their licenses? Zero. And furthermore, the FCC has stated time and time again that when it came to programming content, they would not get involved. I have a letter here from Charles Ferris, chairman of the FCC, and he says turning the set off is not the only thing to do—you can write to broadcasters and advertisers who make the programs possible. How about that? The federal government is saying that expressing concern to the advertiser is a legitimate method of airing our concerns.

Q: *But do advertisers buy time according to the program? Don't they buy it according to the number of people who watch?*

That may have been true two years ago, but not today. Just about every advertiser on television pre-screens or has agencies to pre-screen every program that's on. One advertiser just a few days ago said that he had pulled thirty-three spots since the first of March. They have

the privilege to pre-screen anything they want to—and the privilege to withdraw from those programs. So the advertiser knows—or has the ability to know—entirely what that program consists of.

Q: *You trust the advertiser more than the network executives?*

I guarantee you I do, and do you know why? Because I have a way of expressing myself to that advertiser. I can use my dollar. It's regrettable and unfortunate. You know, when I talk to the networks, they talk about decency and the American way and they quote me great ideas. But their definition and my definition aren't necessarily the same. But when I talk to the networks and advertisers in terms of the dollar, everybody involved knows precisely what we're talking about. There's no misinterpretation about the definition of a dollar.

Q: *What about Norman Lear's activities and People for the American Way?*

He's got a right to do that. I'm for the American way too. I thought the American way was plurality—that's what he's saying. Diversity of opinion. But the only opinion coming out of the networks is that sex and violence sell. Mr. Lear has a right to do what he's doing.

'There's a tremendous amount of disgust with television. And the public is asking for a handle.'

Q: *You also believe in what he's talking about?*

Sure I do. It's not ideas that are not going to come into our homes, it's products. You know, in the last three weeks I've been called by the networks Khomeini, McCarthy, and Hitler. I'm the bad guy. Now, what happened to McCarthy? People found out what he was, and that was it for him.

Q: *You don't think he did a certain amount of damage before people found out what he really was?*

He might have, but a lot of that damage was overcome after they found out what

he was. The thing is this: If we are McCarthy reincarnated, as they say, the public is going to find out who we are and what we are. They can call us McCarthy from now until the day we die—and if we aren't McCarthy, their simply calling us McCarthy won't make us so.

Q: *What about the ads themselves? Why not make the advertisers responsible for their ads and the networks responsible for their shows? What do you think about all the jeans commercials, for instance—why aren't you concerned about the sexual exploitation there?*

I think that's the next step. They're exploiting young people—twelve- and thirteen-year-olds. Companies like Jordache, Calvin Klein, have moved in and said, "Hey, the only thing we care anything in the world about is making a dollar. We aren't concerned about the influence or subtle message we give to the young people." But what we have going on is a real good example of the American process. We're casting our votes at the checkout counter. The networks use their economic clout when they deal with affiliates. The National Organization for Women has been boycotting states all over the country, the Civil Rights movement has always pushed boycotts, Israel refuses to do business with the PLO—and yet the networks never condemned any of them.

Q: *But you're boycotting advertisers who may or may not have had anything to do with the product you're objecting to—namely programming.*

They're paying for that program to be on the air.

Q: *So you want them to have more of a moral responsibility for programming?*

I'm saying the advertiser needs to be a responsible corporate citizen in all aspects of our society.

Q: *How involved is the Moral Majority with your activities?*

They are one of 300 groups. Their name is a buzz word. The networks rarely refer to the Coalition for Better Television without referring to the Moral Majority, even though it's only one of several groups, albeit the largest group. As far as having any influence on the direction the coalition will take, their influence is equal to any other group's.

Q: *How do you feel about Reverend Falwell?*

Do I agree with everything he says? Absolutely not. Do I agree with a good bit of what he says? Absolutely so. I can think for myself just like everybody else. ■

CBS REGRETS

“We regret that the subject matter of this commercial...deals with a controversial issue of public importance and does not fall within our ‘goods and services’ limitation for commercial acceptance.”

—letter from CBS to Mobil

In other words, the most powerful communications medium yet devised—television—will let you sell dog food and blue jeans, but never an idea dealing with a controversial subject of public importance. Not even an argument about such an idea. Not even facts if they are remotely connected with such an idea. To the television networks, controversial issues are objects of taboo that may be approached only by a special tribe: their own broadcast journalists.

As an oil company, we have opinions on a wide range of public issues. And we're able to assert them in print, in speeches, in public hearings—just about everywhere but on television. We think they're important, and that television audiences should be able to consider them, too.

Letters like the one we quote above are really death notices in the marketplace of ideas. A responsible news organization shouldn't be sending them.

Mobil[®]

Overstepping the Delicate Line

by Les Brown

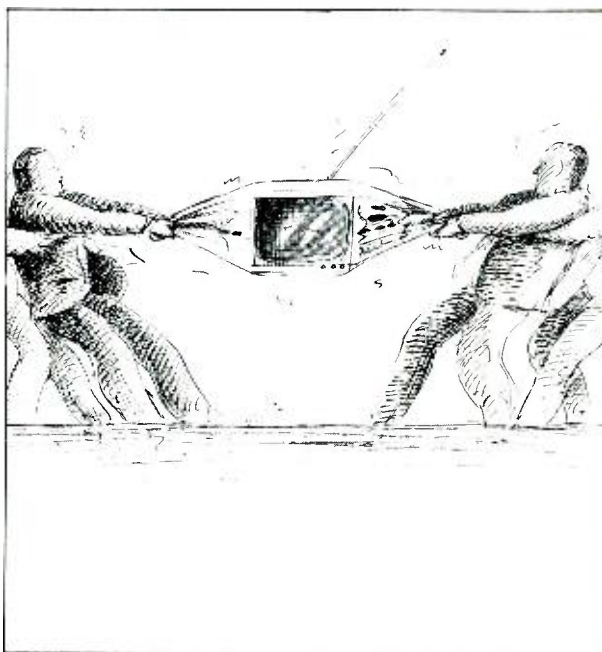
SEX AND VIOLENCE are of course distinctly different forms of behavior but are so related as television issues that they are usually hyphenated in the public mind. Sexuality is for titillation, violent action for intensity; they are program flavorings linked by the commercial cynicism from which they both spring. They alternate; like sides of a coin, when one is down (suppressed), the other is up.

Yet they are oddly matched, at opposite political poles. One of the long-recognized truths in television entertainment is that sexuality agitates people on the political right but doesn't seem to disturb those on the left much, while violence has the opposite effect. "You can almost tell how a person votes by what he or she complains about," a veteran network executive once wearily remarked.

At the moment, exploitation of sex is rampant on television just when the country has made a pronounced swing to the right. What until now has been a serious public issue has turned explosive and divisive. An army of concerned citizens, led by fundamentalist ministers from the Bible Belt and calling itself the Coalition for Better Television, has risen to take on the networks, to "clean up" television and restore traditional moral values on the airwaves. A chief collaborator in the campaign is the Moral Majority Inc., an activist organization that derived its visibility from attacks on television's excesses. This movement, feared by many as religious, political, and repressive, has spurred a marshaling of opposing forces.

On March 1, the coalition began a three-month effort to monitor prime-time programs for sex content, after which it will select by consensus the least moral ones. It will then name the advertisers that predominate in those shows and instruct its membership to boycott them.

"We're not trying to Christianize anything," Cal Thomas, a former NBC News reporter who is now the Moral Majority's vice president for communications, explained in a recent television industry forum. "We are simply trying to have an influence. We're trying to get television to represent life as it really



is. All night long, every night, it's people jumping from one bed to another, wives cheating on their husbands, sex, and dope. All we're asking for is a little balance in programming."

People who speak out and express their objections to broadcasting practices are performing as good citizens; their action is in the spirit of the Federal Communications Act. As businesses licensed to serve the public interest, television and radio stations have been known to respond when citizens groups raise their voices. Women, blacks, Hispanics, homosexuals, consumerists, and environmentalists have all gained, through organized vocal campaigns, somewhat more considerate treatment in television programming than they had before.

The Coalition for Better Television contends it is doing nothing less than the other groups that have put pressure on television. In fact, it is doing a good deal more. Zealous to achieve a positive end, the coalition has resorted to means that raise moral questions of their own. It has crossed the line of healthy citizen involvement in adopting an action which, though legal, inevitably leads to the silencing of voices and the vanquishing of the creative and journalistic spirit. The coalition intends to clean up television by censoring it.

Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television (ACT), put it this way: "They are coming up with a hit list. And once you get started with a hit list you're dealing in repression."

Cal Thomas defends the coalition's boycott technique as "an old American tradition." He points out that "black people boycotted lunch counters in the South, anti-Vietnam War protesters boycotted Dow Chemical for making napalm, and people have boycotted lettuce in support of the workers." He might also have mentioned that a number of social action groups (sometimes thought of, but not always accurately, as on the political left) were instrumental in driving violence off the networks at the midpoint of the 1978-79 season with techniques similar to those being used by the Coalition for Better Televi-

sion. Yet there was no great stir over it, and no one yelled repression.

Indeed, paradoxically, it may very well have been Nicholas Johnson, the onetime member of the Federal Communications Commission with a reputation as a liberal-activist gadfly, who created the blueprint the rightist coalition is using for its clean-up crusade. The former commissioner was at the time chairman of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, a public interest group now headed by Ralph Nader. Johnson spearheaded a campaign that (1) identified the programs on television most oriented to violence, basing those findings on the Violence Profile produced by Dr. George Gerbner of the Annenberg School at the University of Pennsylvania; (2) identified the advertisers whose spots appeared most frequently in violent programming, and (3) published a report on the survey — and a press release — to hold those advertisers up to disgrace.

That campaign continues, now under the auspices of a larger group called the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV). It seems to attract little attention, however, despite the involvement of religious organizations, consumerists, psychiatrists, social scientists, and educators — perhaps because television violence has been in decline these last few years.

The violence coalition has in the past stopped short of the advertiser boycott, thus short of outright censorship. It may be as much at fault as the Coalition for Better Television in making advertisers scapegoats for programs over which they have no control, but it does not overstep the delicate line that separates a public outcry from an attempt at repression.

The advertiser boycott by special-interest groups aiming to keep programs off the air is not by any means the invention of the Coalition for Better Television. In the fifties, Blatz Beer yielded to pressures from black organizations and canceled its sponsorship of *Amos 'n' Andy*, causing CBS to take it off the network. In the seventies, the National Rifle Association and other gun lobbyists chased advertisers off a CBS News documentary on hunting, *The Guns of Autumn*. CBS aired the program anyway, to show it could not be intimidated.

More recently, religious groups tried to prevent *Jesus of Nazareth* from being televised on NBC, and *Soap* from going on ABC. In both cases, the groups mounted advertiser boycotts without having seen the programs. Their anger and fears had been triggered by what they read of the programs in publicity materials and magazine articles. Last year, Jewish groups tried to suppress the telecast of *Playing For Time* on CBS, whereupon the network withheld disclosure of the advertisers until the broadcast.

All these attempts at censorship were of an ad hoc nature, centering on a particular television show. But the coalition works on a much larger scale and, moreover, in a continuing and systematic way.

If the scope of the crusade and the boycotting technique are matters of concern, two other elements are downright alarming. First, the organization plans to determine, by its own form of “consensus,” what is wholesome and what is not, thereby electing itself arbiter for the nation; second, the Moral Majority, a principal force in the coalition, has a political tincture. In the November elections it was outspoken in support of candidates on the right.

When all the characteristics of the movement are considered — its scale, its tactics and ideological bent, the fury of righteousness that propels it — the resulting image frighteningly resembles that of another movement which, some thirty years ago, brought on television's darkest and most shameful period: the years of the blacklist. In the McCarthyist climate of the early fifties, an organization known as Aware Inc. successfully engineered the blacklist. Aware threatened to boycott

advertisers if they sponsored programs employing people it had found insufficiently loyal to America. Since television's life blood is advertising, the industry quickly complied with the campaign by weeding out the undesirables.

The nightmarish episode established that television sponsors are easily intimidated, that their interest is in making friends and not enemies, and that they do not spend millions on television to lose customers. It also proved that the quickest and surest way to make a program or person disappear was to threaten a boycott of the sponsor's products.

But one large and important change in the way television conducts business has occurred since that time. The advertiser has given up his status as program sponsor, except in a few special instances. Instead, he now merely buys a schedule of thirty-minute spots on a network, in much the same way he buys space in a newspaper or magazine. He has no more direct involvement with the television program than he does with the newspaper article on the page carrying his ad.

Today the networks make virtually all the programming decisions and control what they choose to broadcast. When the advertiser purchases time, he actually buys viewers; what he cares about is how many people, and what kinds of people, will be exposed to his commercial. Often he leaves it to the network's computer to decide which shows will carry his spots. In light of that, he cannot justly be held accountable for the quality and character of television shows. To hold him accountable is to ignore truth for expediency.

If the advertiser is not responsible for the program, then the coalition's tactics are even more dangerous than those of Aware Inc. For there is only one short step from the boycotting of television advertisers to the boycotting of newspaper and magazine advertisers who may appear in publications that displease the coalition.

Most unsettling of all, the coalition's crusade is nothing less than a purge of television's content; no one can predict where it will stop. The more powerful the coalition becomes, the wider undoubtedly will be its compass. Peggy Charren, who has committed ACT to a campaign of its own against the crusade, summed it up when she said, “Perhaps no one will miss the first program forced off the air in the name of morality. But the New Right's censorship crusade will not stop there. What will be the next target? A production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*? A documentary on teenage pregnancy? The news?”

Well before the organization has named any offenders, advertisers are responding to the crusade. A number of large companies have instructed their advertising agencies to keep them out of programs that might be boycotted by the Moral Majority and the coalition. The networks, in their planning for next season, may therefore steer clear of the kinds of over-sexed sitcoms and gamey soaps that have sparked the clean-up movement. And if they should, what in the name of wholesomeness will they choose instead?

Bets are on a return of the police show, the western, the war melodrama — the violence side of the coin. This might placate the sex coalition while moving the violence coalition to the fore. After the shooting of President Reagan in April, the violence coalition (NCTV) announced a “stepped up” campaign to monitor television programs and gather greater citizen support through a direct-mail campaign. It said also that it will “encourage direct citizen action by urging customers not to buy from sponsors of the most violent programs.”

Each side has learned from the other. In their impatience for results, people on the left as well as the right have chosen to spurn the mechanisms law provides for public participation in broadcasting. Each would have mob rule — and, sadly, in the name of morality and the public good. ■

**“Keep the news straight,
short, understandable.”**



“I think the role of an anchor man is to give the news, give it straight, keep it short, make it understandable. One thing we ought not give away is the trust that the audience has in you that you’re really trying to *give* them the news, and not *sell* them any.”

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Is Glen Larson bigger than life? Well, let's just say he's been working on it.

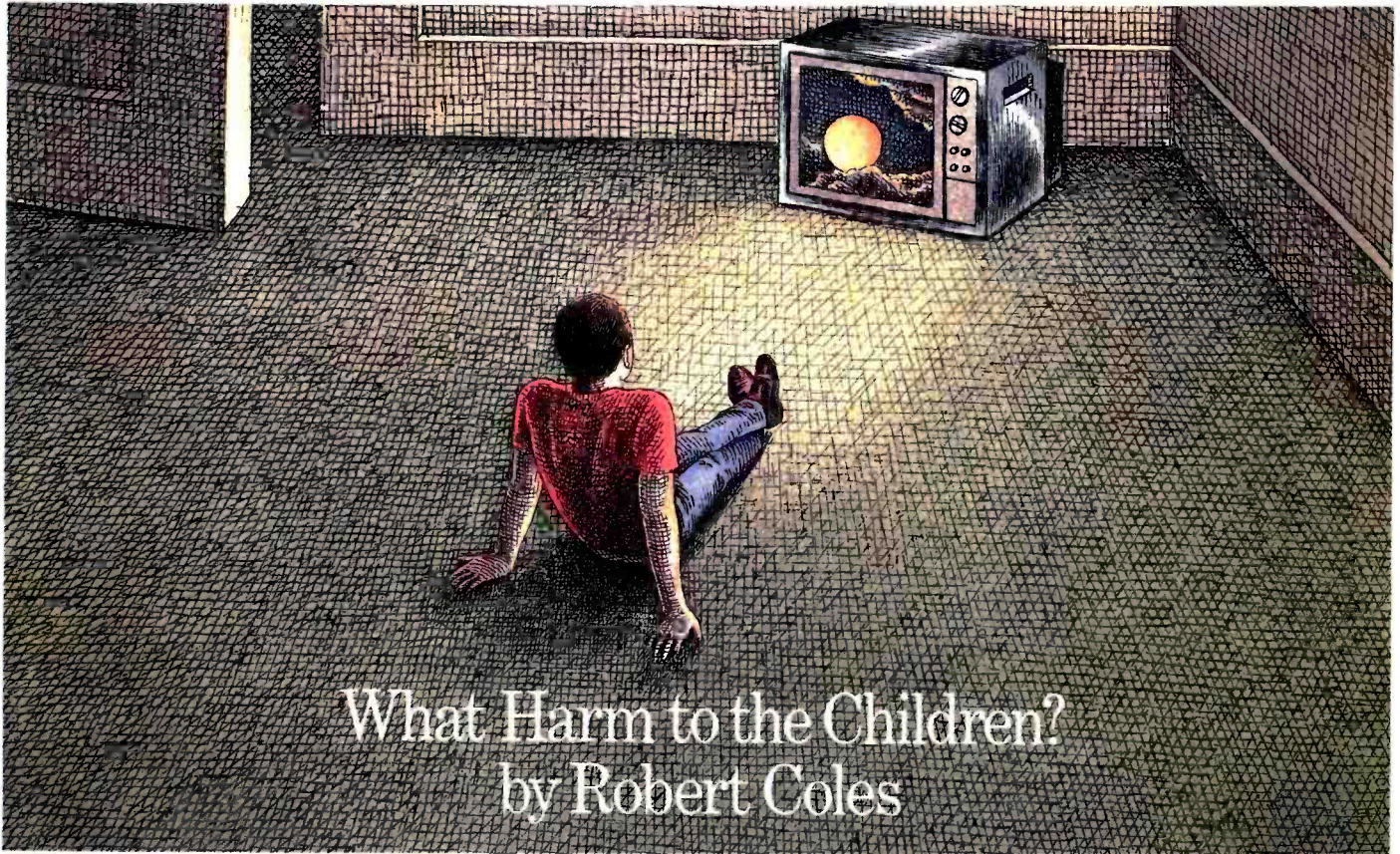
Welcome Glen Larson!



Glen Larson is here.

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What Harm to the Children? by Robert Coles

WHEN I WAS in medical school I very much wanted to be a pediatrician. I took all the electives in that specialty I could manage. Later, I went on to take residency training in the subject before moving in the direction of child psychiatry. A wonderful mentor and friend at the time (the 1950s) was William Carlos Williams, a writing doctor if ever there was one: poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, and not least, a marvelously astute, conscientious “general practitioner,” as we used to call an almost forgotten species of physician. All the time “Doc Williams,” as he was called, made his home visits among the poor and working-class people of northern New Jersey, Paterson especially. He was attentive to a population some other doctors have chosen to ignore—humble, moneyless, uneducated families—from whom, he kept insisting, he learned a whole lot. The children of those tenement houses particularly impressed him with their vitality, resourcefulness, canniness, their marvelous sense of humor, and very important, the lessons they kept giving him. No talk about “cultural disadvantage,” “cultural deprivation” from him. No inclination on his part to emphasize the flaws, warts, deficits of the “tough kids” (he often called them) who said “hi” and “hi” and “hi” to him as he made his way on daily rounds. Later, well into the evening, he’d pull scraps of paper out of his jacket pockets—words, phrases, entire sentences that had caught his fancy. They became the stuff of his lyrics, his poignant stories, a number of them (those collected as *Life Along the Passaic*) drawn from his medical work with children.

Robert Coles is a child psychiatrist at The Harvard University Health Services, and is author of Children of Crisis, winner of the Four Freedoms Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

I mention Dr. Williams because I accompanied him, from time to time, as he did his pediatric work, and I talked with him, over a quarter of a century ago, about this country’s young—how they contrasted, to his shrewd and knowing eyes, with the boys or girls of an earlier America. He was rather wry, even skeptical, as he heard my excited talk of this and that, the “new influences” I was sure would make life so different for everyone. In a letter once, he was tactful in bringing me up short after hearing me out: “You may be right. Certainly things change over the years. But I often wonder whether the changes are as big and significant as we make them out to be. Don’t you think that each generation wants to make *its* mark on history, on the world? Maybe one way to do so is to say: Hey, look at what’s happening to *us*, that makes *our* life so very special. I guess I favor waiting and seeing—and keeping an eye on the past, because my hunch is that there’s a *sameness* to this life for all of us, the result of what we are: a creature with a certain kind of head and a heart, a limited number of years—what those existentialists talk about.”

As for television, increasingly around in the last years of his life (he died in 1963), Williams had no great expectation that it would strongly affect children—a major conviction of mine back then, and one I discussed with him occasionally. I was in my twenties, and I was stunned at the “gap” between my childhood (with the radio and its demands on the listener) and the kind of childhood I was observing as I trained to work with the young—with television and its quite different offerings to a boy or girl viewer. One day I told him that I believed the upcoming generation would be “markedly different,” because it would be strongly influenced by the constant visual experiences in the home. He agreed that soon enough television would be virtually every American child’s inheritance, of sorts,

Think of the kids crossing this country
in covered wagons; think of the coyotes,
the talk of Indians, the talk of gold.
What effect did all that have
on our children? They never asked that,
our ancestors. We do.

but he picked me up on the adjective “markedly.” He said he remembered the arrival of radio and the movies and he was sure that children would never quite be the same—all that auditory and visual “input.” But he had noticed no real break, on the part of the children he knew, with the essential character of their humanity. They were, still, trying to grow up the best way they knew how, given the ups and downs of their particular family life. They knew, as did children before them, all the big and small emotions: love for parents and warm feelings toward friends and admiration for certain older persons and envy and spite and meanness.

“Whatever they see and hear will have to find a place in a child’s life,” Williams pointed out, and then he added, “Think of the kids crossing this country in covered wagons; think of the long days across the prairie; think of the coyotes and the buffalo; think of the talk of the Indians, the talk of gold, the talk of the Pacific, and the sight of the Indians and the sight of the desert or the mountains or the canyons or the mighty rivers and finally, the ocean. What ‘effect’ did all that have on children? They never asked that, our ancestors. We do. The question may be more important than any answer there is to it—and I don’t think it’s the kind of question that gets one answer. Maybe as many answers as there are children!”

A KIND OF WISDOM, that; and a kind I fear I was not very interested in receiving at the time. I was concentrating hard on the likely negative influence of a new aspect of twentieth-century technology; he was reminding me that my overall view of human vulnerability was as significant as my concern about a particular, potentially noxious element of today’s world. Like a good social historian, Williams was reminding me that through the generations, children have had to deal with an astonishing array of enticements and hazards. By now, indeed, many of us have absorbed Phillippe Aries’s reminder

(in *Centuries of Childhood*) that even our notion of when adulthood begins has been, and continues to be, an entirely relative matter—a matter of which culture or people, dealing with what traditions, social obligations, economic limitations or possibilities. In the nations of the West, until the seventeenth century, an eight- or nine-year-old person was already “grown up”—at work, and regarded as quite responsible, morally, civilly. Put differently, childhood is no exclusive mandate of nature’s, but rather has to do with the way we view certain other mandates. For the upper classes of such increasingly industrial, secular countries as France, England, and America, children become an ultimate concern, an abiding preoccupation, a prized possession, to be protected at all costs—the only credible approximation of eternity. In earlier times, of course, children were one’s co-workers—there on the farm or in the town’s workshop, sweating it out with everyone else. A child old enough, as we see it, to go to school, was a person old enough, as others saw it, to work—and dress like adults, behave like adults, be held morally accountable as adults are.

Through a strange turn of events, we may well be edging back to that earlier notion of childhood. Children of well-to-do families are hardly protected from the onslaughts of the adult world. They are increasingly becoming as worldly, as savvy, as independent as are their grown-up fellow citizens. More and more we learn about the drinking and drug problems of younger and younger children—down to the upper precincts of the elementary-school population. Teenage sexuality and the resulting pregnancies are a severe national problem; and unfortunately, younger adolescents are very much active in that regard. Just as sad is the exploitation of our children by advertisers—for example, the sexual precocity of various girls used cleverly to hustle potential purchasers of one sort or another. In one of the interviews I recently did with a group of suburban

school teachers, I heard this from a woman of forty who has been teaching sixth grade in a middle-class New England town for fifteen years: “I can’t even remember the ‘old days’ any more. Now my pupils are so *worldly*. They know their rock music. They respond not only to the rhythms, but the words, innuendos, and suggestions. They act macho if they are boys, or seductive if they are girls. They’ve more than tasted beer, or even hard liquor—at least a significant number have. They’ve looked at *Playboy*. They are very clothes-conscious, and what they wear is meant to show how ‘with it’ they are. They are thirsting to be ‘teenagers’—meaning all taken up with cliques and sexual talk, if not action. I have to pinch myself sometimes and ask, how did all this happen?”

She had much more to say—an astute observer of a swiftly changing American social reality. When I asked her for *her* explanation, I received a demurrer: “I pass! I’ve blamed everything—affluence, permissiveness, the decline of religion in the lives of people (I mean, as opposed to the showy ritual of going to church!), the rootlessness of families, the increasingly longer absence from home of both parents and, of course, television. There was a time when I blamed television more than anything else; I felt these kids I teach are ‘tube dazed,’ the phrase my husband used. But we’ve both begun to realize that the tube is just part of a larger story—what’s happening to the American family. When I listen to children these days, I hear more than television programs and ads influencing their heads.”

AT THE TIME, I wasn’t so sure she was right to dismiss so readily the impact of television on children. I had in mind a number of studies, which tell us that children who watch some of the violence-filled programs afterwards become excited if not prone to their own kind of truculence. Of course, these are the results of psychological *experiments*—and

‘You’ve got to ask yourself why these kids
sit and stare at those shows. I’ve watched
them with some kids, and then I’ve asked them
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aren’t looking at the tube the same way I am.’

do not by any means prove that what happens in someone’s research situation is what happens in everyday life. No matter, I had in mind my own annoyance, if not disgust, at the programs my children and their friends want to watch—and watch and watch, if not stopped by worrying adults. Is it not a matter of pure common sense that a child who sees meanness and nastiness made a matter of casual, everyday life, is a child put in serious psychological jeopardy? Can it possibly be good, in any ordinary sense of the word “good,” that so many of our young sit and watch the silly drivel, the brutish junk that all too many television stations over the country offer, in the morning and in the afternoon, and Lord knows, on Saturday without interruption?

I shared some of those concerns with that teacher, and she nodded in assent at first. But she hastened to offer some thoughtful reservations, which I’ve not wanted to forget: “You’ve got to ask yourself *why*—why these kids sit and stare at those shows. I’ve tried something: I’ve watched them with some kids, and then I’ve asked them afterwards what went on, and a lot of the time, they don’t remember too well! They will try hard to dredge up something, but usually they speak in generalities: ‘It’s about this bad guy, and he fools everyone for a long time, but he gets caught in the end.’ Or, ‘It’s about these people out in space, and they are lost, and there are these bad people, and they try to hurt everyone, and they do, but in the nick of time the good people escape.’ I’m interested that the children are long on schematic generalizations, I suppose I call them; but short, very short on specifics. I watch them when the specifics are right before them, showing on the television screen, and there seems to be no fear or anguish in the children, but sometimes a laugh or two. I wonder why?”

“Actually, I think I know why. The kids aren’t looking at the tube the same way I am. What do I mean by that? I mean that these kids are sitting there and listening

and looking, but they’re not really paying attention. I am! I’m seeing all the ridiculous or awful situations and I’m angry or appalled. The kids are in a bit of a daze—but not because they’ve been sedated or because they’re mesmerized by fear or anxiety. Often I think they are bored silly. They are bored silly in school sometimes, so I know the syndrome. They don’t really take in what is being said, even though they seem to be sitting there, looking right at you, and not distracted by anyone or anything. An older teacher I’ve known for years—she’s taught me so much!—used to say to me, ‘There’s a big difference between being there, and putting your mind to work.’ I find myself, a lot of the time, practically shouting at the children to *pay attention*, but they’re not paying enough attention to begin paying attention, real attention—the kind that means something will stick, sink in, and stay in.”

She was quick to apologize for her mere anecdotal and impressionistic vein—her possibly presumptuous subjectivity. But she works with children all the time, is herself a mother—and may well have something to teach us. It is one thing for us to bear down on a given phenomenon, relentlessly analyze it, even make it the subject of research in what is called, these days, social psychology—and quite another matter to figure out how lives get lived, in this case meaning how certain events get worked into the texture of the mind’s perceptual and moral life. As a matter of fact, I remember the words of the college professor who supervised the research I did on William Carlos Williams’ life and poetry: “I teach these writers, and I wonder how much of what they say, never mind what I say, sticks with my students any longer than five minutes after they’ve taken the final examination.” A moment of despair, maybe. But also, quite possibly, a comment on the way our minds work, no matter our age. We are showered all the time by stimuli—the continual press of sights and sounds upon the limited terrain of our awareness. We work harder than we

know, as Freud repeatedly reminded us, to push things aside, tuck them away, consign them to the spacious oblivion we call, in our time, the unconscious. This forgetfulness is not by any means all bad. It can be a great and necessary friend. Plenty of the mind’s troubles, the world’s drab or sinister reality, get screened from our notice.

IN MY EXPERIENCE with various kinds of American adults and children, television programs have a short mental life, so far as the viewer goes—often for sad reasons, indeed: “I watch a lot, and so I can’t always recall what I saw. I get mixed up. I confuse one program with another sometimes. There will be times I watch just enough to pretend I’ve seen the program so I can keep up with my friends when they talk about it.” Not an elderly, slightly disoriented person, fighting hard against the ravages of senility, but a ten-year-old boy willing to be candid about his viewing time, the nature of his friendships. How much, many of us wonder, can anyone possibly absorb—from the endless parade of visual banality? Rather a lot, I fear. Absorb, and often enough forget or bury. Several times that same child told me he fell asleep watching a series of Saturday morning cartoons. He himself was shrewd enough to remind me that there was no good physiological reason for that to have happened: “I went to bed early, and slept all night. I wasn’t tired when I woke up.” I decided to press a point home: Was he, maybe, a bit bored? No, he insisted, his eyes now open wider than usual. He was alert to yet another adult’s around-the-corner preachiness. His own parents were often quick to deny him television—yet he watched it and watched it. All too commonly, they were not home, in fact, to stop him.

I have no wish to defend our networks from the oft-stated charges of misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance with respect to their responsibilities toward our younger television-viewing population. Trash is produced in abun-

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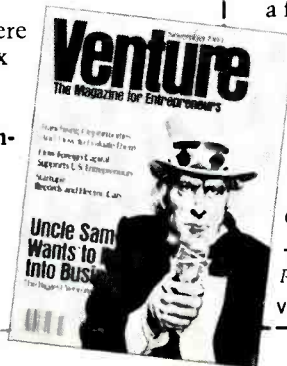
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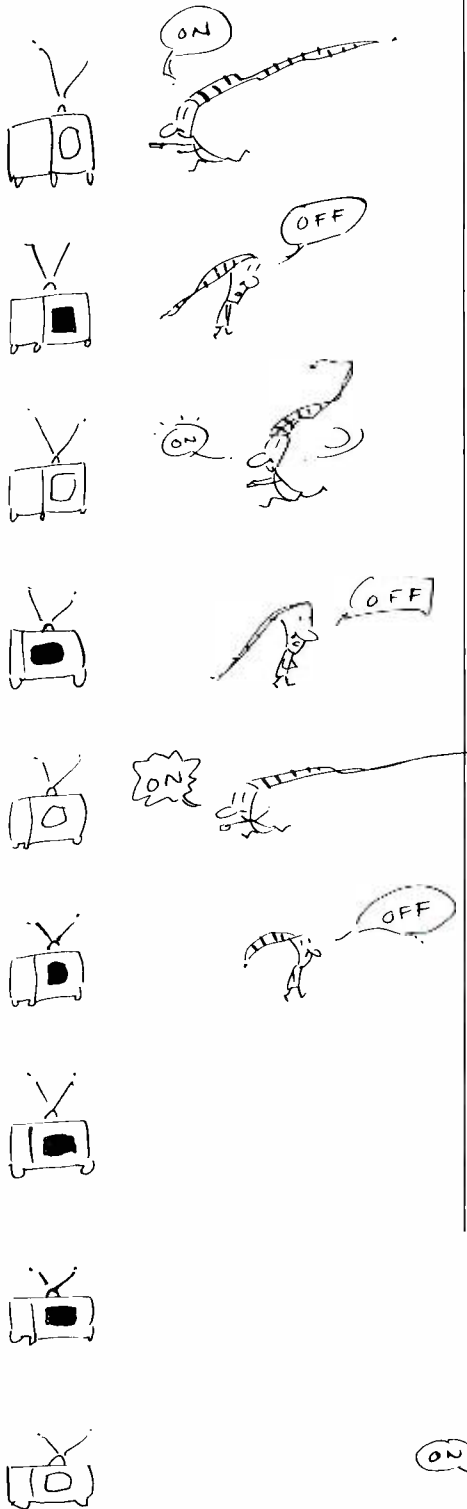
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dance; trash is seen and seen; trash cannot but remind our boys and girls, once more, how terribly cynical and disappointing certain aspects of this life turn out to be. Trash can also, surely, give a sanctioning, external nod to the trashier side of one or another child's psychological life. I have known troubled children who pick up cues from radio programs, from the lyrics of rock music, from televi-

PATRICK'S VIEW



sion, and yes, from reading matter: comic books, so-called adventure stories, spy thrillers, even what many of us adults would deem to be "good fiction." For example, what is so reassuring, sound, and instructive about Maurice Sendak's pictures and stories? Some of us adults find him a first-rate artist and storyteller—imaginative and uniquely talented. We are told that children, as well, love his work. No doubt many do—or pick up the attitude of their elders, and respond similarly. Some don't, however. I know children who find Sendak's stories "strange," or "no good," and who find his drawings "scary" or "nuts" or "real, real strange." I know other children, especially those already struggling with the quite real fearfulness of ghetto life, who find Sendak, and others in the tradition of romantically extravagant and humorous storytelling for children, impossibly cute, coy, unappealing—even maddening. "Who in hell is supposed to read all that loony stuff? Kids who have nothing to do but sit and make up stranger and stranger things in their heads, and think how smart they are for doing it. If they come here, they'd have something else to do." This from a nine-year-old ghetto youth who has four younger brothers and sisters to care for, and who is trying long and hard to deal with everyday "wild ones"—in a jungle we happen to call a "neighborhood" of a particular city.

The real issue, however, for many children, is not Maurice Sendak or various stupid television shows; the issue is the character of family life that is the inheritance, these days, of thousands and thousands of children. Why are children abandoned to hours of no-good television? We are told that *millions* of our children *under thirteen* spend hours at home with no adult present. We are told that more and more children get diagnosed as victims of "child abuse." The teachers I have talked with keep telling me of the pain and sorrow they hear about—broken homes, an increasing crime rate, the constantly accelerating problems of drug and alcohol abuse, each a serious problem in our so-called adult world, to which our children belong, in all their impressionable vulnerability. Guns are everywhere—a measure of endemic fear: of racial war, of possible social and

economic collapse, and not least, of assaults and robberies. It is not television that is giving our young a sense of loneliness—giving them, too, a case of the jitters. Nor does television, per se, drive children to despair, to self-loathing, to nasty and brutish behavior toward one another, toward their parents or the neighbors of their parents. I hate to say it, but I feel I should: For some already hurt, bewildered, all-too-anxious or withdrawn children I have come to know—caught in the middle of one family conflict after another, or caught in the dead-end life of a given ghetto—the television screen, with its banalities and flights of preposterous or mean-spirited fancy, ends up being one of the more reassuring elements in a particular set of circumstances: something there, and relatively reliable, lively, giving.

We who live fairly stable and privileged lives are right to scorn our present-day prevalent "tube junk"—a phrase I heard a boy not yet ten use once. But that same boy consumed "junk food," even as he stared at the very screen he knew offered so little to him. Better that little than the alternative he, sadly, perceived to be his: "nothing to do, no one to be with." Yet another of the latch-key children mentioned above, alone after school in a fancy suburban home, while his parents strive hard through work to keep up with the ever-mounting bills, and when home, strive hard to "unwind." How do they do so? They eat too much; they drink too much; they watch a lot of television. Will the unlikely prospect of a thoroughly reformed attitude toward children's television on the part of our three national networks do much to change that child's essential (existential) situation?

I watch him, I watch other children—and I once more remember the words of William Carlos Williams, as we surveyed together, on a rainy afternoon, the stretches of New Jersey's expanding urban sprawl: "The children come into this world, and their eyes grow wider and wider—until the blows of fate come thick and fast, and the eyes close and stay closed, even though to a casual observer they seem open. The eyes help such people negotiate through one day, then another, but they stop letting much in. There isn't much that's worthwhile to let in. The eyes have learned that." So it goes, I fear, for the eyes of all too many children, cast adrift in all too many rooms, as the box gives forth its lights and shadows, its colors, its darting figures coming out of nowhere, leaving abruptly. The eyes gaze, blink, squint, ogle, glance—but do they really even bother to take stock, to behold and discern?



When News Gets Lost in the Stars

Talent agents have found a fertile field in television news. Some are pushing contract provisions that blur the line between journalism and entertainment.

by Ron Powers

WHEN THE AGENT from William Morris finally perceived Debbie Norville's potential, she thought it was about time—her career had started to level off.

Being anchorwoman at WAGA-TV, a CBS affiliate in Atlanta, was okay for a twenty-two-year-old fresh out of college. But for Debbie Norville, it wasn't enough. Practically as soon as she arrived in Atlanta, she told a local television critic that she wanted to be a television star and that television news was about the best avenue she could see toward that end.

Norville doesn't try to get ahead on her looks, which are stunning. She knows you have to have credibility. So when people bring up the Georgia Junior Miss title she won at age seventeen, she draws a breath and says, "Gosh Almighty," pointing out that the Junior Miss contest is mostly about *scholarship*, not beauty.

Anyway, she paid her dues. She covered the Georgia State Legislature for a public television station while still a sophomore in college.

You just can't spend your whole life as an anchorwoman in Atlanta. So Norville agreed to be represented by William Morris—a Los Angeles talent agency whose track record includes Marilyn Monroe, Mark Spitz, John Denver, and Clint Eastwood. Now she gets telephone calls from the networks. Norville has a perspective on things. "Gosh Almighty, I'll more than likely just start out with a reporting position," she allows. "That is the trend."

When Cliff Morrison was perceived by an agent named Bill Cooper, he was doing the weather for KRIS-TV in Corpus Christi, Texas. Morrison is an easy-going guy with a lopsided grin and a friendly image. To pass the time at KRIS, he had "weather-artist" contests.

"It was very loose, very crazy," he chuckled. "I'd get, hey, literally *thousands* of these handmade drawings. I'd pick out two winners every day. Send 'em KRIS T-shirts. I was kinda flamboyant down there. Live weathercasts from the beach. Lot of live things."

Then a buddy told Morrison about Cooper, a theatrical agent in New York who has sold successful properties like *The Flying Nun* to big-time television.

"I said, 'Hey, lemme get out of here!'" recalls Morrison. "So I sent him a tape. He just flipped out! He said, 'Damn! I think I can do somethin' with this guy.'"

Ron Powers is a Pulitzer Prize-winning television critic and author of *The Newscasters*. His most recent book is a novel entitled *Toot-Toot-Tootsie, Good-bye*.

Bill Cooper could, and did. In June 1979, Cliff Morrison—who is twenty-nine years old, digs transcendental meditation, wants to learn sky diving, owns a 1974 mint-condition Corvette, and has described his life's ambition as "to retire early and get that island somewhere"—joined New York's WNBC, the flagship station of the NBC network, as a weatherman.

And Cooper is not finished doing things for Morrison. "I've told Cliff he has more talent than to be just a weatherman," he says. "I perceive him as an anchorman."

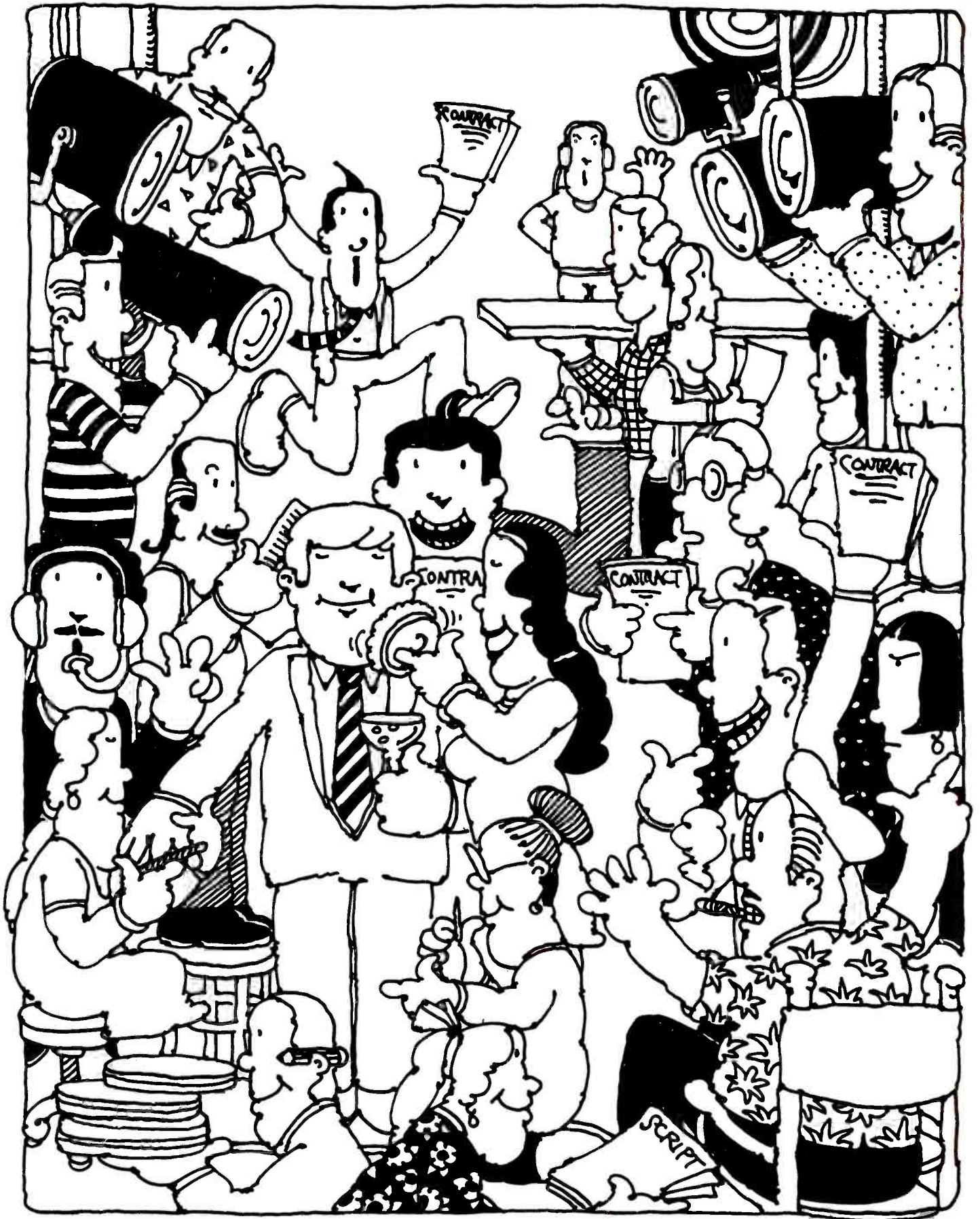
When another agent—also from William Morris—perceived Kelly Lange, she was already doing pretty well for herself as weathergirl for KNBC in Los Angeles. But this was nothing compared to what happened after she signed on William Morris's bottom line.

She ended up with a contract that remains a legend in local television news lore. Among its provisions: an anchor spot; a regular "people" feature; a salary estimated at near the \$300,000 mark; a "no-cut" provision, meaning that Lange's salary was secure for three years; a two-week stint as guest host of NBC's *Today* each year; documentary assignments for all five NBC-owned stations, and an assignment as co-host of the Rose Parade.

A full-page ad in the Los Angeles *TV Guide* and newspapers on November 5, 1980—a ratings "sweep" period—gave some indication of Kelly Lange's journalistic mission at KNBC. In it, a grinning man clutched a fur coat in one hand and a fistful of fanned-out dollar bills in the other. Below him was Kelly Lange's likeness. The ad's caption read: "What Are Your Chances of Making It on the Game Shows? Kelly Lange shows you what's behind the fun and games. A special four-part report this week at 6 p.m. on *NewsCenter 4*."

What are talent agents doing in the selection and career-advancement process of television news? You might as well ask what a major local station is doing, in the week of a Presidential election, airing a four-part series entitled, "What Are Your Chances of Making It on the Game Shows?" The answer in each case is the same. It has to do with a fashionable term in television news these days: perception. A station vice president will say, apparently unconscious of the strangely qualifying sound of the phrase, "We want to be perceived as the most viable news medium in our market." Not *to be*, but *to be perceived as*.

A revealing term, perception. You don't hear it much in the shoptalk of working newspeople. Prosaic wretches, they tend to say "see" or "think." It is one of those carefully neutral, technically adaptable concepts arising from the smooth argot of behavior specialists and market researchers, many of whom



have developed close ties with the management of television news over the last ten or fifteen years. Hired as consultants to improve the news image and ratings, they tell the executives—only a few of whom have any journalistic training—that what they need is greater perception by the public (or the “demographics,” or “the marketplace”). A newscast should be perceived as—well, accurate, surely, and perhaps, what the hell, even a little on the newsy side. But more important, the news should be perceived on the same terms that make for successful television the rest of the broadcast day. It should be perceived as warm, as visual, as appealing to the mood of its audience.

The anchorpeople and reporters—the “talent”—must know how to communicate this warmth. (That, by the way, is the highest praise you will likely hear heaped upon a television news personality in the eighties. Not that he or she “has a helluva news sense,” but that he or she

positions of authority, and have often managed to control the editorial terms under which their clients work. The long-range effects of this wide discretion could erode the quality and integrity of television news.

Since the mid-seventies, talent agents’ involvement in television news has intensified greatly. Thoughtful professionals in the representation business finally began to realize how lucrative and untapped the news sector was. As one of them put it, “What are there—maybe ten thousand people on the air in this country? National and local-station? I’d estimate that maybe 350 of them today are represented by the major firms. The great, overwhelming majority of on-air talent is either unrepresented or underrepresented. I happen to think that is shocking.”

It could also be a money-maker of huge proportions. Aggressive, hustling agents have found they can bargain a client’s

Several important factors prompted the current news-agent bonanza:

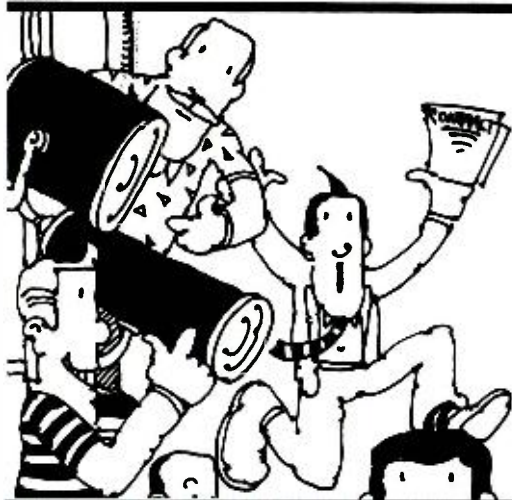
—Barbara Walters’ \$5 million contract with ABC, negotiated in 1976 by Lee Stevens of William Morris. This widely publicized coup put agents on notice that show-business salaries were available in television news, where top anchors and reporters were increasingly considered “stars”;

—the advent of Roone Arledge as president of ABC News in 1977. The fiercely competitive Arledge at once began luring well-known stars from the other networks: Sylvia Chase, Hughes Rudd, Barry Serafin, Jack Laurence—in the end, seventeen defected from CBS alone. Never before had the transfer of news talent from network to network been regarded so casually. It was like baseball’s “free agent” system. Except in this case, the agents were not free. They cost 10 percent;

—Dan Rather’s contract. *Time* magazine hailed Rather’s \$8 million triumph with a cover, and announced the beginning of the television news “Superstar Era.” *New York* magazine followed with a long and admiring profile of Leibner, “The Superstar Agent of TV News”;

—the arrival of the video cassette. This little spool of tape, compact and easy to mail, opened up the era of the electronic resumé. Young broadcasters began sending their images around the country to prospective employers. The emphasis on an instant perception of image thus became even more pronounced (one cannot tell a video cassette to cover a sample story or write a news lead);

—the unofficial new policy allowing non-journalists (consultants, promotion specialists) access to the decision-making process of news professionals. This trend has grown as station managers have felt increasing pressure to hone the newscast into a competitive ratings tool. In New York, for instance, the top-rated local newscast, WABC’s *Eyewitness News*, can generate \$40 million of the station’s gross receipts each year. Many now feel that the news has become too important to be left to newsmen.



Vacation dispute. Guy wanted to go, I needed him to stay. He said, ‘Talk to my agent.’ That was throat time.

“is a great *communicator*.”)

And who is best qualified to sense out the personality components, the look, the voice—the image of a potentially great communicator?

A talent agent.

Agents of varying description have been part of the broadcast-news mix all along. Edward R. Murrow had one. Walter Cronkite has had one for three decades (Tom Stix of Stix and Gude). Most top network news stars have long been represented by professionals, if not by flat-out “talent agents”—and of course, by lawyers, accountants, and other specialists who oversee their clients’ financial and general career interests. This is nothing more than prudent business practice.

But what has changed, in the past few years, is the extent of agents’ influence in the once strictly guarded policy-making domain of news professionals. They have accelerated the rise of young talent into

salary up to twice any previous level, and sometimes more. Just a few years ago, a very respectable network anchorman’s salary stood at around \$200,000. Today, many local-station anchorpeople in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles are at the \$250,000 level, with a few salaries nudging the half-million mark.

Network anchor salaries seldom dip below \$650,000 these days—with Dan Rather’s \$8 million, five-year contract at CBS topping the field. That contract, negotiated in the spring of 1980 by super-agent Richard Leibner of the New York firm N. S. Bienstock, gave news agents a celebrity cachet. A study of news salaries quoted in the April 7, 1980 issue of *Broadcasting* magazine found the following average levels for anchorpeople at local stations in the U. S.: top ten markets, \$87,000; medium-sized markets, \$35,000; small markets, \$23,000; smaller markets still, \$19,000, and markets below that, \$17,000.

LAST SPRING’S FLURRY of publicity over news agents concentrated mostly on big stars and big salaries. N. S. Bienstock, for example, was celebrated for a client roster including Morton Dean, Tom Jarriel, Morley Safer, Ed Bradley, Lou Chioffi, and Jules Bergman—plus some of the top local-station stars around the United States.

William Morris was toasted for its work in behalf of Barbara Walters, Sandy



CHUCK GOMEZ



KELLY LANGE



MARK MONSKY



CLIFF MORRISON



MARVIN KALB

Hill, Nancy Dickerson, Dave Marash, Pierre Salinger and, of course, Kelly Lange.

International Creative Management (ICM), like William Morris a giant in the film and theatrical worlds, weighed in with John Chancellor, Harry Reasoner, Bill Moyers, and Roger Mudd. Ed Hookstratten, a freelance attorney, was linked with Tom Snyder and Tom Brokaw. And so on.

What got lost—in the stars, perhaps—was the true cutting edge of the issue: the “overnight” involvement of big agencies with no previous interest in the history or principles of journalism.

Sally Bedell, writing in *TV Guide*, was among the few to report a substantial beachhead by Morris in 1977: the birth of a special division devoted exclusively to people in television news and sports. Ron Yatter, who heads that department, acknowledged in a telephone interview that Morris was actively searching out promising youngsters in the mold of Debbie Norville and Kelly Lange.

But a veteran broadcast newsman in Atlanta, who has watched Morris agents pursue Norville and a number of others, interprets the agency’s interest in new talent differently.

“William Morris got into this game a little later than some of the other big agencies,” the man said, “and they saw that Leibner and the rest had most of the heavyweights. So Morris is concentrating on the next generation of stars. What bothers me is that lots of these kids are in no way ready for network responsibilities.” He mentioned the name of one woman. “She’s better than most people her age. But, dammit . . . I’ve been watching her for a year. *She hasn’t gotten any better*. And no one can tell her what she’s doing wrong, because *no one at the station knows!*”

No one knows. Many veteran newsmen have sounded this complaint. They say there exists a vacuum of journalistic ex-

pertise in the executive suites of the broadcast world—a vacuum that talent agents are rushing in to fill.

“I act as more than an agent for my news clients,” says veteran impresario Bill Cooper, who rescued Cliff Morrison from Corpus Christi. His midtown Manhattan office evoked Broadway as strongly as Broadcast Row. Brightly bound theatrical scripts lay in a jumble on his desk. “My background enables me to make creative judgments,” he asserted. “I’ve got enough perception, plus the initiative at the network level, to fit the talent to the job.

“My background has involved every facet,” he continued. “I’ve sold game shows and sitcoms to television. I deal with radio, movies, the theater. Right now I’m mostly divided between literary and the news.”

Cooper is a vital man in late middle age, owlish behind dark-rimmed glasses, his anvil-black hair combed straight back. He favors an informal dress style. On this morning he sported an open-collared nylon shirt of geometric design, buttoned at the cuffs. He was still suffering the aftershocks of perhaps the most painful reversal of his career—the defection of superstar client Roger Mudd to ICM’s Ralph Mann.

But on the other hand, there were fresh triumphs. “You heard about the people who just skied across the Greenland Ice Cap?” he asked with a smile. “No? Americans. Four guys and four gals from Minnesota. I’m closing a deal with them for ABC Sports. Last summer I represented Gerry Spiess.” He paused, expectant. “*Spiess*. He sailed across the Atlantic in a ten-foot boat.”

Cooper was asked to cite an example, besides Cliff Morrison, of a news client who had benefited from his creative judgment. “Charles Gomez,” he replied, naming the respected young CBS correspondent for Latin-American affairs. “I spotted Chuck when he was starting out

at WPLG in Miami. I heard of a situation: They wanted somebody of Latin extraction for a news job in Chicago. [Gomez’s parents are Cuban.] WBBM, the CBS outlet. Now Chuck’s at the network.”

Gomez, who received a master’s degree from the Columbia School of Journalism in New York, draws uniformly high praise within the industry. It would be wrong to assume that he owes his present stature entirely to the machinations of an agent. And yet, why did Cooper think a television news executive could not recognize his *own* weakness in Latin-American affairs, or launch an efficient scouting system to repair it?

Cooper was asked whether he knew of any television news agents who attempted to delineate the duties of their talent. His eyebrows went up. “I do it *myself!* I would *certainly* ask, on behalf of my talent, to be able to denominate the type of work!” He spread his hands. “It’s the nature of the business. I just made a deal for a fella to be an investigative team’s chief correspondent. Four-year contract!”

He drew the interview to a close. “I have a client at CBS who’s being mis-used,” he said. “I got a meeting—to get him out of a certain area.”

Alfred Geller operates in a distinctly different style from Bill Cooper. A former Wall Street lawyer, Geller agrees completely with the anonymous Atlanta newsman that a gaping void exists within television news leadership. He is building a career in training his clients to use that fact to their advantage. One room in his suite of offices has been converted into an ad hoc television studio. It contains a video-tape camera, an editing system, a full-time editor, and a shelf-full of video cassettes variously labeled “Slick,” “Funeral Directors of America,” “Boring-Uncaring,” “Strong, Cold Women,” and “Connecticut Lockjaw.”

“I did my first piece of repping while I was still practicing law. It was a personal favor to someone,” Geller recalled. “But

as soon as I got that first glimpse of the television news business, I was shocked. Here was an important institution, with great significance to the public—and *there was no training for anybody!* They spend fortunes on sets and on market research, but as to on-air performing, it's sink or swim."

This inspired Geller to create an ombudsman role for himself, extending far beyond the mere negotiation of news-talent contracts. He discusses with his clients their career aspirations—their on-air look—and he uses his tape system to evaluate their techniques. He coaches them in dramatic theory.

"I'm in career guidance," Geller summed up with a sarcastic edge to his voice. "I encourage my clients to experiment—on the air! Management is, by and large, so unknowledgeable about broadcast technique that they don't even know we do it. 'Performing,' in the news, is not a dirty word."

Another thing Geller does for his clients is insist that they learn the subtleties of market research—specifically as it pertains to them. "I have spent a barrel of time studying market research," he said. "I now understand that the television-news business lives and dies by it.

"They deny it. They say, 'It's just another tool.' They say, 'We fly by the seat of our pants.'" He rose from his desk, marched to the side of it and turned, almost as though facing a jury. "When that research comes in the door, they follow it—slavishly!" Geller brought a fist to his lips and meditated for a moment. "When I get a big person on my hands," he said, "I write it into his contract that we retain the right to share the research done on my client." He shrugged. "They don't honor it, of course. But I believe in applying the pressure. You have to keep up with management. Or else your client hasn't got a chance."

The job's financial advantages only fuel Geller's zealous defense of his clients. "It's *really* profitable," he declared, shaking his head in wonder. "Particularly for the big agencies. Minute for minute, it is probably the most profitable sector of talent management, because in most cases, the client has to get his own job, and calls in an agent only to negotiate the contract. Let's say the agent negotiates fifty the first year, sixty the second, and seventy the third. Let's be extravagant, let's say he takes eighteen hours over a few weeks to do it.

"I get 10 percent of the total. I get five thousand the first year, six the second, and seven the third—I'm earning a thousand bucks an hour! But a lot of agents

work for that money," he said. "They see their client maybe once a year, whether he needs it or not."

He makes no apologies for his penetration into the area of image-control—an area that, some might argue, properly belongs in the jurisdiction of a news director. Other television agents penetrate farther still.

I BUILD STATUS-PROTECTION into my contracts."

The speaker is a prominent news agent whose clients include at least one network anchorman and several others at major-city stations. "I want to be sure that my man, or my woman, is not going to be surpassed by a competitor within the same news shop," he explained. "When they come to me for help I ask them: 'Are you signing a contract that describes you as an 'anchor'—but with no description of what the word 'anchor' means?"

"Are you a co-anchor, equal anchor, primary anchor—what? Are you on 40 percent of the time, or 60 percent, or is there any minimum specified? Do you want a clause specifying that no one will receive more time than you?"

"I've gotten this kind of assurance for clients. And that includes not just raw on-air time, but is broken down to cover openings, closings, the right to do lead stories, the right to *choose* stories, the right to do teases—even the actual *number* of stories the client gets to report, including voice-overs to film."

Asked whether he thought this amount of control did not usurp a news director's authority, the agent merely shrugged, a bored expression glazing his eyes. "Hell, I cover billing. Promotion. It's the key to Fred Silverman's success."

Agents have made most of their job-description inroads at the local-news level. Network news chieftains insist that, so far, agents have not penetrated their policy-making sanctum. But evidence suggests that the policy-making gates have in fact been pried open just a wee bit.

"I don't even talk *money* to anybody," growled Burton Benjamin, vice president and director of news for CBS. "We have a business affairs department that does that.

"What if we had a Three Mile Island-type story, a meltdown, people being evacuated?" he continued. "And a guy comes in, a reporter, and says, 'Hey, I haven't been on this week like it says in my contract. I got a piece on the Sultan of Oman.' As long as I'm here," Benjamin insisted, "we're never going to do that."

How, then, to explain *l'affaire* Marvin Kalb? Benjamin does not volunteer any-

thing. The burden of proof is on NBC and on a couple of Benjamin's former colleagues, now competitors: NBC News president William Small and NBC vice chairman Richard Salant.

In July 1980, Kalb, a twenty-three-year veteran of CBS News and its long-time diplomatic correspondent, joined the parade of network-switching news talent, landing a highly visible position at NBC. Quickly, a rumor circulated out of CBS News—and was reported in the June 23 issue of *Broadcasting* magazine—that Kalb left partly because CBS "would not meet his contractual demands," which included a guaranteed minimum of three appearances a week on newscasts.

Neither Kalb nor his agent, lawyer Ar-



thur Emil, will comment. And NBC's Bill Small refutes the rumor by implication only. "I never discuss what's in anyone's contract," he declared. "I'll tell you this: If I could have Marvin Kalb on our show five nights a week, I'd be pleased as punch. But I think that if you checked, you'd find that he has not averaged three days a week [since he arrived]."

"Nothing in any contract we have is going to distort the news at NBC," Small continued. "I have a well-known antipathy toward agents. But they're simply a fact of life. The great majority of agents are very upright."

At the local level, news director Mark Monsky of New York's WNEW was one of few to air strong opinions on agents. Monsky is a maverick in New York's tele-

vision news community, an outspoken critic of the industry from within its ranks.

"I don't have anything called 'talent' at my station," he asserted with a cultivated snarl. "I have *reporters*. Most agents are not qualified to know whether their clients are good enough. What the agents do mostly is complicate the process of bringing qualified people into this business."

"When a news reporter hires an agent," Monsky continued, "he or she creates a system in which accountability is removed. I'll give you an example from my own shop. Vacation dispute. Guy wanted to go, I needed him to stay. He said, 'Talk to my agent.'"

"That was all I had to hear. That was throat time. I screamed at him, 'If you don't take that back right this instant I'll blow you out the door!'" Monsky smiled a terrible little smile. "Anyway, he didn't go on his vacation."

But unlikely as it may seem, news director Monsky and agent Geller do agree on something. "There is no apprentice system in TV news," said Monsky, echoing Geller's "shock" at the lack of training for young reporters. "As things stand now, a young reporter is hired, given one or two talks . . . and then sent out on the street. It's strictly learn on your own—the bad with the good."

Monsky recalled that in recent weeks he had checked over the resumé of about a dozen reportorial candidates at WNEW. "None had any newspaper or wire service training," he said. "Only two had any journalism schooling. All had less than four years in television. Their reportage was laced with ambiguities in place of accuracy: editorialism and commentary without any identification; unbalanced coverage in the name of 'personalization'; fawning and mugging for the camera without any apparent journalistic purpose. Yet each of them was responding to what he thought the industry was demanding. They want jobs, status, good pay. If those things were offered for thoughtful, perceptive reporting," insisted Monsky, "I imagine applicants would respond to that as readily as they do to the stimulus of personality-venting."

"The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences should fund and support a three-month summer school for inexperienced TV reporters," he suggested. "It could be staffed by vacationing journalism instructors from the best colleges, and set in an intern atmosphere, attached to some active news organization. It would return the young reporters to their home stations with something substantial to share with the rest of the

reporters in their market. It'd be a sort of 'Johnny Appleseed' of TV journalism."

Mark Monsky's proposal may not wash in the world of those who deal in perception. News experience, judgment, degree of interest in public affairs, educational discipline—none of these matter when market research shows that consumers respond only to a news show's "mood."

The recent Presidential campaign lasted more than two years, but voter turnout was the lowest since 1948. Many political analysts concluded that American voters had responded to the blandishments of a cadre of image-makers—pollsters, media consultants, and public-relations advisers. One reason for this may have been that television news simply did not define and pursue the issues. Newscasts concentrated instead on the candidates' personalities and their standings in the polls.

The three major networks fell short mainly because they lacked time. But local stations enjoy 60-minute, 90-minute, 120-minute—and now, on the West Coast, 180-minute—blobs for their late-afternoon newscasts. In political election periods, that could ideally mean extended attention to the issues—interviews with candidates, debates among interest groups, analyses of how consistently and how deeply a candidate has identified with a given issue.

The local stations in fact fell far short of this standard. In February 1980, for instance, a CBS-owned station sent an anchorman to New Hampshire for a four-part report on the forthcoming primary. During the first of these reports—three minutes, twenty seconds of air-time—the anchorman, businesslike in a blue parka, stood in front of a frozen New Hampshire pond, waxing poetic about boys playing ice hockey, quaint clapboard cottages, and the heritage of Robert Frost. Not once did he mention a candidate or a political issue.

Several months later, in the heat of the primary season, another network flagship station invited to its studio a candidate who had unexpectedly defeated one of the Senate's oldest and most respected leaders. The interview with this man, who went on to win the Senate seat in the general election, was literally stopped in mid-sentence, because two women stand-up comedians needed to get on before the station's "action reporter" visited a veterinarian who made house calls.

This is the climate of "perception" in which the talent agent is allowed to operate, to select and advance news clients, and to help determine the rules under which they will "communicate." This is what's behind the fun and games. ■



The Twists in Two-Way Cable

When Americans start shopping, banking, and voting through television, computers will be collecting large amounts of information about their private lives.

by David Burnham

WITHIN A HUNDRED MINUTES after last fall's televised debate between President Reagan and former President Carter, three-quarters of a million Americans flashed their thumbs up-thumbs down verdict to an electronic voting booth set up by the American Telephone and Telegraph Company for the news division of the American Broadcasting Company. It was the world's largest and fastest public-opinion survey.

Though the ABC survey was conceptually and technically flawed, similar polls will almost certainly become a force in America's political and commercial life. Already, politicians, news organizations, and entertainment shows in Columbus, Ohio, are harvesting public feelings about issues ranging from energy to homosexuality—with the help of an experimental electronic system soon to be ubiquitous in the United States.

The ability to collect and tabulate the almost immediate reactions of millions of Americans to a specific event or problem could ultimately reduce today's prevalent cynical alienation. But it could just as easily lead to a serious weakening of many existing institutions in representative government—and to a gradual erosion in the independent judgment and leadership of public officials.

Two-way interactive television presents these starkly contrasting opportunities for good and evil. It is a computer-powered system that lets the subscriber answer, through his television, any multiple choice questions he is asked, or order any goods and services he is offered. The home terminal of this electronic umbilical cord is a small plastic keyboard, about the size of a thick paperback novel, attached to the family set. When responding to a question, the subscriber "touches in" on one of a series of buttons, the central computer swiftly calculates the proportion of the audience preferring the various options, and the answer is displayed on the home screen.

The interactive television subscriber can also wire his home with sophisticated security and health-monitoring devices, and can increase the number of entertainment, news, and educational programs already piped into his living room.

Dreamy blue-sky speculation about interactive television and its potential has increased markedly over the past decade. But 500,000 homes will probably be wired within the next three or four years—many millions more by the late eighties—so the wave of the future is about to crash on the beach of reality.

Optimistic futurists and executives selling two-way televi-

sion have eloquently enumerated the ways the system can enrich America's cultural life, improve the responsiveness of government bureaucracies, and even solve the national energy crisis by eliminating the need to drive to the shopping center or town meeting. The perils, however, have largely been ignored. Some problems:

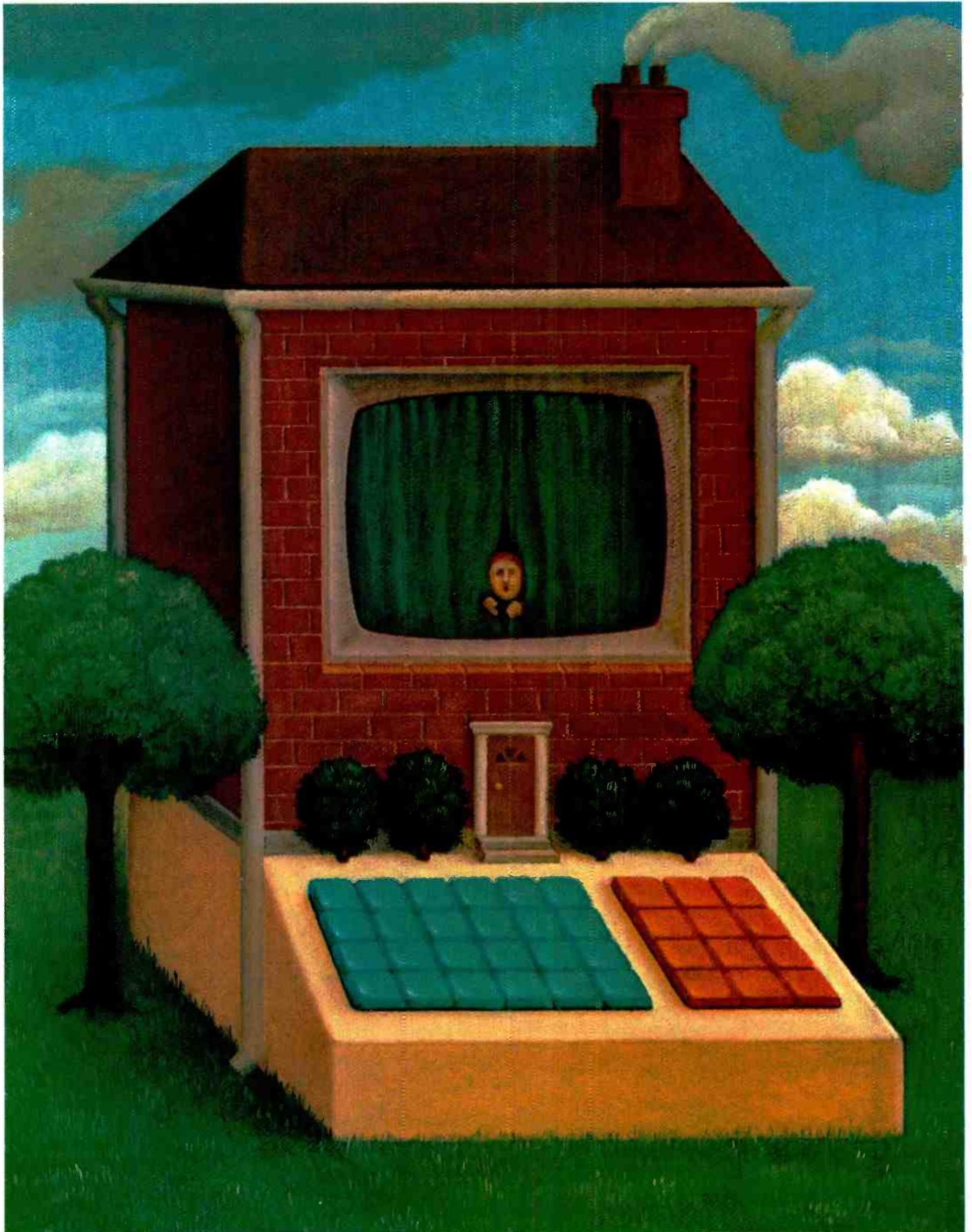
Instant Polling—Two-way television's technical ability to take the pulse of the body politic creates an almost irresistible desire to undertake such polls. But if ABC News was willing to ask the nation who won last October's Presidential beauty contest, why won't ABC News or some other organization decide to measure the nation's mood the next time some nation decides to seize a group of American diplomats? And how would such unreflective and necessarily ill-informed opinion influence the actions of the politician then occupying the White House, or the response of the nation holding the hostages?

Personal Privacy—With a fully developed two-way system, many significant details about the life of the subscribing family will be funneled through the system's computer. The information collected by such a computer might well include messages sent by electronic mail to a stockbroker or travel agent, various banking transactions, books ordered at the local bookstore or library, hours devoted to pay-per-view programs that might include soft-core pornography, and the comings and goings of security-service subscribers. Though such details are now frequently recorded by separate organizations, the concentration of data in the computer of one privately owned company presents a major snooping hazard.

Collective Privacy—Even if laws and procedures provide each subscriber an ironclad guarantee that personal information will never be improperly shared, neighborhood patterns of book reading, television watching, banking, and electronic shopping will give commercial and political marketing experts a powerful new tool to use on the psyches of unsuspecting customers. When the information collected by the two-way system's computer is merged with the Census Bureau's tract-by-tract information, super salesmen will be able to target their ever-more-refined pitches only at the most susceptible consumers.

Information Deprivation—The services offered by two-way interactive television are expensive. The rate for the proposed menu in the Dallas system, for example, is now \$47 a month. As such systems become more and more essential in the delivery of cultural, educational, and political information, will the service's price further widen the gap that already separates the poor from the rest of society? Behind this issue lies a complex debate about whether two-way television systems

David Burnham is a former New York Times reporter. He is writing a book on corporate power in the telecommunications era.





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"Baker's Dozen" is one of the intriguing works in "Twyla Tharp and Dancers" with Gary Chryst, former star of the Joffrey Ballet, filling in for an injured dancer.

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Even our acquisitions are subject to CBS's rigorous artistic standards. There will be no random package buys here. Each program will have freshness—and importance. Stars of the caliber of Alec Guinness, Tom Conti, Diana Rigg. Works by

Twyla Tharp moves into a new role as a television director. In this one-hour program for CBS Cable, she re-shapes and captures on camera the pulse and unique style of her brilliant choreography.





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Above is a moment from the debut of "Short Stories," two powerful dances interpreting the emotions of shifting relationships ... from fantasy to passion to hostility.

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 And all of it—new productions and acquisitions alike—is under the direction of CBS Cable's star production team: Jack Willis, Vice President, Programming, and seven-time Emmy winner; Merrill Brockway ("Camera Three," "Dance in America");

Roger Englander (N.Y. Philharmonic Young People's Concerts); and Stephanie Sills ("Lovers and Other Strangers").

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should continue to be owned and operated by traditional business organizations or whether they should be regulated.

Blurring—With the enormous increase in the number of channels entering subscribers' homes comes a diversified selection of programs. One experimental show in Columbus is called the "infomercial," a combination of objective documentary and paid commercial. Some consumer experts fear the marriage of the two forms might do nothing more than mislead and confuse. Lurking behind their concern is the broad question of editorial responsibility. Should the owners of two-way cable systems be considered similar to newspaper publishers and granted First Amendment rights and obligations? Or should cable systems be likened to the telephone company and be required to carry any message an individual wants to send?

Regulation—New government agencies are the traditional panacea for serious social problems in America. But where fragile matters like freedom of speech and privacy are at stake, the cure might well end up being more serious than the disease. Curiously, that possibility has not stopped Sweden, France, and several other European countries from

establishing strong government agencies to inspect and license the very computerized information bases that need protection. The prospect of a similar fox being asked to guard the chicken-house in the United States may well be the communication boom's ultimate ironic threat. The dimming but nevertheless powerful memories of the Watergate years remind us that government agencies sometimes abuse their powers.

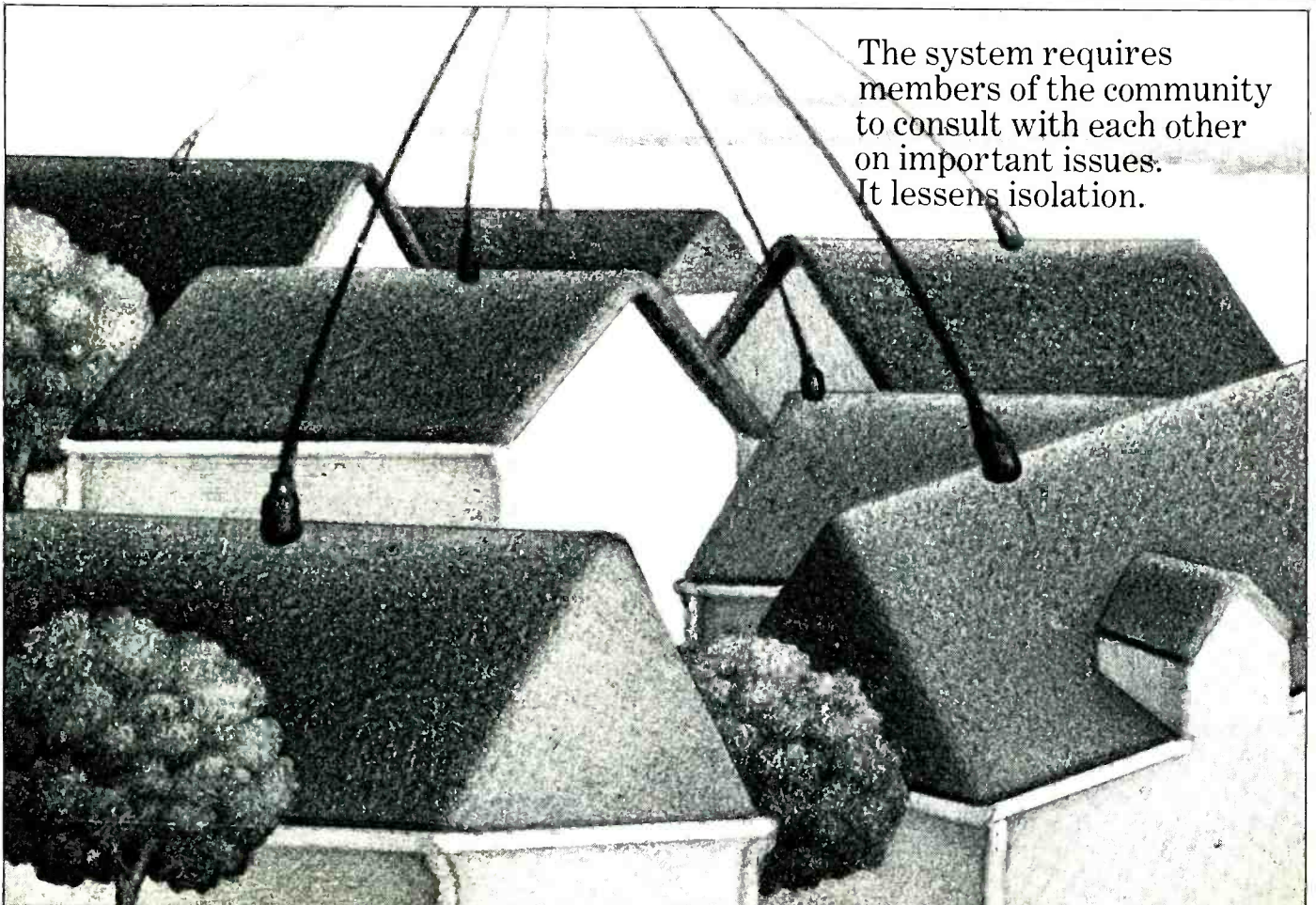
All this talk of unchecked communications growth and the problems it could cause irritates Gustave M. Hauser, a principal godfather of two-way television's commercial development. "Tony Oettinger, the Harvard professor, got it right at a seminar in Cambridge last year," he said. "Perils, perils, perils. If we keep worrying about all the perils, we're going to be paralyzed."

HAUSER, a Harvard-trained lawyer and former senior executive in the independent telephone industry, now is co-chairman, president, and chief executive of Warner Amex Cable Communications Inc. It is Warner Amex, a subsidiary of the entertainment conglomerate Warner Communications and

the American Express Company, that has pioneered commercial development of two-way television in Columbus and is now installing similar systems in Houston, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Dallas.

The far-reaching potential of two-way television (which other companies have been forced to offer cities in hopes of gaining territorial franchises) has deeply fired Scott Kurnit, the tall, bearded, and faintly Mephistophelean program director for the Warner Amex system in Columbus. "I think interactive television can be an enormously beneficial social instrument," Kurnit said during a recent interview. "The unrelieved passiveness of traditional television broadcasting has had a significant negative impact on the American family and the American community. Interactive television will allow people to have fuller, freer lives, to communicate with each other, to learn how to work with each other. The system lessens isolation because it almost requires members of the family or community to consult with each other before deciding on important issues."

The system, which Warner Amex calls "QUBE," offers two other television services in addition to the interactive one. First, QUBE's 29,000 Columbus subscrib-



The system requires members of the community to consult with each other on important issues. It lessens isolation.

ers have at their disposal an enormous number of programs—approximately 720 hours in every twenty-four-hour day. Second, because of the system's design, specialized programs can be offered to appropriate subscribers. A highly technical medical course, for example, cannot be seen by regular subscribers, but only by physicians signed up for the training. The system can also insure that televised town meetings only be aired in affected townships, where subscribers can use their QUBE keypads to answer their mayor's questions directly.

"The idea, our goal, is to offer sufficient programming so that every member of our community can satisfy his separate needs every moment of the day," Kurnit said as he flipped through the thirty channels currently available to Columbus subscribers. (Systems now under construction offer even more channels.) Together we briefly inspected some of the varied offerings: the channel providing a twenty-four-hour-a-day news program; another showing round-the-clock movies; a third featuring old television shows with their commercials removed; a fourth carrying children's programs, and another channel offering soft-core pornography. The special pay-per-view features—like a major boxing match or the Ohio State University football games not carried on regular television—were of course not available that weekday afternoon.

Neither were any of the Columbus system's experimental programs. One of them is a monthly show giving viewers a chance to take part in a discussion about books. It is unlike any discussion show on conventional television, as the audience is frequently asked multiple-choice questions about the book under discussion, and is given an opportunity to vote on which one of five books should be the subject of next month's program. Any participant, furthermore, can telephone in while the discussion is underway, ask an appropriate question, or call for a change of subject matter—and the proposal will immediately be put to the rest of the audience. One final wrinkle. After the book for next month's discussion has been selected, viewers interested in preparing for the talk can receive a loaned copy from the Columbus Public Library simply by pressing a button. Their response tells the central computer to include their names and addresses on a distribution list for the library's use.

"The book club is in many ways the most interesting and exciting use of interactive television now on QUBE," said Tom Harnish, a thirty-five-year-old former navy pilot. Both Harnish and his wife, Judy, are officials of a Columbus-

based non-profit organization that operates an on-line computer network used by more than 2,300 libraries. Neither is noticeably uncomfortable with America's high-tech society. But sitting in the second-floor den watching Scott Kurnit as he led an early-evening interactive discussion about government regulation, both indicated they had some reservations about QUBE.

"One aspect that worries me," said Harnish, puffing on his pipe, "is what happens to those who are not able to pay the \$15 or \$20 a month for QUBE, the possibility that we may be creating a new kind of underclass. I remember I once worked in a hospital in Baltimore where medical treatment was pretty easy to get as long as you had a telephone. But you would be surprised at how many people living in a big city are so poor or disconnected that they don't have a telephone."

And Harnish added that there is precious little interactive television now being offered by the Columbus cable system. "They bill QUBE as two-way interactive, but there aren't very many hours of interactive each week and some of the programs so labeled tend to ask trivial questions, such as whether you wear eye-glasses."

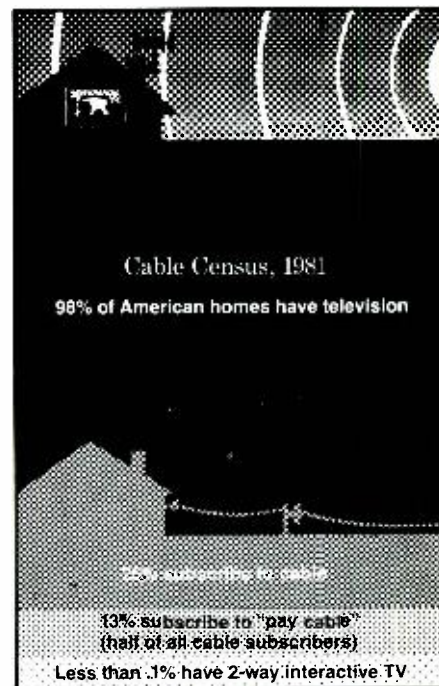
Gustave Hauser, the Warner Amex executive, at first brushed aside a question on the extent of QUBE's commitment to interactive television. "No, no, no," he replied when asked how many hours of such television were scheduled each day. "You can't judge it that way. Television is not based on tonnage, it's based on quality. The number of hours is irrelevant. You can put a dog in front of a camera and you have a show, but you don't have a program."

AFTER FURTHER PRESSING, however, Hauser said QUBE was now programming "several hours of interactive television each day. But some days we might do none. It depends upon what we want to spend our money on. Everything is a question of economics. I can't schedule eighteen hours of interactive every day. It requires too many people. Everything is relative to economics, and the economics is changing because there will be advertising and other sources of revenue, particularly if we do market research programs."

The question of economics—what the subscribers and advertisers are willing to pay for—of course bears on every issue concerning two-way television. And because the service is totally new, developing at a tremendous speed and affecting American life in ways as yet only dimly perceived, it is hard for the public

to know what problems the system may pose—and therefore what safeguards are worth buying. In a speech a few months ago before the Union League Club of New York City, Charles D. Ferris, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission during the Carter years, tried to awaken the public to threats against personal privacy. "The fundamental problem I see with the coming information age," he warned, is that it "will rob us of one of our more important rights in a free society, the right to privacy."

When American families are wired for two-way television and its ancillary services, he went on, "a computer will have a



record of what they buy and how much they spend. It will know whether they pay their bills quickly, slowly, or not at all, and it will know where their money comes from. It will know whether they watched the debates, or the football game, or a controversial movie. It will know when they came home the previous night—and probably in what condition, depending on how many alarms they accidentally set off. It will know how many people are in their houses and in what rooms. In other words, it will know more about them than anyone should."

What's to be done? Many knowledgeable experts believe that mechanical or legal safeguards can be developed. "In my own view, privacy is something of a wash," said Harry M. Shooshan III, the former chief counsel of the House Communications Subcommittee. "Of course, there are problems, but there are also ways technology can enhance personal

security."

Charles L. Jackson, a partner with Shooshan in their recently established Washington consulting firm, worked on the same House subcommittee as chief engineer. "The technology gives us an opportunity to enhance privacy as well as undercut it," Jackson said during a conversation in the small firm's new office. "As the system is being built, you can choose the ends that will be served. I do not believe that reliance on the technology by itself creates the hazard to privacy. The question is, what are the goals and what are the values of the people who are creating that system?"

Jackson had to acknowledge, however, that privacy is a subtle issue. "Somehow, we want an assurance that someone who is a political dissident—whether it's John Anderson or even Abby Hoffman—can live his life without fearing his political opponents will someday be handed a detailed report on his private behavior."

Warner Amex's Hauser emphasized the concern he felt about the privacy of QUBE customers. "I am concerned, others are concerned, we should all be concerned," he said. But like many lawyers, he saw the savior in the law, rather than in technology. "If there is an abuse, there will be a regulation. I am delighted to have any regulation that is appropriate. Why don't we see what the public wants before we start regulating the business? Why don't we build the system and then worry about the things we don't like in it? The people who want to regulate in advance are the people who are going to prevent progress."

The seriousness of the privacy threat, and suggested remedies for it, generate much disagreement. But two-way television's instant polling capability evokes a much more unified sense of concern. "There, there lies the potential for a real problem," said Shooshan. "The media too much dominate the political environment today. If a mayor can take a poll over two-way television about any issue he wants, he can significantly erode the powers of an elected city council or the intent of state referendum laws, which require a certain number of signatures before an issue can be put on a ballot for a direct decision by the voters."

"Instant polling is an area of enormous peril," said Sidney W. Dean, chairman of the City Club of New York's ad hoc committee on cable television, and for seven years a member of the city's advisory committee on the same subject. "Instantaneous surveys on public-policy issues are frightening for a number of reasons. First, there is no time for thoughtful consideration of the issue. Second, from my long experience in marketing research, I

know that the hand that writes the questions usually begets the answers."

Robert W. Ross is the young, aggressive, and highly articulate senior vice president for law and government relations of the National Cable Television Association. "The consequences? All the consequences are positive," was Ross's reply to a question about the ultimate impact of the cable industry on Americans. "Information is like nuclear power. You can harness it for good or you can

Will the service's price further widen the gap that already separates the poor from the rest of society?

harness it for evil. It depends upon what kinds of regulatory structures are set up and how the regulations are applied." But he was far less reassuring when our conversation turned to what he ironically called "the era of plebiscitary democracy." This era will have arrived, he said, the day a politician can say "push button three if you agree with me, and seventeen million hit button three and the decision is made to lock up the Nisei."

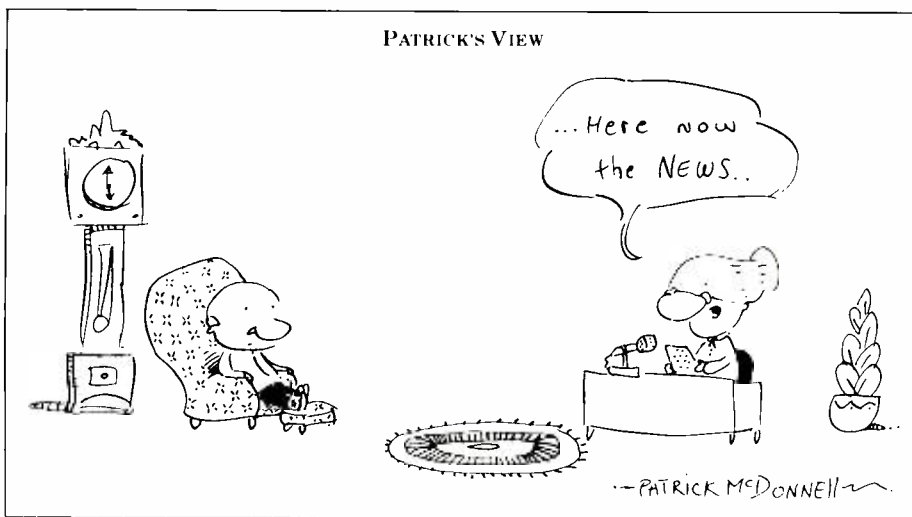
Ross recounted his experiences as an ensign in Vietnam, where he believes the nearly instantaneous communication links with Washington robbed him and the rest of the officers of the appropriate authority to make decisions. "If the time comes when an elected official has the ability to swiftly determine how his constituents feel about any issue he is dealing with, it is my guess that the individuality and self-confidence of that official will be undermined," he warned. "A congressman is there to represent his constituents, not just to do his own will. On the other hand, it is simultaneously important for politicians to exercise their

own judgments about the rightness of something, rather than responding to pressures of the mob or emotions of the moment."

As two-way interactive cable is installed in a significant number of American homes, many of its fundamental perils—Constitutional, economic, and philosophical—become evident. And Ithiel de Sola Pool, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, worries that society might overreact to these perils. "No democracy would tolerate the notion that a reporter's notebook be licensed and subject to inspection by those he is writing about," Pool said. "No democracy would tolerate that a political party's campaign plans be treated the same way, nor that our correspondence with our friends abroad should be compulsorily opened up. But that is exactly what many countries are requiring for computer files. What then happens when a reporter keeps his files on his home computer, or when a political party produces its plans on an intelligent word-processor, or when we write our friends by electronic mail?"

Pool noted the laws recently passed by several European countries. He warned darkly that "a Luddite fear of the computer" is intensifying the centuries of struggle for the protection of personal freedom.

At a time when technological changes are placing large and unanticipated pressures on society, choosing the right course is hard business. Consultant Harry Shooshan recalled Lord Devlin's telling comment about the dangers of our difficult and subtle times: "If freedom of the press or freedom of speech perishes, it will not be by sudden death. It will be a long time dying from a debilitating disease caused by a series of erosive measures, each of which, if examined singly, would have a great deal to be said for it."



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Diplomat Without Portfolio

Television technology has changed the style of international relations. Foreign leaders, diplomats, and terrorists today tailor their words and actions for the cameras.

By Michael D. Mosettig

WHEN BRITAIN'S LORD CASTLEREAGH journeyed to the Congress of Vienna in 1814 to help arrange the post-Napoleonic concert of Europe, he took his wife and sister-in-law along in his coach. When Egypt's Anwar Sadat flew to Israel in 1977 to begin an equally historic peace process, he left his wife at home and brought the anchors from the three American television networks in his presidential jet.

From Poland to the Persian Gulf to Latin America, diplomacy, war, revolution, and terrorism can now be presented instantaneously in the living rooms of American television viewers. The media have for more than a century been what CBS News president William Leonard calls "a third presence in international diplomacy." But as the delay factor in reporting has vanished, television's role in diplomacy has gained prominence. Now, portable electronic television cameras can send live or video-tape pictures via satellites to audiences thousands of miles away.

"It [the exploitation of television in diplomacy] is there, and what the hell are you going to do about it?" says Hodding Carter III, the former Assistant Secretary of State who became a household figure during the Iran hostage crisis. In Iran, for the first time in history, a foreign government tried to use television as a substitute for diplomacy—not merely a public relations tool.

American politicians have long tailored their speeches and campaign stops for the maximum evening news exposure, but now foreign leaders, diplomats, and terrorists are also aiming their words and actions to the cameras. Their goal is to reach governments and public opinion far beyond their native terrain.

Anwar Sadat, who watched Henry Kissinger use the media during the shuttle diplomacy period, invited some former U.S. government publicists to advise him on television techniques. Third World students are returning home from the United States and Europe ready to use television to further their political careers or revolutionary aspirations. And even the Soviets have decided to play television diplomacy. Suddenly this year their Washington diplomats have been appearing on network news programs to rebut the allegations of President Reagan and Secretary of State Alexander Haig about their diplomatic conduct.

The Soviets' use of television provides the latest evidence

that television diplomacy usually operates down a one-way street. While increasing numbers of foreign spokesmen try to reach American audiences, American officials rarely appear on the news programs of Soviet, Iranian, or Iraqi television. Arab oil producers have made big investments in television transmission equipment and in public relations, but most of the oil nations try to restrict the visits and access of the U.S. networks. The networks made great efforts to cover the Iran-Iraq War, for instance, but no matter how strong their interest, no matter how vital the event was to U.S. concerns and how modern the communications technology—television news coverage from much of the world remains subject to the policies and whims of government officials.

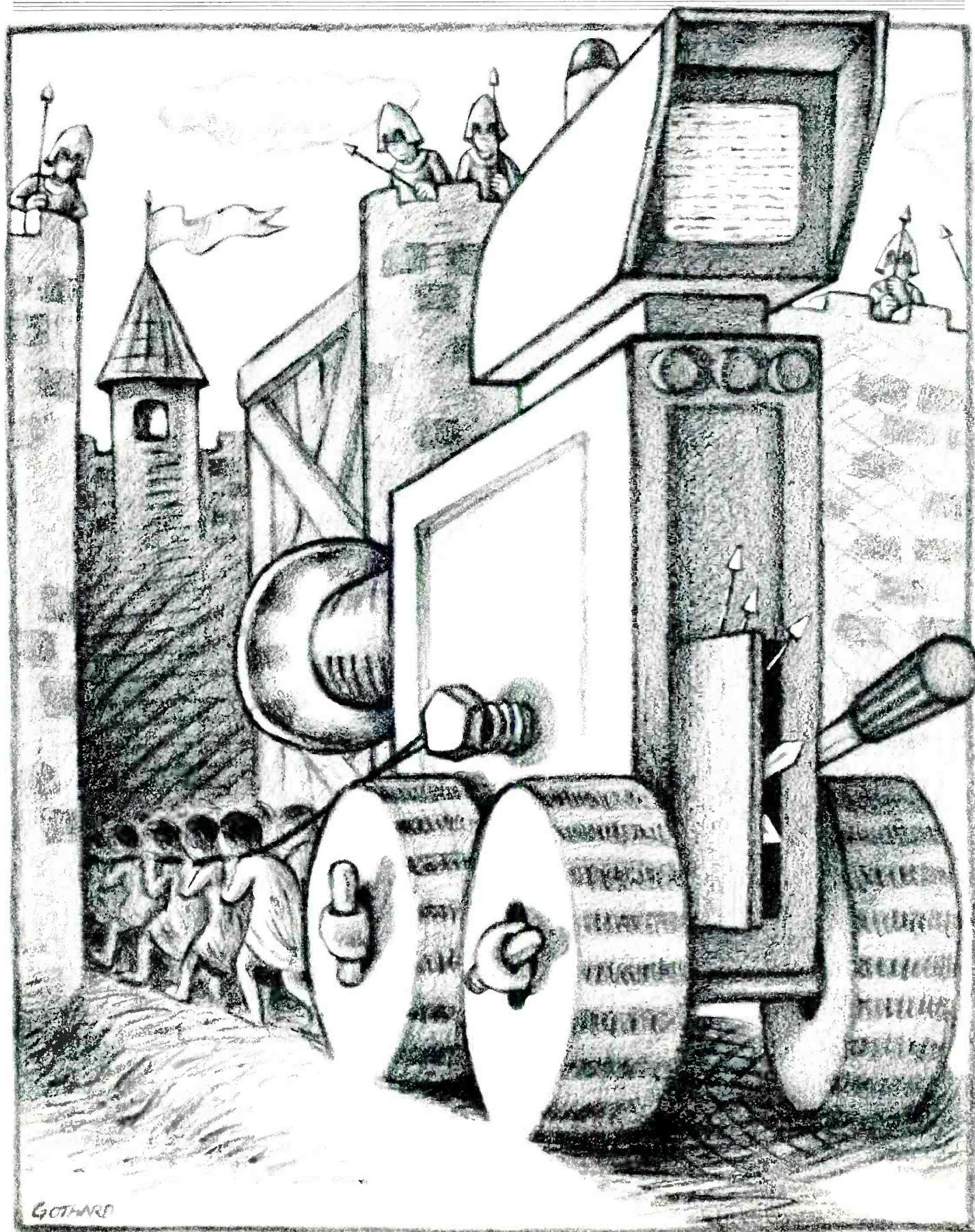
And television's absence has come to define a diplomatic reality as much as its presence. Stories in countries that deny access to American television crews tend to become non-stories. President Carter described the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as the most serious threat to peace since World War II, but the coverage and the international reaction to it quickly lost steam because American television teams were not allowed to remain in the country. "We can only begin to sense what's happening here," says CBS's Leonard. "Clearly, the technology has plunged us into a change before we had any particularly thoughtful ideas of its implications."

Television's powerful position in international affairs first became evident with the Vietnam War, which was broadcast daily into living rooms across America. Since then, many have wondered whether a modern democracy will be able to sustain a war for any duration before television coverage turns the public against it. The next time American troops go into combat, the networks will have the technical capability to carry the fighting live and to pair it up with live pictures of the soldiers' families watching their loved ones being shot.

The coverage of Iran has provoked a lot of media-critiquing, but so far little of the "kill-the-messenger" pressure that accompanied and followed the Vietnam War. Some experts believe that in a future Iran-type incident, the American government would feel compelled to make its military or economic response within thirty-six hours, before the networks had time to turn the hostages and their families into soap opera characters.

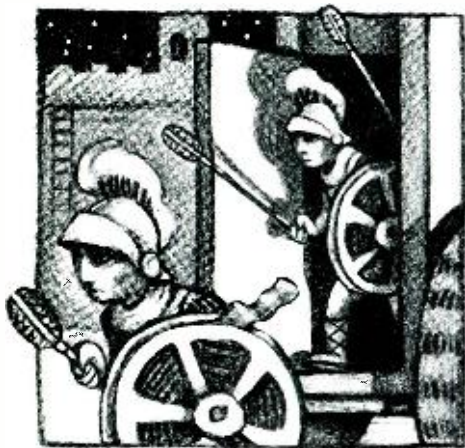
As the reach and potential of international television become more obvious, attempts to curb it are growing. Many Third World nations are trying to obtain United Nations approval for their efforts to restrict the entry and activities of foreign correspondents. Television's performance will also come under closer scrutiny in the United States, as the Reagan Administration makes a major issue out of international terrorism.

Michael D. Mosettig writes frequently about diplomacy and television. A former NBC News producer, he is currently an adjunct professor at the Columbia School of Journalism.



Technology has combined with a series of dramatic news events since the mid-1970s to bring even more of the world into American homes every evening and morning. The first major technological change was the introduction of portable video-tape cameras, popularly known as minicams, to foreign coverage during Sadat's trip to Israel. The second was the spread of communications satellite ground stations to much of the Third World, making possible instant transmission of news stories. (Two countries still without ground stations are El Salvador

The next time our troops go into combat, the networks will have the ability to carry the fighting live.



and Afghanistan.) Foreign stories previously had to be shot on film, then developed and often shipped to a country with a ground station. Even most stories from Vietnam were twenty-four or forty-eight hours old by the time they were seen in the United States. Now stories can be sent by satellite to New York live, or within moments after they occur in most of the world.

In the early seventies, the New York producers of the national evening news shows often regarded foreign news (except the Vietnam War) as remote, stale, and boring. It could not compete with the political and social turmoil taking place in the United States. Oil changed that. The 1973 Middle Eastern War led to gas lines in the United States. Foreign news ceased being abstract. With the middle and late 1970s came the stories of great human and historical drama—Sadat, Begin, and Middle East peace; European terrorism; the deaths, coronations, and pilgrimages of popes; revolution from Iran to Nicaragua, and finally the fourteen-month hostage epic. Beefing up their overseas operations to cover the big

stories, the networks also covered and aired some slightly less important ones, and did more special segments and feature reporting from abroad.

The foreign news content of the evening programs has doubled and trebled since 1976. The morning news shows, which almost never bought satellite time for foreign stories, now do so routinely. (The cost of satellite feeds is only half what it was in 1970.) Ten years ago U.S. network coverage consisted largely of canned film features; now it runs like a wire service, with morning and evening cycles of updated news and pictures. And the development of twenty-four-hour, all-news cable television has accelerated that trend.

United States network coverage follows the country's vital economic and strategic interests, among which oil remains a staple. The networks now can and will go almost literally to the ends of the earth (recently to Bali) to pursue the maneuverings of the OPEC oil ministers. As Leonard Marks, the former U.S. Information Agency director, has noted, Saudi Arabia's oil minister appears frequently on the Sunday afternoon panel shows and other news programs to soften the American public for another price increase. The capture of an American embassy anywhere would be great drama, but the seizure of one U.S. ambassador in Colombia received far less attention than the capture of fifty-two Americans in the Persian Gulf region.

The Iran hostage crisis offers the most provocative case study of the potential and limitations of television diplomacy. It showed that some foreign and would-be leaders have developed an appreciation of television's potential power. It also showed that while television can communicate quickly, it cannot close profound cultural gaps.

The Iranians displayed considerable savvy about the politics of American television. Sadeh Ghotbzadeh, who controlled Iranian television, was well aware, for example, that ABC's *Good Morning America* had higher ratings than NBC's *Today* show, but that the latter had more viewers among Washington's government and political elite. Once a student in the United States, Ghotbzadeh joined the Ayatollah Khomeini during his Paris exile and handled his publicity. He cultivated American network news producers in Paris and the U.S., and offered interviews with English-speaking aides of Khomeini. Gradually he pierced the veil of indifference among executive producers who were then only vaguely aware of Khomeini or the potential for revolution in Iran.

After the embassy seizure, Ghot-

bzadeh became what NBC News correspondent George Lewis calls "the Jerry Rafshoon for the militants." He advised them when to stage marches for maximum U.S. television exposure. He arranged journalist tours of Savak torture chambers, and visits to slums followed by trips through the Shah's lavish palace. He also evolved, perhaps because of his command of English, into the government spokesman for the American press and television.

According to Lewis and other correspondents in Tehran, the Iranian leaders genuinely believed they could turn U.S. public opinion against the Carter Administration. By showing the wickedness of the Shah's regime, they expected to prove the virtue and sincerity of their own actions. They could not comprehend that the American public would be in no mood to listen while their diplomats were held hostage and while their country and its symbols were reviled by chanting demonstrators.

In the absence of direct diplomatic contact with the U.S. government, the Iranians clearly viewed the U.S. networks and their reporters as part of the diplomatic process. At times, this effectively turned the network correspondents into unofficial diplomats. Correspondents would ask officials about various negotiating terms and acceptable bargaining positions. If the officials, such as Ghotbzadeh and Foreign Minister Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, responded favorably to these unofficial offerings, the semblance of diplomatic progress was created when in reality nothing had changed. In one NBC interview, Bani-Sadr gave a highly nuanced explanation of how an investigating tribunal might work and how it might eventually lead to the release of the hostages. He concluded the interview with a plea to correspondent John Hart: "Help us, so that reason may reign."

Hart's response is not recorded on the NBC tapes stored in New York, but he and colleagues recall him telling the foreign minister that newsmen are not diplomats and cannot play that kind of role.

Instantaneous television also made possible a circular process of response and counter-response between Washington and Tehran that George Lewis dubbed "verbal Ping-Pong." In the absence of normal official communication, spokesmen reacted almost immediately, across several time zones, to each other's statements, thereby reinforcing a pervasive opinion that the only negotiations to occur with Iran took place on television.

"It's an insane activity," Hodding Carter said later. "Had we been doing serious diplomatic business rather than political

posturing, it would have been disastrous. We never had time to think. We were responding to partial texts and partial responses. It was inherently distorted and inherently anathema to anyone who wanted an orderly negotiating process."

The press participants were equally unhappy with their role. "It was like a dog chasing its tail," Lewis says. "We were trying to put a new top on a story that had no new top. Sometimes, we were pressing for things that were not there. We all got caught up in it. It just contributed to the noise level."

Media prominence during the Iran story served as a smoke screen for some real diplomatic activity. When ABC producers put together Pierre Salinger's three-hour retrospective of secret Iran diplomacy, they found many pictures of third-party intermediaries in the retinues of more publicized visitors. As William Leonard pointed out, television may make totally secret diplomacy more difficult, but it certainly has not eliminated private meetings between representatives of governments.

For all their attempts to use television, the Iranians failed to move U.S. public opinion or the Carter Administration in the direction they wanted. When it became clear, by January 1980, that Americans were growing angrier rather than more sympathetic, the Iranians concluded that the Western press and television were biased against them. Their response was to throw the networks out and only to allow them back sporadically in the months after.

The Iranian pattern will probably become more familiar in coming years. Some Third World leaders and revolutionaries will try to use television to gain a sympathetic American audience. A few will succeed, as Sadat did. More will fail and quickly grow disillusioned. Most will decide that the easiest way to avoid criticism and trouble is to keep the Western press and television out as much as possible.

Denying access can be an effective way to further a cause, as the Soviets showed after they invaded Afghanistan. The U.S. networks were allowed in the country briefly after the invasion, but have been barred since. The result has been the virtual elimination of the Afghanistan story from the airwaves.

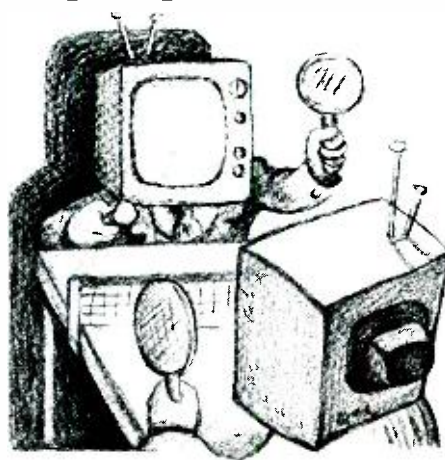
The National Security Council staff tried to keep the story alive with weekly briefings and other situation reports. A decade or so ago that device might have worked. It did not in 1980. News organizations could not see for themselves what was happening in Afghanistan; neither they nor their audiences were reminded of the Soviet occupation with nightly pic-

tures on television. For all its strategic implications, Afghanistan simply vanished — as did much reaction to the Soviet involvement.

Network executives acknowledge their dependence on pictures, and know they can fall into the out-of-sight, out-of-mind trap. "If you can't get it, you don't broadcast it," CBS's Leonard says. "You can't put Dan Rather in front of a flat for four minutes every night."

A more subtle and delicate drama is being played out in Poland. The Polish government, with some exceptions, has

Instantaneous television made response and counter-response between Washington and Tehran 'verbal Ping-Pong.'



permitted each network to keep a correspondent in the country, and has allowed them free access. Leaders of the Solidarity labor movement are accessible to Western coverage, which is relayed back into Poland on the BBC, Radio Free Europe, and German radio. This link to the West may be giving the Polish government a few more inches of maneuvering room with the Soviets.

Any attempts to throw out the foreign press would immediately raise fears that an invasion is imminent. On the other hand, the Soviets will be able to charge that Western reporting, regardless of what is actually said, helped create anti-socialist and anti-Soviet sentiment, a pretext for invasion. Expulsion of Western correspondents and closing of the satellite ground station would probably be among the first orders of business in a Soviet take-over of the country.

The toughest criticism of television's performance in international affairs generally comes from people who have served in both journalism and government.

"In Iran," says Ron Nessen, press secretary to President Ford and former NBC correspondent, "television refused to accept responsibility for its role . . . Television is an element of the story and to pretend otherwise is sophistry."

"These kinds of stories require a degree of responsibility that television so far has not displayed. They require self-discipline. There is a general rule in television: If it can be done, you do it. This needs to be re-examined."

Hodding Carter suggests "active, self-conscious humility." Television, he says, "needs to be more thoughtful and willing to sacrifice some of the theatrical elements of a story for an explanation of what is really going on. I know you've got to sell it, and I know it's a very competitive game. But there's also a word called responsibility."

"It is strange to me that journalists, who are the first to denounce politicians they think are only following, justify what they are doing [following each others' leads] by saying 'we can't take the lead because of the competition or ratings.'"

News executives disagree. If anything, says ABC News senior vice president Richard C. Wald, the news media too often follow agendas laid out by government officials. He insists, for example, that President Carter, not the networks, made the lives of the hostages paramount to national security and national honor, thereby reducing the prospects for U.S. retaliation.

Executives like Wald admit they are capable of making mistakes but say they must resist any attempt to limit the gathering and dissemination of news.

"Sometimes," Wald acknowledges, "we are caught in our own trap of reporting all sides, and come to a faulty end. But our critics are caught up in their own trap of when we should be free and when we shouldn't."

"A lot of people who are theoretically in favor of a free press in fact favor a free press that will do what they want."

"When you don't know the answer," says CBS's Leonard, "you always come down on the side of the thing that it can't be better when people have less information rather than more information."

"The amount of knowledge people hold is a factor in the conduct of foreign policy," Wald adds. "Foreign policy only operates to the extent it gets support in domestic policy. Foreign policy exists to advance domestic interests."

One of the most controversial aspects of television's involvement in international events is its relationship with terrorism. The symbiosis between international terrorism and international televi-

sion has been chillingly clear since the Palestinian Black September movement chose the 1972 Munich Olympics to stage its most spectacular act, the kidnapping of Israeli athletes.

International television has in the past ten years become the vehicle propelling small and obscure groups to worldwide recognition. The South Moluccans, for instance, captured a train in the Netherlands, and drew television coverage from all over the world. As Robert Kupperman, a Ford Administration terrorism expert, said, "You've got to understand, they [most terrorist groups] have limited resources. Their problem is to appear massive. They need the media."

Television's challenge is thus to report on terrorism without playing directly into the terrorists' hands. Kupperman and other experts such as Captain Frank Bolz, chief of the New York police hostage rescue team, do not advocate news blackouts of terrorist incidents. The important thing, they say, is that reporters and cameras maintain a clear distinction between covering an event and participating in it. They think the networks overstepped this line in Iran, NBC most notably, in its controversial decision to give an Iranian militant prime air-time in return for a network interview with a hostage.

Kupperman fears that coverage of a future terrorist incident might run out of control and inspire an angry reaction from government—and possible attempts to curb Constitutional liberties. "There is a risk of total frustration in government and the risk of doing things they will regret later," he says. He believes the press should forestall any such reaction by a conscious effort of self-restraint. "Report it, but seek as best you can to de-sensationalize it. Don't dominate the news with it. Cut out this crap of 'Day 282.'"

Beyond those debates remains a basic imponderable: To what extent do American television's news reports at home and presence on the scene finally affect the conduct of governments and the outcome of events?

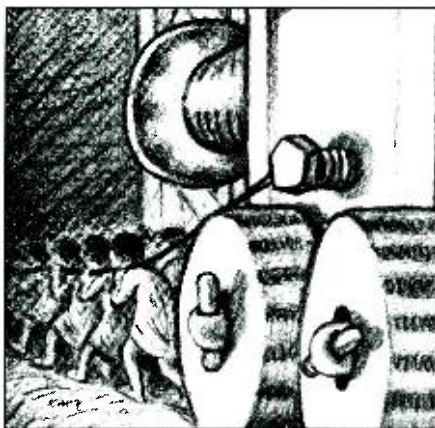
"The [new communications] technology reinforces the idea of many in the foreign policy establishment that the country is going to hell," says ABC's Wald. In foreign policy, as in domestic politics, some people see television as an omnipresent and visible symbol of the many changes in society. "They impart to television a power that is flattering and uncalled for."

The ultimate effect of television's Iranian coverage supports Wald's assertion. Barry Rubin, author of a recent book on Iran entitled *Paved with Good Intentions*, noted that both television coverage

and election-year politics created pressure on the Carter Administration to negotiate on Iran. But he insisted that television did not have that much effect on the final outcome. "The course of the negotiations and the rhythm of the negotiations really depended on political events in Washington and Tehran."

Similarly, many State Department officials were proven wrong in their predictions that the absence of U.S. cameras would speed up the hostages' release. A

Third World students are going home ready to use television to further their political and revolutionary aspirations.



full year passed between the two events.

As the Iranians learned, television diplomacy cannot substitute for the real thing. One needs action; the other often requires secrecy, or at least discretion and the time for internal government debate. The hostage crisis finally ended through conventional diplomatic mediation, even though the Iranians at the very end still wanted President Carter to reply to their demands through the media.

As much as Sadat and Egypt benefited from television publicity, the peace with Israel took more than a year of negotiations. Despite the enduring myth, Walter Cronkite did not arrange the Jerusalem trip. That was done through intermediaries and contacts in Morocco, Rumania, and the United States. Sadat used the Cronkite interview to seal the arrangements.

For the viewer most of all, the combination of diplomacy and television may be particularly deceiving. In diplomacy, even more than in domestic politics, there is a difference between what the public is seeing and what is really going on. In Iran, for example, the networks often covered the events of an entire country and revolution by focusing on one block of downtown Tehran. The embassy seizure,

part of a struggle between factions of the revolution, was transformed into a conflict between the United States and Iran.

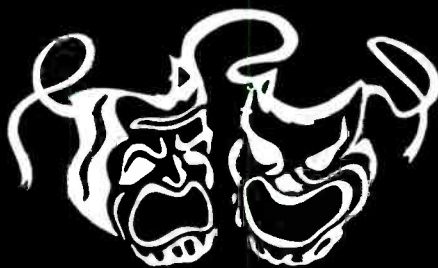
On their twenty-two-minute newscasts, the networks cannot pretend to cover the world. At best, they offer tiny slices of events outside the United States. If one story dominates, like Iran did, little or no time remains to cover the others. Television news is all front-page, without the newspaper or magazine perspective of back pages. The networks are more likely to give air-time, for instance, to foreign leaders who speak good English. (We see more of Jordan's King Hussein than of Syria's Hafez al-Assad.) U.S. television does not maintain bureaus in such vital places as Saudi Arabia, China, and Eastern Europe—and its mobility in the Soviet Union is tightly controlled. The networks had no Iran specialists in Tehran, no Eastern-European experts in Poland. Only recently have they demonstrated willingness and ability to cover complicated strategic and military issues like arms control, a central component of U.S.-Soviet relations. They are just beginning to master economics, so increasingly important to diplomacy—as even Henry Kissinger eventually acknowledged.

The technology that makes expanded international coverage possible has seriously stretched the people providing it. Rather than concentrating on one or two countries and becoming expert there, they are jetting from one crisis to the next, their expertise in a file of clippings. "Technology has ruined the life of the foreign correspondent," says NBC's Richard Valeriani. They now spend more time in airplanes and hotels with colleagues than at elegant and informative dinners with foreign ministers. They cover and report during one time zone and feed their stories to New York during another, guaranteeing regular workdays of eighteen hours. They are subject to increasing pressure to serve as unofficial diplomats, message carriers, and propagandists. They are more visible—their cameras symbolic of their power to reach around the world—and much more likely to come under deliberate attack in a war overseas.

Yet, for all these limitations, American television has joined the game of nations. It has certainly changed the style of diplomacy. How much it has changed the substance of government policy is still debatable. Diplomacy, even in the instant-communications age, still depends on factors not necessarily visible on television or compatible with journalism—the exercise of power and the ability to lie, or at least to be artfully ambiguous on behalf of one's country. ■

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Blackout

The FCC encourages minority ownership, but local opposition—including threats and vandalism—has been keeping blacks off the air.

by Ira Mothner

THINGS CAN HAPPEN to new black broadcasters—bad things. Many are learning that a permit to construct, or a license to operate, a radio or television station doesn't automatically clear the way for them to start building, broadcasting, and piling up profits. The hurdles in Washington may be easier to clear than obstacles closer to home.

Donald McMeans, whose Renaissance Broadcasting Corporation won Federal Communications Commission approval to construct WRBV-TV, a UHF station in Vineland, New Jersey, has been held up by legal skirmishes with local government and the area's environmental watchdog agency. He's also run up against community protests and some truly nasty forms of harassment—threats, vandalism, intimidation of construction workers, gunshots, and firebombs.

Out in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Walter Goins hasn't encountered anything nearly so vicious. Yet, after time-consuming wrangles with state agencies over environmental and air safety issues, he's still waiting for a permit to construct his UHF station there.

Matters are more straightforward in Beaufort, South Carolina, where William Galloway recently became the first black owner of radio station WSIB/AM. Since then, the station has lost two-thirds of its advertising, and anonymous callers have threatened both Galloway and his wife. "They couldn't make it any clearer," he says. "They just don't want a black station owner in Beaufort."

It isn't always that clear. Not every obstacle a new black broadcaster encounters is rooted in racism. Public sensitivity to such concerns as the environment, community planning, and home rule can make it hard for any new licensee, minority-group member or not, to avoid bureaucratic tangles and legal obstructions.

Donald McMeans's troubles in South Jersey may not have been racially motivated at the outset, although now almost no one denies that race is a factor. McMeans is convinced, however, that it *was* racism from day one. "I assure you that if I could dive into a can of white paint and straighten my hair, I'd be on the air."

Not given to overstatement, McMeans, forty-one, is usually quiet, persuasive, and reasonable. Born in Alabama and raised in Connecticut, he earned his master's degree in international relations at the University of Pennsylvania, and worked for Hartford's anti-poverty program before coming to New Jersey in 1968 to be director of human services for the state's Model

Cities program. Three years later, he joined New Jersey's broadcasting authority, called NJPTV, as director of community services.

During five years with the authority, McMeans wrote, directed, produced, and even hosted, his own shows, which usually focused on social problems. It wasn't always easy to get his bosses at NJPTV to go along with his ideas or underwrite them, he admits. "I first saw the idea of owning a television station as a way around having to ask permission before I could produce a show."

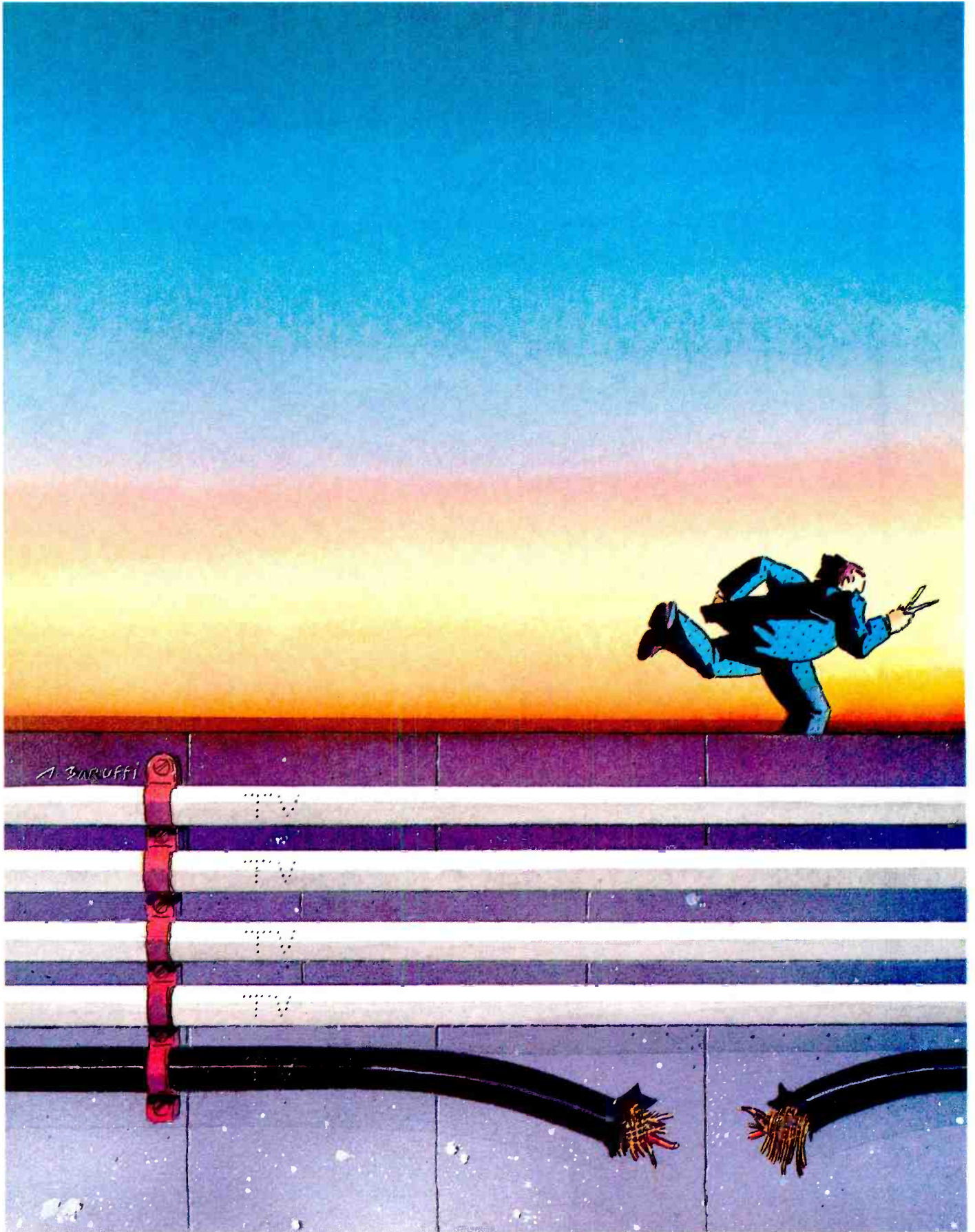
South Jersey, with only one small commercial UHF station (in Wildwood) and no VHF's, seemed a good place to look for a license, and Channel 65 in Vineland was a lucky find. McMeans had no competition for the channel. The mayor supported his application, and the city got him an Urban Development Action grant of \$1.7 million to finance WRBV's 26,000-square-foot studio building, now standing vast and empty at the edge of town. When no local bank would pick up on the \$4.75 million loan guarantee McMeans had gotten from the Farmer's Home Administration, the Girard Bank in Philadelphia did. And after his hopes for an ABC network affiliation were blasted, he arranged for \$600,000 more in financing from Wometco Enterprises and agreed to turn WRBV over to Wometco's Home Theatre subscription service each night at 8:00.

From 8 A.M. to 8 P.M., however, he plans regular commercial service, heavy on news and community programming, and promises "to cover those issues that are not ordinarily covered—and should be." When pressed to describe the kinds of stories he intends, McMeans lists: "why New Jersey has one of the highest cancer rates of any state in the Union, or what is becoming of New Jersey's large population of senior citizens, or how to deal with toxic wastes poisoning our waters."

McMeans also plans to do many of the things he did for minority viewers—and some he wasn't permitted to do—on NJPTV. "We would provide an opportunity for broad television exposure for some very talented people who, were they not black, would have had that exposure anyway." He makes it clear, though, that the bulk of WRBV's programming would be aimed at a general audience.

McMeans didn't run into real trouble in Vineland. It was waiting for him twenty miles away in Waterford Township, where the Federal Aviation Administration had told Renaissance Broadcasting it could locate its tower and transmitter. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection approved the location in Wharton State Park and leased Renaissance a site adjoining an NJPTV tower there. Problems began when McMeans sought approval from the state's Pine-

Ira Mothner writes frequently on social problems and politics.





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not have been racially motivated
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that race is a factor.

lands Commission, a newly formed panel charged with preserving the New Jersey Pine Barrens, the last great wilderness area between Washington and Boston. When he sent his plans to the commission, McMeans also sent copies to the Waterford zoning board "in case we turned out to be subject to local zoning ordinances."

According to McMeans, the town's zoning board initially agreed that Renaissance was not subject to local ordinances, but objected to the tower on the grounds that the state had acted "arbitrarily and capriciously" by giving the broadcasting company permission to build there. The folks in Waterford had a real beef with the state and with the new Pinelands Commission, not because McMeans was being permitted to build in the protected pine-lands, but because they, the townsfolk, were not. "How could they allow a company from Vineland—which is like the end of the world—to come in and build?" asks Waterford Mayor Albert J. Pangia Jr. "We can't develop—build homes or subdivide."

While the state government in Trenton might have been the real enemy, the target for Waterford's ire became McMeans and Renaissance. The town and groups of townsfolk fought the tower before the Pinelands Commission, which disapproved of the original tower site because it was within 300 feet of freshwater wetlands. When the Department of Environmental Protection offered to lease Renaissance a second location within the area okayed by the FAA, the commission balked at sanctioning the move until McMeans replanted trees he had removed from the first site, to permit soil-boring tests. Although it was October, and fewer than 30 percent of the seedlings could be expected to survive, Renaissance replanted, and the commission then approved the new site.

Last November, when McMeans was finally about to move onto the new location and clear trails to the tower site, he faced not only a crowd of local protestors but two court challenges as well. The

town was protesting the Pinelands Commission's approval. It also demanded that Renaissance get local zoning board approval. The Waterford authorities tried to stop Renaissance from moving onto the second site on the grounds that construction of the tower would destroy the natural habitat of the corn snake, which town officials maintained was an endangered species.

MCMEANS OVERCAME the corn snake issue by hiring a herpetologist who established the absence of corn snakes at the tower site. The species, which is "threatened" but not "endangered," has never been seen in the county, McMeans maintains. But the battle over the town's right to approve construction on state land still drags on. Although Waterford won the last round in February, the court allowed Renaissance to go ahead with its tower pending appeal of the decision. Local politicians grumbled that the judge was "trying to have it both ways."

At the construction site, things have been far from quiet. Before November ended, workers found a sign with the salutation, "Hey nigger" attached to a tree by a steel-tipped hunting arrow. It warned, "The tower is not up yet." Two nights later, vandals damaged a crane, tore out wires, cut hoses, and slashed tires. That's when McMeans posted guards at the site. Early in December, shots were fired at the nearby NJPTV tower and McMeans found what he is convinced are bullet holes in an equipment trailer.

When the weather became colder and Christmas drew near, fewer protesters appeared. In February, however, after Waterford won the right to approve Renaissance's construction plans, the town's building inspector showed up. According to McMeans, he appeared daily, threatening workers with fines for working on a project the town had not approved.

Later that month, night raiders struck again, tossing rag-fused kerosene bottles

onto the roof of the transmitter building. When guards found the phone lines had been cut, they went for help, returning to find the tires of their car slashed and a second fire burning in the guardhouse. The damage was not great, and work continued until the tower and transmitter were completed early in April.

McMeans plans to be on the air by early summer. He will be in court soon after that, challenging Waterford's right to approve Renaissance's construction in Wharton State Park. Because of his recent experience in the courts, McMeans admits to anxiety: "The only thing I fear is the American system of justice."

Mayor Pangia insists the town's fight is still with the state. "The whole thing has been misdirected. It became the residents of the township against Renaissance," he says. "It is purely a coincidence that the owner of Renaissance is black and Waterford Township is white."

Daniel J. Dalton, the local state assemblyman, also claims coincidence. It is coincidental, he stresses, that the nearby town, where he proposed Renaissance move its tower, is predominantly black. The assemblyman allows that race became something of an issue. But the basic battles, he insists, were over the "environment" and "home rule." "We need a television station in South Jersey," says Dalton, "but do we need it at the expense of the environment?"

For McMeans, the long and nasty battle has been costly, and he is certain it was meant to be. "In private, they said they wanted to delay us. They knew we couldn't afford that." Indeed, it will now take additional financing to get and keep WRBV on the air, and McMeans has been busy raising it. "People should realize," he says, "that they can't keep us off the air."

Walter Goins, whose LEO Broadcasting Corporation is still a long way from getting its UHF station operating in St. Cloud, Minnesota, does have local approval of his tower plans. What he doesn't have is a construction permit, which is pending approval from the FAA. "We

Minority-owned stations have increased from 51 to 140 in five years — not significant in terms of the 10,000 broadcasters.

could have been through the process in a couple of weeks,” Goins maintains. His troubles are not with the local community but with the state.

LEO had no luck raising money locally, and the St. Cloud newspaper refused to take the black broadcasters seriously. “They questioned whether we were for real,” says Goins. “We also ran into a tremendous amount of opposition on environmental issues that were unsubstantiated.” While the LEO team was able to resolve its difficulties with both the state’s Department of Natural Resources and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it could not overcome opposition from Minnesota’s Department of Transportation.

The state agency prevailed upon the FAA to reopen the question of LEO’s tower after it had been approved — and after the period allotted for comments on that approval had expired. Goins maintains that he had earlier submitted a copy of his application to the transportation department, and had been told that there were no problems with it, but that the state had no jurisdiction since a federal permit was required. Nevertheless, the issue was reopened and the state agency commissioned a study of air traffic in the contested area.

As Goins put it, “Since the FCC is somewhat friendly to people of color, it might be that a detractor decided to fight us through the FAA, rather than through the commission.” A pilot himself, Goins resents the idea that he is insensitive to the question of air safety. Nor is he happy with the length of time the FAA took to consider objections — after the period for objections was extended. And the FAA’s proposal that he reduce the height of his tower from 1,549 to 1,349 feet has depressed him most of all.

“We could go to 2,000 feet and still comply with the FAA table of allocations,” he insists. Cutting the tower height by 200 feet, he explains, “will mean we’ll have to double transmitter power.” But he admits he cannot hope to negotiate back more than a small portion of the lost footage.

Black broadcasters in Lake Charles, Virginia, are also having trouble starting a radio station — in this instance because they can’t get hold of a tower site. “When word got around, no one would sell us land,” said Early D. Monroe Jr., an engineering consultant formerly with the FCC. “We finally did buy a piece, but it had to be rezoned, and the county refused to rezone it.” Although license applicants are required, before filing for a station, to show that building a tower is feasible, Monroe’s group went ahead last year and filed for the Lake Charles station anyway. “We made an issue of our inability to get a site,” he said.

Workers found a sign with the salutation ‘Hey nigger’ attached to a tree by a steel-tipped hunting arrow.

In Benton, Louisiana, another group of Monroe’s clients did get a license and started KDKS/FM last year, but were forced to ask the FCC for temporary authority to operate out of studios several miles from town. “No one would rent or sell us space in downtown Benton,” explained Monroe.

Despite these setbacks, the number of minority-owned stations has increased from 51 in 1975 to 140 in 1980. “Far from significant in terms of the nation’s 10,000 broadcasters,” admits Tyrone Brown, who recently resigned after nearly three and a half years on the FCC. Still, Brown, a black lawyer and once vice president for legal affairs of the Post-Newsweek Stations, is enthusiastic about changes he and his FCC colleagues made during what he calls “the heady time” when Charles Ferris was chairman. Particularly dear to Brown is the commission’s program encouraging minority ownership. “We opened the gates,” he declares, and is convinced their action will

produce “a greater diversity in programming.”

While the commission has done a great deal to help minority broadcasters start new stations, the strength of its program lies in its ability to encourage the sale of existing stations to minority owners. The FCC can grant tax certificates allowing broadcasters to defer recognition of capital gains acquired in the process of pursuing a commission policy, so long as those gains are reinvested in some communications enterprise.

The FCC’s “distress sale” policy has also increased minority ownership. The policy allows those station owners whose licenses are threatened to make their stations available to minority-controlled groups at 75 percent of fair-market value. These owners had previously been prohibited from selling. And the commission has made things even easier by relaxing its financial capability requirements for new licensees.

According to Nate Boyer, executive director of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, forty stations came into the hands of black owners between 1978, when the FCC policy was announced, and September 1980. But only half of those sales, said Boyer, were the result of the commission’s program to encourage minority ownership. “New owners,” he explained, “have become much more sophisticated, better able to deal with harassment. Blacks have more contacts now, more clout, more ways to deal with problems than they had before.”

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE to increased black ownership, he believes, is still the problem of finding financing, although the situation is much improved. “Up until seven years ago, banks and other lending institutions didn’t want to invest in minority-owned stations, because they had no track record. Only recently has the Small Business Administration begun to lend to black broadcasters.” Still, financing is far from easy to come by, and the result, Boyer said, “is that guys are com-

They asked the FCC for permission to operate out of town because no one would rent or sell them space.

ing into broadcasting from other businesses—from law, insurance, and real estate.”

William Galloway, who bought WSIB/AM in Beaufort, South Carolina, and is changing this formerly white-owned station's format, had no broadcasting experience at all when he took over in January. Owner of a real estate agency in Charlotte, North Carolina, he bought the station because “Beaufort is my home town.” When the station came on the market, “no one else wanted to make the effort, and I thought blacks might never have another opportunity to buy it.” He also admits, “I figured there must be some money in it; that's why blacks have been kept out.”

If there is money in WSIB/AM, Galloway has yet to find it. “It's costing us eight grand a month,” he says and confesses that if he'd known how much money the station would take from his other business, “I'd have left it alone.” When he looked over the books in November, they showed billings of about \$30,000 a month. Now they're down below \$10,000. Local white advertisers pulled out when the format was changed, letting Galloway know “they'd prefer not to hear that nigger music.” A few local whites have registered their personal disapproval of the change in format and ownership by threatening to kill Galloway or his wife, or at least starve them out.

In Tuscumbia, Alabama, Bob Carl Bailey, an experienced broadcaster, bought a white-owned station that he had been managing, one that already had a black format. Still, once Bailey took over WZZA/AM at the beginning of 1978, he lost 60 percent of his contract advertising. Even selling shares in his station to influential white businessmen failed to bring other white advertisers back or attract new ones. The top-rated AM station in its thirteen-county market, WZZA is still “moping along,” according to Bailey, “still a deficit operation,” although he has pumped in \$100,000 to make improve ments.

Bailey is nothing if not persistent. Early in 1979, he bought a second station, WTQX/AM in Selma, Alabama. There, he explained, “I ran into opposition from a lot of people who also wanted to buy.” He had been general manager more than a year before the sale, and at the time had clashed with several staff members, two of whom resigned. The two former employees got together, Bailey claims, and whipped up feelings against him in the black community. Later, others who wanted to buy the station joined them. Mass meetings were held and petitions circulated, warning the station owners not to sell to Bailey.

Nevertheless, the sale went forward. The black community responded with more petitions and threatened white businesses with boycotts and blacklists if they dealt with Bailey. As a result, WTQX/AM also lost 60 percent of its advertising when Bailey took over. Harassment became more malicious, too—there were bomb threats and mysterious fires, and several of the station's employees were attacked.

In Tuskegee, Alabama, where George H. Clay bought WBIL/AM from white owners in 1975 and added the FM side in 1978, there was little advertising loss at the time the ownership changed. But Clay soon found himself strapped by insufficient capital and an inability to increase advertising sales. He feels discrimination by advertising agencies and white merchants has denied him the sales WBIL deserves as the number-one station in central Alabama. “We have more audience than the ‘Top Forty’ station in Montgomery, and one-fifth the billings.”

While almost all black broadcasters complain that their billings do not reflect audience size, they are sometimes reticent about the harassment they encounter, and often reluctant to say publicly that these incidents are racially inspired. “Because they don't always get alarmed when these things happen,” said Herbert P. Wilkins, who heads Syndicated Communication Inc., “it means that they expect them to happen.” Wilkins,

whose company helps black broadcasters put together their financing, is working with Walter Goins in Minneapolis and probably will give Donald McMeans a hand keeping WRBV/TV on the air in South Jersey.

Wilkins worries that, as black ownership increases, these incidents will become more common. What concerns him most is the impact this will have on the problem of financing minority-owned stations. Though McMeans, for instance, seems to have worn his opposition down, Wilkins wonders what effect his station's many problems have had on officials at his bank.

Nothing can stop black Americans moving into broadcasting as readily as scarcity of funds to buy or build stations. “So it's not what *minorities* think about what is happening that matters,” Wilkins maintained, “so much as how financial institutions feel their investments are being jeopardized because of harassment.” ■



When Wall Street Talks . . .

. . . the industry not only listens but acts.
A handful of financial analysts, who divine trends and quarterly earnings, are television's most powerful critics.

by Christine Doudna

IT WAS A LATE FEBRUARY AFTERNOON, and the new president of CBS Inc. was winding up his presentation. Flanked by his top corporate executives and aided by a barrage of graphics projected simultaneously on six television screens, Tom Wyman had just led an hour-long seminar on the corporation's past and future. His audience was a group of his toughest critics—investment analysts who study and pass judgment on the corporate affairs of companies like CBS.

Wyman had made a similar appearance nine months earlier, when he had been only two weeks in his job. But this was the first time he truly spoke for CBS, so the pressure was on to be presidential. Wyman's predecessor, John Backe, had left CBS under circumstances Wall Street found disturbing. Backe had seemed to be doing everything right—at least from a moneymaking point of view—and several analysts complained that the shake-up was yet another instance of CBS chairman William Paley's erratic behavior. Evidence was mounting of the seventy-nine-year-old chairman's unwillingness to turn over the reins to any successor. Wyman was now the fourth heir-apparent in eight years.

At the time of Backe's forced resignation, one particularly outspoken critic, Ellen Berland Sachar of the Goldman, Sachs brokerage house, wrote in a research brief for her firm's clients, "This latest in a series of top-management changes at CBS is more reminiscent of the power struggles at the major movie studios in the forties and fifties than the orderly transition of professional managements at most large industrial corporations of the seventies and eighties. One could argue in his defense that Mr. Paley is a product of that earlier generation, but to the modern-day institutional investor . . . this is not necessarily seen as a positive attribute."

Now, ten months later, Sachar was part of the audience appraising the newest candidate for Paley's job. Wyman obviously satisfies most of the critical Paley requirements: "The chairman likes a man who's a 42-Long," quips a longtime Paley-watcher, "and Wyman fits the bill. Plus, he's a hands-on, cultured sort of guy—he's on all the right boards." Wall Street's criteria don't necessarily coincide with Bill Paley's. After his presentation that afternoon in February, Wyman took forty-five minutes of questions from his audience and, for all its veneer of cordiality, the mood was combative. Questions were rapid-fire and ranged over the many corporate entities that make up CBS Inc.: How could CBS justify its enormous purchase price for Fawcett Publications last year when the paper-

back business was in the doldrums? How would CBS cover itself if it was backing the wrong video disk? What would happen if the Writers Guild went on strike, in light of the great losses the network suffered the previous year because of the actors' strike?

Wyman handled the questions like Bill Paley's man—with charm, aplomb, and intelligence. But if Ellen Sachar and her peers were impressed with him, they were still officially withholding judgment. Part of their job is to assess management, and no amount of charm will compensate for a loss on next quarter's earnings.

Meetings between network brass and security analysts are a ritual at both CBS and ABC, but one that is taken very seriously. "The network execs really rehearse for those meetings," says one insider. "They may appear in control, but they're often shaking in their boots."

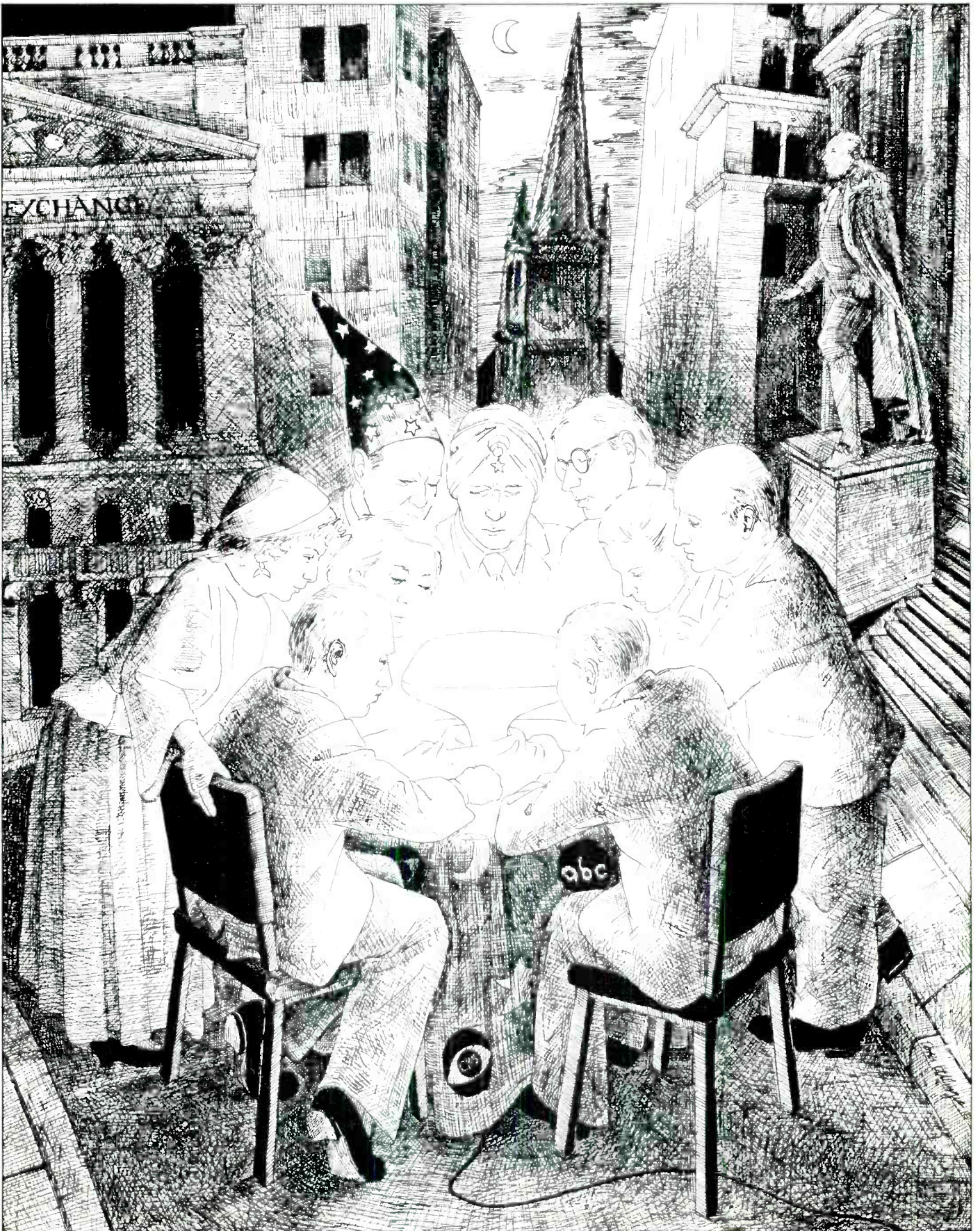
The audience that can induce such quivers in the likes of Tom Wyman and ABC president Elton Rule is a very select group. The forty or so members of the Entertainment Analysts Group represent most of the major brokerage houses on Wall Street, and their collective voice often spells gloom or glee for America's media companies. Their job is to dig for information and evaluate it. They write their conclusions in newsletters sent out to investors and have a powerful voice in the general business press as well. (They are quoted frequently in *The New York Times*, *Business Week*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere about the latest cable-franchise battle, the future of the video disk, the prognosis for Fred Silverman, and on and on.) Analysts function like high-priced reporters, but unlike reporters, their ultimate quest is not the pursuit of truth but the pursuit of the bottom line. Truth in search of profit.

Decades of media complaints about idiot-box fare have had little effect on programming, and critical acclaim means nothing, as the fate of such series as *Paper Chase* has shown. But television executives are not so cavalier with the Wall Street critics. They cannot afford to be.

Wall Street's voice can affect both their jobs and their personal fortunes. Most high-ranking network executives have substantial stock options, and they can personally profit from a favorable Wall Street reading. As one former network executive put it, "Guys like Gene Jankowski [president of CBS Broadcast Group] and Tom Wyman have their second jobs in the stock market; they can make \$50,000 in options in a year."

More important, top executives' performance is measured by the bottom line. If their company's stock declines dramatically, their jobs could be at stake. Stockholders may clamor for

Christine Doudna is a contributing editor of Channels magazine.



improvement—and higher management, or the board, often takes heed by changing the face at the helm.

The business of Wall Street is to make money by moving money. The business of the analyst is to find a cogent reason for moving it—one investors can quite literally buy. The name of the game is the future. Next quarter's earnings are always more interesting than last quarter's, and the challenge is to call it in time to profit from it.

The most dramatic shift in network stock prices came in 1976, when third-ranking ABC toppled CBS's twenty-year reign over prime time. A few analysts caught the change early enough to make money for their clients, and one or two saw it coming well in advance of any fluctuation in the ratings. Dennis Liebowitz, currently a vice president at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette, wrote in April 1971 that despite a projected loss for that year of \$19 million, ABC shares "offer the best appreciation potential in the broadcasting industry." The price of ABC's stock doubled the next year, split in 1973, and went on another spiralling cycle after 1975, when Fred Silverman's wizardry as the network's new program chief began to be apparent.

Ernest Levenstein of E. F. Hutton also saw it coming: "Sometimes you can get lucky and catch a development while it's happening. ABC's ratings started zooming when their earnings were going down because of write-offs of their non-broadcast assets. You have to clue into the right phenomena—it's not just earnings."

THE REAL POWER of the analysts is their ability to influence a stock's popularity—or lack of it. Their perceptions create a climate of opinion—so their business always flirts with self-fulfilling prophecies. If Wall Street likes a stock, the price goes up. If the street is feeling disenchanted with a stock, its fate is normally sealed—at least for that quarter. The game is to be right at least 51 percent of the time, but that leaves a significant margin for error. What happens when it's wrong? "If stock analysts share an erroneous viewpoint of a company," says former NBC executive M. S. Rukeyser, Jr. (now a vice president at *Newsweek*), "it might as well be true."

The networks acknowledge the analysts' power in varying degrees. In the late sixties, CBS and ABC created departments of investor relations to deal with their Wall Street critics. (NBC doesn't have its own investor relations department because that network represents only a fraction of the assets of its parent corporation, RCA.) When Ellen

Sachar and others criticized the firing of John Backe last year, CBS responded through its investor relations department. Garry Blowers, vice president for investor relations, says, "Paley got rough and unfair treatment from the analysts and I got on the phone and said so." Similarly, when analyst Anthony Hoffman of A. G. Becker Inc. wrote a damning indictment of network programming cost excesses in 1977, he got a call the next day from ABC inviting him to breakfast with

One, or how Fred Silverman abused his own theories of viewer loyalty. Such theorizing draws the ire of many programming executives. "They make the least creative observations of anyone in the industry," says ABC Video's Michael Dann. "But what the street is saying is both very obvious and important. It's important because it puts an official stamp on reality."

No one will talk about what happens when Abernathy or Blowers decides that

The name of the game is
the future: the next
quarter's earnings.
The challenge
is to call it in time
to profit from it.



its chief financial officer. The call came from James Abernathy, vice president for corporate affairs, who makes a point of keeping his eye on everything the analysts say about the network. "My job is to make sure the facts they write are correct and that they're apprised of our point of view," he says. "We can't persuade them to love us, but if someone knowingly makes errors or displays a consistent bias at odds with the facts as I see them—I get mad and tell them to watch it."

The popularity of a stock doesn't necessarily correlate with a company's profits. Popularity is, more than anything else, a reflection of ratings. If A. C. Nielsen reports a good season for CBS, it scarcely matters that corporate earnings are down—and vice versa. The unpredictability of ratings is what gives ulcers to television and advertising executives who risk millions while waiting to see if the Fonz will endure another season. Ratings also cause considerable "investor anxiety," as Ellen Sachar puts it, for although investors may understand little about why America can have a love affair with Rhoda one year and abandon her the next, they do understand that ratings count.

Most analysts will tell you that predicting ratings is not their job, but they are happy to expound on the vagaries of network programming—and will obligingly conjure up theories about why ABC is off this year ("the fatigue factor") or how CBS positioned itself to regain Number

an analyst has been wrong too many times for the wrong reasons, but it is obvious that an analyst denied network access might be hard pressed to do his job. So there's a built-in system of checks and balances. Most of the time the relationships are studiously cordial, and the game is one of provocation and seduction between adversaries.

Television has always been a glamor industry on Wall Street, even when other parts of the economy were sluggish. But 1980 was a bad year for the networks, and they're not used to bad years. After the golden days of the sixties, television was considered a mature industry, but the seventies saw another growth spiral and by 1977, all three networks were reporting record earnings. So 1980 was a bad debut for the decade, and analysts like Ellen Sachar and Dennis Liebowitz are quick to tell you why: The cancellation of the Olympics meant a big loss of revenues for NBC, and its excess advertising time affected the other networks—what had always been a seller's market became a buyer's market; the Screen Actors Guild strike eroded profit by eroding audiences, and then there was the recession. Depressed industries like auto-makers and real estate didn't have the dollars to advertise as before, and even election-year spending couldn't pull up the sagging revenues.

But Wall Street analysts are too concerned with future dividends to dwell on past problems. The future of network television has sparked one of the more

interesting debates on Wall Street. A. G. Becker's Tony Hoffman paints perhaps the gloomiest scenario: "The networks are not interesting as investments anymore." Hoffman argues that the networks' collective obsession with being Number One has pushed them all to a point of such extreme competition that their profitability has taken second place. "Who are they running the business for?" he asks rhetorically. "Certainly not for the stockholders. They're simply spending too much." Hoffman's pronouncements are the kind that make network executives shudder, for however much they might wish it otherwise, the pyramid of accountability grants the stockholder peak position.

Hoffman started railing about programming cost excesses three years ago, right after television had one of its most profitable years. "Networks were getting used to 20 percent growth revenues, but because of the huge escalation in costs after the ratings war began in earnest, that growth rate deteriorated," he explains. "I was the one who pulled the plug." And network officials now agree with analysts on this issue. CBS's Tom Wyman made repeated reference to the need to be sensitive to cost excesses in his presentation to the analysts, adding, "I think you've also heard from both other locations in town about this. There's a sensitivity to the problem in the industry."

Whatever ulcers Anthony Hoffman's predictions may induce (and he seems to enjoy the role of analyst provocateur), his gloomy prognosis is not universally embraced. Many analysts believe that network stocks are depressed, or undervalued, and that the reason has less to do with revenue growth than with a psychological perception of networks as "the dinosaurs of the industry," in Sachar's words. The new kid on the block is that collection of entities analysts like to call "the new media"—the various forms of cable and satellite transmission programming.

That Wall Street has gone wild for the new media is clearly indicated by the price/earnings ratios of the stocks. Price/earnings ratios, obtained by dividing the price of a stock by its earnings, reveal just how popular a stock is. ABC and CBS have stocks with multiples now hovering around six or seven, while certain cable companies boast multiples as high as thirty. In simplest terms, network stock used to be considered glamorous, but the new media now enjoy that cachet.

Analyst Liebowitz doesn't espouse the prevailing view. He points out that pay cable is only in 11 percent of all homes

right now, that satellites reach less than 1 percent of the audience, and that on the basis of current viewer patterns, it would require 50 percent cable penetration to divert 10 percent of the network audience. Liebowitz also holds the unorthodox position that the glory days of cable are already over—for investment purposes.

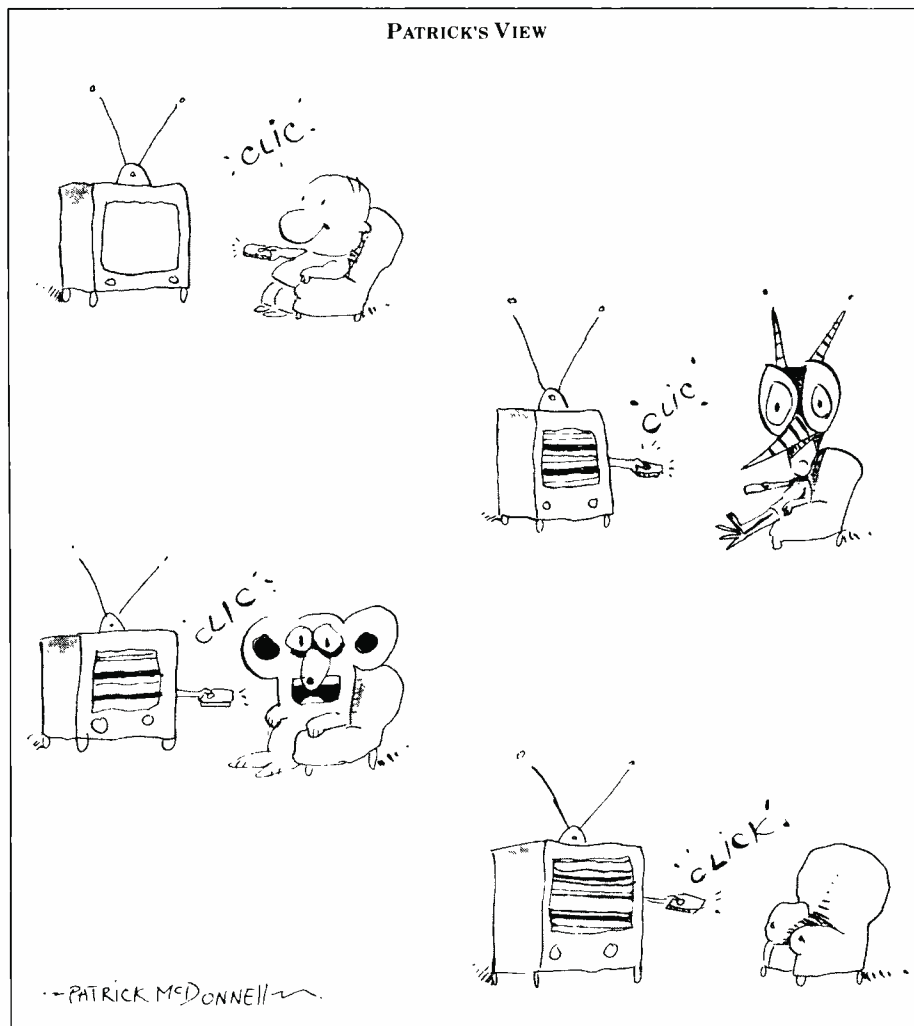
If Liebowitz is right, a lot of big-time investors will be disappointed that their fortunes don't multiply as many times as they may have anticipated—and a lot of network executives will be greatly relieved. In the meantime, the networks are not missing any chances to cash in on a cable boom. CBS announced formation of a cable channel even before deciding where to put it. Tom Wyman told the analysts, "We have one transponder and eighteen negotiations going on. Transponder-trading is the latest game in town. But we're absolutely relaxed about distribution." ABC's cable channel may be better positioned, with its satellite distribution assured by Warner Amex. NBC is still out of the cable programming sweepstakes, though RCA is "betting the ranch on the video disk," as Tony

Hoffman says.

The networks face a curious paradox. Barred by the Federal Communications Commission from buying directly into cable, panicked by the rush to cable and their own eroding profits, they need simultaneously to downplay the possible threat from cable and cover all bases in case they're wrong. If Dennis Liebowitz, Ellen Sachar, et al. decide that CBS and ABC are making the right bets on the future, then the stockholders will be happy.

Most of all, the networks need to satisfy their stockholders. The FCC may have intended it otherwise when it licensed broadcasting outlets back in 1934 to "serve the public interest," but the public has clearly slid down the pyramid, at least a step below the stockholder, the advertiser, and the FCC itself.

The emphasis on next quarter's earnings and the ratings means that no one can afford to take many risks. Wall Street analysts can't be blamed for television's mediocrities, but neither can they be written out of the equation. After all, they're sitting on the bottom line. ■



Mank and the One-of-a-Kind Network

Frank Mankiewicz, coming from politics and journalism, surprised Washington by staying with National Public Radio and turning it into a potent news and cultural voice.

by Nicholas von Hoffman

NEARLY FOUR YEARS AGO when Frank Mankiewicz was made head of National Public Radio, political people, news people, the kind of people he had spent most of his career with, figured he was making his first move toward something bigger—doubtless television. Why would a guy like Frank the Mank fool around with radio, especially public radio which, like anything else with the word public prefixed to it, has got to be tatty, paint-chipped, run-down, and second-rate?

Four years ago, nobody in Washington or New York or Los Angeles, the places Frank the Mank had always circulated, listened to public radio. They didn't even listen to private radio, and if they had heard anything about NPR, it was that that woman, the one with the soft voice, did the news show in the evening. They'd never heard Susan Stamberg themselves, and if you had mentioned *All Things Considered*, the name of the nightly program (now ten years old), they might or might not recognize it, but they would associate it with expressions like gourmet, natural high, Common Cause, holistic medicine, and fresh herbs. NPR had to be a stepping stone, the bounce-off place into a power play that would make Mankiewicz the czar of all the not-for-profit frequencies—television as well as radio.

They all guessed wrong. Mankiewicz not only stayed with the drab little radio enterprise most people never heard of, but in a very short time built it into a radio service unmatched in this country. If NPR is not today one of the leading forces on the airwaves, it's at least a comer.

Frank looks like a tough guy. His fifty-seven-year-old face is smooshed like an old boxer's; but what he is is an old idealist—a lawyer and journalist for a lifetime full of causes, all liberal. Mankiewicz, whom you may remember as Robert Kennedy's press secretary announcing his boss's death on television, is not one of today's supply-side zealots. Nor was the Mank one of the Kennedy-era realpolitik brutes, the cost-effective killers, like Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara, under whom chaps like Al Haig and Joseph Califano were getting their starts.

In the days of Camelot, he worked for the Peace Corps, first as its director in Lima, Peru, and then as its Latin American chief. He inspired the same affection among his subordinates in the Peace Corps as he does at National Public Radio, where people get a kindly tone in their voices when they say his name. Famous media executives, men like CBS's William Paley and

The Washington Post's Ben Bradlee, inspire fear in those under them; Frank the Mank leads by making people like him. Those who worked with Mankiewicz in 1971 and 1972, when he was George McGovern's press secretary and campaign director, remember him with delight.

Most of the media shops in Washington aren't especially happy places to work. Not so at Mankiewicz's NPR, where the people are obviously and genuinely enthusiastic about their work. It is almost the first thing they say when you meet them—how satisfying it is to professionals involved in the performing arts or with the news to be at NPR, how much it compensates for the low salaries they must receive.

"Of all things I've done—wire service reporter, magazines, daily newspaper, and books," says Sandy Ungar, co-anchor on *All Things Considered*, "I've never had the kind of feedback I've had from our listeners."

Cokie Roberts, a woman with extensive experience in both print and broadcasting, is NPR's reporter at the House of Representatives. "It's that business of being able to tell something at length, the freedom to tell the story the way it needs to be told," she says. "It's not like television where they have no history and they're younger, younger than me! Bomb the blow-dryer factories, and they're all gone."

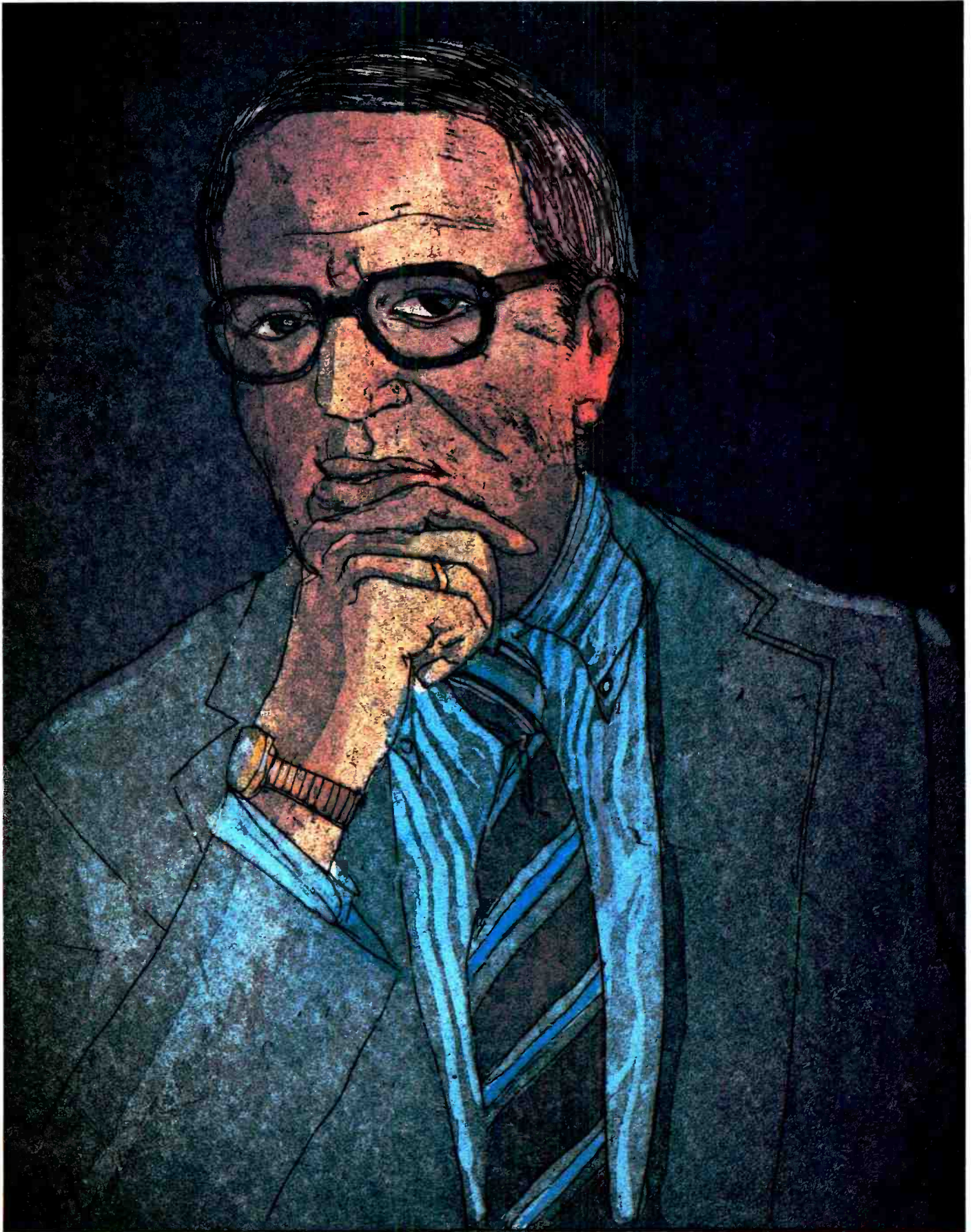
Most of the credit for such happy élan must be given to the boss of this, the only full-service national radio network we have in America. For two hours in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening, NPR provides its 240-plus stations far and away the most exhaustive, the most cosmopolitan and, quite frequently, the most diverting, news broadcast service on the air. No television news, not even CBS's morning show, is of comparable quality to this urbane, unruffled, and unstuffy service. Compare that to what other radio networks offer their affiliates by way of news and public affairs: five minutes of news on the hour and a scattering of brief features through the day.

As Frank the Mank says as he moves around his office drinking coffee and consuming Roloids (diaphragmatic ulcer), "the thing that is lacking in television is local programming; the thing that is lacking in radio is national programming."

Even its commercial competition concedes that if NPR's news service disappeared as a consequence of President Reagan's budget cuts, it would leave an unfilled space. "I would hate to see National Public Radio go under," says Nicholas Schiavone, NBC's director of radio network research. "There is no equivalent of *All Things Considered* in commercial radio. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that they survive. The networks run with the fear that they would lose audiences by

Nicholas von Hoffman is a syndicated columnist based in Washington, D. C.

Illustration by Robert Andrew Parker



It will be
a sweet windswept day on the mesas
when the demographics fellows at Radio City decide
there are enough Navajos around to broadcast
in their language.

doing things like that.”

Nor could local print media be substituted for NPR. For the visually handicapped, it offers a service heard only with special FM receivers. More than twelve hours a week of national programming is distributed for this audience, and NPR's broadcast facilities are also provided to local groups who read to blind people over the radio. Like the network's Indian language programming, it's unlikely that anybody else is going to do it.

NPR sees groups that are invisible to commercial network eyes. NBC, for example, has two networks—one aimed at eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds and, in the words of one network executive, a second “aimed at thirty-five to dead.” It will be a sweet windswept day on the mesas when the demographics fellows in Radio City decide there are enough Navajos to broadcast in their language. The commercial networks don't even broadcast in Spanish, although again, NPR does.

THIS SUMMER, an NPR crew will follow Andrés Segovia, taping the classical guitarist as he plays and talks his autobiography in what will become a thirteen-week series called *Lessons from My Life*. “We're going to tape him at Grenada, tape him with Fleta, the guitar-maker; we'll be at his son's birthday. We're going to be privy to a very important person,” says John Bos, NPR's director of performance programs, the man responsible for putting the music, the drama, the poetry on the air.

For many years before Mankiewicz, public radio was chiefly music. But Mank is primarily a journalist. He wrote a syndicated column in the late sixties with Tom Braden, worked for *Newsweek*, and did a fair amount of television and radio as well. Indeed, he is one of the few people with a rich background in journalism ever to head a major broadcast

organization. Usually those jobs go to the business rabbits.

NPR's many music-loving listeners sometimes grumble that the journalists are crowding out the finer melodies. John Bos, though, has spent a twenty-four-year career in drama and music as a critic, producer, director, and administrator. He brings to the airwaves music unavailable at record stores, and usually beyond the reach of radio stations. Without NPR there would be no national radio outlet for the New York City Opera or the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The network's quality is generally high and its objectives frequently original. Whether you hear the playful radio adaptation of *Star Wars* or the greatly admired, specially commissioned Arthur Kopit radio play, *Wings*—you hear it on an NPR-affiliated station or you don't hear it at all.

Network television dominates its stations, which for lack of money (or the greed born of too much of it), seldom shake a leg and do programming of their own. Mankiewicz says NPR doesn't dominate its affiliates that way. One reason may be that ten representatives from NPR's affiliates and ten public (or outside) directors sit with director Mankiewicz on the network's board. The commercial television networks also communicate between New York headquarters and the pinpoints on the map between Manhattan and Los Angeles—that piece of geography the industry refers to as “the fly-over”—but this communication cannot be of the same quality. NPR's affiliates voted Mankiewicz into his job; CBS's affiliates have had no such voice in the selection of Bill Paley or the network president.

Another difference is that NPR sends its affiliates more than they can use. One of the joys of satellite transmission—aside from the high fidelity of the music—is that NPR can send more than one program at a time. It can transmit a *Pro Musica* program of medieval roundelays at the same time it gives its affiliates

gavel-to-gavel senatorial bombast over the forced metrification of the Wisconsin cheese industry. The recipients can decide when to air it—if at all. A commercial television network, on the other hand, strives to get its affiliates to use every last inch and minute delivered.

Poverty, perhaps, also makes NPR much less dominated by headquarters than, say, ABC-TV. NPR must rely on its affiliates for help with both music and current-affairs production, unlike the commercial radio and television networks.

With her very modest news budget of \$4.3 million, Barbara Cohen must use scores of freelance and local affiliate reports to get NPR's news shows on the air. She has one reporter in Chicago, another in New York, and a one-man band in London covering most of the world by racing hither and yon, using stringers, and repackaging the radio news reports of the British Broadcasting Corporation. With NPR's satellite system, affiliates can conveniently file with the Washington headquarters, where reports from Tulsa and Tacoma can be included in the morning and nightly programs. Thus NPR runs more of a news federation than a service passively received by affiliates.

NPR has a unit of six people, each with a geographic responsibility, who spend their days keeping track of events in their area and getting in touch with people who can put them on the air. This unique sort of functional decentralization must be one reason for the variety, both geographic and topical, of NPR's program content.

The relative scarcity of money may also have the unintended effect of keeping NPR news personnel in closer touch with the hoi polloi. While commercial network correspondents drive to such news events as national political conventions in chauffeured limousines, an NPR reporter on the road may have to bunk in with friends and eat at McDonald's.

NPR calculates its costs for an hour of programming are about 36 percent of



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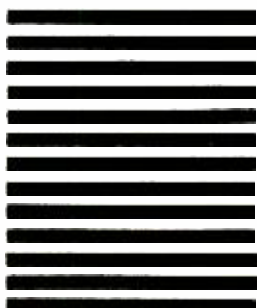
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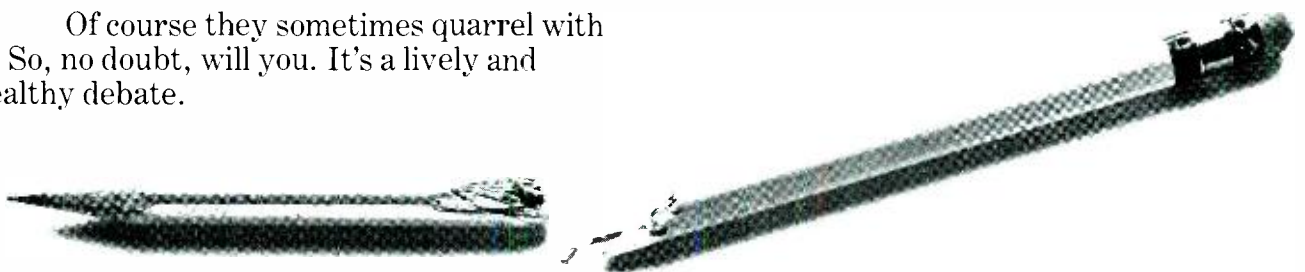
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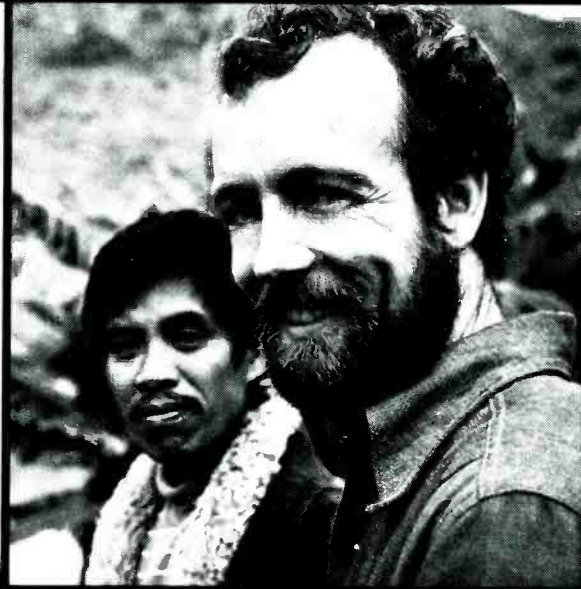
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A commercial network, on the other hand, strives to get its affiliates to use every last inch and minute delivered.

what they are at the four commercial radio networks. Some people around NPR's Washington headquarters whisper that even at those prices, there is a little fat left. NPR's large publicity staff may look like superfluous expenditure, but Mankiewicz has used it to make the network far better known. At a time when so many other publicly paid-for operations are contending for tax dollars, a large public relations staff is necessary, not self-seeking aggrandizement.

But should the taxpayer be footing this bill? The case for radio seems stronger than that for public television. Not only is there a paying market for much, if not all, of public television programming, it is difficult to make any case at all for subsidizing shows like *Wall Street Week*. Surely, if any people can pay for their advice, it's stock-market investors.

Upper-income people ought to pay for their entertainment and their news, but people around NPR get edgy and defensive with this suggestion. They are at great pains to deny that their six-plus million listeners are up-market types, and are particularly vehement in denying they are programming for the well-to-do. They maintain they try to program only what's "good." Their definition of good, however, includes first-broadcast performances of works like the operatic version of Molière's *Tartuffe*. Generally, only the college-educated, and a minority of them, would have a taste for such programs.

There's no good way out of that trap. If it were to program for the masses, NPR might as well switch over to Top Forty, a need that is being more than adequately met by the commercial services. It boils down to recognizing that if *Tartuffe* is to be broadcast, only NPR will do it. Whether you elect to see public money spent on *Tartuffe* depends on what you like most — a rigid free market or opera. You might bear in mind, however, that in many parts of the country, particularly the rural ones, there is no com-

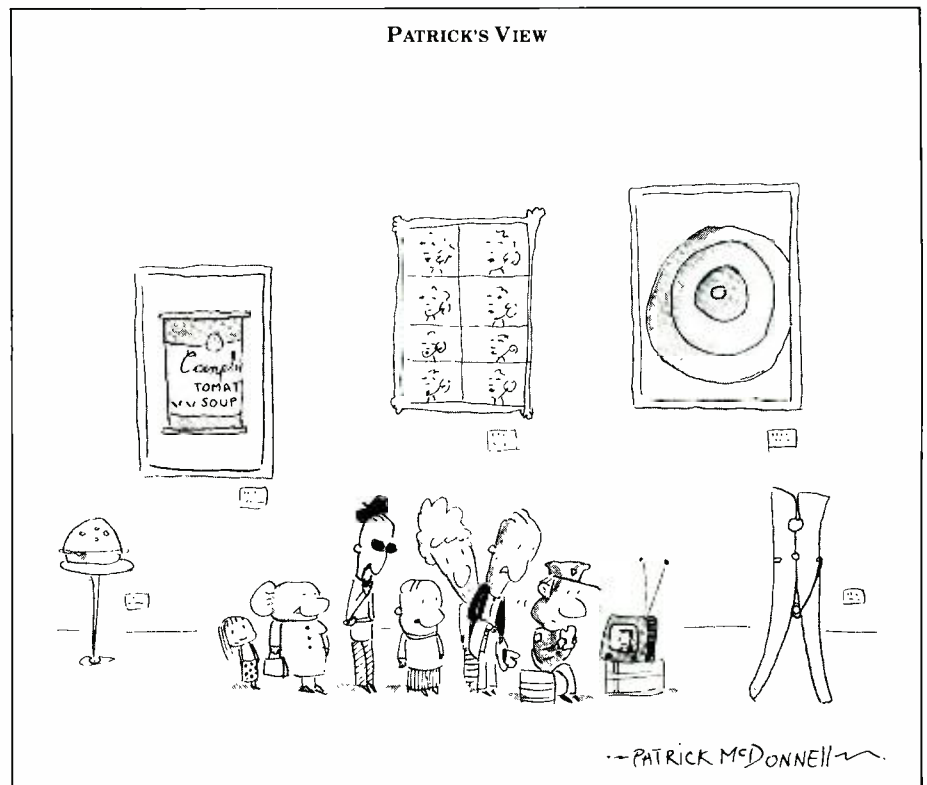
mercial substitute — and no real possibility for one. The end of the \$35 million that Washington spends on public radio broadcasting — about \$14 million of which goes to NPR — will be the end of any fine-arts service to those areas.

AFTER OBSERVING, "You can't have pay radio — people are not going to pay for live news and shouldn't have to," Mankiewicz tells how NPR is trying to develop other, nongovernmental, sources of money. It is out hustling grants, and one procured from the German Marshall Fund is responsible for much of NPR's excellent foreign affairs coverage. Possible endeavors like selling cassettes of programs are being looked into, and Mankiewicz is confident: "Give us ten

years and it can be done, but not if they cut us off in October."

The radio industry, like television, is changing, but the cause is less technological than financial. More people are listening to radio, so there is more potential money in it — ergo, the commercial networks are planning significant expansions. It may be that as laws change, NPR and its affiliates can go commercial without altering their service in major ways. They have an important audience — one that an ABC or a Mutual has never shown any interest in.

Whatever happens — in Frank the Mank, NPR clearly has the right man. Rigid on the fundamentals, flexible on the tactics, inspirational but not monomaniacal, Mankiewicz should be able to lead NPR and public radio to new high ground in the Reagan epoch. ■



The Citizens Movement Takes a Turn

Media-reform groups of the '70s feel the pinch; their right-wing counterparts thrive.

by Susan Witty

The way Howard Symons of *Congress Watch* remembers it, the mark-up of HR3333, Congressman Lionel Van Deerlin's widely publicized rewrite of the Federal Communications Act, was like the madcap stateroom scene in *A Night at the Opera*. Squeezed into a very small room were the fifteen members of the House communications subcommittee, their staffs, and as many lobbyists as could push themselves through the doorway—common-carrier people, church people, labor people, public interest people. The bill, purportedly attempting to bring communications law up to date with technology, had upset nearly everyone.

It dealt with the entire telecommunications industry, but its most controversial feature was the elimination of the public interest standard, which has stood since 1934—the requirement that broadcasters, acting as public trustees, serve “the public interest, convenience, and necessity.” Chairman Van Deerlin's rewrite trusted that the public interest would be served by market forces.

Van Deerlin had devoted his last two terms in office to creating the bill, then laying the groundwork for its acceptance, promoting it in the House and in the industry. But the mark-up session went badly. Several days later, the whole project was quietly scrapped. Some mighty industries contributed to its collapse—the American Telephone and Telegraph Company and the broadcast industry had fought certain segments—but a major contributing force was a nationwide coalition of citizens groups determined to preserve the established avenues of public access to radio and television. Each member of the subcommittee had been heavily lobbied in his district and, when it came time for mark-up, Van Deerlin could not enlist the support of his own colleagues. Mobilized as a national lobbying force, the citizen-action groups carried the day.

These groups, which sprouted in the sixties and early seventies, and came to be known collectively as the media-reform movement, had become in the last decade a full-time component of the American broadcasting system. They pressured for minority ownership and employment, for greater sensitivity to

the needs of children, and for fair treatment in the licensed media for women, gays, Hispanics, and other segments of society that broadcasters seemed to ignore. They lobbied against discrimination, violence, and excessive commercialism in television programming; they were for localism and against monopoly. Generally, they worked to assure a communications system that would respond and contribute to a pluralistic society. Now they saw Van Deerlin's proposals undermining much of what they had striven for.

“When we heard the House wasn't going to hold local hearings on the bill,” said Janice Engsborg, field director for Telecommunications Consumer Coalition (TCC), “we came up with something pretty creative. We decided to hold our own hearings in all the subcommittee members' districts.” TCC and its parent, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ (OC/UCC), in a joint effort with the National Organization for Women's Media Project, got on the phone to affiliates, sent out mailings, and held workshops to prepare local people for effective action. Meanwhile, the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB) kept interested parties around the country alerted to updates in the bill through articles in its magazine, *access*. Other national groups, like the Media Access Project (MAP), the public interest communications law firm, delivered testimony against the bill in Washington.

When HR3333 breathed its last, media reformers heaved a sigh of relief, but they didn't celebrate. “The bill was like Act Two of a five-act play that may not conclude in this century,” comments Kathy Bonk, director of NOW's Media Project. Still, TCC's Engsborg concedes, “we were able to hold our turf.” The media-reform movement had managed to preserve the mechanisms for guaranteeing public access to broadcasting and affirming public ownership of the airwaves.

This happened in July 1979. Since then, technology has opened new media frontiers, and the scramble for markets by giant corporations has raised important public interest issues. But just when they might be most active, the media-reform groups appear severely weakened. Some observers claim that on the eve of a communications revolution, the groups are fighting a losing battle with the changing times.

The media-reform movement had flourished in the era of social consciousness bracketed by *Brown v. Board of Education* and the beginning of the end of the Vietnam War. Though occasionally capable of wielding a Mighty-Mouse kind of clout, the media-reform groups were relatively low-budget organizations. They operated with small staffs and meager resources. Like many other holdovers from that not-so-distant past, they aren't faring too well.

“Media reform is not dead per se, but it's a far cry from the movement it once was,” says Timothy Haight, assistant professor of communications arts at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. According to Haight, the reform effort was an outgrowth of the civil rights movement, and was ultimately liberal and progressive. But then, “the citizen-action groups got pulled into going to Washington and depending more and more on government, which has become increasingly conservative. Media reform is continuing,” Haight explains, “but it's being

Writer Susan Witty has served as an editorial consultant to WNET, New York.

continued by the right instead of the left. The right wing have become much better grass-roots organizers. In the sixties the liberal churches were very active—now the fundamentalist churches are. The left is still trying but they're not in power."

Being out of fashion makes it difficult to attract money. "We are feeling the same fund-raising pressures other public interest groups are feeling," states Peggy Charren, president of Action for Children's Television (ACT), who admits her 1981 budget of \$350,000 is "somewhat less than last year's."

"The funding is following the political climate," observes Engsborg. "In the last year and a half, the Ford Foundation has withdrawn its support for every program working for social change."

WHEN Ford, estimated to have provided 57 percent of all public interest funding, got out of the public interest business, a seismic shock traveled through the media-reform movement. One of the most serious repercussions was the decline of the Citizens Communications Center (CCC), a Washington-based public interest law firm representing media-reform groups before the Federal Communications Commission and the federal courts. For ten years, Ford had sustained CCC at the cost of \$220,000 a year, which constituted 99 percent of CCC's annual budget. Early this year, its professional staff down to two, CCC was forced to merge with the Institute for Public Interest Representation, itself affiliated with the Georgetown University Law Center.

While other foundations, such as Rockefeller, Veatch, Markle, Stern, and Carnegie, contribute to public interest activities in communications, they are not rushing to fill the hole left by Ford's exodus. NOW's Kathy Bonk suggests their caution may be because very few

One of the consequences of being out of fashion is difficulty in attracting money.

media-reform groups have become self-sustaining. Others feel the foundations may be readjusting their priorities to align with the perceived rightward drift of the national mood; perhaps they too have been bitten by the "new" conservatism.

"We were largely responsible for Henry Ford's blast at the Ford Foundation for the way it was using its money for social upheaval," says Dr. Everett Parker, director of OC/UCC. In 1964, the OC/UCC and two black citizens of Jackson, Mississippi, challenged WLBT's license renewal on grounds that the NBC affiliate's programming and hiring practices discriminated against blacks in its community. Ford supported OC/UCC in this legal battle for ten years, but discontinued its grants three years ago. The foundation's retreat happened in part, Dr. Parker speculates, because some powerful broadcast figure said to Henry Ford, "What the hell are you doing giving out money for people to put me out of business? I don't give out money for people to put you out of business."

A decidedly less personal view of the situation is offered by Sandy Jaffe, a program officer at the Ford Foundation: "Foundations like to give seed money. We had been there for about ten to twelve years. That's long enough for a foundation to stay in." In addition, Jaffe believes some goals were achieved. "What you do," he says, "is open up a process and let a lot of people in that hadn't gotten into it, you improve decision-making, make a society a little more responsive. And that's

been accomplished. Public interest law is pretty well recognized today," he says. "I think in some form it will persist."

"I'm sorry to say the prognosis for these groups is not good," says Henry Geller, former director of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). "In the Carter Administration we tried to get bills through to provide some funding for those groups that make a useful contribution to the regulatory hearing process, because their participation served the public interest. But Congress did not want to enact such bills.

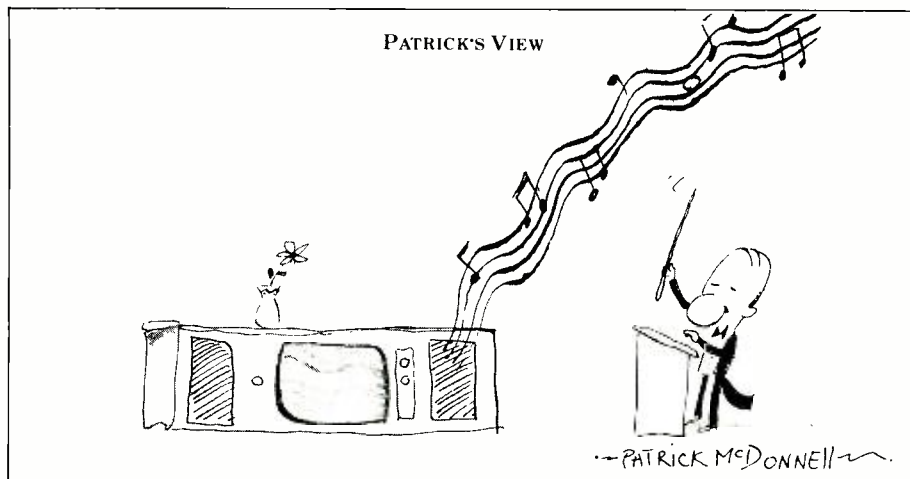
"It was hoped," says Geller, who had been CCC's board chairman in the mid-seventies, "that Ford's support [of the movement's legal arm] would be replaced by tithing the bar, by more contributions from settlements, by Congress—and none of these have been forthcoming."

Most groups are currently squeaking by on budgets at the low end of six figures. The exception is Accuracy in Media (AIM). This organization, working to counteract what it views as the frequently left-leaning bias of the media establishment, is riding high on the right-leaning financial tide. AIM's present budget of more than \$1 million, far more lavish than that of any other group, is double what it was in 1980. AIM's chairman, Reed Irvine, a former Federal Reserve Board official, sees "nothing but growing support for our activities."

"Money is power," says ACT's Charren, referring to the combined force of advertisers and broadcasters who often band together to oppose her organization's proposals concerning children's television. "Those industry groups all have lots of lawyers, and one of their salaries is practically our whole budget."

Money is power. But in a nation of laws, those who don't have recourse to vast wealth still believe they have recourse to justice. In 1966, Judge Warren E. Burger handed down a precedent-setting U.S. Court of Appeals decision in *OC/UCC v. FCC*, which said listeners and viewers of radio and television have a right to participate in FCC proceedings even though they may have no economic interest in the matter. Since Judge Burger's ruling, media-reform groups have worked mainly within the legal and regulatory system. But now that system is threatened by the swelling ranks of "market forces" advocates.

The cry for deregulation is reverberating through Congress more loudly than ever. And the expectation is that the salient features of the defeated Van Deerlin bill—which sought to abolish the license-renewal process, eliminate all forms of program regulation, including



the Fairness Doctrine, and strike down such structural means of achieving diversity as limitations on the number of radio stations individual broadcasters could own — will be reintroduced in other bills over the next few years.

The FCC, perhaps in anticipation of a Congressional slashing, has already begun to slit its own throat. Its January decision to release radio broadcasters from some of their legal obligations — such as keeping detailed program records — also stripped the agency of some of its own oversight responsibilities.

The loss of these records, useful to citizens groups, broadcasters, and the FCC when a station's license renewal is being challenged, is a serious one.

Most of the media-reform groups are gamely attempting to make the best of deregulation, but that doesn't mean they have to like it. "When you take the rules away," warns Andrew Schwartzman, executive director of Media Access Project, "you may create a situation in which responses have to be more free-form and perhaps more threatening to the First Amendment."

At the moment, the conventional wisdom among media reformers is that radio deregulation is a stalking horse for what's to come. "There will be changes in TV regulation in the next three years legislatively," predicts Samuel Simon, executive director of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB). "Our objective," he says, "would be to see that when these rules come out, they significantly increase access opportunities, and do not result in excessive concentration of the media. Teleprompter-Westinghouse is an example of this kind of concentration," Simon explains. "The *New York Times* buying into cable is another. There are going to be information monopolies in this country, and that's very serious for democracy. The stakes are higher than most people are willing to admit, especially the regulators."

A painful irony is that a number of the regulators advocating deregulation were people drafted into government from, of all places, the media-reform movement. In the late seventies the Carter Administration co-opted some of the movement's most articulate and charismatic leaders — lawyers who had hitherto argued persuasively on behalf of the public interest. By 1980 a number had taken jobs with the government agencies before which they used to plead their cases, including the FCC, the FTC, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The hope among their former clients was that they would further the cause of

A Partial Guide to Public Interest Groups in Broadcasting

Accuracy in Media (AIM)

Washington, D.C., founded 1969.

Works for fairness, balance, and accuracy in news reporting.

Chairman: Reed J. Irvine, former official at Federal Reserve Board.

Budget 1981: More than \$1 million, double last year's.

Action for Children's Television (ACT)

Newtonville, Massachusetts, founded 1968.

A national, non-profit consumer organization working to improve broadcasting practices related to children, encourage diversity, and eliminate commercial abuse.

President: Peggy Charren.

Budget 1981: \$350,000.

Citizens Communications Center (CCC)

Washington, D.C., founded 1969.

A public interest law firm.

Executive Director: Charles R. Halpern.

Founder and first director: Al Kramer.

Former chairman: Henry Geller.

(Six of the twelve former attorneys and supervisory staff were in the federal government in 1980.)

Media Access Project (MAP)

Washington, D.C., founded 1971.

Public interest communications law firm.

Executive Director: Andrew Jay Schwartzman.

National Black Media Coalition (NBMC)

Washington, D.C., founded 1973.

An affiliate-based organization working for blacks' interests.

Chairman: Pluria Marshall.

Budget 1981: \$100,000.

National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting (NCCB)

Washington, D.C., founded 1967 as the National Citizen's Committee for Public Broadcasting.

Promotes increased diversity, choice, and participation in all forms of media.

Executive Director: Samuel A. Simon.

Chairman: Ralph Nader.

Budget 1981: \$184,000; budget 1980: \$170,000.

National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (NFLCP)

New York, N.Y., and Washington, D.C., founded 1976.

Promotes and protects local access.

Executive Director: Sue Miller Buske.

Founder: George Stoney, co-founder and co-director of New York University's Alternate Media Center.

National Organization for Women Media Project (NOW)

Washington, D.C., founded 1971.

Encourages broader distribution of positive informational programming on women.

Director: Kathy Bonk.

Budget 1981: \$150,000; budget 1980: \$60,000.

Office of Communication/United Church of Christ (OC/UCC)

New York, N.Y., founded 1954.

Active in the effort to protect public rights in all forms of communication and to serve communications needs of churches.

Director: Everett C. Parker.

Budget 1981: \$483,000.

Telecommunications Consumer Coalition (TCC)

New York, N.Y., founded 1978.

An information clearing house formed by OC/UCC, Consumer Federation of America, and Consumer's Union.

Field director: Janice M. Engsborg.

diversity by working from the inside to strengthen the regulatory process and make it more effective. But in several key instances exactly the opposite happened.

Frank Lloyd, for example, was a former executive director of Citizens Communications Center. But as administrative assistant to the chairman of the FCC during the Carter Administration, he supported the commission's *laissez-faire* deregulatory philosophy.

"The public interest groups have to be very concerned about protecting the First Amendment rights of broadcasters. I'm more and more convinced of the importance of that," Lloyd said, shortly after the commission announced its radio-deregulation decision. "Some groups have thought the FCC should decide what is not good programming, and that's folly. When you see the potentially whimsical or political nature of those decisions, giving the government power over program content is very dangerous."

What is government's proper role? According to Lloyd, it is to define the rules of the game so the largest number of people can play, to create as many outlets as possible, to fashion structural rules that assure a fairly open-entry marketplace—in other words, more business opportunities for more people and less government intervention in business.

"Deregulation will not go away," asserts Henry Geller, another former bulwark of the public interest law community, after having been general counsel at the FCC for close to twenty years. He claims that the public-trustee scheme, under which the broadcaster is considered only a temporary trustee for what is essentially a public property, has been a failure. "The FCC never came to grips with what they meant by the public interest," he says. "They never defined what they meant by being 'an effective local outlet.' Licenses were renewed 99 percent of the time."

AN NTIA REPORT issued while Geller was that department's chief calls upon Congress to "drastically" change the 1934 Communications Act and eliminate the public-trustee programming regulation of radio broadcasting. "The broadcaster should be given a long-term license (e.g., twenty-five years...)," the NTIA report recommends, "with no renewal of license within that period and no need to obtain prior approval for an assignment."

"Henry Geller and I are very good friends," says Everett Parker of the OC/UCC, "but he's inconsistent. He didn't have a good experience at the FCC. He was there at a time when nobody

would do anything, so he thinks that because they didn't make the law work, the law should be repealed."

Whether they are simply putting up a brave front or are indulging in a self-protective act of psychological denial, the surviving media-reform groups refuse to be disheartened by their co-opted confreres, their depleted ranks, their disappearing legal options, and their uncertain financial future. "Nothing could com-

For most of the groups it is not a time of exuberant self-congratulation.

pletely handcuff us, short of giving the broadcasters licenses in perpetuity, with no accountability to the public," says National Black Media Coalition (NBMC) chairman Pluria Marshall.

This kind of outsized determination will carry the wounded media-reform movement forward. It may not be riding the wave of the moment, but one of the things that should buoy the movement in difficult times is the record of its past achievements.

The gains the media-reform groups have made may seem minimal to some, but they cannot be called inconsequential. They cracked open a closed legal system. "The media-reform movement has had a tremendous impact in the FCC," says former commissioner Tyrone Brown. "If it weren't for them the commission would not have included the public in any way in its deliberations."

As he pointed out in a 1979 speech to the NBMC, "The general public needs to be reminded of the major role public interest groups have played. For example, a public interest group (OC/UCC) won the right of listener and viewer groups to petition for denial of broadcast licenses at renewal time, and initiated the proceeding that led to the commission's policy and rules on affirmative-action employment in the broadcast industry."

Pluria Marshall's NBMC spearheaded the drive that led to FCC's adopting tax-certificate and distress-sales policies, which facilitate minority ownership. He believes blacks have made "some progress" in employment in the industry. An increase of about 8 to 9 percent since 1973, he estimates. But "the behind-the-scenes jobs are where we're getting our butts kicked," he says. "In management the least progress has been made in news: news directors, executive producers, assignment editors."

Black progress in employment in the broadcast industry is currently being "somewhat stymied," says Marshall, because white women are being hired instead of blacks. "The women's movement is not helping black folks," he says. "If anything, it's hurting them—in broadcasting that's for sure."

"I can name you a dozen or so women news directors and maybe fifty or so women program managers and a few women owners and a couple of station managers, but it's token," says Kathy Bonk, who doesn't think women have come such a long way since NOW got the FCC to amend its Equal Employment Opportunity rules to include women in 1971. It can't be denied, however, that the gains for women in on-air representation over the past decade have been dramatic.

"When we started this," Bonk says, "there were no women on-air as network reporters, no women in sports anywhere, no news about women. After we filed against NBC, they put on *Police Woman*, the first major prime-time network program that had a woman in a leading, dominant role."

Increased broadcaster sensitivity to stereotyping women and other minority groups can be counted a victory for media reformers. So can a number of improvements in children's television, such as the reduction of advertising on children's weekend television by 40

For the thirty-three million school-age television viewers in the U.S., many of whom spend more hours in front of the set than in the classroom, Action for Children's Television has been a force for eliminating commercial abuse and encouraging diverse programming. "The genius of Peggy Charren," according to Frank Lloyd, "is that she has evolved a carrot-and-stick strategy. She goes to great lengths to give positive feedback. It has become a source of pride for a broadcaster or cable company to win one of ACT's annual 'Achievement in Children's Television Awards.'"

"People give public television credit for changing children's programming for the better," comments Charren, "but public television only released other broadcasters from the responsibility. If it hadn't been for public pressure nothing would have been done."

Most likely, neither would anything have been done about increasing news and public affairs programming, initiating government funding of public television, opening up public television's board meetings to the public, televising Presidential debates—all of which can be credited to the public interest movement in broadcasting, as can efforts to block mergers that would lead to monopoly.

ONE SUCH EFFORT, a recent legal action by the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting to foil a General Electric-Cox merger, precipitated a quarrel within the movement. Because GE and Cox had agreed to spin off some stations into black ownership, National Black Media Coalition was willing to have them merge. In this instance, the goals of NCCB and NBMC were different, but that is not so unusual. From time to time the groups will get together in loose coalitions, but basically, as Media Access Project's Schwartzman phrased it, "we cherish our diversity."

Another NCCB initiative that did not have unanimous support among the disparate groups, due to concerns about censorship, was an attempt to reduce violence on television by monitoring shows, identifying the ten with the most acts of violence, and then putting pressure on the companies whose commercials accompanied these shows. NCCB's strategy, which won the cooperation of national organization like the Parent Teachers Association and the American Medical Association, and resulted in the disappearance of some targeted programs, was the brainchild of Nicholas Johnson, chairman of NCCB before it moved under the umbrella of Ralph Nader's organization.

Johnson, a maverick FCC commissioner in the sixties and now head of a group called National Citizens Communications Lobby, is the most unreservedly enthusiastic member of the media-reform movement when it comes to rating the movement's achievements. "In the fifteen years from 1965 to 1980," he says, "we accomplished what we set out to accomplish in that we now have media reform firmly ensconced right in the center of middle America. We expanded from groups specifically interested in media reform into major organizations like AFL-CIO, the Roman Catholic Church, PTA. You can go all across the country now and find innovative things that have been done in terms of improving children's programming, reducing commercials, or increasing public-affairs programming. People's consciousness has been raised."

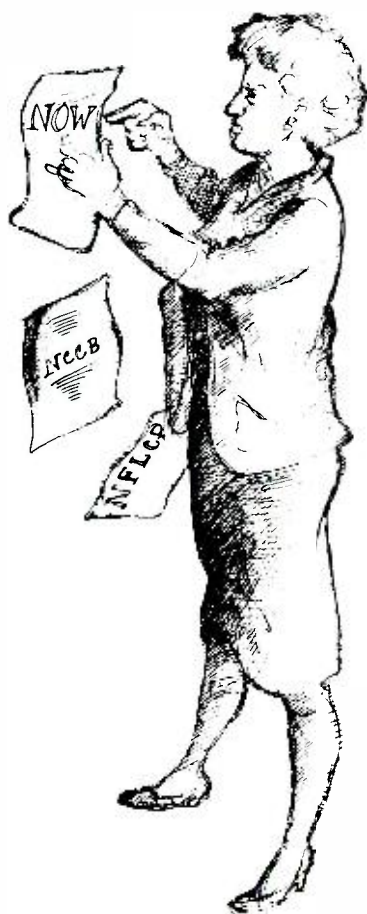
Johnson's brand of euphoria is not the dominant mood, however. For most of the groups it is not a time of exuberant self-congratulation. It is, instead, a time of reassessment. It could also be called a time of floundering.

Kathy Bonk categorizes the media-reform groups' current discussions as "positive." "We're trying to get some vision in this movement again," she says. Many veterans would agree with Wiscon-

sin's Timothy Haight that "the movement is on the defensive," struggling to preserve former gains in a hostile environment. They would also agree with Engsborg of the Telecommunications Consumer Coalition that, though the first job of the public interest groups may still be to make sure *all* the rules don't get taken away, the next job is to get into more creative roles.

With its focus on a new technology and grass-roots work in local communities, the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (NFLCP), formed in 1976 to promote and protect public access to cable around the country, seems to be on the right track. "Fortunately, we did a better propaganda job than we knew," says George Stoney, one of the group's founders and co-director of New York University's Alternate Media Center. "There isn't a city council in the country that would give out a cable-franchise con-

Those who don't have recourse to vast wealth still believe that they have recourse to justice.



tract that didn't have access written into it."

But cable isn't necessarily the promised land. "Cable is simply a useful rehearsal ground," Stoney says. "We need public access to all electronic media."

In the summer of 1980, Congressman Van Deerlin, sometime opponent of the groups on media issues, urged the movement to come to grips with current realities before it was too late. Pointing out in *access* that the combining of the telephone with computer, satellite, and broadcast technologies would transform American lives, Van Deerlin wrote: "Technological change and industry reorganization raises a host of vexing policy problems. For example, what public interest responsibilities accrue to a direct satellite-to-home broadcaster? What First Amendment restrictions, if any, should be imposed on an electronic publisher? What common-carrier obligations should be assumed by a cable-television operator who offers data transmission or other information services?"

"While the media-reform movement concentrates its effort on blocking radio deregulation and imposing new rules on children's television," Van Deerlin warned, "it is missing an excellent opportunity to shape the new telecommunications industry."

Many of those in and out of government pushing for deregulation believe that the proliferating new media are going to solve all the problems. But the new media will by no means assure diversity. All the electronic media are awesome tools of power. Whoever can dominate them can determine not only how people spend their money, but also what ideas people are exposed to, the decisions they make based on these ideas, and ultimately the political process.

Are the groups of the old media-reform movement capable of leading the fight to assure that all electronic communications truly serve a diverse public, and are not monopolized to serve narrow interests? Can they tackle such a monumental job in their present fragile condition? The corporations interested in shaping the new telecommunications industry are certainly not going to welcome them onto the field of battle. And these corporations seem to have momentum on their side.

The imbalance is tremendous, especially now, between the public interest groups in broadcasting and their opponents, the well-financed, politically influential companies who would gobble up the entire communications pie solely for profit. "It's David and Goliath," says George Stoney. The analogy sounds like an admission of defeat. Until you remember who won that one. ■

This Age and the Coming Age

The Camera Age

By Michael J. Arlen

Farrar Straus Giroux, \$12.95.

IN *The Camera Age*, Michael Arlen gathers together thirty essays about television he has written for *The New Yorker* during the last four years. His own material is like his definition of good television: "intimate, jumpy, nosy, scurrying along, always involved."

Arlen is funny and unpretentious. His mind is usually skeptical and reflective; often it is hilarious. He is also generously democratic. His egalitarian urge gives him remarkably high hopes for our little home screens—potentially "the greatest communicators of realistic life the world has seen."

Sometimes he must feel buried under the schlock that fully half his essays have sport with. Still, he believes the world has no civilizing force as powerful and as pervasive as television. In two of his most interesting essays, he supports this intriguing possibility.

Arlen discusses, among many choices, the anchormen who remind him of Easter Island's great stone heads, happy with their "special, lofty Cronkite or Walters tone which networks are fond of bringing to affairs of state." When Nixon, portrayed as the Ancient Mariner, answers interviewer Teddy White, Arlen detects heavy lubrication: "Well, I would say that our most serious problem is the problem of inflation, and close behind it is the problem of unemployment."

I heard the news today oh boy!

It's a pleasure to move over to the Olympic skater, Eric Heiden, "gliding along on the icy oval, and gliding along . . ." Arlen describes him moving zing zing in the cold with the big arms moving, blades digging the ice.

Watching the Russian dissidents on television the day they arrived from "the dark side of the moon" is another manifest high for Arlen. The moon men, he calls them. He wants to know whether they bring glad tidings to "our notorious and indefatigable Bureau of Moon Secrets." Surely the critic irregularly senses in himself, staring professionally at the tube, sometimes for long hours,

other-worldly attributes. The pale, sad faces of the Russian dissidents tell him of our erstwhile lives, "when pain and paths were admitted into every household." Now all that has been smoothed out and disavowed, partly by the schlock he must return to. Arlen wonders if all of us prefer to fly high, even (literally) going places in airplanes. The Russians' trip, he says, is like "watching most commercial television, and involves a similar passivity, even a similar sense of the experienceless voyage."

It is not surprising, then, for Arlen to buy himself a rowing machine and install it in front of his screen for random workouts. He says it's there in front but not blocking the set for reasons "as subtle and inspirational as those that compelled Archimedes to keep an eye on his bathwater levels."

"The point about truth, one always thought, was trying to get close to it." But truth is hard to find when one is confronted with *Dallas*, *Shogun*, and *Three's a Crowd*.

Incuriosity about the nature of truth in television "entertainment" distresses Michael Arlen, but the language of the self-christened "political media consultants" (pollsters) enrages him: "pre-selecting fifteen or twenty people on a psychodemographic basis . . . people in smily kinds of situations . . . communicating more emotionality." We only need to read one of their sentences whole to understand Arlen's reactions: "It wasn't that McGovern was dishonest, but that he was perceived as lacking credibility."

The point about truth is trying to get close to it.

Although both Carter and Reagan tried remarkably hard throughout their "debate" to run as fast as they could any time a truth raised its delicate head, Arlen clearly loved the telecast. The camera came right up next to their terror: There's "Candidate Jimmy!" There's "Candidate Ronald!" Each stands in his "little pulpit," peering at the other, scared stiff.

What, one wonders, if one or the other should say something he meant?

And for a ridiculous stretch of time,

neither one gets any help from "whirr of tape on editing and mixing machines—snip, snip, splice, forward, stop, snip, whirr: our new montage actuality." No helicopters to save them, no cossetting assistants, no loops or voice-overs. Only sixty million people looking at them "congealing their minds into that special kind of television-talk-show numbness, from which no birdsong ever escapes, in which no living thought can be discerned."

The camera was trying so hard, and succeeding in getting close to the truth of our candidates, two thin and greedy little boys in dark suits who had nothing at all to say to us or to each other.

But the best news in this fine book is enclosed in the essay, "Fred Wiseman's Kino Pravda." Film truth! Mr. Wiseman, avatar of Arlen's ambitions for television, is of course documentary film maker of *Titicac Follies*, *High School*, and *Law and Order*, among others. It is Wiseman's *Manoeuvre* that gets the critic off the rowing machine and over to his Betamax to play over and over one scene that he imagined might release the secret of Wiseman's mastery.

A handful of soldiers stand in a field in Germany talking desultorily. Their talk furthers no plot. Nor does it establish mood or character. Flat and indiscriminate, it doesn't even pass their time of day, and is so dull that Arlen begins writing down the words to worry out a possible pattern. "Fields of fire and weapon ranges. The discussion rather droned; the men seemed rooted to the spot; the camera also seemed rooted to the spot, patiently giving us a close-up of now one man, now another man, now part of the group, now the whole group."

Then, Eureka! The camera so intimate, nosy, continually involved, staying in there with these men until we know we are seeing them without masks. Candidate Ronald! Candidate Jimmy! too. "Where obstinacy lurks it is likely that not merely emotion but passion will be close behind." BUD STILLMAN

Bud Stillman, a former newspaper reporter and high-school English teacher, is a freelance photographer.

Electronic Nightmare: The New Communications and Freedom

By John Wicklein

The Viking Press, \$15.95

WHETHER SOCIETY IS READY for a computerized communications system far beyond the conventional telephone and television set is becoming more and more beside the point. Twentieth-century man's enthusiasm for innovations promising a greater variety and quantity of information and entertainment is restrained only by the hardware's price tag. Affordability will follow availability—witness the pocket calculator phenomenon. And as John Wicklein states five sentences into *Electronic Nightmare*, "every technique of the communication revolution that I discuss in this book is already in place somewhere in the world." His intention, then, is not to lodge another screed against progress, but rather to preview the consequences, what he calls the "clear and present danger," of blindly leaping to embrace these latest marvels of science.

There's no denying the attractiveness of the technology Wicklein describes. After a brief refresher course on silicon chips, optical fibers, and communications satellites, he reviews the QUBE experiment in Columbus, Ohio, and similar programs in Reading, Pennsylvania, and Japan. Each involves two-way interactive cable television. Wicklein acknowledges the pleasure viewers gain when they abandon traditionally passive attitudes toward television.

He goes on to discuss the first "videotex" systems, Ceefax and Prestel, developed in Britain. Drawing on a computer data base, videotex, also puts textual information—i.e., words—on the television screens of sets equipped with an adapter. The combination of two-way cable and two-way videotex has, Wicklein says, "moved the new communications technology a giant step toward the fully integrated home communications set," and the properly wired consumer may now avail himself of: "electronic funds transfer, including checkless banking and credit-card sales; facsimile re-

production and hard-copy printout...

At this point in the book, about a third of the way through, the more domestic wonders cease. Wicklein's chapter on "electronic newspapers" is largely an exploration of what might be, and it allows him to present an interesting scenario of "newspapers after 2000 A.D." Drawn by a computer Wicklein programmed, that scenario posits (among other oddities) a portable electronic typewriter with a small dish antenna that a reporter aims at a nearby news-service van, which in turn transmits the typed story to a communications satellite for eventual recep-

found *Electronic Nightmare* a more pleasant and shorter read had Wicklein been less conscientious. As it is, he lets no facet of the "new communications" stand without rushing to examine its potential danger.

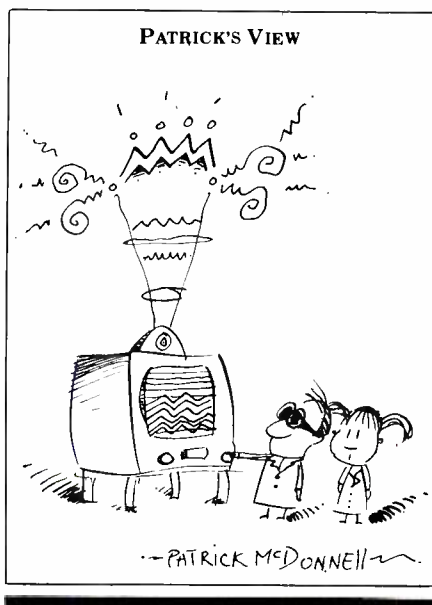
The dangers are legion—too numerous to detail and stemming mainly from an almost complete absence of social policy and legislation controlling the application of this technology. Wicklein's numerous examples of potential misuse or abuse are plausible, imaginative, and convincing, especially since computerized dossiers are already a thriving business in this country. Both to prove that privacy can be protected and to chasten the United States for its failures in that area, Wicklein examines the enlightened policies Sweden has established to control the use of personal data.

The penultimate chapter describes the frightening political censorship of print and broadcast news media during the Geisel regime in Brazil, where Wicklein taught as a visiting professor of communications. Electronic technology would clearly make a censor's job very easy. But a more likely problem for the less authoritarian United States would derive from a free-enterprise philosophy blithely operating only for the bottom line, content to supply no more than the most profitable sort of information and entertainment, and intent on placing private interest above the general welfare.

Wicklein has worked for newspapers, radio, and television. Besides being a good reporter, he is realistic, no raving technophobe. Probably he finds the technology as exciting as the next fellow does. Fortunately for the next fellow, Wicklein has cast a gimlet eye where our society tends to sport blinders, if not rose-colored glasses. His politics may be further to the left than fashion now dictates; his tone may at times be alarmist, and his medium weighed down by a lot of flatly informational prose—but his message is vital. It deserves a wide reception. ■

JEFFREY BURKE

Jeffrey Burke is a contributing editor and writer at Harper's and Home Video magazines.



tion (and further editing, if desired) on the home communications set. The chapter on communications satellites reflects Wicklein's considerable skill at sifting through and clearly explaining the political, economic, and social aspects of a subject enmeshing national and international, public and private interests.

Unlike Wicklein, who integrates solid reporting and criticism throughout the book, I have chosen to separate the bad news from the good. I admit to an overwhelming fascination with these technological wonders, and I would have

Canadians View U. S. As a Big New Cable Frontier

Hester Riches

Toronto Globe and Mail

AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT in Canadian media has always been a major concern of business and government north of the 49th parallel. But in recent years the trend has—in a small way—reversed, and now some Americans are frowning their brows as they watch modern-day carpetbaggers from the North invade the booming U.S. cable-television market.

Cable wiring began in Canada as early as 1950, to improve reception in isolated communities and bring American signals to urban markets near the American border. By the early seventies the country was cable-saturated—recent figures indicate that 55 percent of all Canadians who watch television have cable, compared to the American figure of 25 percent. Canadian operators began to view the U.S. market as the logical one to move into. After 1972, when the Federal Communications Commission lifted its freeze on cable development in urban America, some of the larger Canadian companies began applying for franchises. And they've been winning them, sometimes by picking up local partners to demonstrate a commitment to the community, but mostly on the basis of proposals that draw on years of technical experience and proficiency in community-access programming.

Even though the competition is tougher, Canadians seem to prefer applying to local governments in the U.S. rather than to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). There are several reasons why. There is, of course, growth potential in the States that no longer exists north of the border. More important, while Americans grant franchises for fifteen years, the CRTC has cable operators re-applying every three to five years. "Down there, once you get it, you've got it," says Gene Fitzgibbons of Selkirk Communications Ltd., which has subscribers in five Florida communities.

"You can certainly budget your investment better when you know you've got fifteen years."

The lucrative subscription rates, though, are the main attraction of the U.S. market. There's a higher basic cable rate in the U.S. (in Ontario, subscribers pay \$6 to \$7 monthly, while Syracuse, New York, customers pay \$7 to \$8), but it's pay-television service, yet to be allowed in Canada, that is bringing in the big bucks.

The cruise into the U.S. cable market hasn't been all smooth sailing for Canadians. With other franchises in Syracuse, Portland, Oregon, various communities in California, St. Paul, and suburbs of Minneapolis, Rogers Cablesystems Inc. (formerly Canadian Cablesystems Ltd.) applied for and won the license in Minneapolis in 1979. Subsequently, the three losing companies took out a full-page newspaper ad to ask, "Why must we import services that American companies can perform?" The city council took another vote and awarded the franchise to Storer Broadcasting of Miami. (Last January a state hearing examiner also decided in favor of Storer, but in mid-April the Minnesota Cable Communications Board voted four-to-three to deny Storer a certificate, and Rogers now may have a chance to win the franchise.)

The Canadian cable operators would like to be considered more than just modern-day carpetbaggers: all together they aren't likely to take more than 5 percent of the American market, and the profits they earn won't find their way back to Canada in the near future. "That money stays down there for a long, long time," says Philip Lind of Rogers. "We bid in Miami today . . . and we need fifty-million bucks to construct that system." And investing in the States is probably the wisest move a Canadian operator can make these days. A final decision on pay television has yet to be made by the CRTC, but broadcasters and telephone companies are lobbying heavily for the rights to that new game. Yet another threat to cable companies is posed by a

growing number of viewers picking up satellite signals from their own backyard dishes. For the cable companies, there just may not be any more territory left in the true North.

'Cable porn' Under Attack in Buffalo

Michael Beebe

Buffalo Evening News

AMORALITY IN MEDIA chapter here has launched one of the first skirmishes in the anti-obscenity group's national campaign against what it labels "cable porn." The target is a local cable-television company offering Escapade, the pay-cable network that brings such R-rated movies as *The Happy Hooker* and *Young Lady Chatterley* into America's living rooms.

Rainbow Programming, the Denver company that sends Escapade by satellite—Escapade alternates with the cultural channel Bravo—says the protest here is its first in more than a hundred communities. Morality in Media members, however, say they don't care about what happens elsewhere. They want Escapade stopped here and have demanded that Buffalo's Common Council, the city's lawmaking body, refuse renewal of its franchise to CableScope Inc., a 55,000-viewer subsidiary of *The Minneapolis Star and Tribune*. The company also owns *The Buffalo Courier-Express*, the city's morning newspaper.

But the cable company's franchise runs until 1988. In the meantime, the anti-obscenity crusaders have forced a public hearing on Escapade, sat stone-faced through a special screening of *The Happy Hooker*, and gotten a pledge from Buffalo's mayor, James D. Griffin, who faces re-election this year, to work for repeal of a state law barring local governments from tampering with cable programming.

In a side issue to the dispute, Morality in Media has demanded that Buffalo's

school board president, David B. Kelly, resign because he is a CableScope vice president and supports its offering of Escapade.

"If you allow your kids to watch something you don't want," Kelly told the group, "you ought to have your heads examined."

Despite all the furor and headlines the protest has caused, Morality in Media has accomplished little and knows it is powerless to stop Escapade immediately. In fact, in the middle of the dispute, a subscription television company announced plans to start showing X-rated movies over the air to homes in the Buffalo area equipped with unscrambling decoders.

"It's clear that technology has outraced the law," complained James Likoudis, a board member of the local, 1,600-family Morality in Media chapter. "The law apparently is helpless.

"Our objection is not to R-rated movies," he added. "We are objecting to the bump and grind, the jiggly, sick sexual comedy stuff."

A. Ross MacGregor, CableScope's president, is the first to admit *The Happy Hooker* will never win any Oscars, calling it a "pretty trashy movie." But he points to a survey of his subscribers that showed 96.1 percent felt people should be free to decide whether or not they want to subscribe to Escapade. "We don't feel we have the right to tell our viewers what or what not to watch," MacGregor said. "We have no desire to be censors." He rejects the idea that Escapade's protest here came because of the area's strong identification with the Roman Catholic church, the religion of the Irish, Italian, and Polish working-class immigrants who swelled the city in the nineteenth century.

MacGregor claims the Escapade protest has little public support outside of Morality in Media and says of the group: "I think people involved with this are more dangerous than what they are trying to stop." Buffalo councilman James P. Keane, who walked out of *The Happy Hooker* screening and wants to restrict adult cable programs, says he'll fight "cable porn" no matter how little support he has from the public or his fellow council members. "If I'm the last guy to talk against it, fine," Keane said. "I think it's garbage."

New Network Would Convey The Message of Rural America

Steve Mills

The Prescott Courier
Prescott, Arizona

A PLAN to beam rural Americana to the big city has been buried under an avalanche that the Federal Communications Commission brought down on itself, and Neighborhood Television Co. (NTVC) wants the FCC to dig it out from under.

After unsuccessfully seeking a network affiliation for a conventional channel assigned to Prescott, Arizona, William Sauro, a Phoenix adman with a programming idea, hooked up with Marshall Carpenter, a broadcasting technology expert with an idea for establishing a new network.

Sauro's idea: "We want to take what's good about America's small towns and put it in the large urban areas, and Prescott is a strong-valued western community that we think is typical of what's good about America." KUSK-TV's future hometown is a mile-high community of about 35,000 located in ranching country about ninety miles northwest of Phoenix.

Carpenter's idea: To deliver this whole-grain fare to 100 million viewers via satellite and 141 NTVC-owned UHF translator stations in major markets across the country and offer that audience to advertisers at a third of network rates.

Reports that KUSK programming would be based on country-and-western music and rodeo coverage are inaccurate, Sauro said. "That's a little too commercial. We're looking a little further into the rural syndrome." Ideas for original programs include spotlighting great American high school bands; the best of *Grit*, the self-styled family newspaper; coverage of county fairs; horse shows, and livestock and agricultural programming. Sauro sums it all up as "wholesome family entertainment that gets away from the slick urbanity of commercial TV."

Spanish International Network uses a

satellite-translator system to get its signal from San Antonio, Texas, to Washington, D.C., and Denver, according to Sauro. The opportunity to use such a link in establishing a truly national network has existed under FCC regulations for at least three years, according to Carpenter, a former RCA research engineer who has operated FM stations in the Midwest and has been involved in cable television.

NTVC was simply the first organization to see the potential of a new network within the framework of current technology and regulations, Carpenter said.

So in September 1980, the firm submitted applications for broadcast frequencies for thirty to fifty of its planned 141 translators.

"Then the avalanche happened," Carpenter added. The FCC opened up the floodgates on applications for a new class of broadcasting to operate on translator frequencies. Some 5,000 interim applications for low-power television stations have been submitted, he said. "Interim"—that's what burns Carpenter. The FCC "jumped the gun" by allowing applications to be filed before formalizing low-power regulations. Now the commission is "mired down in its own poor advance thinking" and is "not trying to move anything else ahead," Carpenter complained.

He takes the position that the low-power applications are illegal, or at least irregular, because of the unprecedented procedure. The more than 100 NTVC applications for translator channels filed with the FCC under existing regulations should be extricated from the avalanche of speculative proposals and processed. Carpenter spends half his time in Washington working to persuade the FCC it "should live by the existing rules."

Some of the ammunition for his argument was provided by a commission-sponsored study released at about the same time as the low-power announcements, he said.

According to Carpenter, two of the re-

port's conclusions were:

- That better programming would be forthcoming only if there were more networks;
- That the FCC has continually aborted efforts to establish new networks.

"It looks like they're trying to abort this effort again," he said.

Sauro stated that "if necessary, we may go to court" to force FCC action. More reluctant to talk about the possibility of litigation, Carpenter emphasized lobbying efforts. Arizona's congressional delegation has been contacted, and Carpenter said he hopes to see constituents from the Grand Canyon State and the rest of the country urge congressmen to support Neighborhood Television's network.

Although Sauro claims it would have been best "if the FCC never announced low-powered television at all," NTVC would service that market. Tentative agreements have been made with eighty applicants; low-power affiliates would get rights to two thirty-second spots an hour, while NTVC would keep any addi-

tional national advertising revenue.

However, according to Sauro NTVC could not achieve its goal of 100 million viewers without a large number of translator stations in major markets.

If KUSK starts up on schedule late this year, it initially will be a purely local station until prime time, then go network for five hours in the evening. But eventually, network programming would run twenty-four hours a day.

The package has proven attractive to Allstate Insurance, the Sears-owned company that is providing financing for NTVC. Initial costs for the network are estimated at \$20 million to \$50 million, depending on how many translator applications are granted.

Carpenter's voice takes on fervor when he discusses the programming, and perhaps that's why he's quick to assert "we're not Moral Majority, we're not a southern Baptist thing. Grass-roots Americana: That theme . . . you just feel it. People are hungering for that kind of programming; and what better place than Prescott to provide it?"

lar. Both offer news stories, stock-market reports, and weather forecasts. Both offer a page detailing the station's schedule for the day. Both feature consumer information like movie and restaurant reviews, ticket availability at local theaters, and phone numbers to be called in an emergency. The difference, not surprisingly, is that the CBS-owned magazine, *Extravision*, is studded with advertising, while KCET's has none. From a suite of offices atop a bank building in the heart of Hollywood, CBS project director David Percelay explained matter-of-factly, "We want to assess whether teletext makes any sense as a business for CBS. We won't be involved in it if it doesn't have any commercial prospects."

Thus, a page featuring the stock-market report also carried a line at the bottom plugging the brokerage firm of Merrill Lynch. Wilson Sporting Goods got credit on a page of sports news. A local supermarket took a page to list its sale items for that day. American Airlines used a page to list the arrival times of its flights into Los Angeles International Airport.

In granting permission for the teletext experiment, the Federal Communications Commission specified that KNXT was not allowed to charge these companies for such advertising. But that would be CBS's intention if and when the service becomes operational, although the exact pricing structure remains to be set by the Los Angeles test.

A few miles down the street from the KNXT operation, KCET's teletext staff and equipment are crammed into a basement office on the station lot. Project director Richard Gingras wonders whether the station will be able to raise enough money to keep the experiment going. Nonetheless, he speaks loftily of the need to carry on public broadcasting's heritage by demonstrating the educational potential of teletext, as KCET is attempting to do.

The station devotes a major section of its magazine, called *NOW!*, to children, relying heavily on a teletext feature that can hide part of the information on a page until a button labeled "reveal" is pressed. In this way the station provides riddles, guessing games, and instructional questions such as "Who shot Lincoln?" and "What was Indian money called?" KCET

Testing Teletext With And Without Commercials

Lee Margulies

Los Angeles Times

DEJAVU: In its first major consumer test in the United States, the new video technology known as teletext is unfolding in strikingly similar fashion to the broadcast system it is intended to embellish.

The test, due to run at least through the end of the year, was launched in April by two Los Angeles television stations, KNXT and KCET, which are sharing some technical equipment but are offering separate demonstrations of teletext's potential uses. KNXT is owned by CBS, one of the wealthy giants of commercial broadcasting; KCET is a public, non-profit station.

Teletext is a process enabling broadcasters to incorporate printed news and

information in their television signal so that viewers with special decoding devices attached to their sets may, with the push of a keypad button, replace the conventional program picture with a display of one of scores of "pages" that then can be read off the screen.

The technology has undergone technical evaluation by a variety of American interests over the past several years. The Los Angeles test seeks for the first time to determine just what services teletext can offer and which of them interests the public. About twenty decoder-equipped television sets were placed in shopping malls, museums, and public buildings at the outset. In the fall, from ninety to a hundred homes will be outfitted so individual viewer response can be gauged.

The KNXT and KCET teletext "magazines," as the stations dubbed their compilations of pages, are not totally dissimi-

has also developed pages that give teachers suggestions on how to use upcoming public television programs in their classrooms.

Among the questions CBS and KCET hope to answer with their tests: Will people use teletext after the novelty wears off? Do they want longer news stories, or shorter ones? How much would they willingly pay for a decoder? What is the impact on conventional television-

viewing habits? Do viewers respond to the advertising? What are the best ways of making a page attractive and readable?

Just when this information can be put to practical use remains to be seen. The FCC still is mulling over what technical standards should be adopted for teletext in the United States, and most industry officials say it will be at least two years before those can be approved, incorporated by television-set manufacturers, and marketed to consumers.

Cable's Biggest Gamble Yet: Wiring New York's Boroughs

John E. Cooney

The Wall Street Journal
New York City

WHEN CABLE FRANCHISES are awarded in New York's four outer boroughs—Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island—the results are bound to be spectacular, if only because of the size of the billion-dollar venture. The only statement that can be made with a degree of certainty is that cabling the boroughs is the biggest gamble ever for an industry used to playing high stakes.

The contracts will probably be awarded either late this year or early in 1982. Whether they prove impossible blunders or glittering money machines may not be known until the last bit of cable is finally laid eight years after that. Despite all the problems, the odds favor economic success.

The reasons, of course, are the fantastic growth in pay-cable services during the past few years, and the public's willingness to pay for them. In many instances, cable operators have found that the money subscribers are willing to spend is limited by the number of services that are offered. Glib industry people like to point to the typical telephone bill as the likely amount subscribers will part with for their monthly cable fare, but in New York, with its vast array of entertainment that can be brought into the home on a pay-for-play basis, the amount may be much higher.

"There are concerts and play openings

or closings—a tremendous number of live performances that people would pay \$10 to see on a particular night, because they can't afford the \$25 or \$35 a ticket being asked these days," says Morris Tarshis, director of the city's Bureau of Franchises. "The cable companies understand that."

Another factor favors the wiring: the recent history of the two cable companies already operating in Manhattan, and the lessons to be learned from them. Manhattan Cable Television, which serves the lower half of the island, is a subsidiary of American Television and Communications Corporation (the nation's largest cable system operator and itself a unit of Time Inc.). Teleprompter Manhattan, serving the upper half, is a subsidiary of Teleprompter Corporation, the nation's second biggest system operator. The different experiences of the two systems in Manhattan reflect the potential problems of wiring any urban area.

Manhattan Cable, for example, serves a much more affluent section of town than does Teleprompter Manhattan. Manhattan Cable has made money in recent years, while Teleprompter has yet to earn a dime. By serving the generally poor northern end of the island, Teleprompter has been beset by a host of problems. Bad debt reached such proportions a few years ago, for instance, that the system had to form its own in-house collection agency to prod subscribers. To make matters worse, the original 360,000 households included in the northern franchise has dwindled by at least one

third due to urban decay. Nevertheless, Teleprompter's position has improved slowly over the past several years, and the company expects the trend to continue.

"There is more programming available, and new pay services help our position," says Christopher Conley, president of Teleprompter Manhattan and a vice president of Teleprompter Corporation.

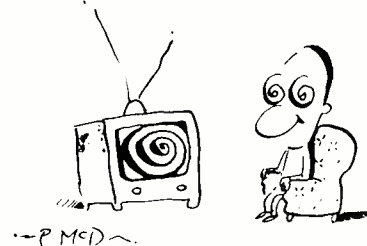
Still, the biggest source of concern is the cost and scale of the project. New York is trying to award the franchises thoughtfully, despite political infighting and mounting pressure from borough residents.

Today, the thirteen competing cable companies must fill out supplemental information requests that are much more specific than their original proposals. The Washington law firm of Arnold & Porter, hired to bring order to the evaluation of franchise proposals, drafted the requests to ensure that the companies are indeed capable of carrying out the massive undertaking. There are more than 2.5 million households to be cabled, and the city insists that every area be incorporated in the process, no matter how impoverished.

Since no single system can muster the resources to wire the entire city, petitions were accepted on a borough-by-borough basis, and the big boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn will be subdivided into more manageable chunks. However, a number of potential problems remain: getting access to apartments for connecting and disconnecting, collecting bad debts, and dealing with the high rate of turnover among borough residents.

But there is promise too. Paul Bortz, a communications consultant with Brown, Bortz & Coddington, says the potential for profit is great "if the systems get subscribers on the order of 50 percent of the homes they pass. The density makes it that attractive." ■

PATRICK'S VIEW



The Rules at Our House

by Marvin Kitman

ACTUALLY, the only effective way ever invented by modern man to limit children's television viewing during the prime time evening hours is to make them go to sleep on the dot of 7:30 P.M. This can be done sometimes if the child is under three or two. One has to be the boss in his house, and I speak from experience here. I am always very firm with the underaged about program viewing.

Unfortunately, though, I no longer have any kids under three. And the older ones are a little more difficult to regulate.

The basic rule at our house is that nobody can watch a so-called adult program (i.e., anything after John Chancellor) without a parent in attendance. We know what is best for our kids.

Specifically forbidden is the viewing of any program—regardless of the hour—about girls behind bars. Anything having to do with heterosexuality is also banned.

My reason for being so hard in these matters is a little different than the average parent's: I don't want my kids to learn anything about mature subjects from television. The networks are too immature in their approach to deal with mature subjects. I'd rather my kids learn about "it" on the streets.

Children in my house must have "parentals" for guidance on any program with a disclaimer suggesting this. But like some other parents, we tend to fall asleep before 10 P.M., when the good stuff usually goes on. I am convinced that children, like the Strategic Air Command, never sleep.

Marvin Kitman is the television critic of the Long Island newspaper, Newsday.

The networks' advance warning system about mature programming has caused major changes in viewing patterns since it began in 1975. By the time this useful announcement warns us that a major filthy program will follow, we don't have any children to advise. They are up in their rooms already, tuned in on the second set.

Kids today don't at all mind that inconvenience. Black and white makes it all seem risqué, like a stag movie. Going to your room when mature programming is on is the electronic equivalent of reading dirty books (de Maupassant and *Studs Lonigan*) under the covers by flashlight in the old days.

"Parental Discretion Advised" seems to have become a teenage slang expression meaning: This is good. Don't miss it, or you'll be a moldy fig (culturally disadvantaged) at school tomorrow.

The parental discretion advisory warning is one of the most dangerous inventions since television. Suppose your child is sitting there looking at the screen, instead of reading Aristotle and Schopenhauer in his "Great Books" course for juniors. You're in the other room fighting with your spouse. Does the television network expect the kid to cry out, "Mommy, Daddy, they're having a show about Linda Blair getting raped in a women's prison. Get me out of the room quick!"?

Have network psychologists considered the possible damage to the child from a parent rushing into the room like a bat out of hell or Jerry Falwell, yanking everyone out of the den of iniquity? Such an action would at least do more harm than good.

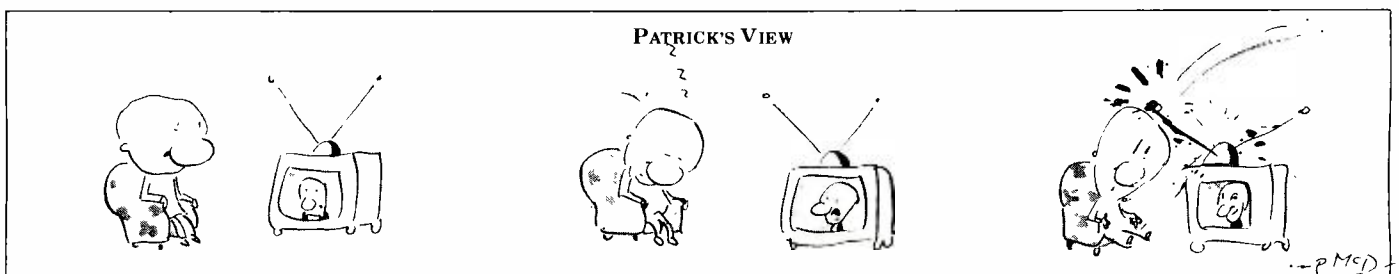
And what happens when your child misses the warning, aired during the first thirty seconds of a mature show? He wanders innocently by, bouncing a ball or reciting Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," and suddenly he is zapped by the immoral stuff without warning. A similar thing must have happened to me. It's the only way I can explain my interest in sex and nudity on television.

Parental discretion warnings are sadly inadequate. There should be a light blinking in the corner of the screen on all prime-time television programs. A red light means "danger, immoral programming ahead"; yellow, "exercise caution"; green, "mindless pap." These advisory lights could change as the program progresses in and out of harmful subject material. But, of course, the lights could have the other effect. Children could come running into a room when the red light is on, just to be contrary.

I often wonder why the networks call immature things mature, as in: "Due to the mature theme of *Dirty Harry*, viewer discretion is advised." Why are kiddie porn, sex, and violence mature? *Universality of the Air*—now *that's* mature. *Book Beat*. *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*. "Due to the mature theme of *Meet the Press*, viewer discretion is advised." Now *that's* helpful.

The whole warning system is a can of worms.

At my house, when I really don't want my kids to watch a program, I simply go down to the basement and pull the circuit breaker. A few obscenities hurled at the power company when the kids rush in to tell me the television sets are broken, and the air is cleared for a while. ■





**THE
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ON TARGET.**

Weeknights on PBS
with Charlayne Hunter-Gault



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Ivanhoe

MGM January 16, 17 & 18.

The Big Fisherman

Buena Vista March 27, 28 & 29.

Jack & the Beanstalk

Columbia Pictures April 24, 25 & 26.

Margie

20th Century Fox May 1, 2 & 3.

Blood and Sand

20th Century Fox May 22, 23 & 24

State Fair

20th Century Fox June 26, 27 & 28

Thunderhead, Son of Flicka

20th Century Fox August 28, 29 & 30

Prince Valiant

20th Century Fox October 16, 17 & 18

Flame Over India

The Rank Organization November 13, 14 & 15.

Journey Back To Oz

Filmation Studios November 27, 28 & 29.

El Cid

Time Life December 4, 5 & 6.

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