Television's Way with Words, by Edwin Newman

CDC 00415

CHANNELS

OF COMMUNICATIONS

1982 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

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Why the New Right Is All Wrong About Prime Time

BY WALTER KARP

America's New Information Empire

Cable & Magazines: Can the Marriage Last?

The Wizard of ABC

A Daring Proposal: Take TV Away from Hollywood

The Legal System in the Video Age

ESPN. THE CA
MEN GET EMO

ESPN: the on y 24 hour cable TV sports network. It's *the most efficient* way of reaching men in upscale TV households. Men just don't turn it on. It turns men on. They bring to ESPN the special emotional involvement most mer have for sports. An involvement they brinc to no other kind of TV.

ESPN is continuous big time sports that produces more men per household than anyone else reported in cable or broadcast network TV. ESPN beats even, yes, the 1982 Super Bowl with total adult male and male 25-54 viewers per household. And ESPN's male viewers per household are greater than CNN, WTBS, and the networks in prime time.

ESPN. HIGHEST MALE VIEWERS PER HOUSEHOLD.

PRIME TIME (Feb. '82)	ADULT MALE VIEWERS PER HOUSEHOLD	% DISTRIBUTION ADULT MEN 18-49	25-54	50+
ESPN	**.98**	**66%**	**63%**	**34%**
CNN	.76	37%	43%	63%
WTBS	.74	61%	58%	39%
ABC/CBS NBC (avg.)	.62	61%	56%	39%
WEEKEND SPORTS (reg. sched., 3 networks)				
Feb. '82	.74	63%	57%	37%
Nov. '81	.87	61%	55%	39%
'82 Super Bowl	.97	66%	56%	34%

NOTE: Nov. '81 data are shown for network sports to include Football, their strongest male event

As men desert network TV, they go where their emotions lead them. ESPN has substantially higher viewer concentration in pay TV homes than either CNN, WTBS. And pay TV is where the big spenders are, the heavy consumers of just about everything from beer to automobiles.

ESPN. HIGHEST HOUSEHOLD CONCENTRATION IN PAY CABLE HOMES.

*DISTRIBUTION OF AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD AUDIENCE PRIME TIME, February '82**

	ESPN	CNN	WTBS
Pay Cable	**64%**	50%	50%
Basic Cable only	**36%**	50%	39%
Non Cable	—	—	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%

On ESPN, you get attentive, upscale men for a very low out of pocket cost. For example ESPN can give you a year's worth of advertising for the cost of just one 30 second spot in the Super Bowl.

If you've got to sell men, you've got to be on ESPN. Call Mike Presbrey today at (212) 661-6040.

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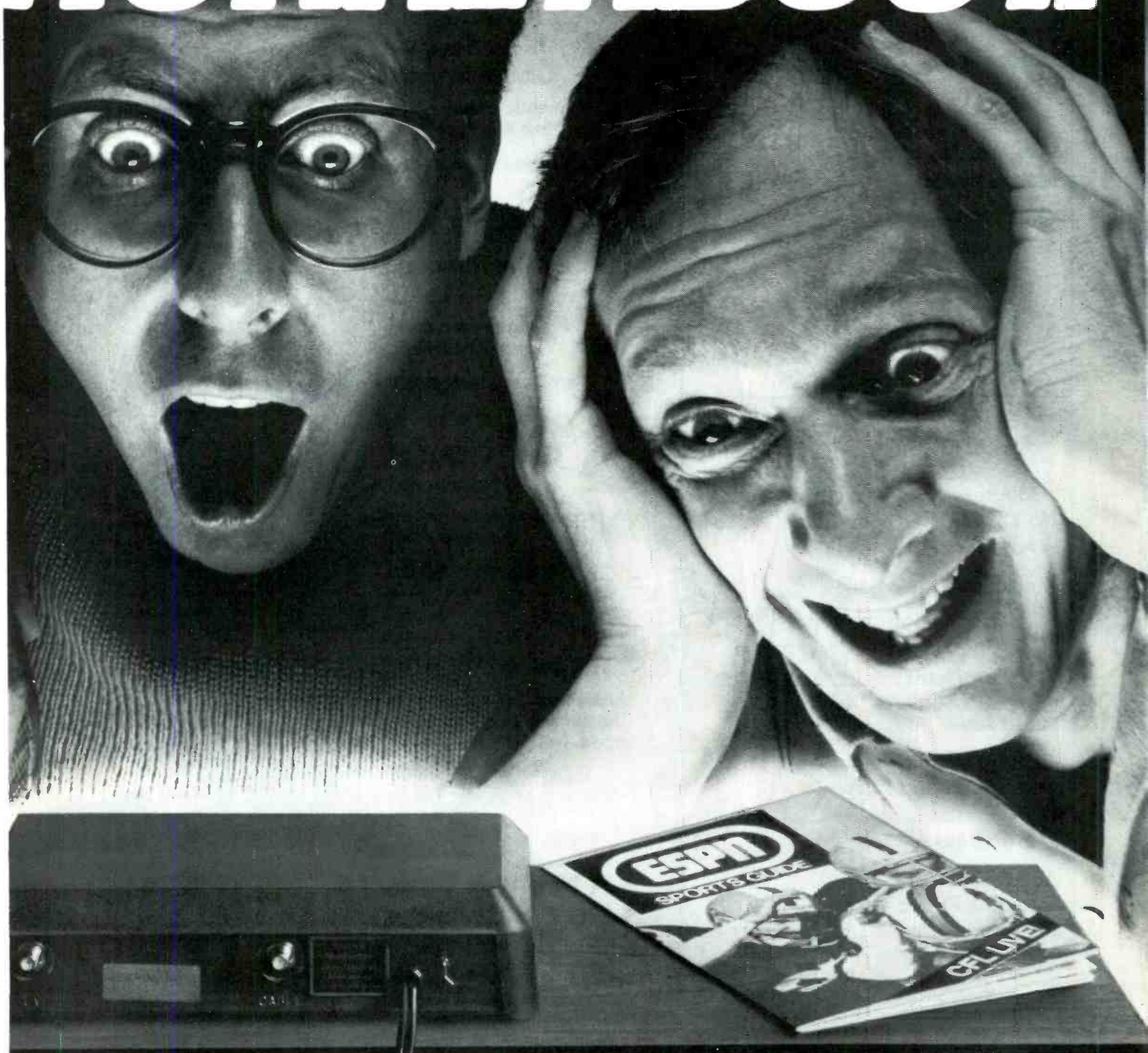


*SOURCES: NTI/NAD Nov. '81, Feb. '82. NHI Special Analysis of NSI Diary Data Feb. '82 for ESPN, CNN & WTBS. Subject to qualifications. Available upon request.

C H A N N E L S

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1982

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3

CURRENTS

Issues & Reports

ON AIR

Comment & Criticism

Cover illustration by Richard Williams Cartoons by Charles Barsotti

Why the New Right Is All Wrong about Prime Time

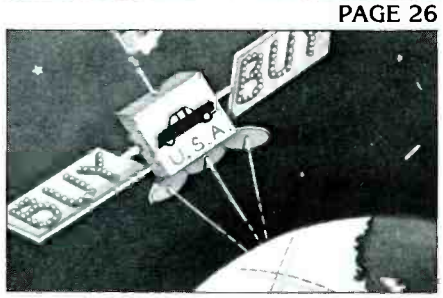
Television's most popular shows celebrate America's traditional values

BY WALTER KARP

Information: America's New Global Empire

The diplomatic pitfalls of the "free flow" economy

BY HERBERT SCHILLER



Cable & Magazines: Can the Marriage Last?

Print and video make uneasy bedfellows

BY JONATHAN BLACK

Get TV Out of Hollywood

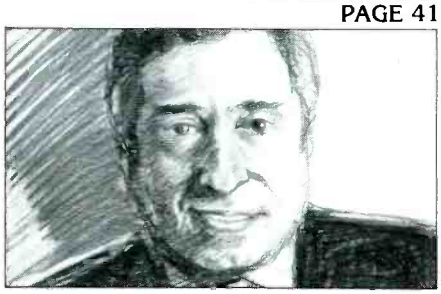
A proposal to make writers the stars again

BY ROSS WETZSTEON

The Wizard of ABC

Julie Barnathan helped pave broadcasting's yellow brick road. Now he's working on TV's future

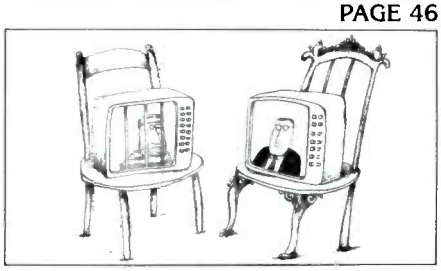
BY JAMES TRAUB



A New World: The Legal System in the Video Age

How new technologies grease the wheels of justice

BY AUDREY BERMAN



Computerized news retrieval explained in plain, simple language

How news directors nationwide use the *NEXIS*® computer-assisted news retrieval service to get elusive but vital facts competing stations may not have. And how *NEXIS* gives their news departments a distinctive character some say boosts ratings measurably.

A new era of instantaneous research was ushered in when the first *NEXIS* terminal was installed in April 1980. Since then news departments of leading networks have relied on *NEXIS* as the research tool they turn to most often.

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It's as simple as that. But all news retrieval services are not created equal. Some offer you a limited number of databases. Some don't even give you the complete stories you may request–giving you instead short abstracts. Still others use computer mumbo-jumbo and require extensive training before you can use them.

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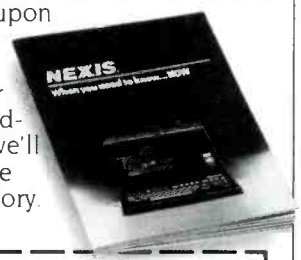

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LETTERS

Volume Control

In your April/May issue you comment on the loudness of television commercials ["Do Not Adjust Your Sets: Commercials *Are* Louder"]. You quote a media person, a network executive, as saying he does not want to irritate people with the loud commercials. Are we to believe that the network audio engineers have no ears and no hands? What prevents them from simply turning down the gain when the commercials are too loud?

WALTER F. STROMER
Mt. Vernon, Iowa

Ears vs. Sales

If we are to believe CBS has a device to control program loudness that takes into account the physiological elements "influencing our perception of loudness," and if we wish to be seen as citizens of this country rather than consumers dwelling in the marketplace, then we must demand, as *citizens*, not just consumers, that the FCC require this device to control loudness.

TOM THON
Baldwin, New York

Good News on Our News

Thanks for printing Bill Pease's remarks on the news in Europe [On Air, April/May]. The extent to which the rest of the world is not covered on American television news frightens me, and it's always nice to see somebody reminding the media people that journalists in other countries may be doing a better job. At the same time, the following points should be made:

1. European countries are smaller than the U.S. and are surrounded by other countries, whose politics affect them directly. It is much easier to broadcast critical documentaries about the goings-on across the border than to dig into what's happening in your own country. Hard-hitting coverage of foreign countries compensates for an unwillingness to upset the apple cart at home. American journalism still scores points in this regard.

2. Viewers in Europe are usually not aware of how overwhelmingly their television coverage of foreign affairs is generated by American (and British) news agencies and network reporters. So the excellence of European current-events television partly reflects the continued excellence of American journalism.

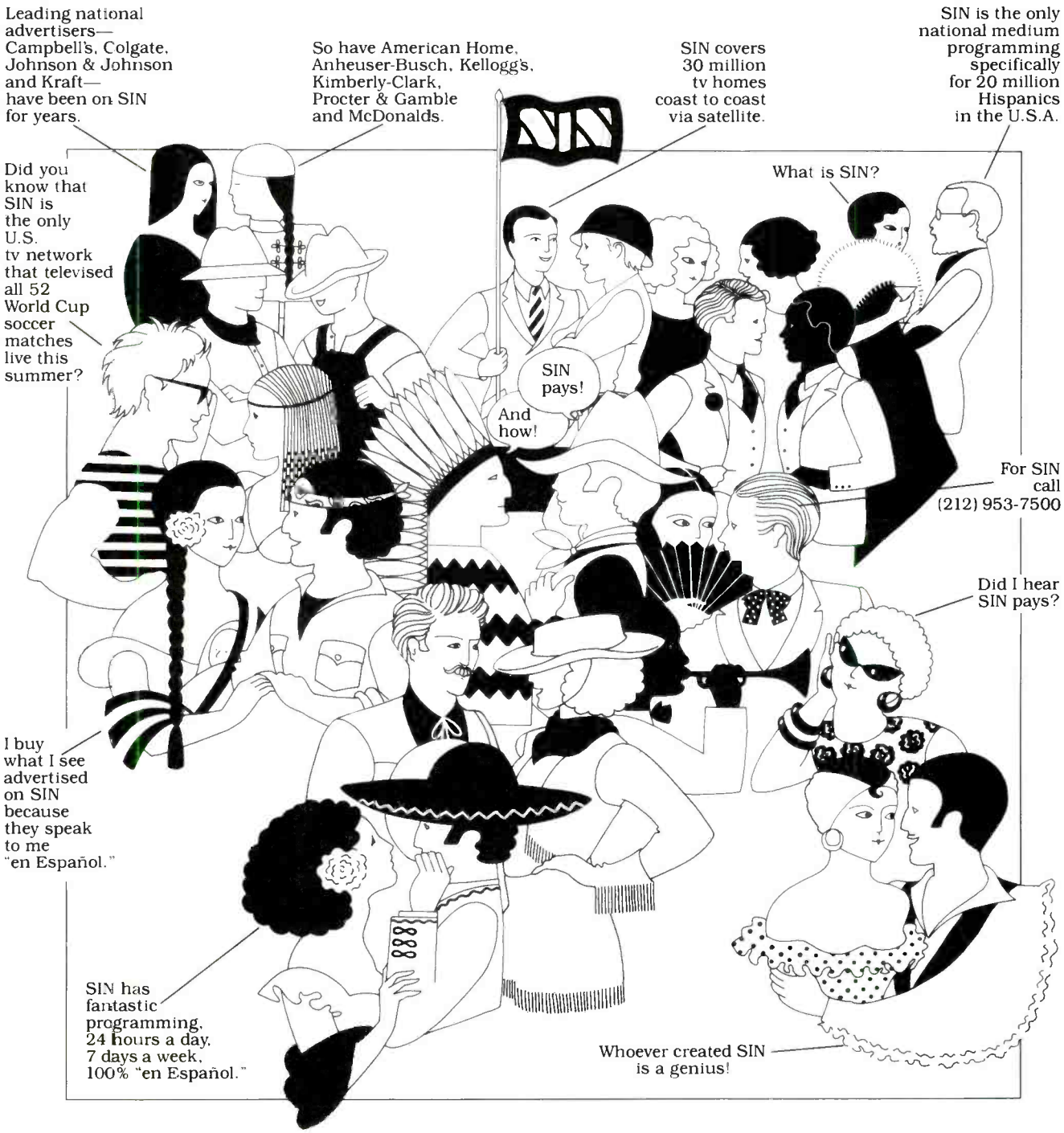
3. It may be true that European newsrooms give Tass and the White House press releases equal weight as authoritative sources, but this does not mean equal credibility. Tass *is* authoritative. It presents the Soviet position, and it is through control of Tass that the Soviet government determines the news content of the Soviet press in general. Even Western editors lose track of where their news items from the Soviet Union originate — *Pravda, Isvestia,* Tass, or a back-room committee feeding all three. In fact, many of the "Tass" stories broadcast in Europe and the United States are taken from Western news agencies that monitor Tass. In that sense, they are AP stories, UPI stories, Reuters stories.

BOB FIEDLER
Allschwil, Switzerland

On TV and Violence

Concerning your article, "Death Imitating Art" [Quo Video, April/May], Dr. Thomas Radecki, president of the

Everybody's talking about SIN



SIN TELEVISION NETWORK 250 PARK AVENUE NEW YORK NEW YORK 10177

National Coalition on Television Violence, provides typical arguments against television violence: guilt by association and unsubstantiated facts.

I challenge Dr. Radecki to prove that the twenty-six deaths by Russian roulette were a direct result of the movie *The Deer Hunter*.

Rather than trying to stop programs from airing, the NCTV should be investing its funds into a national push for critical viewing skills in the classrooms. I've found that properly taught children can distinguish between reality and fantasy. They can understand the propaganda of commercials, and they can understand how movies using special effects can make a man look like he is blowing his brains out when he isn't. What children will not understand is the narrow viewpoints of NCTV and other organizations trying to restrict their right to information.

RICHARD C. THORNTON
Fort Knox, Kentucky

Nielsen Is Right

On "Living in a Nielsen Republic" [The Public Eye, April/May], I think it is important to remember that sports, pornography, and made-for-television religion are main ingredients in American culture. So why should we expect any more from television?

Moreover, why should we think this state of affairs is a problem when it really is not? In our society, there are many alternatives to staring at a television set.

PATRICK NOLAN
Jackson Heights, New York

Trusting Fowler

Some of Les Brown's arguments in "Living in a Nielsen Republic" [The Public Eye, April/May] sound right, but then sophistry *sometimes* does. The problem is his basic supposition. It was Ralph Nader and Nick Johnson who fostered the false idea of plebiscitary public interest that Mark Fowler has now taken over and that Brown does not like in its new incarnation. Brown seems to think that there was a time twenty or thirty years ago when intellectuals, including television critics, were given a respect Rodney Dangerfield would envy. Not so. It's part of the "good old days" myth.

The key question is who is going to interpret the public interest. Right now I trust Fowler as much and more than I ever trusted Nader and Johnson.

THOMAS H. CLANCY
New Orleans, Louisiana

Correction

The June/July issue incorrectly identified the company that produces *Couples*. It is Arnold Shapiro Productions.

Notice to Readers & Advertisers

With this issue, the cover date has been changed to reflect our publication cycle more accurately. This will not affect the number of issues our subscribers receive.

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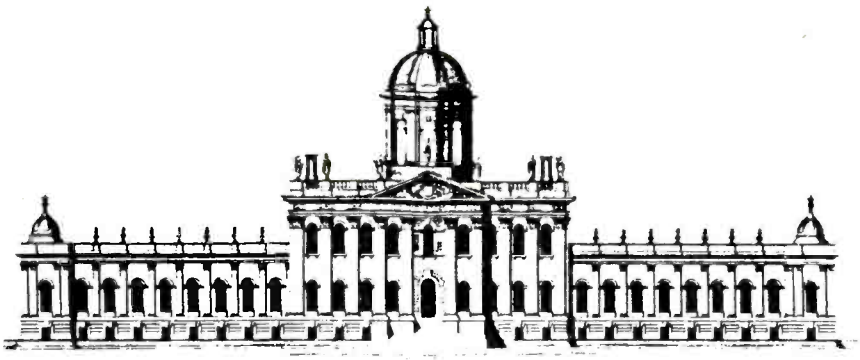
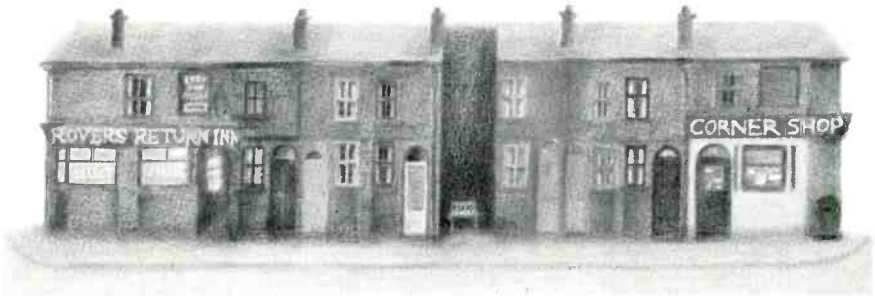


BRIDESHEAD REVISITED



CORONATION STREET

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CROSS CURRENTS

A War for Sale

IF VIETNAM was the world's first television war, the Falklands has become the world's first video-cassette war.

Two British television companies have pieced together the electronic reportage that was barred from the airwaves during the war to reveal how the Royal Marines, Gurkhas, and Welsh Guards retook the windswept islands. Granada Television International and Independent Television News (ITN), have created a two-hour cassette telling the story, they claim, "in a way that has so far not been possible because of the communications problems between Britain and the South Atlantic."

The video cassette aims to tell the Falklands story "fully and in a balanced and measured way." This is no mean feat. For the American media and viewers, the Falklands war was a jigsaw puzzle of often conflicting realities emanating from Buenos Aires and London. In Britain things weren't quite so muddled, since British television stations and newspapers — unlike most of their American counterparts — did send their own reporters to the South Atlantic. Nonetheless, even in England, British Defense Ministry photos weren't available until two weeks after the war ended.

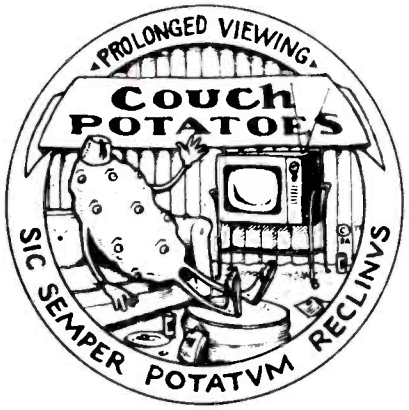
The cassette is being distributed world-wide but, of course, will be of greatest interest in the United Kingdom. Thus, as a by-product, the Falklands war may spur the sale of video recorders in the U.K.

G.M.H.

Voice of the Tubers

DO YOU SPEND more than eight hours a day parked in front of the television set? And are you proud of it? Then you may qualify for membership in an elite group of television fans: the Couch Potatoes — so called because they like nothing better than to vegetate in front of the tube, recumbent, all eyes.

Officially, there are some five hundred self-proclaimed Couch Potatoes — a sizeable number when you consider that these are not the sort of people who join organizations. Indeed, it is a minor miracle that people who watch so much television can find the time and muster



the energy to publish a newsletter, which Couch Potatoes sporadically do: *The Tuber's Voice* began publication last spring.

Volume one, number one, provides a useful introduction to Couch Potato manners and mores. A Couch Potato declares himself by mailing a favorite-show list to the nine Couch Potato elders; a compilation of these choices appears on the first page of the newsletter. *Star Trek* is number one, followed by *Leave It to Beaver, M*A*S*H,* and the Sergeant Bilko show. But, as Couch Potatoes are quick to point out, they are none too choosy about what they watch.

After the television set, a Couch Potato's best friend is a nearby toaster oven, according to Chef Aldo, author of a column called "The Station Break Gourmet." Endeavoring to explode the myth that Couch Potatoes subsist on pre-packaged junk food, Aldo offers a recipe for *quesadillas mole,* a south-of-the-border treat of tortillas stuffed with melted Mars bars. Cooking time, no doubt, is less than a commercial minute.

More useful information comes from Davenport H. Spudd, who writes the advice column. "Amazed in Ohio" asks Spudd's opinion of interactive television. "I don't like it," Spudd says. "If you're going to have to respond to your TV, you might as well unplug it and go out and cultivate friendships, or read a book or something."

To judge from *The Tuber's Voice* mailbag, Couch Potatoes are predominantly male, and may even be sexist. Women join an auxiliary, the Couch Tomatoes, and are responsible for preparing snacks, locating the *TV Guide,* and adjusting the vertical hold. Dr. Spudd (a.k.a. Jack Mingo, a West Coast school teacher) explains that many CP elders cling to the doctrine of "Zenith envy," which holds that women are incapable of the perfect viewing experience. The sex barriers are breaking down, however, and some Tomatoes have recently been promoted to full Potato status.

If you recognize in yourself Couch Potato tendencies, the group can be contacted by writing: Rt. 1, Box 327, Dixon, California, 95620. *The Tuber's Voice* costs $1 an issue. The second issue is underway, but don't hold your breath: Couch Potatoes only work on it during commercials.

M.P.

Bolt from the Blue

ONE OF THE WONDERS of the new electronic age is that it has taught the National Association of Broadcasters the meaning of *the public interest.* The industry lobby has a long history of insisting that the phrase has no meaning at all. Whenever a broadcaster, or the industry itself, is called down for a violation of the pledge on which television and radio licenses are granted — the pledge to serve the public interest — the NAB responds indignantly that the phrase is too abstruse to define. In its view, broadcasters serve the public interest merely by existing.

In the last few months, however, the NAB has seen the light and become a champion of the public interest. The bolt hit on the day the Federal Communications Commission voted a go-ahead for direct-broadcast satellites (DBS), a technology that will beam television signals to small dish antennas mounted on rooftops or window ledges. This means television can be delivered over the air, without going through the transmitter of a local station.

After the commission's vote, the NAB issued an angry statement of protest. It said, "In an effort to embrace the interests of the marketplace by authorizing DBS, the FCC has abandoned the interest of the public."

It then spelled out *the interest of the public.* "DBS," it noted, "will hoard the significant amount of 12-gigahertz spectrum space, leaving little for the current users, such as health-care, public-safety, and educational organizations. It will impair the growth of rural broadcast service, and stifle the development of high-definition televi-

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Bravo to

David Davis

Executive Director
"American Playhouse"

and all the individuals, institutions,
and Public Television stations involved in
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ARCO
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sion.'' The elusive definition came suddenly into focus: The public interest has something to do with the well-being of society — education, health care, public safety.

What the NAB statement meant, of course, is that the public interest is best served when broadcasters are protected from new competitors. But it reveals that the association has acquired, in a belated epiphany, a true sense of what the public interest is all about and cannot raise again the old argument of meaninglessness without looking ridiculous.

L.B.

Poor Man's Television

THE RUSH to get into low-power television says quite a lot about (1) the American entrepreneurial spirit and (2) the hopes of minorities to gain a piece of the television action. It also reveals the naïveté of people trying to get in on the telecommunications revolution in a small way. For despite appearances, low-power television (LPTV) is not the little version of big television.

When the Federal Communications Commission, during the Carter Administration, designated a new kind of broadcast station that would send out a television signal with a reach of ten to fifteen miles on an unused channel, it was motivated by a wish to increase competition for broadcasters and give members of minority groups the opportunity to become owners of stations.

LPTV is poor man's television, relatively speaking. Modeled on the old translator stations that carry urban transmissions to rural areas, low-power installations can be built for a few hundred thousand dollars and can cover either a group of small towns or a section of a city. There could be a station for Harlem, for example, and one serving Beverly Hills and Bel Air. The theory is that stations operating on low wattage can be inserted onto the UHF and VHF bands without disrupting the signals of full-power stations occupying the same channels in nearby cities. All told, close to 4,000 low-power frequencies are available around the country. Overnight some 6,500 applications were filed for them. Because of the deluge, the FCC had to cut off new bids last April.

Now the FCC has begun granting low-power licenses, but in stages — first to the communities that fall so far beyond the range of the full-power stations that they receive only a single over-the-air station or none at all. These LPTVs may fare best of all — so well, in fact, that they could feed the false hopes of the next group to win licenses.

For there is a fatal hitch to low-power television: It does not come under the FCC's ''must carry'' rules for cable. These rules require cable systems to provide channels for all television stations licensed within thirty-five miles of their communities, and all stations whose over-the-air signals are significantly viewed in the area. ''Significantly viewed'' eliminates, at least for now, the LPTV outlets. What this means to the new, short-distance stations is that they cannot be received on any set that is hooked up to cable. Unlike the big television stations, which can come into homes either over the air or on the cable, the LPTVs can only be received off the air on television sets with rabbit-ear or old-fashioned rooftop antennas. If a cable subscriber wants to watch a low-power broadcast, he will have to disconnect his cable and reconnect an antenna. LPTV coverage, already limited by low wattage, is restricted further by this lack of entree to cable homes. These are devastating handicaps in communities saturated with cable.

Moreover, low-power stations are almost forced by commercial exigencies to specialize in pay television, which somewhat goes against the original idea. And in doing this, LPTVs will have to compete with larger stations offering subscription services, as well as with the pay-cable networks. Thus poor man's television is contrived to keep poor men poor.

L.B.

Don't Feed the Set

SOMEBODY has finally done the three-martini lunch one better. Thanks to a California computer-software company dedicated to tranquilizing harried office workers, future stress-reducing liquids may contain guppies instead of olives.

Fish, it seems, create a calming environment. After learning about experiments at the University of Pennsylvania that detailed this revelation scientifically, the Candle Corporation in Los Angeles decided to put the finding to use. The result is *Fish Video One*, an hour-long video tape that brings tropical fish — and the sound of bubbles in an aquarium — to the workplace. The tape simply pops into any video-cassette recorder, and before your eyes, lifelike, appears the inside of an aquarium — fish, seaweed, blue water, and all.

Fish Video One is meant to be a salutary accompaniment to the bustle of a lunchroom, conference room, or computer center. According to Candle's Wade Evans, the production crew found the video tape much more relaxing than a real fish tank. ''It seems that the video tape creates a rapport with the fish through the use of two cameras dissolving back and forth at different angles,'' Evans notes.

Candle, which now hopes to do for clouds, fire, and waves what it's done for fish, sees its $35 software product as a logical means of reducing tension — not only for executives, but for politicians, baseball players, and just about anybody whose profession demands a cool head in hot times. The only thing Candle hasn't figured out yet is how to get these fast-paced achievers to sit still in front of a screen-full of fish for an entire hour.

G.M.H.

The News That's Fit

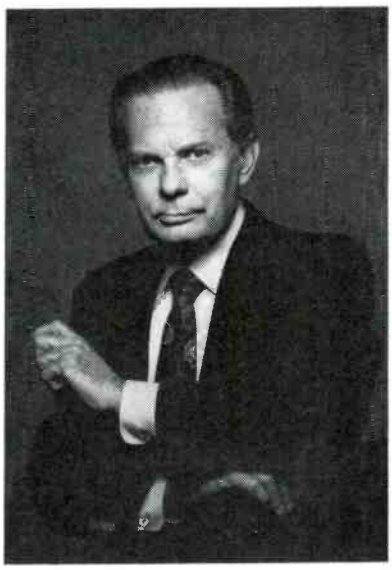
THE POTENTIAL for new communications technologies to increase diversity of expression was dramatically illustrated with the disarmament rally in New York City this summer. The demonstration was covered live by a group of independent producers working with Boulder, Colorado's public television station, KBDI. For $1,000 they purchased three hours of spare time on one of PBS's satellite transponders and used it, as anyone can, to create an instant

They each bring you something unique. Together, they bring you the world.

Uniquely qualified to bring you the world.

ABC NEWS abc

Frank Reynolds—*Washington* "People have a right to expect that you're telling them the truth as you see it, as you understand it. So, for me it's a responsibility and a joy at the same time."

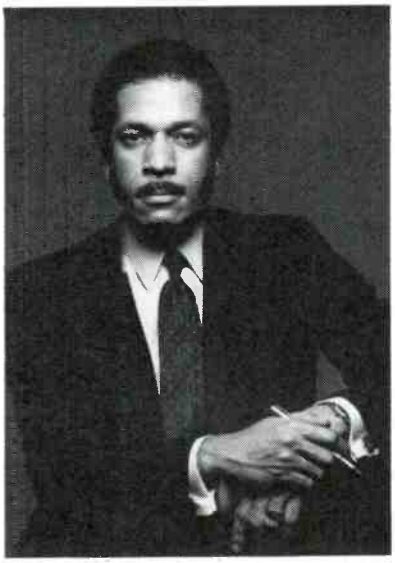


David Brinkley "My new job with ABC News fits me perfectly. It allows me to use whatever abilities and experience I have acquired from all my years in television. The requirements are exactly those that I am able to fill."

Ted Koppel "I'm really one big, exposed nerve on 'Nightline.' I'm conscious of every sound, of what the people are saying, the expressions on their faces ... it's a very, live half hour."

Peter Jennings—*London* "We must understand one another. To learn how people in the rest of the world see themselves, and to try and convey that home to Americans is a challenge."

Barbara Walters "Curiosity gives me courage. To me, the most important question is not the first, but the second. And it's usually *why*. Why did you? Why didn't you? Why can't you?"



Max Robinson—*Chicago* "It is our job to provide a perspective on people. And, in the heart of America, you can hear people's voices with a special clarity."

ABC News is "...the most aggressive and innovative news organization in television."
—*NEW YORK* MAGAZINE

television network. Fourteen of the 280 PBS affiliates preempted their regular Saturday schedules for the live coverage.

The New York Times, normally a strong advocate of free expression, attacked the program in an editorial as "loaded news." The interviewers, it complained, were guilty of "bias and amateurism." Though the *Times* conceded that the faults were "more sins of amateurism than manipulation," it feared that "they nonetheless pollute public confidence" in journalism.

The occasional insipidity of the reporting, however, was hardly the most significant aspect of the broadcast. Far from being an embarrassment, it attested to the importance of public television. For the rally was the largest and most pluralistic political gathering in American history — three-quarters of a million people converging on Central Park to call for a freeze on nuclear weapons. By any standard, this was a major news story, yet no commercial network was disposed to give it continuous live coverage.

If the telecast failed to measure up to the valued traditions of broadcast news, it was precisely because it was not conventional broadcast news — many of those responsible were not professionals. Its purpose was to bring the rally into the homes of those who could not attend. With most of the work done by volunteers, the entire three-hour telecast was produced for less than $10,000. The diversity of expression that the new technologies make possible is meant to include amateurs as well as professionals. One doubts *The New York Times* would make free speech the exclusive right of professionals.

A more important question than the lack of journalistic detachment by the people working on the broadcast was the lack of interest in the event by other broadcast organizations. For if the independent producers, KBDI, and the Washington-based Public Interest Video Network (which arranged the satellite distribution), had not taken the initiative, the Saturday of the rally would have been a business-as-usual day on television.

Instead, there were no interruptions for commercials when a Hiroshima survivor told the audience that "even those who survived had to live wandering between life and death." She began to chant, "No more Hiroshima, no more Nagasaki," as thousands of people rose to applaud her. It was a stirring scene.

In the end, the question raised by what some considered a questionable broadcast boils down to this: Does conveying that scene live represent the promise of new technologies, or the threat they pose?

M.S.

1001 Ways to Look at Television

VIDEO ART, if people even notice it at all, has a tiny claim indeed on the public eye. That claim was strengthened immeasurably when New York's Whitney Museum of American Art recently mounted a two-month-long retrospective of the work of Nam June Paik. It was the first such exhibit held by a major American museum.

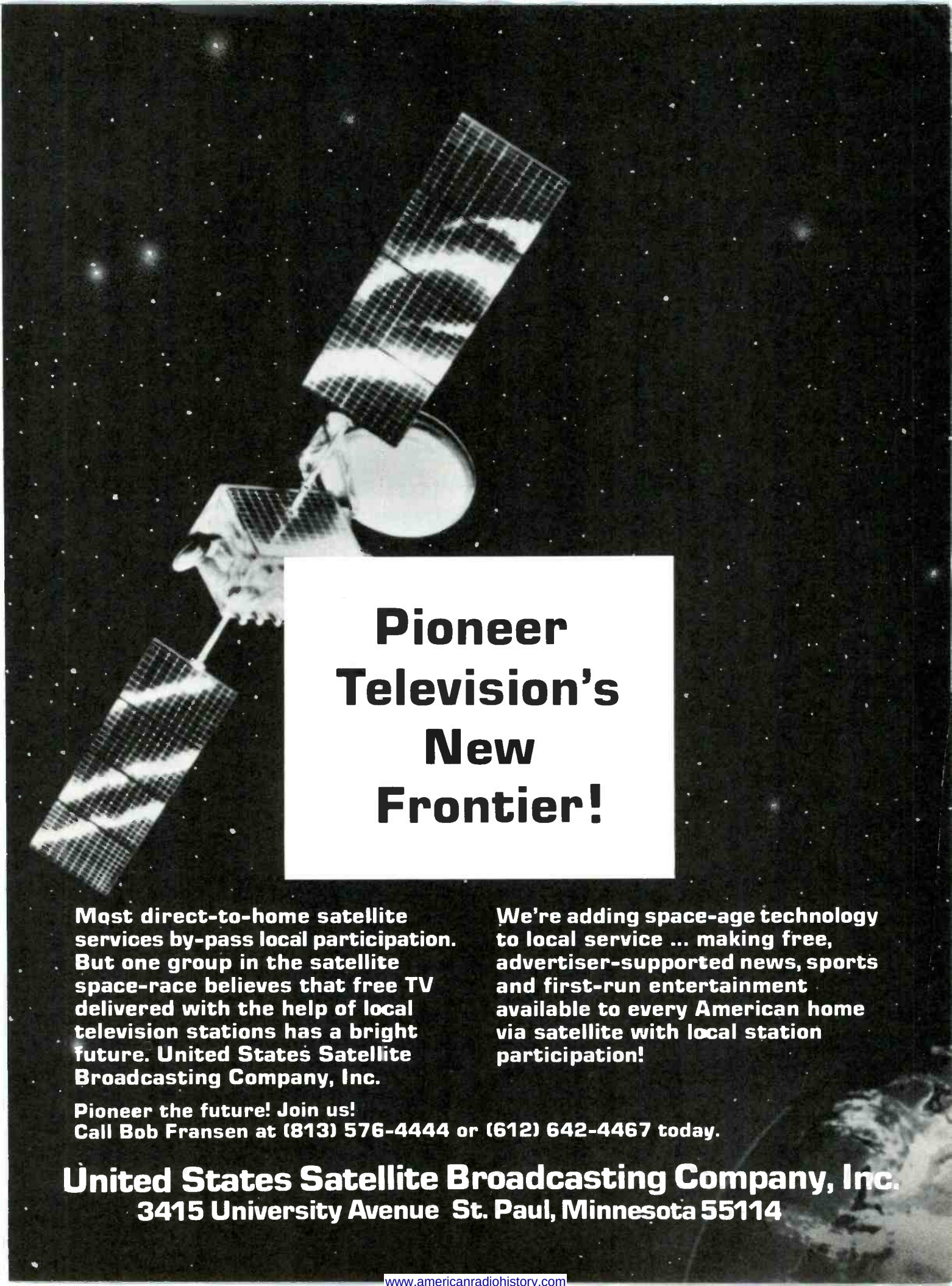
The show was a treat. One step off the Whitney's massive elevators into its fourth-floor gallery and the visitor confronted the mesmerizing sight of fifteen aquariums at eye level, glowing in the dark, their tiny fish flitting in front of fifteen television monitors that blinked outsized close-ups of goldfish in hot pinks and oranges. More tapes flashed down from the thirty-three sets suspended from the ceiling of another room, sixteen feet off the ground; visitors could lie back on floor pads and give themselves over to undulating images of skyscrapers, Merce Cunningham dancing, plumes of jet smoke, and still more fish — a study in peripheral vision. Everywhere another pun on television jumped out: A camera aimed at a window across the street offered a live picture even though the window itself was in full view; a candle burned in a television set deprived of its tube (Paik calls this one "the TV set that never breaks down"). By the time a visitor had wended his way past the statue of Buddha contemplating his image on a television screen, and had arrived at the tower of forty television sets — from giant consoles to baby-sized portables, all piled in a pyramid pulsing green-and-pink hockey players to "Devil with a Blue Dress On" — he may not have become a schooled devotee of video art, but chances were good he'd smiled more than once.

Most of the seventy-three thousand visitors to the show knew little of the fifty-year-old Paik's background in the more inaccessible regions of the avant garde. Born in Korea and trained in twentieth-century music, Paik traveled in his youth to Europe, where he came under the sway of John Cage; he began a ferocious involvement with the kind of musical composition that involved, for instance, the hurling of pianos before live audiences. He turned his attention to television in 1963. Ironically, the principles of Cage that bring cacophony to music bring only improvement to television.

In fact, it's hard to imagine an aspect of television that Paik has not exposed, manipulated, or joked with: Television can be live; it can be on tape; it can show a line — horizontal, vertical, diagonal — or a simple sphere that looks remarkably like a pale moon (as in "Moon is the Oldest TV"); sound can create a video image, or a magnet distort it (the two underlying principles of the video synthesizer); a television can be burnt, buried, or boarded up; it can be very, very small, as was the miniature statue of Rodin's "The Thinker" musing over Sony's new, two-inch "flat" set, or it can fill a room, as did the laser video image, so precise it can be split into 225 images and projected onto four walls. And although the little Sony and the laser room represent the latest in technology, Paik retains a Buddhist's respect for the ravages of function: He leaves his televisions battered, out-of-date, their innards exposed.

The retrospective travels to Chicago's Institute for Contemporary Arts in September.

JULIE TALEN



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Computer Camps:
BASIC Training for Kids

IN THE OLD, ROLLING POCONOS, on Main Street in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, passersby smile, nod their greetings, stop to tell a newcomer the time — as if time had stood still for them the last thirty years. It's an idyllic setting, their town, but an anachronistic one for a computer camp.

At two on a Friday afternoon, the computer rooms on the second floor of Stroud Hall, at East Stroudsburg Community College, strangely evoke an insect colony. Dozens of children wearing brilliant green t-shirts emblazoned with "ATARI" sit, slouch, or stand in small groups before buzzing, humming, clicking keyboards and screens.

Some clutch smudged sheets of graph paper asnarl in points and intersecting lines, frowning at the keyboard as they laboriously tap in the list of coded instructions that will bring their diagrams to the screen. Others, taking a break, delight in summoning up a half-finished image — the U.S. Space Shuttle minus one wing, the Starship Enterprise, one end colored in.

They call out to each other, run across the room to hear a computer's rendition of the *Star Wars* theme that a friend has spent hours perfecting. "What color should my background be?" shouts one girl to a counselor across the room. Other kids crowd around her creation, a foot-high, block-shaped Atari logo.

Atari is the first computer company to sponsor its own camp. Ostensibly for kids from nine to eighteen, the Stroudsburg camp's eighty-five students (nine of them girls) are almost all between the ages of ten and thirteen. At $1,580 for a four-week session, the Atari camps — in Asheville, North Carolina and San Diego, California as well as Pennsylvania — have obviously enrolled the children of the well-to-do, children who are learning the brand name to look for when they grow up and buy electronics equipment.

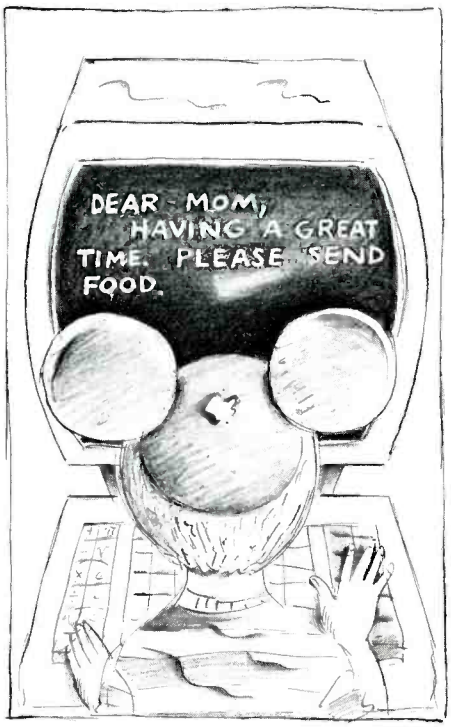

Illustration by Laura Cornell

But Atari is achieving more than that. As chief instructor Tony Pellechio puts it, "These kids are young — their minds are like sponges. They can still learn that the computer is a tool, helpless without instructions. Older people can't learn this stuff so readily. But for the young ones, it can all be fun." As the computer's importance increases in the next decades, and as its uses multiply, the people who gain power in society will be those trained from youth to understand and use the new technology.

The designers of the camp's curriculum obviously had this fact in mind. The work is appealing, and, importantly, the kids don't get too big a daily dose of it. They spend an hour-and-a-half, morning and afternoon, in classroom instruction, and in the evening are given a free period to play any computer game that takes their fancy — and there are scores: "Conversational French," "Basketball," "Text Wizard" . . .

Regular camp-type activities — arts and crafts, swimming, etc. — fill out the day. And at night the campers get the real treatment: lessons in ethics, or "values clarification." Pellechio explains: "We discuss whether they think it's right or not to steal somebody else's program, or whether they should use their knowledge to break into the school's computer and raise their grades." He allows that these are "very heavy" subjects. "But these kids have to start thinking creatively about this as early as they can."

The kids who don't have access to camps such as these present yet another moral question — one that Atari seems aware of. "You should see our camp down in Washington, D.C.," says Pellechio. "It's for underprivileged kids — mostly black. They just come during the day."

The effort seems commendable — until a discussion over dinner in the camp cafeteria makes one feel the need of a little more than one pilot project for the poor. "Eighteen states already require some degree of computer literacy from their graduating seniors," an Atari official says hopefully. This will help equalize things, he adds — interest more females in computers and expose greater numbers of underprivileged children to them.

But a counselor across the table has a different story to tell. A junior-high administrator in New York's South Bronx for almost twenty years, he knows firsthand of the high dropout rate — especially for his charges, the pregnant students. They almost never come back, he says.

"How can you keep them in school, let alone teach them this computer stuff?"

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The Ouster in Gloucester

Why the FCC was right to lift the FM underdog's license

by John Sedgwick

ALTHOUGH HAMPERED by arthritis, kidney troubles, diabetes, and a bum knee, sixty-two-year-old Simon Geller has been broadcasting all-classical music at his one-man station — WVCA-FM in Gloucester, Massachusetts — fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, for the last eighteen years. If the Federal Communications Commission has its way, however, Geller won't be sending Bach, Dvorak, and Bruckner out over the airwaves much longer. Citing his failure to broadcast sufficient public-interest programming, the commission voted four-to-two to take away Geller's license and give it to a well-financed media group called Grandbanke.

Viewed as particularly distasteful considering the Reagan Administration's avowed goals of deregulation, the decision has produced yelps of protest across the country. Indeed, some even suspect that the FCC sided with Goliath against David in this case precisely to mobilize public opinion against such regulations and force Congress to repeal them.

Swelling with indignation against such callous treatment of a solitary radio operator, I made the trip to Gloucester recently to see for myself what all the fuss was about. After my visit, I felt differently: Whatever its motivation in lifting Geller's license, the FCC had a point.

Geller's little WVCA-FM seems an unlikely subject for a national furor. It's located below street level in a former bank — the vault has been converted to a supply closet — behind an unmarked door on a side street in this once-thriving fishing town. "All I ever see looking out the window is legs," says Geller, who also lives on the premises. A sink, hot plate, and refrigerator stand a few steps away from the microphone, turntable, transmitter, and four dusty tape decks that comprise the sum total of his broadcasting operation. An unmade bed off in the corner completes the domestic appointments.

Simon Geller at WVCA-FM, the classical music station he has run for 18 years.

A career broadcaster, Geller moved to Gloucester in 1964, when, as he says, "I decided to pick the biggest town outside of a metropolitan area on the East Coast that had no radio. And this was it." Although he started out with four employees, tight money forced him to let them all go within three years.

One of only three commercial stations in New England to offer more than 50 percent classical music, WVCA now limps along with nine advertisers, including three banks, a candy store, and a piano tuner. Geller calculates that his salary last year amounted to 58 cents an hour. He subsists mainly on contributions — $12,000 last year from about five hundred donors. And, thanks to the publicity surrounding his FCC troubles, the money continues to flow in.

Lured by the potential value of the station, estimated at between half a million and a million dollars, Grandbanke first filed for Geller's license when it came up for renewal in 1975. The company's major shareholder is Edward Mattar, the possessor of a radio station in Winchendon, Massachusetts; Josiah Spaulding, a former Massachusetts Republican Party chairman and owner of a station in Montpelier, Vermont, also has an interest. Grandbanke planned to dilute Geller's all-symphonic program and offer a little bit of everything: rock, jazz, top forty, and symphonic (this last divvied up into twenty-minute bursts), along with public-interest programming for local Italian and Portuguese communities. The company also planned to beef up the signal to reach more than eight times Geller's audience of 43,000, and to expand the station's broadcast day from fourteen hours to practically around the clock. Despite all these plums, FCC administrative law judge John Corlin declared in 1978 that Geller's license should be renewed. But Grandbanke appealed the decision and this year the FCC voted in its favor.

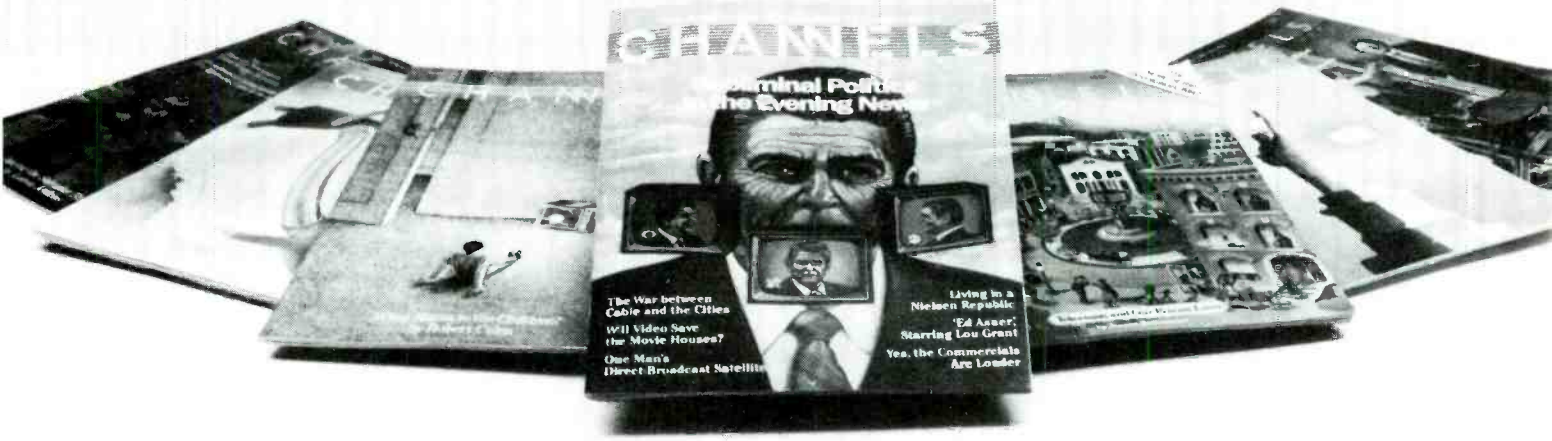
In their decision, the commissioners noted that whatever Geller deserved for promoting "diversification" of station ownership and for "integration" of ownership with management — two goals of the FCC regulatory process — those gains were offset by Grandbanke's promises of a larger audience and extended broadcast hours. The scales were decisively tipped in Grandbanke's favor on the issue of news, public affairs, and other non-entertainment programming. Grandbanke planned to dedicate 28.7 percent of its broadcast day to such good works; Geller offered one-half of one percent.

Geller feels the FCC doesn't understand his position. "How can I hire somebody to do the public-interest broadcasting they want," he asks, "with the kind of money I make? Last year I had a taxable income of $3,000." He frankly doubts that the public is really interested in so-called public-interest programming. "I used to do a local talk program and a show on job prospects," he says. "I had everything any station had, but it didn't bring me any advertising."

Geller's lawyer at the public-interest Capital Legal Foundation, Anthony Murry, finds the FCC's decision singularly high-handed. He notes that Gloucester has its own newspaper and pulls in a number of outside radio and television stations for breaking news and

John Sedgwick lives in Boston and is the author of Night Vision, *to be published in October by Simon and Schuster.*

A NEW VISION OF TELEVISION



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BC209

public-affairs shows, and he observes that no one in Gloucester had ever complained about Geller's programming. "The people of Gloucester are happy with his service," Murry sums up, "but here you have the seven commissioners saying to them, 'We know better, and Geller has to fulfill needs you don't even know you have.' It's classic, paternalistic government."

Speaking for the FCC, however, Steven Harris, special assistant to the general counsel, says that in Geller v. Grandbanke the commission was merely applying established FCC standards for a "comparative renewal" — and that, head to head, Geller's one-man show was found wanting. "We're not trying to close down the small operations," he explains. "But we feel that, as the only broadcast outlet in Gloucester, Geller has a responsibility to serve the community's needs and interests. And there's very little evidence he made much of an effort to do that."

For reasons quite separate from the hallowed ideal of public-interest broadcasting, the FCC has stumbled onto the right decision in the matter of Geller v. Grandbanke. Radio stations are precious, and Simon Geller is wasting his. There isn't much evidence to suggest that Grandbanke will do any better, of course, but it would be hard put to do worse, for Geller is hardly doing anything at all. His devotion to classical music seems laudable — until you find out how he expresses it. He's got all his programming recorded on thirty-seven twelve-hour tapes, holding most of the 1,400 records in his collection, which he has been playing over and over since April of 1981 and has no plans to change. Because he can't afford the necessary licenses, he's restricted from playing anything composed after 1909, the year of the international copyright law. He juggles the tapes a bit so that his evening audience (the bulk of his listeners) doesn't hear the same music again for two months. Since his comments introducing each composition — Geller reads the information off the record labels — are also recorded on the tapes, there isn't much for Geller to do all day except read his mail and look out the window. He broadcasts live twice a day at most, for a few minutes each time, generally to thank his donors. He confesses to some boredom at "being cooped up in here all day." One has to think that the boredom must extend to his listeners. ■

"Geller was not meeting his responsibilities."

Television's Way with Words

English not spoken here

by Edwin Newman

I have, while watching television, recently learned the following:

Zest soap, by its own admission, "lathers up pretty good." You can, therefore, wash pretty good with it.

A man who went into the Washington Monument with a gun was "successfully persuaded to come out." Successful persuasion is more effective than unsuccessful persuasion.

Heavyweight fighter Gerry Cooney has been "faithful to his destiny." This was revealed by HBO and must have come as a relief to those who feared that Cooney's devotion to his destiny was flagging and that he thought he could get away from it. While clinging to his destiny, by the way, Cooney fought Larry Holmes in "a twenty-square-foot ring," meaning that it was five feet by four feet, or ten by two, or possibly twenty by one, which would have made for a shorter fight.

The Democrats charged that, thanks to Republican budget plans, "the poor are again being abandoned at the expense of the military." *The CBS Evening News* reported this at the expense of the Democrats, who had charged approximately the opposite.

These are small matters, I suppose, but they are representative of the language on television news and sports programs and in the commercials that pay for them. It is a language often incorrect, often relying on "journalese," and sometimes completely illogical.

The journalese is everywhere: President Reagan made "a major speech" in which "he blasted the Russians." Beirut is the "beleaguered capital" of a "war-torn" or "embattled" or "war-shattered" country. Israel is "the Jewish state," of which Menachem Begin is "the Jewish leader." The United Nations is "the world body." Oh yes — "awesome," "perception," and "historic." Also "address,"

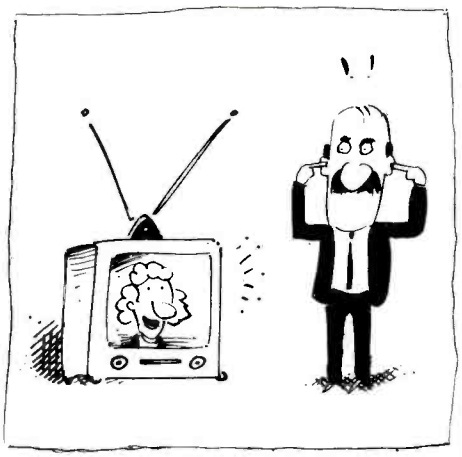


Illustration by Patrick McDonnell

"vowed," "officials," and "controversial." Let us say that a perception, awesome in its dimensions, was addressed by officials who vowed something, if possible something historic but at least controversial, leading to a bombshell development that caused a dramatic shakeup. That would be an ideal story, still more so if it began with what "sources said" was a "clash of perceptions," once known as a disagreement.

Here are some other gems, picked up in a short period of random viewing:

General Basilio Lami Dozo, commander of the Argentine Air Force, may be referred to as General Dozo (CNN) and may be reached in the Argentine capital, which is "Bwo-nos Air-ees" (CNN and almost everybody else).

More Spanish: Somebody — I wish I had written down his name — is "an affectionado of baseball."

More English: People in the real estate business are real-a-tors (CBS).

Still more English: If one takes sides in the Middle East, one is either pro-Israel or pro-Arabist (CBS), which means that one favors Israel or favors the specialized study of the Arabic language and culture.

A man called in by ABC News to say that last winter's snow and cold were bad for business was a "weather impact analyst."

"Despite demonstrations by PLO supporters," Menachem Begin made his scheduled speech to the Disarmament Conference of the United Nations. This non sequitur, of a kind one hears over and over again, was supplied by a CBS correspondent who seemed to think that because supporters of the PLO were demonstrating, Begin might not speak.

There are "pro- and anti-nuclear weapons supporters." If they are supporters, the pro isn't needed. If they are anti, they're not supporters.

Sugar Ray Leonard, according to HBO, is "the most popular athlete in the United States of any persuasion." Leonard's religion was not given.

Roberto Duran, facing the aforesaid Leonard of any persuasion, suffered (on HBO) "an ignomonious defeat."

During a fire, flames "bellowed from the upper floors." There was no word on what they told the local correspondent who reported this.

At the beginning of John Hinckley's trial, CBS reported that the outcome "will turn on whether or not he was sane or insane" at the time he shot President Reagan. A remarkable double redundancy, that. In any case, Hinckley undoubtedly was sane or insane at that time. Everybody was.

When President Reagan made known Alexander Haig's resignation as Secretary of State, this was "a major announcement."

In an Atari commercial, a young man, faintly astonished, tells a young woman, "You did better than me." Perhaps he should have gone all the way: "You did better than me did."

I have been urged while watching to "Make it a good day," and to "Have a good day," a good evening, a *good* evening, a good night, and a good week, and to enjoy my Saturday morning. Plus I got "Be well" and "Enjoy," with no time limit attached. I wish I could enjoy. The language of television doesn't much help.

One thing more: Could the various anchors stop telling one another the news, as in "And in the Gulf of Oman, Jim," and tell it to the viewers, instead? ■

Edwin Newman is a correspondent for NBC News and author of A Civil Tongue.

QUO VIDEO

International News

WORLD television takes a major step forward this fall when American news begins crossing the Pacific on a regular basis. In conjunction with the Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT), Australia's Seven Network plans to transmit both NBC News and Cable News Network broadcasts live to Australians. And the country's Nine Network has teamed with CBS Broadcast International to provide direct satellite broadcasts of CBS News programs.

Though initial plans call only for news to travel Down Under, the satellite connections might eventually be used to provide entertainment as well.

The Electric Want-Ad

IT's not quite snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, but a lot of small and medium-sized newspapers have begun parlaying their communications resources into successful local cable-television services.

The newspapers transmit classified ads on local cable systems, which they usually operate twenty-four hours a day, charging their regular newspaper classified advertisers an extra fee for the added exposure. Some channels broadcast each classified ad as often as sixty times a day, typically adding a 50 cent surcharge to the initial $5-to-$10 cost of a four-day newspaper classified.

The idea was first implemented about two years ago by *The Yuma Sun*. It was natural, since newspapers enjoy a monopoly on classifieds to begin with. Most papers have found cable profits develop handsomely, once the initial investment — leasing the channel and obtaining the equipment — has been made. Explained Blake DeWitt, advertising director at R/G Vision, the *Arizona Republic/Phoenix Gazette* cable channel: "Once a system is interfaced, it just takes about a half-hour per day to update, and a single extra key stroke [by a newspaper classified ad operator]. There's absolutely no need to increase your personnel."

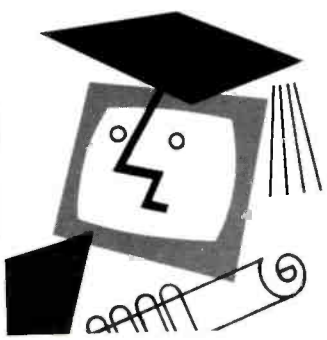
There is a minor hitch: Cable classifieds, unlike newspaper ads, cannot be circled or clipped by interested readers. Cable viewers have to wade through an entire classified "loop" — often six hours or more.

But Video Data Systems of Hauppauge, Long Island is changing all that. Eventually the ads will be grouped according to subject.

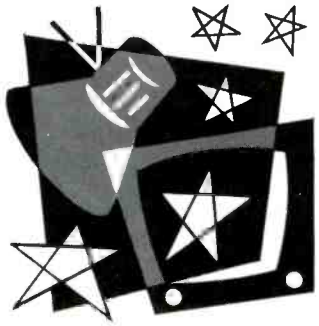
Careers in Cable

NINE students recently graduated from the University of Cincinnati with this country's first degrees in cable management. All of them landed jobs with cable companies; many had them lined up before graduation.

Cincinnati's program is the only one in America that prepares students for middle-management positions in the cable industries. It combines a basic business curriculum with courses on cable technology, law, and operations.



The program, set to embark on its third year, currently has more than fifty students. Donald Langley, director of the two-year cable course, predicts that by 1990 the industry will employ another 200,000 people.



Hype Illustrated

IF home-video technologies threaten to put movie theaters out of business, you wouldn't know it from the Hollywood studios' latest promotional gimmick: the electronic press kit, a videotaped collection of film clips and interviews with the stars, producers, and directors of a new film.

Originally shipped one by one to television stations at great expense, the electronic kits are now also delivered by satellite, at somewhat lower cost: Studios produce a single broadcast-quality tape that local stations can record off the satellite for use at their convenience.

(Some studios still prefer to deliver the electronic kits by conventional means, because not every television station has a dish capable of receiving the satellite feed, and not every station manager wants to take the trouble of recording it.)

Electronic press kits have been used to promote *E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial; Conan the Barbarian; Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid; Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* and *Rocky III*. Since they make it easy for local stations to put stars on their programs, the kits are much in demand. Universal Studios has reportedly invested $1 million to prepare ten new kits for upcoming films.

Illustrations by Anders Wenngren

One good season deserves another.

Last season, as the one before, the number one choice of television viewers was CBS. This coming fall we'll

Private Benjamin starring Oscar-winner Goldie Hawn. First time on network television.

be continuing our winning ways, with a full roster of programs

Raging Bull: Robert DeNiro in his Oscar-winning role. First time on network television.

America loves best. The range is boundless, the rewards infinite.

60 Minutes: Bradley, Reasoner, Safer and Wallace in America's most popular news series.

Exciting new series. Returning favorites, such as "Dallas," "60 Minutes" and "M*A*S*H," in its 11th and final season. Specials that run the gamut from the large-scale magnificence of "The Blue and The Gray" to the

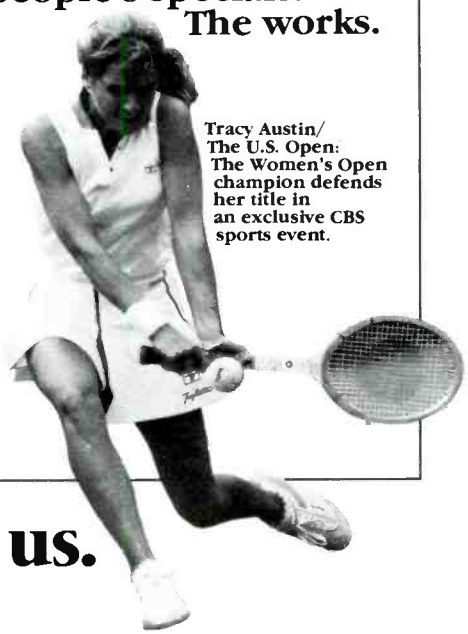
The Blue and The Gray: Gregory Peck as Abraham Lincoln in Bruce Catton's stirring Civil War epic.

Charlie Brown Specials: The PEANUTS® gang continues to charm young and old alike.

intimate delights of "Charlie Brown."

M*A*S*H: The 4077th final season will be climaxed by a special two-hour farewell episode.

Blockbuster movies. News. Sports. Documentaries. Young people's specials. The works.



Tracy Austin/ The U.S. Open: The Women's Open champion defends her title in an exclusive CBS sports event.

Plan to winter with us.

CBS

We promise you one great moment after another.

Source: Audience estimates based on NTI AA Household Ratings, Monday-Saturday 8:00-11:00PM, Sunday 7:00-11:00PM, October 5, 1981-April 18, 1982. Subject to qualifications upon request.

Whose First Amendment Is It, Anyway?

by Les Brown

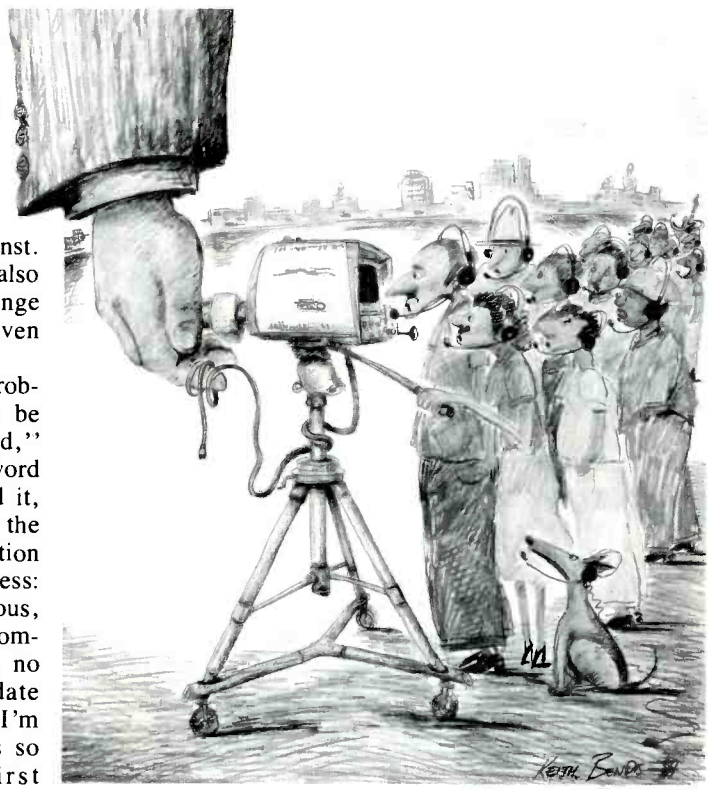


Illustration by Keith Bendis

TWO OR THREE administrations ago, a Federal Communications Commission official spoke with concern about all the people who feel wronged by television, dealt out of it or discriminated against. Not just the minorities, but also independent producers, fringe political candidates, and even certain advertisers.

"All the commission's problems with broadcasting can be summed up in a single word," he remarked to me. "The word is access." As he explained it, nearly every issue facing the FCC comes down to a question of one or another kind of access: ideological, political, religious, artistic, ethnic, racial, or commercial. "Broadcasting has no mechanism to accommodate these demands. That's why I'm so hopeful about cable. It's so well-attuned to the First Amendment," he said.

Others have also been hopeful, for reasons besides the opportunities cable affords for free expression. With its enormous channel capacity and interactive capability, the broadband wire can expand the social services of a community and contribute richly to its civic and cultural well-being. This is what has made cable the darling of intellectuals, futurists, urban planners, and social activists for more than a decade.

But in the real world there is quite a distance between cable's potential and the cable industry's own aspirations for the medium. And the evidence today is that a great many cable owners, perhaps a majority of them, have little interest in what cable can achieve as a positive social force. Having spent millions building their cable systems, these operators want a return in the fastest, surest way — which is to emulate conventional commercial television. One fact alone proves that this is where the money is: A single network — CBS — had greater revenues last year than the entire cable industry. So cable isn't interested just now in being the darling of anyone but the viewing masses.

This was most apparent at the cable industry's convention in Las Vegas last spring. A workshop on the strategies of programming local cable systems gave me the dizzying sense of having been there before. The session was pure television talk, laced with the familiar slogans of maximizing audiences and targeting for the choice young-adult demographics. The speakers, representing four cable companies ranging in size from small to very large, evaluated the satellite program services the way local television managers evaluate syndicated programs — for their cost efficiency and popularity with viewers. No one espoused a balanced schedule for all elements of the community or talked up the virtues of local origination or public access. The reason was clear: You simply can't make a buck on free speech.

I thought about the former FCC official and his misplaced hopes, and about the irony of cable exacerbating the First Amendment problems it was supposed to alleviate. For if cable is to be merely plain old television in more abundant form, the frustrations of the disinherited can only be magnified.

Ted Turner, cable's mercurial superstar, seems none too pleased himself with the direction his medium is taking. In a *Forbes* interview, he is quoted as saying: "Do you want to know what tomorrow's cable programming will be like? Then turn on your TV set now. They're one and the same."

Michael Fuchs, program chief of HBO, chided a group of reporters recently for writing about cable as a medium for specialized audiences. "Narrowcasting is not something we said we'd do. You people put narrowcasting into our vocabulary," Fuchs asserted. "We're after the mass audience."

Since cable wants to be television, television has had no trouble moving in on cable. It was not very long ago that cable operators and broadcasters were bitter adversaries, engaged in a propaganda war and battling before government for protective favors. But now the two industries have started running together, hand in hand. ABC and CBS have gotten heavily involved in cable programming during the last year, and the burgeoning field of cable software is overrun with current and former network television executives. Having invaded cable,

commercial television has permeated the medium with its value system and standards:

- The three all-news cable channels do newscasts exactly the way they're done in commercial television, even though these services aren't caught up in a ratings race.
- The USA Network has modeled itself on the established television networks in bidding for the same audiences, while The Entertainment Channel is selling a higher grade of network-style programming.
- Home Box Office and Showtime, the two leading pay-cable services, have taken to scheduling weekly series, soap operas, and mini-series, just like the commercial networks.

Cable is already so steeped in television that it has even begun to absorb the bad habits of the broadcast media: indifference to public service and community standards. Like television, cable has begun attacking its critics, calling them "elitist" for suggesting that the operators might pursue something more than ever-larger audiences. Like television, cable complains of being oppressed by its obligations as a public trustee. Broadcasting can get away with such arrogance, but cable is too young a medium to risk alienating the people who have built dreams on its remarkable technology.

Even so, the cable industry is going the limit and pushing hard now for legislation that would free it from virtually all regulatory constraints. In this pursuit, it is practicing a deception on the government. For while cable, in the everyday world, is doing its utmost to make itself in television's image, it portrays itself to Congress as something else — the electronic equivalent of the newspaper. What makes this a particularly brazen deception is that, unlike newspapers, which usually espouse some sort of local identity, almost half the cable systems in the country do no local programming at all.

"We in the cable industry must preserve, protect, and defend our basic First Amendment rights," says Thomas E. Wheeler, president of the National Cable Television Association, the industry's lobby. "We are telepublishers — we put electrons on the screen instead of ink on paper — but our function and our rights are parallel to [those of] the more traditional publishers."

Wheeler and the NCTA argue that local provisions for public access amount to government regulation of program content. The association takes exception also to the characterization of cable as a local monopoly, although in most situations, cable franchises are granted on an exclusive basis, so that residents of a municipality have only one choice of cable service — take it or leave it. The NCTA concedes that cable may be the only television wire in town, but it contends that this does not make it a monopoly because there are always other information and entertainment services available — broadcast television, radio, movies, newspapers, and pay-television purveyors.

In what seems more a threat than an argument, the NCTA says that the communities "would ultimately lose the most" from mandated access by municipal governments, because such rules might discourage investments in the construction of cable systems. "The community would thereby lose the new sources of information and entertainment that cable construction makes possible when cable systems are protected by the First Amendment," the association warns.

It is hard to muster sympathy for pleadings that hold such a selfish view of the First Amendment. The cable operator loves freedom of expression when it belongs to him exclusively but feels put upon when it is guaranteed to the people of his community. Yet, despite the transparency of the arguments and the lack of any justification for increasing the cable operator's control over information, the cable industry's push for legislation has found important adherents in Congress. In addition, cable has gained powerful support outside government — from, of all sources, its traditional rivals, the broadcasting and newspaper-publishing industries.

Broadcasters have been siding with cable in this effort on the theory that if one television technology is freed from regulatory shackles the other television technology will have to be freed as well. But why has print journalism lent its support in the legislative quest when newspapers already enjoy full protection under the First Amendment? Because newspapers increasingly are venturing into electronic publishing through the technology of videotext. Their worry is that the rules on fairness and equal political opportunity applying to broadcasters will be extended to them on the video screen.

Anyone who just arrived here from another country and didn't know anything about the First Amendment could be forgiven for mistaking it as a constitutional right to make money in communications. The media companies behave as though the founding fathers were handing out exclusive freedoms with the Bill of Rights and framed a special set of rights for people in the entertainment and journalism businesses.

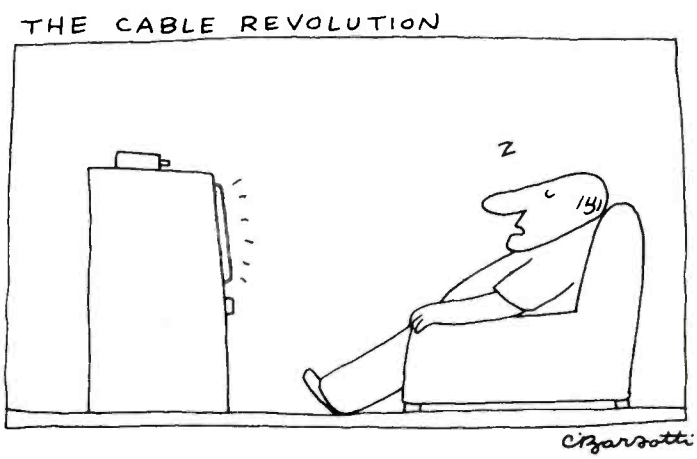
A contrasting view on this issue, expressed by FCC chairman Mark Fowler, appears on page 54.

The First Amendment, after all, was written for the entire American citizenry. It reads: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." This doesn't mean broadcast speakers in the first instance and newspaper editors in the second; it means, plain and simple, that all people have the right to speak and publish freely.

Broadcasters for years have tried to strike down regulation with the argument that Congress transgressed the First Amendment when it required radio and television to be licensed in the public interest and when it adopted the fairness and equal-time laws. Mark S. Fowler, chairman of the FCC, agrees with the broadcasters. Calling himself a strict constructionist, he reads the First Amendment's opening phrase with an emphasis that sounds the tocsin for the repeal of Equal Time and Fairness: "Congress shall make *no* law . . . *No* law."

In fact, Congress has made no law abridging the public's First Amendment rights. The laws it created are consistent with First Amendment goals and exist to preserve, in some limited measure, the public's right to free expression in a medium that otherwise affords no access. Similarly, the municipal regulation of cable and the mandating of access channels do not violate the First Amendment, as the cable industry insists, but rather uphold it.

Cable is uniquely equipped, among all media, to advance the ideal of free speech and create an open marketplace of ideas. And yet it is doing its utmost to be spared having to provide outlets for free speech — and doing it shamelessly in the name of the First Amendment. ■



Why the New Right Is All Wrong About Prime Time

BY WALTER KARP

Television's most popular shows celebrate America's traditional values

ACCORDING to a much-discussed book called *Post-Conservative America,* fascism will soon be menacing the United States, inflicted upon us by what author Kevin Phillips calls "populist lower-middle-class conservatism." This debased conservatism, he argues, manifests itself in hatred of the rich and the poor, in hunger for a Leader, in the belief that "it might be necessary to use force to restore the American way of life." This political force, as detected by Phillips, shows a marked proclivity for "cultural and moral traditionalism" and a sharp appetite for "nationalist pride and grandeur." Its political triumph will produce, he says, "a peculiarly American authoritarianism, apple-pie authoritarianism" — the bitter fruit of lower-middle-class America's jingoism, its disillusion with Reagan, and its lawless moral bigotry.

My first thought on reading Phillips's prognostication was that American conservatives have been predicting rabble-inspired tyrannies since July 4, 1776. My second thought was the rueful admission that this, in truth, is no happy time in America. Popular frustration, disillusion, and "traditionalist" reaction are not merely the bogeys of a timid elitist. They are real enough, so real that I decided to do what I had not done since Uncle Miltie was the king of video: sit down and watch attentively the ten or so most popular prime-time television series (soaps, sitcoms, mysteries) of the 1981-1982 season. If there was such a thing as "populist lower-middle-class conservatism," it seemed to me that nothing would reveal its nature more clearly than *Dallas, M*A*S*H, The Dukes of Hazzard,* et al. This is true because you cannot tell popular stories, and maintain their popular rank against stiff competition, unless you affirm with dogged devotion and perfect pitch the moral and political sentiments of millions upon millions of viewers, the bulk of whom Kevin Phillips would surely describe as "lower-middle-class." What makes most of the top dozen television dramas almost unbearably insipid is also what makes them an opinion poll incomparably more subtle than the clumsy questionnaires of the professional pollsters.

TAKE the quite complex issue of "moral traditionalism" that, to give Kevin Phillips his due, runs rampant through almost every hit show that I watched. In *One Day at a Time,* Mrs. Romano's daughter elopes to Las Vegas; in due course she is persuaded to return home for a "real wedding" that will give joy to grandma. Matrimonial ritual triumphs over footloose romance. In *Alice,* Mel Sharples, owner of the diner, decides to have his nose surgically improved. Lying in the hospital, however, he suddenly recalls that his uncomely, banana-shaped nose is just like his late father's. "It's a Sharples nose," says Mel in a sudden surge of pride. Cosmetic surgery is canceled as filial piety triumphs over personal vanity.

Moral and cultural traditionalism are ever victorious, but the main point, the politically significant point, is that they are never shown triumphing over any particular enemy. They are pitted against no faction, group, creed, or individual bent on subverting old-fashioned morality. Moreover, on at least half a dozen hit shows the prevailing moral conservatism is cast in a strikingly genial mode. This is done by pitting old-fashioned ways and precepts against modern-day social novelties. The main novelty in prime time is the irregular household. Alice is a divorcée with a teenage son; Mrs. Romano is a divorcée who raises a college-age daughter *and* a young boy who is not even a kinsman. Archie in *Archie Bunker's Place* is an aged widower who lives with a teenage niece and her female cousin. The family in *Too Close for Comfort* lives in two separate apartments in the same two-story house: the parents upstairs, the two daughters and their cousin below. In *Three's Company,* the household is extremely irregular, consisting of two nubile young women and a young man, linked at the outset by no ties of family, friendship, or sexual intimacy.

The irregular household is obviously a way of epitomizing a whole slew of social novelties that America has experienced during the past twenty turbulent years. What are the consequences? The answer is, there aren't any. The divided family in *Too Close for Comfort* suffers no real division at all. When the father reads his will aloud to the assembled household, everyone starts complaining just like any old-time, old-fashioned family would. Alice renounces her "big break" as a touring singer in order to raise her son properly. The household relationship in *Three's Company,* which consists chiefly of suppressed desires and unavowed affections, forces the three roommates into an endless succession of fibs and white lies. That a false position breeds falsity is the traditionalist moral principle of the program and the source of what little humor it generates.

The theme running through all these irregular-household shows is that, despite social novelty, the old moral verities always triumph, which is another way of saying that novelty and change are not so threatening after all. A century's worth of social thinkers and historians have been trying their best to persuade us that nothing ever remains the same, but the plain people of America, invincibly anti-intellectual, still believe that nothing important ever really changes. In this they would agree with Rudyard Kipling, who once said, "The gods of the copybook maxims always return." That confident faith is not the sort of debased and frightened traditionalism that sweeps tyrants into power.

Traditional precepts, moreover, must stand the test of experience. They are not adhered to slavishly, for Americans still possess the old, bumptious habits of freedom. The essential comedy of Archie Bunker, for example, consists in

Walter Karp's last Channels *article, "Subliminal Politics in the Evening News," appeared in the April/May issue.*

"What makes most of the top TV shows almost unbearably insipid is also what makes them an invaluable opinion poll."

his utter inability to distinguish between old-fashioned prejudice — "all boys is animals" — and old-fashioned common sense. Experience, come upon him unbidden, makes the distinction for him, or at any rate, for the viewers. In one fine episode Archie persuades his good friend and neighbor to accept as a lodger an ailing man who is patently deranged. The man is a Republican, a businessman, and an Elk — so Archie, always blinded by hand-me-down doctrines, is certain he's sound as a bell. After turning everyone's life into a nightmare, the wretched man dies right before the two friends' eyes. In the final scene Archie's friend grows maudlin thinking about his late lodger's dying without any family at hand. Archie, however, will have none of that. Old-fashioned common sense tells him that his pal's mournful pity is but self-pity ill-disguised, although he had to learn the hard way that an Elk can be a madman ill-disguised.

EXPERIENCE separates what is valuable and what is dross in the mish-mash of verities and follies that make up the cultural and moral tradition. In *One Day at a Time*, Schneider, the aging, amorous janitor, takes up with a twenty-two-year-old girl, much to the Romano family's dismay. Hoping to placate them, he begins spouting a half-dozen variations on that most common of popular American delusions: that aging is largely an illusion. "You're only as old as you feel," insists Schneider. "It's not the clock on the wall that counts. It's the clock inside your heart." It will not take long before life with a twenty-two-year-old girl teaches Schneider the painful truth that growing old, alas, is no illusion.

Since experience distinguishes what is true from what is false in the moral tradition, bigotry — the refusal to learn from experience — is looked upon as the very prince of follies, or worse. It does not protect the cultural and moral traditions. It weakens them. In the moral order affirmed by the prime-time hit shows (an order that can safely be called "populist lower-middle-class conservatism"), bigotry and traditionalism do not work hand in glove, as Kevin Phillips assumed. They appear as antagonists.

AN EPISODE of *The Love Boat* gave sharp form to this moral precept in the story of the identical twin sisters who make the cruise on a single ticket, each of them taking turns appearing in public. One sister is looking for romance. The other is an avowed misanthrope determined to despise and repel all men. In a word, she is a bigot; by any traditional moral reckoning, she is a moral subversive as well, for humans, we all know, were born to mate. What cure her are the comical consequences flowing from the heated affair that develops between her sister and the ship's doctor. Whenever he sees the man-hating twin taking her share of the cruise, he rushes forth and woos her ardently. Icy stares, pursed lips, rigid posture, harsh words — none of the devices this young lady uses to repel men can repel the doctor. He is puzzled, but persistent beyond anything the man-hating twin has ever had to cope with. In due course she embraces the doctor and abandons her life-blighting creed. Experience rescues tradition by stamping out the subversive power of bigotry.

The separation of traditionalism and bigotry may not seem, at first glance, especially profound or significant. Neither does the larger moral code of which that separation forms a conspicuous part. Indeed, the moral virtues that the prime-time hit shows affirm and celebrate are singularly unheroic. Honor, glory, self-sacrifice, renunciation, devotion to harsh duty, adherence to unpopular principle — these play almost no part in the moral world of the prime-time shows. The Duke boys in *The Dukes of Hazzard* valiantly foil the greedy schemes of Boss Hogg, but only to protect their family. Beyond that they seem to have no more public spirit than the village idiot. Thomas Magnum of *Magnum P.I.* is one of the few figures in the noble private eye tradition who is not represented as a shopworn Galahad tackling the world's corruption single-handed. On the contrary, he is the friend of a man so rich and powerful that the very mention of his name opens doors Sam Spade would have had to pry loose with a jimmy and Jim Rockford with a complicated lie.

The chief moral virtues celebrated in the prime-time hits are sweetly modest ones: tolerance, forgiveness ("we all make mistakes, don't we?"), helpfulness ("what are friends for?"), and kindliness. One episode of *Alice*, quite typical, was spent showing Alice letting down a teenage admirer as painlessly as possible. Half the hit shows on television depend for their popularity on an audience in love with kindliness, thoughtfulness, and decency. Whatever threatens these virtues — arrogance and self-importance, for example — is always fair game on prime time. Much of the moral charm of *M*A*S*H* lies in its utterly convincing demonstration that even in a wartime army, candor and kindness need never yield an inch to military hypocrisy, martial cant, and the arrogance of rank — or even military obedience, if it comes to that. Of "nationalist pride and grandeur" there is no sign whatever on the prime-time shows I watched. There's no grandeur of any kind.

It would be easy enough to deride a moral code so limited and undemanding that it makes neighborliness the highest good. It would be a mistake to do so, however, for the real significance of that code is not moral but political. It is the moral code of liberty and democracy; its object is to protect democracy and liberty from harm. The neighborly virtues that form the prime-time moral code — the willingness to help, the willingness to forgive, the determination to consider the other person's feelings — stand as a popular bulwark against tyranny. This is because a tyrant, as de Tocqueville long ago pointed out, does not care if his sub-

"It's easy to deride a moral code so limited that it makes neighborliness the highest good. But the real significance of this code is not moral but political."

jects hate him as long as they dislike each other. The great worth of the neighborly virtues is that they safeguard mutual respect, the thoughtful regard in which fellow citizens hold each other simply because they are fellow citizens. The great value of mutual respect is that it enables free people to act together in great public affairs and so foil the lawless designs of would-be tyrants and ruling cabals. Without such mutual respect, no constitution could safeguard our liberties.

That the televised moral code is deeply political the makers and viewers of prime-time television seem to understand clearly enough, though perhaps in a wordless, intuitive way. This is reflected in the two most striking features of the shows I watched: the determination to celebrate traditional morality without scoring off of a social enemy, and the emphatic insistence that bigotry is no friend of traditional morality. The explanation for this seems clear enough. We live in dark and frustrating times; we have lived through rapid and painful social changes. It is now, most of all, that mutual respect needs special protection. It is as if the great body of the American people were determined not to become the lawless bigots Kevin Phillips expects us to be. The moral code of prime-time television reflects the political determination not to lose the bulwark of our liberty.

BECAUSE it is a code of political morality, the prime-time moral code mirrors, too, the American people's enduring love of equality, which figured largely in almost every prime-time show I watched. Commonly it takes the form of equal relations between ostensible unequals: Mel and his waitresses; the Romanos and the janitor; The Harts and their factotum Max on *Hart to Hart;* the Duke boys and the Hazzard County powers; everyone on *M*A*S*H* regardless of rank. What levels the inequalities between employer and employee, master and servant, governor and governed, officer and enlisted man is, of course, the counterforce of equality deriving from citizenship.

In the moral code of prime time, egalitarianism is always a mark of goodness. The unforced, unfailing respect the Harts show to those poorer, weaker, and less lucky than they is clearly meant to be their signal virtue. To the viewers it gives welcome reassurance that the possession of every material blessing need not undercut the equality of citizens. To hate the rich as such forms no part of the prime-time moral code. Only when the very rich deny the fellowship of citizens do they bring moral odium on themselves. What marks Mrs. Channing of *Falcon Crest* as wicked is her arrogant assertion that family "tradition" takes precedence over mere, stupid "equality." To sneer at the Declaration of Independence is an act of intolerable impiety to the majority of "populist lower-middle-class conservatives"; such an attitude will never bring fascism in its train. The "neo-conservatives" who pretend that it will do not fear fascism, they merely hate equality. The same popular conservatism (as opposed to neo-conservatism) makes J.R. Ewing of *Dallas* America's favorite villain. He is inequality incarnate. Every time he unleashes his personal, lawless, and utterly irresponsible power, he dashes our ancient hopes for a republic of equals. Every time he destroys somebody's self-respect by reducing him to a hapless pawn, he does violence to the deepest meaning of equality in America.

THAT "all men are created equal" has never meant that all people are alike. The proposition is not refuted by noting that Mr. Jones is five inches taller than Mr. Smith. What it does mean, fundamentally, is that no one is ever entitled to reduce another to a mere means: No master can treat his servant as if he were only a servant; no government can treat the governed as if they merely performed social functions. How well Americans understand this (as the Reaganites are beginning to learn) is neatly attested by an episode of *The Love Boat* that offered three variants on the theme of equality violated by turning people into means. One subplot concerned a long-grieving widow who falls in love with an amiable professor the moment she sets foot on the ship. The second involves a penniless Lothario who persuades an oil heiress that he's a Riviera swell. The third concerns a young woman's determination to bear a genetically well-endowed child by seducing a handsome, healthy, intelligent pro football quarterback. The subplots thicken quickly. The heiress discovers that her glib suitor is a professional fortune hunter. The football star refuses to be reduced to a chromosome supplier. The professor discovers that the widow loves him because he resembles her late husband. All three have been reduced to means, their self-respect badly marred. Not until equality is established between each of the three pairs can happy endings ensue. Unless we recognize the requirements of equality, the whole system of mutual respect is menaced.

This is political understanding of no small order, although Americans possess it by the saving light of intuition, for on the face of it there is no reason why Americans should have any political understanding at all. We are systematically miseducated in our schools, taught that a citizen is a guy with a job, that the Gross National Product measures a republic's greatness. We are despised by our betters and viciously blamed for all that goes wrong. We are lied to by our leaders, day after day, decade after decade, without let or hindrance. We ought to be lost, cowed, utterly bewildered, but somehow we are not, at least not for long. As the prime-time shows prove, we always return to first principles — to liberty and equality and to the moral code of democracy, which preserves them and us from harm. Some day perhaps the light of intuition may flicker and fail, but not, I think, just yet. ■

INFORMATION: AMERICA'S NEW GLOBAL EMPIRE

BY HERBERT SCHILLER

A new international economic order is being created rapidly, unobtrusively, and, in this country at least, almost without journalistic attention. Dependent on the global flow of information and fueled by advances in communications technology, the development is encouraged by business and government leaders in the United States because they believe it carries hope for a revitalized economy. The emerging new alignment finds its justification and chief support in a single phrase that expresses a distinctly American idea: the free flow of information.

But America's enthusiasm is not shared by many other countries, particularly those of the Third World. They view the movement of data across borders — and the technologies that facilitate it — with concern and alarm. In their perception, the so-called Information Age enjoyed by the developed nations represents a new kind of domination.

This story goes largely unreported in America, where the growth of an information-based economy is good news for business, and where the rhetoric of free flow is as difficult to oppose as the First Amendment. Yet it is a story that may well come to haunt this country in the years ahead, for it will significantly shape our relationship with the rest of the world.

Herbert Schiller, professor of communications at the University of California, San Diego, is the author of Who Knows: Information in the Age of the Fortune 500 *(Ablex Publishing).*

A growing number of countries are beginning to fear that America's use of the free-flow doctrine — to encourage television broadcasting from satellites, transborder data flows by giant private corporations, and satellite photography of the earth — will do little to enhance their economic independence; instead, these countries suspect it may be a strategy for further subjugating their interests to those of the wealthy countries controlling the development and use of the new technologies.

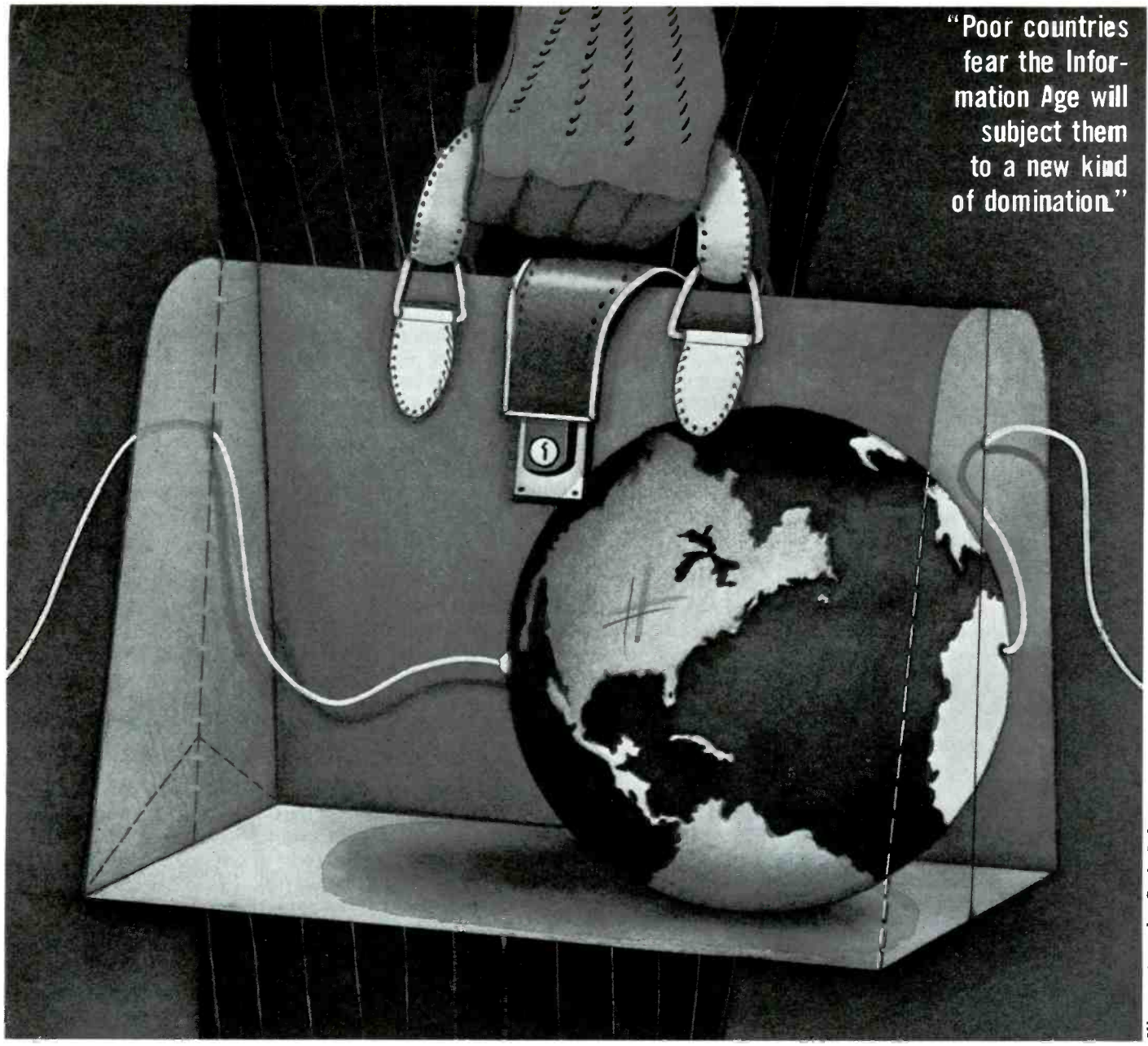
The roots of this colossal perceptual disagreement between America and much of the rest of the world lie in the old mercantile system, which the new economic order would replace. For the ascendancy of information industries is the direct result of the expansion of U.S. manufacturing business abroad. Lured by foreign markets, raw materials, cheap labor, complacent governments, tax havens, and tariff exemptions, hundreds of American corporations have developed foreign holdings whose total value now exceeds $200 billion. (This sum represents American-owned plant and equipment, whose productive capacity is larger than the national outputs of all but three or four countries.)

With their operations scattered across the globe, these companies depend on sophisticated communications technologies (often linking computers and satellites) to provide them with the constant flow of information they need to run efficiently. The information encompasses everything from their investments, production schedules, pricing, wages, and raw-material inventories to currency-exchange rates, taxes, advertising, and legal decisions.

Although these technologies are most commonly used to increase the efficiency of traditional manufacturing industries (especially those located far from corporate headquarters), there is growing expectation that information processing and transmission will become a dominant industry in itself. As Vincent Giuliano, senior analyst for the consulting firm Arthur D. Little, has written, "A small but increasingly powerful group of decision makers — in government as well as in industry — is now coming to believe that an ideal way to relate to the world economy is as an idea and knowledge exporter, based on sophisticated tools." Similarly, John Eger, who directed the Nixon Administration's White House Office of Telecommunications Policy and is now a vice president at CBS, has urged that America win "the international information war" through a combination of government support for the information industry and a willingness to accept the demise of "sunset" industries — the older, industrial sectors of the economy.

Indeed, many companies whose products are used for electronic communications are experiencing a boom: in the manufacture of satellite microchips, computers, and thousands of related electronic items. Demand is also growing for computer software, database organizers and assemblers, data processing, and data transmitting. Most recently, super corporate combines have begun to appear. These giants use the new technologies to integrate many previously separate services under one roof — as Sears has done by offering its customers not only retail services, but also banking, real-estate, insurance, and stock transactions.

All this makes the information industries seem a good bet for reviving the U.S. economy and insuring the continued growth of U.S. businesses abroad. If that prospect is appealing, the political rhetoric behind it — "the free flow of information" — sounds even better. It *seems* to stand for freedom and against censorship. It is meant



Illustrations by Seth Jaben

to protect not only the information on which industry depends, but also information not directly related to manufacturing: movies and news services, television programs, banking transactions, access to computer data services — almost anything, in fact, that can be communicated by words, numbers, or pictures.

Why then are so many countries threatened by a doctrine that sounds like a noble corollary of political freedom? The reasons have to do with the history of our international economic relations — especially those with the Third World.

A History of Resentment

While much of American foreign investment is concentrated in industrialized regions such as Western Europe, Canada, and Australia, a significant portion of foreign holdings lies in less developed regions of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where American investments have created new manufacturing enclaves for turning raw materials into processed goods. By and large, the sites have remained under the direction of the transnational companies that control their operations. Wages are low, and the foreign-owned corporations traditionally take most profits out of the country for investment elsewhere.

"This story could well come to haunt America, for it will shape our relations with the rest of the world."

The resentments and hostility engendered by this system gradually gave rise to demands for a new and more equitable economic order — one in which the developing countries would get a better deal for their raw materials as well as a bigger say in their own economic development. But if the United States has its way, the new world economy will be based on the very technologies whose explosive growth facilitated the rapid expansion of American business abroad — technologies instrumental in creating the unequal economic relationships that poor countries seek to rectify.

U.S. government support for the emerging information industries has taken more concrete — and disturbing — forms than the simple advocacy of a free flow of information. Many of the new technologies, especially communications satellites and computers, were made possible by forty years of colossal expenditures on military research and

development. And in fact, beyond their role in the corporate world, these technologies provide the control mechanism for global American military security. Many countries see the development of the new information technologies as little more than the direct result of America's quest for worldwide commercial and military advantage.

The combination of dramatic changes in the domestic American economy and the increasing reliance of U.S. businesses abroad on information technologies has given the "free flow of information" doctrine a new importance. For half a century, the doctrine was a favorite of diverse media interests — news agencies, film and television producers, publishers, and record companies — which campaigned regularly against any foreign laws that might restrict the exportation of their products. The doctrine was the most effective rhetorical instrument for prying open markets (often cornered by Europeans) in the name of human rights and individual freedom.

When the Associated Press tried to oust Reuters from its long-held news markets in 1944, *The Economist* commented tartly, "Kent Cooper [the AP's executive director], like most big business executives, experiences a peculiar moral glow in finding that his idea of freedom coincides with his commercial advantage. . . . Democracy does not necessarily mean making the world safe for the AP."

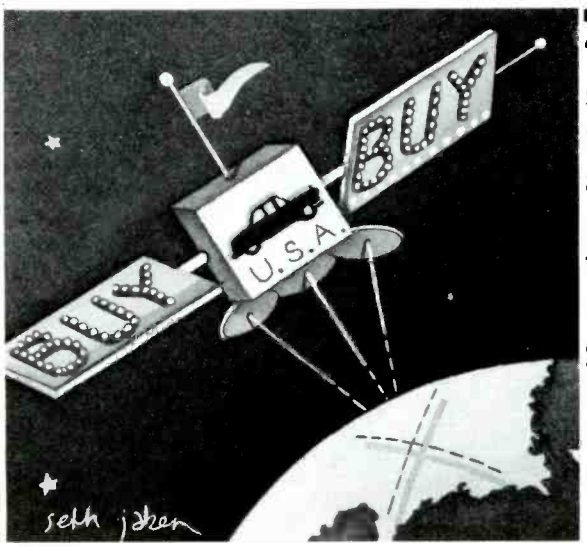
As *The Economist* noted, the free flow of information was no more than a convenient rationale serving business's interests. Today, it is just as much a myth as it was in 1944. The flow of information within and among societies isn't free at all; it is still shaped and controlled by the powerful interests that can afford the necessary technologies. (The only questions are, who are they, and whom do they represent?) But something important has changed since the 1940s: The free-flow doctrine has become essential to the evolving economic system, both at home and abroad.

Consider an IBM executive's recent remarks before a congressional subcommittee: "IBM does business in over 120 countries . . . We are, therefore, very dependent on a free flow of information in order to maintain our operations worldwide . . . to communicate worldwide engineering, design, and manufacturing information . . . to move financial and operational information among our various organizations as freely as possible. Finally, we must interact continuously with international banking and transportation facilities, such as airlines, which, in turn, also depend on a free flow of information to conduct their operations."

Hugh Donaghue, vice president of Control Data Corporation, is more blunt: ". . . the basis for new management is a growing dependency on the free flow of information, and consequently, a growing vulnerability if the free flow is restricted or stopped completely." Within this context, it is easy to see why the free-flow doctrine has been elevated to the highest levels of foreign policy. Philip H. Power, owner and chairman of Suburban Communications Corporation, has stressed that attacks on the free-flow doctrine would imperil much more than media interests alone: "The stakes in the coming battle go far beyond editors and publishers . . . They extend to the great computer-and information-hardware companies whose foreign sales of billions of dollars are at stake; to the TV networks and movie makers whose entertainment products range the globe; to the airlines and banks and financial institutions whose need for computer-to-computer data literally defines their business; to the multimillion dollar international advertising industry. . . ."

To poor countries, such statements as these suggest not only that the new information industries will revive the U.S. economy, but that they will also attempt to guarantee future U.S. dominance in the world economy. The developing nations thus fear that the new economic order will merely substitute a new dependency for an old one: Instead of providing cheap raw materials to make manufactured goods they can barely afford to buy, poor nations could wind up supplying cheap raw data to make high-priced processed information.

Already, the United States imports more data than any other country; it is also the world's largest exporter of processed data. Against this background, the free flow of information takes on a more insidious meaning.



"Remote sensing satellites are in the vanguard of America's attempt to forge new pathways for the free flow of information. If used for the common good, they could benefit all humankind. But that 'if' is a very big one."

Looking into the Earth

Nowhere is this more evident than with developments in remote sensing satellites. These remarkable devices study land masses and oceans in minute detail. They can reveal crop conditions, mineral and fuel location, fish concentrations in the seas, and geophysical data. If remote sensing were employed for the common good, it could clearly offer enormous benefits to all humankind. But that "if" is a very big one: Since their first use in 1972, remote sensing satellites have been devoted almost exclusively to corporate and military purposes. If U.S. industry leaders have their way, they'll continue to control the operation of the satellites. Frederick Henderson, president of the GEOSAT Committee, echoed a common sentiment when he told a congressional subcommittee in 1979, "The United States cannot afford to lose the remaining advantages that have come from developing techniques that have allowed us to become primary finders and developers of the world's non-renewable resources." Given the limits of the earth's bounty and the struggle for control of scarce resources, this is no small matter.

Indeed, remote sensing satellites are currently in the vanguard of America's attempt to forge new pathways for the free flow of information. This attempt denies the people whose territories have been "sensed" — even without their request or permission — the right to claim sovereignty over information concerning their own natural resources.

Three years ago, Dr. Irwin Pikus of the State Department's Environmental and Scientific Affairs Bureau told a congressional committee that "many developing countries guard their natural resources quite jealously and are con-

siderably concerned that advanced countries might be able to exploit them." Once information and data are in the hands of others, argued Pikus, the developing countries have no claim on sovereignty: "We do not consider the question of sovereignty negotiable."

United States policy-makers extend this less-than-accommodating perspective to other forms of international information flow. For instance, direct broadcasting from communication satellites into home receivers is also considered an inviolable right of the transmitting party (against which the receiving public has no legal recourse).

More important to the corporate economy, so are transborder data flows — the electronic information moving silently across frontiers over computer and telecommunications circuits. Any attempts by foreign countries to regulate the flow of information across their borders are regarded as interference with the "free flow of information." Thus the basic requirements and interests of U.S. business are colliding more and more often with those of developing nations, as well as those of competing developed economies.

Global First Amendment

But despite growing international opposition to the free-flow doctrine, U.S. government and business leaders continue asserting their First Amendment right to free speech — and insisting on its international applicability and judicial appropriateness.

This tactic is doubly mischievous. By conferring on billion-dollar private combines the right of the individual to free speech, the government is weakening legitimate concern for genuine individual liberties. And its attempt to impose American laws and institutions on other countries encourages chauvinism abroad and at home.

Even our customarily friendly Canadian neighbors have complained that the real issue is not the "freeness" of information flow but jobs and national sovereignty. An official Canadian commission studying the implications of telecommunications for Canadian sovereignty recently warned that "greater use of foreign, mainly U.S., computing services, and growing dependence on them, will . . . facilitate the attempts of the government of the United States to make laws applicable outside U.S. territory."

Third World leaders have been even more forceful in their criticism of U.S. telecommunications policy. Africa, Asia, and Latin America are the most likely places for the imposition of a new international economic and information order — but it will be a very different system from the one they've been demanding for years. Emphasizing high technology, the emerging system ignores the need for fundamental changes that could make the world economy more egalitarian.

Understandably, many Third World countries regard the new information technology with great ambivalence. Satellites and advanced information processing could provide to developing countries invaluable information about the extent and location of their natural resources. Yet the transnational corporate system's stranglehold over the new technologies makes many Third World countries question who would really control the information. Still suffering from one kind of dependency, they are wary of risking a new one — this time based on information and information technology.

Their policies reflect their fears: In the United Nations, Third World countries have consistently voted against the United States doctrine of "free flow." They have been particularly agitated by American insistence that countries have no right to reject any communication-satellite signal — no right of "prior consent." The United States stands practically alone in its denial of this right.

Many issues vital to international communications are still to be decided: the allocation of orbital slots for communication satellites; radio spectrum frequency allocations; transborder data-flow rules, and the prior-consent issue itself. The rights of mammoth private corporations to operate internationally, heedless of and unaccountable to national oversight, are increasingly being disputed.

Two years ago, the U.S. government issued a report that explained just why other countries opposed the U.S. information policy:

> Whatever the particular perspective of a country, an increasing number of nations worry that the loss of control over information about internal functions can jeopardize their sovereignty and leave them open to possible disruptions ranging from uncontrollable technical failures to political sabotage.

Why the Press Is Silent

The media haven't publicized the government's finding. In fact, they have paid scant attention to stories about information policies that in many instances will have direct consequences for their own future. The main providers of our daily news participate in and benefit directly from the arrangements and institutional structures they (sometimes) describe and analyze. Fairness and comprehensiveness can hardly thrive when such a monumental conflict of interest exists.

The danger is that without change, our government will continue to pursue policies favoring corporations that seek profits from the control and selective sale of increasingly vast stores of information. And these policies will be justified as furthering a "free flow of information" that will benefit us all. Our greatest need today may be to challenge *not* the enticing doctrines that invoke imperishable human and individual rights, but the misapplication of these desirable principles in the service of corporate and propertied interests. ■

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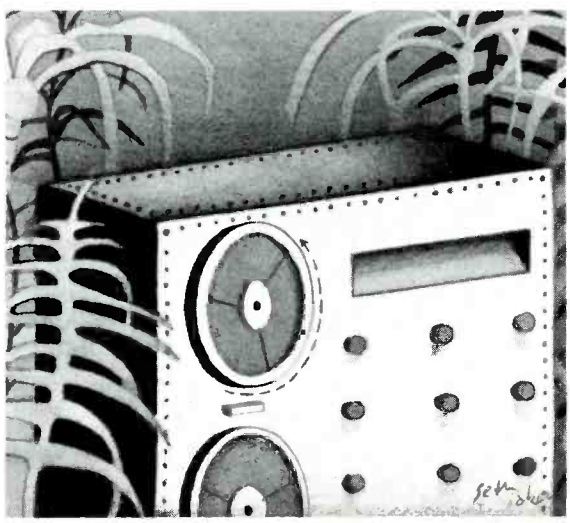

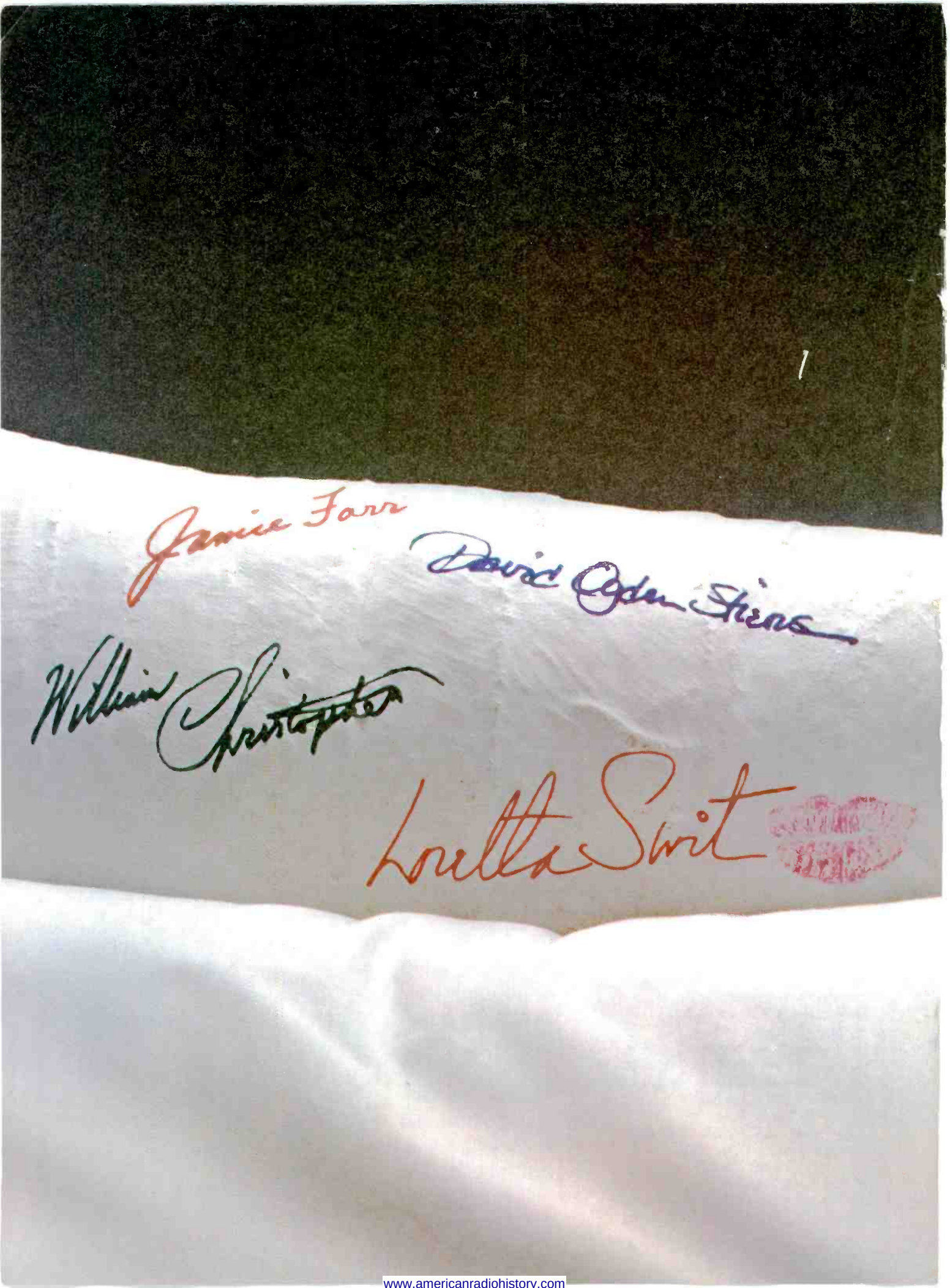

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The rest is history.
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20th CENTURY FOX TELEVISION

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CABLE & MAGAZINES

Can the Marriage Last?

BY JONATHAN BLACK

Maybe it's less a passionate romance than a marriage of convenience, but the dash to the altar is on. For the magazine industry, the combination of slumping sales and vanished ad pages makes the nuptials with cable look irresistible. Comes the day when not a solitary fisherman gets casting tips from print bibles like *Field & Stream*, CBS Publications will have long since angled the anglers into video. And should print stay healthy, a *Field & Stream* cable show will boost magazine sales. These days, no magazine magnate can ignore electronic brinkmanship.

"Any company not putting its metaphysical toes in the metaphysical water is going to find itself high and dry," warns Carey Winfrey, director of video development at CBS Publications, where the trend is far from metaphysical. This year, CBS will fund cable pilots for two of its magazines, *Cuisine* and *Road & Track*, then peddle the venture to cable software companies. In the next three years, all ten magazines in the CBS Publishing Group will have cable counterparts. "It's an investment in the future," says Winfrey.

So far, an astonishing number of consumer magazines have made, or toyed with, a similar investment. Time Inc. just announced a $5 million-to-$10 million project to convert fare from its seven magazines into video; already *Money*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Consumer Reports* have popped up as HBO series and specials. Women's cable magazines so far run the gamut from *Ms.* to *Family Circle*, *Woman's Day*, and *Better Homes & Gardens*. USA Network eagerly rolls out the welcome mat to magazines, bragging, in the words of one spokesman, "We are preeminent in adapting publications to video series." The fledgling Cable Health Network has launched friendly raids on such magazines as *Prevention*, *American Health*, *Readers Digest*, and *Psychology Today* — the last already besieged, in the words of its editor, by ravenous cable networks. *Omni* is committed to its television show; *Playboy* boasts its own cable network, and the Hearst empire pumps its mighty resources into *Daytime*, a joint venture with ABC. Why? What have magazines got that cable so desperately wants?

"Star quality" is how Ed Tivnan,

Jonathan Black is a frequent contributor to Channels.

Illustration by Carol Wald

ex-producer of the *Better Homes & Gardens* video magazine, sees print's special allure. With a rich alphabet soup of channels, any cable show lacking instant recognition risks getting lost in the pot. A magazine with two million subscribers provides that recognition. When cable networks peddle their programs to system operators, a magazine is a highly promotable asset. "Why are cable networks interested in magazines?" asks Winfrey. "Because most people don't know SPN from ESPN." It's what they air that is remembered.

Magazines also provide instant authority — very handy for neophyte cable networks that lack the credibility of ABC, CBS, or NBC. In Podunk, who listens to a local "expert" advise on Chantilly lace or hazardous cough syrups? Tips given under the auspices of *Good Housekeeping* or *Consumer Reports* carry clout.

But occasionally the magazine's input is less tangible. The *Ms.* show for HBO, called *She's Nobody's Baby,* didn't blatantly invoke the name of the feminist journal, yet HBO's Sheila Nevins says, "If it weren't for the liaison with *Ms.*, we simply would not have had the same impact. Their passion made it a better product."

The liaison with print also helps create a more cost-efficient product. Compared with the broadcast Big Three, cable networks survive on generally skimpy budgets, with minimal resources devoted to "information gathering." With its commitment to in-depth science and medical stories, the Cable Health Network is particularly receptive to print tie-ins. "At this stage, it's hard to get sufficient manpower and personnel," says CHN program director Loreen Arbus; she's delighted with the chummy CHN-*American Health* link-up, which she calls a "mutual-admiration society." The magazine's network of top doctors and researchers supplies both invaluable expertise and story ideas, and its editors often provide upcoming articles in galley form. "It means we can be there first, before the stories break," says a grateful Arbus. So far, the magazine's only remuneration is the benefit of free exposure, a real boon to a new publication.

Cozy affinities like that of CHN with *American Health* typify the shared marketing strategy of cable, with its narrowcasting ability, and "specialty" magazines. The same folks who can't waste time and money on *Life,* but buy *Byte* instead, are the ones who may be drawn to a practical cable show on herpes therapy or roof repairs. Such highly specific programs have prompted much excitement at advertising agencies. Indeed, the print/video marriage has, in several situations, become a *ménage à trois,* with the ad agency taking the initiative. This year's *Better Homes & Gardens Great Idea* show on USA Network was, in fact, dreamed up by Doyle Dane Bernbach, which was seeking a nice slot for its client, Sherwin Williams paints. Recently, Young & Rubicam announced an elaborate deal for its client, General Foods, linking up *Woman's Day* to the USA Network. The ad agency's goal is only partly financial. "We're not expecting to make any major money, it's just a service to our client," admits Doyle Dane's Jay James. Naturally, getting in on the ground floor means reduced ad rates and, advises the McCann-Erickson agency, "cost benefits down the road." But a more important impulse behind advertising's cable/print matchmaking may be its own chance to play an entrepreneurial role. Not since the 1950s, when so many shows were sponsored by products, has Madison Avenue seen the chance to seize such initiative and creative control.

"Magazines provide fledgling cable networks with star quality, instant recognition, and authority."

Which is not to say that "major money" can *not* be made from video magazines. The secret, at least to breaking even, claims Ed Tivnan, lies in repeats. "It's easy money, the economics aren't bad," he says, scribbling figures on a pad and calculating a threefold profit. Easy money on paper, anyway. But this rosy outlook is disputed by David Jordan, creative director for Meredith, the *Better Homes* publisher. When Tivnan's thirteen-episode series ended, Meredith tried a new arrangement with USA Network, this time without Doyle Dane. The plan was fairly basic: USA and Meredith would pool capital, sell advertising, and split revenues. What happened? Not much. "It's so hard to make any money," says Jordan. "We came up against the cost per program. The only way to make it pay is charge advertisers a much higher rate. It's hard to sell. It's tough."

To facilitate the economics, publishers have worked out a variety of deals with the video people. The most cautious and limited route may be independent production. *Family Circle,* the first magazine to be serialized on cable, was co-produced and financed by outsider Don Kirshner, who put up $1.5 million for thirteen episodes of *It's a Great Idea.* Time Inc. merely sells or leases a magazine's title to its video sister, HBO, which then pays for production (lavishly: Whereas Hearst/ABC's *Daytime* rejected a popular Rodale Press magazine pilot because it cost $50,000, HBO routinely coughs up six-figure budgets for its magazine-title series and specials). Like Time Inc., CBS Publications leans toward a simple licensing deal but is also exploring a more active packaging role.

A few publications have gone to the opposite extreme and launched their own satellite networks. *Penthouse* magazine has been struggling to set up the PET Network to compete with Escapade, the channel already launched by *Playboy* in tandem with Rainbow Enterprises. Costs for this type of scheme — in both risk and capital outlay — are high. At *Daytime,* where aspiration runs equally high, Hearst/ABC president James Perkins opines, "I need a *Daytime* at nighttime. I need a transponder. I need the hours, and I need the distribution. Until then I don't have a network. Figure the transponder will cost $26 million, $600,000 for insurance premiums, another $1.5 million to get the signal up . . ."

Though expensive, a scheme like Hearst/ABC's or *Playboy*'s assures one big "plus" for the magazine: total creative control. But despite the benefits of marriage, print and video are uneasy bedfellows — made all the more so by this sudden rash of intimate inter-media encounters. Print, for example, reflexively tends to view video with a mix of disdain and wariness, concerned lest its own "serious" values be sullied by the lowest-common-denominator fluff — the occasional realm of television. "On the part of magazines, there's a real fear that some TV turkey will send their fifty-year reputation down the tubes in half an hour," says Tivnan, whose own venture for Meredith ended bitterly.

At *Psychology Today,* editor Jack Nessel still sounds traumatized by the crass treatment he claims his magazine received at the hands of cable. "One pay service wanted to feature a celebrity host, another just wanted to do a program on sex with our name on top. They were very honest; they said that's what their research showed people want. Nudges in the ribs. They had no intention," says Nessel, "of doing a serious program."

This clash of interests may have less to do with the specific negotiation than with poor communication bred of bias. The magazine people bristle at the very

hint of sensationalism; the video people are equally irked at print's elitism. "Information versus entertainment," is how one publishing person sums up the two value systems, while a broadcast person stresses "impact." And such fracases will no doubt grow more frequent as the separate worlds of print and video seek some common ground and collide, bringing to the surface some fairly profound differences — not just in style and content, but also in operational structure. For example, while television has its "stars" — a handful of anchors and correspondents — ultimately it demands a more collaborative effort than do magazines, where power resides in a few editors and bylined writers. With more bruisable egos, magazine workers may grow discontented with the relatively anonymous television atmosphere. And creative attempts to remedy this situation risk negating the very point of video — leading to "talking heads" rather than evocative visuals, as in one *Newsweek* segment, when the camera actually "visited" editors in their offices. "One thing you *can't* do," stresses CBS's Winfrey, invoking a cardinal rule of transforming print to video, "is make a literal translation."

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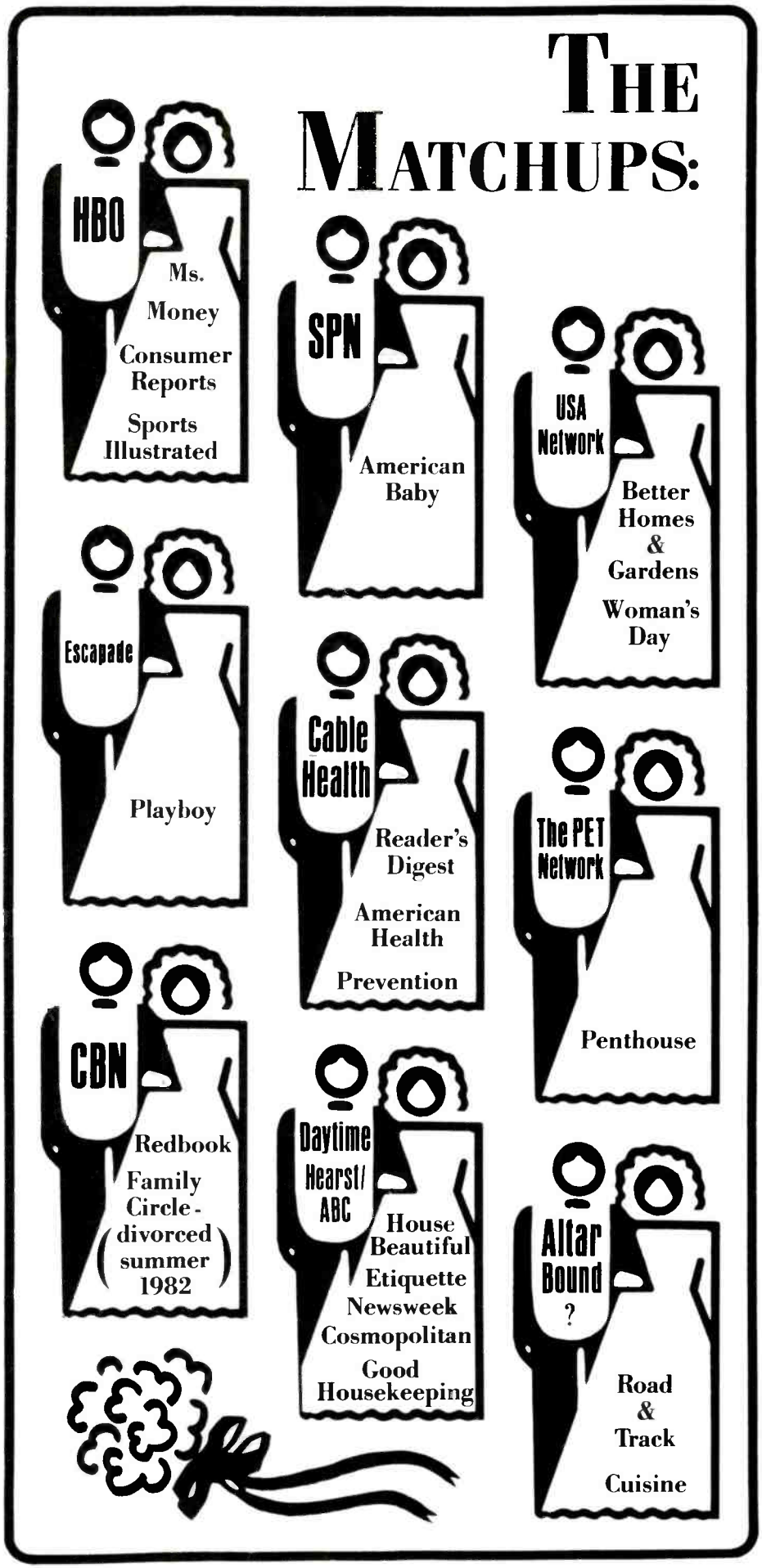

tions, which has entered into several co-ventures with magazines. "A lot of people," warns Hubert, "are going to be very disappointed."

Hubert is among them. The day we talked he was still reeling from the abrupt cancellation of the Readers Digest magazine, *Families*. To convert this magazine to video, Gateway had prepared a detailed 200-page proposal complete with invented characters, graphics, even storyboards. "It's astonishing. The magazine's *canceled*? Who would have thought it?" said a dazed Hubert, whose romance with magazines suffered another setback two weeks later. Gateway's other big print-to-video project, *Psychology Today*, got snarled in a bureaucratic snafu. It is currently in limbo.

"Cassettes and discs are closer than cable to the spirit of print magazines."

When the cable romance with magazines goes sour, some, like Hubert, tend to grow more excited about another print-to-video venture: cassettes. Philosophically, cassettes and discs are much closer to the spirit of print magazines than cable. Without the intervention of a video-cassette recorder, cable is a totally passive experience. Cassettes can be plugged in anytime, like magazines, with a "fast forward" control to approximate skim-reading. Like magazines, cassettes are tangible; they can be picked up, put aside, browsed. In marketing terms, magazines that want to package and sell cassettes hold one nice trump: their mailing list. With cable, there's wasted circulation. But for advertisers, cassettes promise the ultimate in specialized audience. Hubert feels big profits await only the buildup to a critical mass of VCRs. And he's not alone in his optimism. *Playboy* recently announced an unusual deal with Twentieth-Century Fox whereby the two will team up to produce and distribute quarterly *Playboy* video cassettes.

Right now, cable and magazines are locked in the hot throes of romance. In a way, the union's a bit like an impulsive, sexy, young marriage. Reality hasn't quite set in, passion runs high. When heads cool, someone will have to earn a living, someone will have to organize a future. Eventually, the national divorce statistic will take its toll on our innocence. But right now, who wants to stop the party? ■

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GET TELEVISION OUT OF HOLLYWOOD

"It is no mere coincidence that the Golden Age ended when television production left New York."

by Ross Wetzsteon

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, the writers were stars. People would say there was a Paddy Chayefsky they had to catch next week, or a Rod Serling, or a Reginald Rose. Everybody knows the names, even a quarter-century later: Gore Vidal, William Gibson, Mac Hyman, Horton Foote, Robert Alan Aurthur, A. E. Hotchner, Robert Anderson, Calder Willingham, Tad Mosel, a dozen more. From 1947 to 1957 — the Golden Age of television — they wrote, among them, ten to twenty plays every week, creating an entirely new body of literature. But in the past *two* decades, not a single major writer has come out of American commercial television. In fact, it would be safe to say that no one recognizes the name Fred Fox, or Michael Ross, or Herman Groves, or Dana Olsen, although these are the writers of such top-rated shows as *Happy Days, Three's Company, Fantasy Island,* and *Laverne & Shirley*. The difference is not only in the quality of the programming but in the methods of scripting. These days, so many people are involved — people with titles like Executive Story Editor or Executive Script Consultant — that it's nearly impossible for an individual's vision to emerge. In a sense, writing for television became too important to leave to writers.

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

Howard Morris, Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, and Carl Reiner in a sketch from *Your Show of Shows* performed live in prime time in the early fifties.

"The commitment to the writer has diminished significantly since the days of

Of course, nostalgia is as accurate as a fun-house mirror. Even some of the pioneers will admit there was a lot of tin in the Golden Age. "Out of every ten shows on *Kraft Theater,*" says writer Ernest Kinoy, "three were excellent, two were so-so, and five were rotten." There are those who feel, however, that that's better than what you'd be more likely to hear today: "Out of every ten *Love Boats,* five topped the ratings, two held their own, and three got clobbered."

But merely moaning about the change in emphasis from nuance to Nielsen, merely mourning the death of the Golden Age, is the opiate of the elite. Instead of offering an embittered obituary, then, I'd like to make a constructive proposal. Since the decline of standards and the shift of television production from New York to Los Angeles took place simultaneously, perhaps the way to bring intelligent, provocative drama back to television is to encourage a rebirth of production in New York. If the audience were regarded as a participant rather than as a target, if the talent pool were connected to the traditions of theater rather than the balance sheets of Hollywood, and if, most important of all, writing were considered an imaginative act rather than a collaborative process, maybe some of the vitality of television's Golden Age could be recaptured.

Time on Their Hands

You can't plan a Golden Age. Back in New York in the late forties and early fifties, they fairly stumbled into excellence. The new medium had suddenly provided hours to fill. Old films, small-fry clubs, roller derbies, Uncle Miltie — we got through today, but what about tomorrow? Why not put on a play? Get Fred to put on a play tomorrow, and we'll try to come up with something for the day after.

Not only was there little material with which to fill the time, there was little money to pay for it. So in finding his play, Fred had to go either to the public domain, which meant classics, or to young, unknown writers, which meant risks and the chance for originality. (Some of the first scripts, in fact, came in from an airlines clerk named Tad Mosel, a record company owner named Robert Alan Aurthur, an advertising copywriter named Reginald Rose, a writer of nightclub sketches named Paddy Chayefsky.) Production values on those budgets called for imagination, and the fact that the programs were live made it imperative that they use trained actors. Every disadvantage, in short, turned into an advantage. Circumstances forced a reliance on nothing but creativity.

"We had no money in those days," recalls Tad Mosel. "We couldn't afford large sets and special effects and big action scenes. All we had were writers and actors. So we had to fall back on characterization and relationships and motivation — in other words, on the essence of drama."

Another important factor — another disadvantage that turned into an advantage — was the lack of time. "You'd walk in with your script one day and the next day it'd be on the air," says Ernest Kinoy. "There wasn't enough lead time for executive thinking."

Writer Philip Reisman Jr. points out another significant consideration. "Television programming was at first intended primarily to sell receivers, so it was aimed largely at people who could afford to buy television sets. At the time, of course, this meant a much smaller number of people than it does today." Those tended to be sophisticated people in a few urban centers, where, as Reisman suggests, "their appetites were whetted for theater."

With the networks based in New York City, it was natural for them to draw upon the pool of Broadway actors and directors committed to a tradition of literate entertainment. Consider the acting talent nursed by the early years of television drama. To name only a few: George C. Scott, James Dean, Steve McQueen, Paul Newman, Sidney Poitier, Lee J. Cobb, Grace Kelly, Peter Falk, Jack Lemmon, Rod Steiger, Nancy Marchand, Lee Marvin, and Charlton Heston. (Try to make a comparable list for the last twenty years and you can't get much beyond Mary Tyler Moore, Ed Asner, Alan Alda, and John Travolta.)

Go West, Young Sponsor

A number of major decisions made by the networks in the late fifties and early sixties, some quite calculated and some born out of desperation, combined to bring the Golden Age to a quick and decisive end. Within a period of only a few years, most production had moved from New York to California. This marked the end of live drama influenced by theater, performed by actors, and created by writers. It was replaced by taped series emulating movies, inhabited by personalities, and controlled by executives.

In the wake of the quiz-show scandals, Jim Aubrey moved in at CBS and began to shift the emphasis from a mix of dramatic anthologies, quiz shows, and variety programs to episodic adventure series produced in Hollywood. A few years later, in an effort to keep up with Aubrey's steadily increasing audience, NBC's Robert Kintner brought feature films into prime time. Within a year it was evident that no original program could compete in the ratings with a movie; soon each of the three networks was airing two Hollywood features a week. Suddenly everyone was talking less about "abdication of creativity" than about "motion picture quality."

Unfortunately, achieving "motion picture quality" meant not only escaping from the chaotic conditions of live production, it meant changing the entire character of television — a different kind of writing (taking precautions instead of risks), a different kind of actor (with presence instead of talent), a different kind of audience (large instead of discerning). The movie people took over from the theater people, Hollywood from Broadway. *Philco Playhouse, Kraft Theater, Omnibus, Playhouse 90* — one by one they were canceled, replaced not by programs but by weekly series, and soon it seemed as though the airwaves were full of nothing but careening cars and frenetic families.

The technology of the swimming pool certainly had something to do with it — a good argument can be made that one of the major reasons for the move West was that network and advertising agency executives were seduced by the expense-account glitter and glamour of Hollywood — but even more important was the technology of the tube. With the invention of video tape in the late fifties, programs no longer had to be aired live, which meant less chance for things to go wrong, more chance to be sure they didn't, and a broader definition of what "wrong" meant. This is no minor distinction, because you could *control* video tape; once you could control the product, vice presidents and sponsors wanted in on the act.

While the new technology meant that the writer lost power to the executive, there were equally important technological developments on the receiving end. The signal was no longer confined to a fifty-mile radius, and the set was no longer a toy for the affluent. One could not say that the commercial implications of the vastly increased audience were overlooked. "The real reason why live programming ended is that we found out that the medium *sold* so well — so fast," NBC's Robert Kintner once said. "All the big sponsors, the soap companies and the cereal manufacturers and the automobile makers, jumped in to sponsor shows. The medium got away from itself by its ability to sell."

the anthology dramas, which had a strong tradition of personal vision."

From that moment on, the ratings became — to paraphrase Vince Lombardi — not the most important thing but the *only* thing. There was simply too much money at stake to bask in prestige. And, from the viewpoint of those paying the bills, how could writers show that life was messy when the advertisements were proclaiming that you could solve every problem with a product? Television's new mission was to create an appealing environment for commercials.

Look Back in Anguish

Some writers of the Golden Age went West and became wealthy, but many — Reginald Rose, Tad Mosel, Ernest Kinoy, Philip Reisman Jr., Loring Mandel, and Richard Hanser among them — refused to be lured. They speak of television with a certain bitterness.

"When technological advances created the mass audience," says Reisman, "television jettisoned its original underwriters, the discriminating audience. Television had to get rid of those people, so it got rid of the thing that appealed to them most, the anthology drama show. The anthologies had no continuing characters, no carry-over appeal. Series were much safer, much more predictable."

"What television has done," says Rose, "is the same thing that food manufacturers have learned to do. With McDonald's, what everybody wants to know beforehand is that they can walk into one, anywhere, and get exactly the same food, at any time. The TV audience has been conditioned to want what it's watching, and it makes things a helluva lot easier for the television networks now, because they don't have to change the shows much, if at all. All they have to do is change the actors' costumes."

Perhaps in twenty years we'll be mourning the Golden Age of the seventies and eighties when we look back at, say, *M*A*S*H* or *Barney Miller*, remembering only the three or four quality shows a year. Nevertheless, the fact remains that commitment to the writer has diminished significantly since the days of the anthology dramas — with their commitment to risk, spontaneity, idiosyncracy, and personal vision. Quality today may be an accident, as some suggest, but then quality in any medium is always an accident. The difference is that in the Golden Age producers were more likely to let accidents happen.

Nine's Company

What about today's writers — people like Fred Fox, Michael Ross, Herman Groves, and Dana Olsen? Do they feel the quality of television writing has declined during the years in which the writer's status changed from stardom to anonymity?

Understandably, while unanimous in their praise for the shows of the early years, they feel that their product is as good or better. "We turn out a quality of material on a par with that of the old days," says Groves, a twenty-five-year television veteran and executive story consultant for *Fantasy Island*. "We had good and bad writing then, and we have good and bad writing now," adds Ross, who was involved in the Golden Age as an associate producer with Max Liebman. "If anything," he goes on, "technological advances have led to higher quality. If you can do it over and over until you get it right, it stands to reason you're going to have a better show."

They also stress that working methods today differ significantly from those of the old days. "There used to be one writer's first draft and notes, and a second draft, and that was it," says Fox, executive story editor of *Happy Days*. "But today, our entire staff of nine works on the drafts and notes, and continually tries to improve a script up until the last minute." But doesn't this collaborative process tend to mute the individual writer's voice? "Most of the time no. After all, a staff knows the show more intimately than a freelancer." Dana Olsen, a staff writer on *Laverne & Shirley*, says, "Writing now

The move from New York to Los Angeles brought a different kind of actor, and a new style, to television. Below, scenes from the Golden Age and the Hollywood Age. Clockwise from top left: Patti McCormick and Teresa Wright in "The Miracle Worker," (1957); James Best and Catherine Bach in "The Dukes of Hazzard" (1981), and Jack Palance, star of "Requiem for a Heavyweight," (1956).

"The two most important elements of the Golden Age have not disappeared —

is a rhythmic thing — exposition, conflict, resolution — a kind of beat that's become formularized. And for that kind of writing, a staff works better than individual writers. The story idea might come from a freelancer or a producer, then the entire show is talked out before any words are put on paper. We'll sit around spitballing, with someone taking notes, then a couple of us will do drafts, then all nine of us will go over the drafts, rewriting lines and scenes, and finally we'll all get together and do a table. It's completely arbitrary how we hand out the final writing credit."

Michael Ross, a frequent writer for *Three's Company*, went on to say that even with the major changes in the methods of writing since the Golden Age, "we still don't have enough time. It's impossible to be good every week. Look at theater — people have *years* to prepare plays, and still most of them fold. There really isn't that much brilliant writing around — not in theater, not in film, so don't expect it in television. When you get right down to it, the best we can hope to do" — he strongly emphasized his words — "*is hit a good level.*"

A good level . . . While from one point of view this makes sense (as does the concept of the writer producing his own script), from another it's a devastating critique. In defending today's television writing, Ross may have inadvertently described its major weakness as well. For that's precisely what it's too often become: level.

New York City, Here I Come

Is moving production back to New York a way to bring back television's Golden Age? And what are the chances of survival?

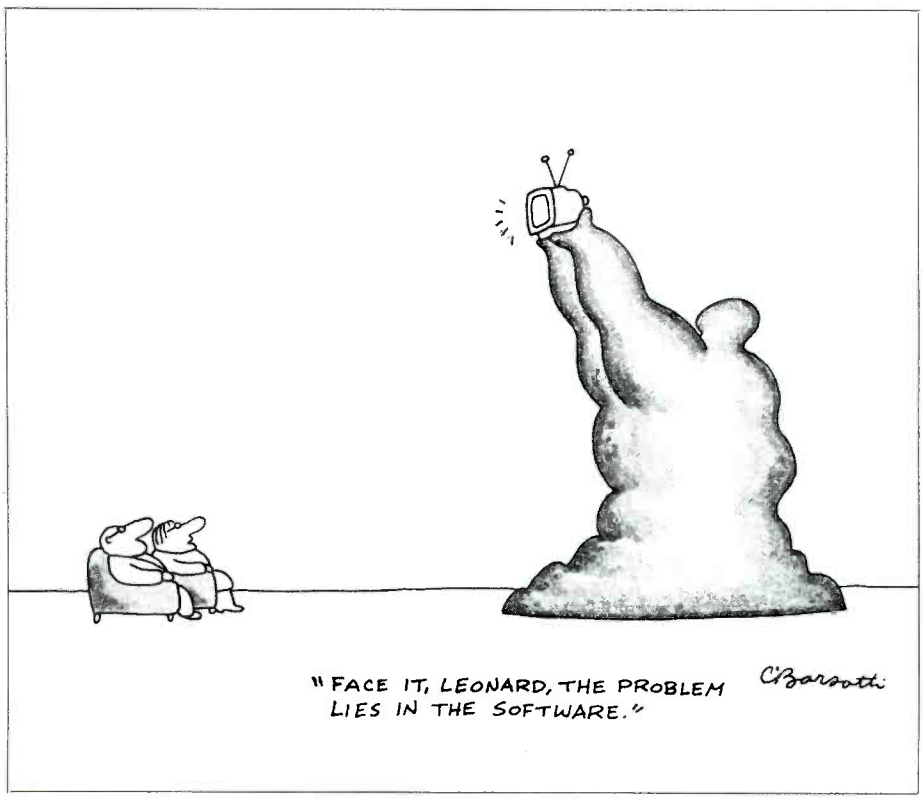
A few veteran writers are optimistic about the potential for a move back East. For instance, the late Dick Hanser, a documentary writer whose credits include *Victory at Sea*, felt that "if television moves to New York it'll be a great stimulation to writers and playwrights as a matter of course." Some writers mention the stir caused by the success of *Saturday Night Live* — "it's that kind of thing," said one, "that's going to bring glamour and excitement back to live New York production." Most of the writers I talked to, however, were convinced it could be done, but wouldn't be.

"New York City missed the boat by not clearing out ten square blocks and building its own Television City," says Tad Mosel. "Television might have stayed if the city'd done that, but I'm afraid it's too late now." Another writer: "They keep making sounds about coming back to New York — all that vitality, all those ideas. They mean it, but they don't do it. They'll stay put in Hollywood unless the big quake comes, in which case they'll move to Las Vegas, where they're happier anyway."

As might be expected, non-writers have a different perspective. "It doesn't have anything to do with geography," argues Buzz Berger, an independent producer working out of New York. "Writers? The new ones are every bit as good as those guys were. There was so much less television then, the shows that stood out really stood out." Richard Kobritz of Warner Brothers in Hollywood, speaking of the prohibitive cost of a shift back East: "I suppose we could use below-the-line staff, but the creative people would have to come from L.A." And Robert Daly, chairman of Warner Brothers: "There have been a couple of new shows coming out of New York recently, but I don't think that indicates any shift back East. Get behind each of those shows and find out the facts and I think you'll find it's just a matter of circumstance." I did — and it is. NBC's *Love, Sidney*, which premiered last year, and *One of the Boys*, which was a mid-season replacement and has since been canceled, were being produced in New York only because their stars, Tony Randall and Mickey Rooney, made that a condition of their appearance.

If this is rebirth, it looks like it's going to be a long and painful labor. But Josh Kane, former vice president for East Coast programming at NBC, is cautiously optimistic. "We have more than just those two shows. We have a commitment from Lorne Michaels [of *Saturday Night Live* fame] for next year, and we're in the process of signing deals and developing other projects, especially in the dramatic area. A major part of my job is monitoring the New York creative community. Look, news and sports and soaps are still here, we're moving heavily into late-night New York production, and I think there'll be an upswing in activity in prime time too — at least on a selective basis. I like to think that when the history of this season is written, even if the projects we're airing now aren't smash hits, people will conclude in retrospect that the production environment we're creating is on a par with that on the West Coast. If we at least show potential, others will follow — and if we're successful, all the better. In this business, success feeds on success."

Alan Wagner, Kane's counterpart at CBS, who since has left to head the new Disney network for cable, spoke with enthusiasm about "the community of writers" in New York, about "the New



the New York creative community and the young, talented, unknown writers."

York sensibility'' (''it's as impossible to define as the taste of good cognac''), and especially about the city's effort to encourage production. ''They've done wonders,'' he says, ''not just in the most important thing, making facilities available — refurbishing an abandoned pier, setting aside an entire floor of a hospital, that kind of thing — but in working with unions, in easing regulations, in getting police and fire department cooperation, in making it easier to shoot in general. They *do* want to see more production here.''

Nancy Littlefield, head of the New York Mayor's office of film, television, and broadcasting, agrees that the key to the city's program is helping make facilities available. ''We're expanding the Astoria studio — that it's operating at all is largely due to the city — and taking a major role in the construction of the Metropolis Studio in an abandoned high school on the West Side. The ball and crane is in there right now, in fact, and by late '82 we'll have five completely furnished stages, all exclusively for television.'' This $50 million project is only the beginning: Silvercup Studio, a former bread factory in Long Island City, is on the drawing boards, and negotiations are underway at other sites. We lost in the fifties because we weren't paying attention. But I'll tell you one thing — we're not going to lose cable too. I'll be damned if I'll let *that* happen.''

Author! Author!

Littlefield's determination is encouraging, but then Custer told his troops not to take any prisoners. Even if it's true that the way to create a new Golden Age is to move production of dramatic shows back to New York, there's little reason to suppose the networks would be interested. After all, if one squarely faces the crucial question — can television simultaneously appeal to a mass audience and consistently produce high-quality drama? — one has to admit that the answer is most certainly no. On the other hand, it was once considered hopelessly naïve to appeal to General Motors to produce gas-efficient automobiles — at least until the appeal was felt in the pocketbook.

Is there an OPEC in the future of television drama? Is it called cable? Consider the fact that cable is in much the same position as television itself was at the advent of the Golden Age: endless hours to fill, and little to fill it with, small but discriminating audiences, and budgets too low to attract well-known writers. Will they ask Fred to put on a play?

''The need for the product is so great, and the competition is so great,'' says Jack Willis, vice president for programming at CBS Cable, ''that people will be forced to go into original production. Drama will definitely be a big factor in cable, along with music and dance. Right now the competition for Broadway shows is going up and up — one of the ways we're fighting that is by setting up a development fund for original drama.''

''The research we do with our subscribers shows that they'd very much like to see drama on cable,'' says Home Box Office executive Mal Albaum. ''We'll be picking up ready-made plays and commissioning original material. Some of the properties we'll be buying might have been made into movies at one time, but we're also looking for new scripts all the time. There are two schools of thought about production — simply taping it in front of a live audience or taking it into the studio and treating it like a real movie — but in either case we'll be using actors from Broadway and Off-Broadway.''

Another HBO executive: ''Cable is going to have a large appetite for theater — New York is the center for theater in America and most cable programming is based in New York. There's not as much original drama right now as filmed theater — in fact, it's one of our best ready-made sources.''

Alan Wagner sees an intensive competition for audiences in the eighties, and an intensive quest for material. ''Cable will entice talented people to the medium, people who otherwise wouldn't think of communicating via that box. And that'll be good for all of us.''

Let's suppose that the moment actually *is* ripe for a rebirth of quality drama on television. Many of the ingredients that produced the Golden Age have disappeared forever — but not its two most important elements, the New York creative community and young, talented, unknown writers. And possibly even a third: an increasingly sophisticated audience that might make an occasional project not merely philanthropic but actually profitable. In any case, think what would happen if all the intellectual energy that currently goes into contempt for television writing were transformed into creativity instead.

On English television, the name of the program is listed first, then the name of the author — not the special guest star, or the executive script consultant, but the *author*. The notion that this might happen here is in many ways naïve, but the alternative is in every way cynical — and at the very least such a step would establish the Golden Age less as a memory than as a goal. ■

THE WIZARD OF ABC

by James Traub

JULIE BARNATHAN knows television's yellow brick road as well as anyone, because he helped pave it. And now, as ABC's mastermind of technology, he's back on the frontier.

TWO YOUNG PRODUCERS from ABC's hunting and fishing series, *American Sportsman,* have come to the vast walnut-and-leather office of Julius Barnathan, the company's president for broadcast operations and engineering, to talk about equipment. Barnathan tips himself back into an armchair and, chin in hand, gazes at them intently as they speak. After a few minutes he begins fidgeting with his Florsheims and interjects: The Japanese already make a box to keep humidity out of a camera. He can get it for them; no problem. Now he has worked himself diagonally across the armchair as he grows more agitated. Their situation is clear to him, and his interruptions get longer. Yes, what they need is the new RCA Hawkeye integrated half-inch video-tape camera/recorder, and, yes, he can get them a prototype to try out. He's getting even more excited, and he pitches himself forward in his armchair and saws the air with his arms as he speaks. Now he pushes himself way back in his chair like a fisherman fighting a marlin, his belly popping out from under an open vest button — 200-odd pounds are distributed pear-like on a frame of perhaps five feet, four inches — and he is practically shouting as information pours out of him in a virtuoso monologue — camera specifications, competing suppliers, editing facilities, unions, editors. He is passionate, thorough, incontrovertible; he seems practically omniscient. And at a time when ABC, like its competitors, is thrashing about in the whirlwind of technological innovation, he is an asset of incalculable value.

Julius Barnathan is some kind of genius. Robert Trachinger, who as West Coast vice president for operations has worked with him for years, says flatly that his boss has "the finest mind in the industry"; a supplier says the same thing; so does the owner of an affiliate station. Barnathan is the man who executed many of Roone Arledge's innovations in sports coverage. In fifteen years he has transformed ABC's engineering and operations division from a quixotic band of improvisers to a highly sophisticated, creative group responsible for much of the visual dazzlement that is the hallmark of the network.

The odd thing is that Barnathan isn't even an engineer. Before attaining his present position in 1965, he served as vice president for research, vice president for affiliated television stations, president of the network-owned stations, and then general manager of the network. He is remembered by colleagues at each of these stages as indefatigable, original, exuberant, and eminently successful. His admirers sometimes make him sound like the greatest thing that's happened to television since the invention of the cathode ray tube.

A person might wonder why he never became president of a network. Barnathan used to wonder himself, though now he seems more or less reconciled to the idea that a brilliant, joyous, argumentative Sephardic Jew who talks out of the corner of his mouth makes a poor candidate for the aery perch of network president. His office is plush, but earthbound: on the first floor of the broadcast center on New York's West Side rather than at corporate headquarters on Sixth Avenue. But if Barnathan can't be king of the hill, his present position provides more than enough nourishment for his pride and ambition: ABC looks to him to sort out and appraise the baffling array of new technology, and to help lead the company into a future painfully different from the now-passing glory days of the networks.

Barnathan has a classic little-tough-guy demeanor, reminiscent when he's jolly of Fiorello La Guardia, and on the rare occasions he's not, of Edward G. Robinson. He grew up in the Bronx during the Depression with a father who, he says, never earned more than $2,000 in a year. Barnathan helped put his twin brother through college by working for a year in an A&P, and then put himself through Brooklyn College, where he first deployed his formidable analytic talents to graduate Phi Beta Kappa in mathematics and economics. In 1952 he got a job, at $65 a week, doing market research for the Kenyon & Eckhardt advertising agency. Buying radio and television time for advertisers, Barnathan arrived at his first intuitions, or rather deductions, about how the media work. Programs, he realized, commanded more loyalty than stations, and he told clients to buy time accordingly. "Net net," says Barnathan, using his favorite phrase — it means "the bottom line," and precedes a summary of disparate facts — "I was a maverick, I looked for what was different. I was known as a guy that wasn't afraid to stick his neck out." He concludes, with characteristic pride, "I blew a lot of myths."

Net net, Barnathan was hired by ABC

James Traub is a Channels *contributing editor.*

two years later as supervisor of ratings. At the time ABC was wallowing in a distant fourth place among the networks (the old Dumont network was third), and was desperately in need of terrific ideas. Barnathan, on the other hand, needed a place where eccentricity would be tolerated, and ABC was then, as it remains to some extent today, a place that doesn't strictly forbid idiosyncracy. ABC and Barnathan became inextricably linked. He describes his professional history as a progression from one problem to another in the evolution of a modern broadcasting company. It is a measure of his talent that he has always been where the action is.

It took him all of five years to become vice president for research, and heady years they were. Research is Barnathan's first love — number-crunching is a sort of sensual pleasure for him — and he grows so excited recalling the intellectual breakthroughs of those good old days that he bangs on his desk, speaking so volubly that he becomes practically incomprehensible. At a time when ABC had relatively few viewers in rural areas, Barnathan managed to convince advertisers that saturation wasn't important in areas where little competition for attention existed. "You can drop a bomb in Times Square and no one will hear it, and you can drop a *pin* in Omaha, and *every*body knows about it!" Barnathan sounds as though he's trying out the argument for the first time. "Forget it, man, you don't *have* to have ten spots in Duluth! Cut it down to *four* spots, *five* spots. Take the money you save on those and buy ABC, and you get *ten* more spots in New York." It's all very complicated, though not to Barnathan, and he puts the whole thing down in the form of graphs and numbers in order to enlighten a baffled listener.

Barnathan loves a dramatic situation, and he describes his subsequent promotion — to head of affiliate relations — in storybook form, as he does almost everything. "By 1959," he recalls, "we had the advertising, and we had good programs, we had good suppliers. Our problem wasn't programs; our problem was stations. And I went to the boss and I said, 'Goddamn it, Ollie [Ollie Treyz, network president] the setup you got now stinks. It's not gonna get done, this guy doesn't know what the hell it's all about.' . . . So what happened is, July came, and that's when you really get down to the crunch on clearances [the number of affiliates willing to carry a particular program]. . . . So in July the guy who was the head of station relations went off to Nassau for four weeks! So net net of it all, I was asked to go over there and head affiliate relations as well." (He retained his research post.)

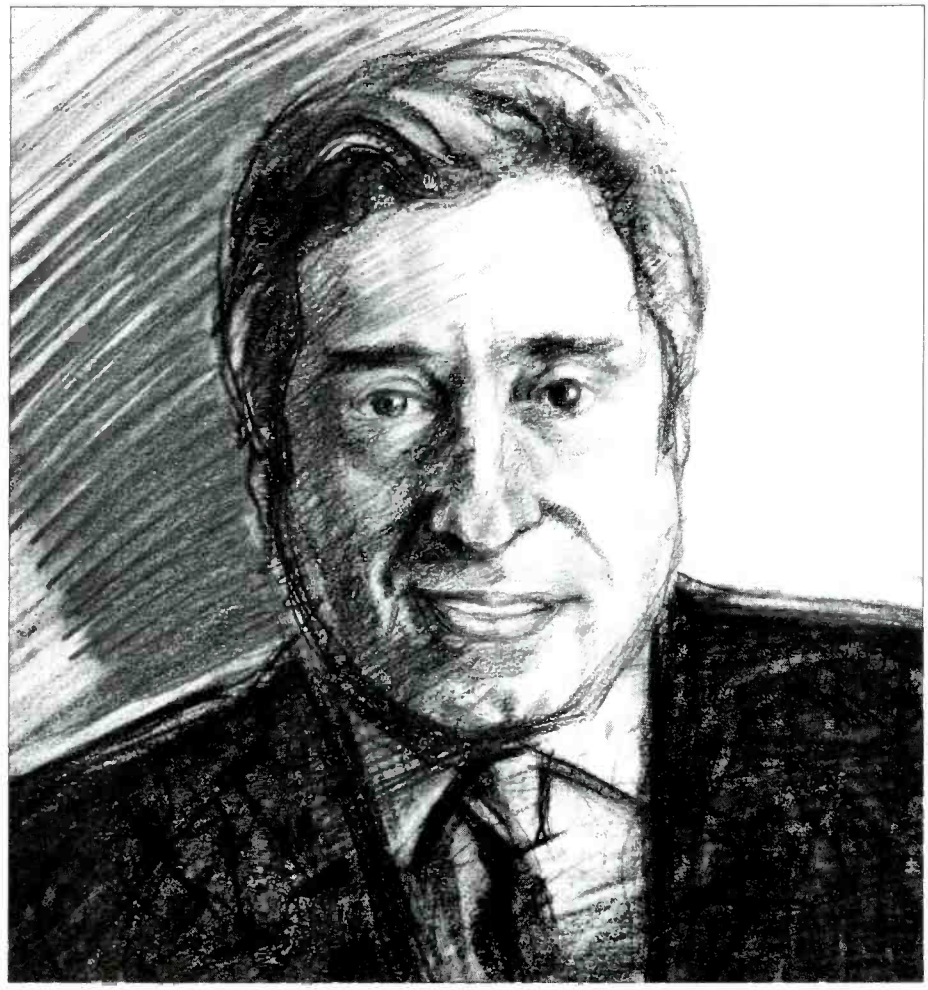


Illustration by Scott Reynolds

UP UNTIL THIS TIME THE function of affiliate-relations director had been something like that of papal nuncio — graceful and diplomatic. But Barnathan had been sent off into the wilderness to whip the troops into line, and he behaved accordingly. A less doughty warrior might have quailed at the thought of heading into hostile territory, but for him the assignment was ideal: The situation was critical, he enjoyed almost complete autonomy, and he could succeed only by the strength of his wits. Affiliates had to be persuaded to carry network programs, and Barnathan seemed like the last man in the world these local businessmen would heed. As he points out with a certain retrospective glee, "Stations hated research, they hated the Northern Establishment, and they hated Jews. So I had three strikes against me."

The affiliates had never seen anyone like Barnathan. He was loud and gruff, but he was irreproachably candid, and he knew more about their operations than they did themselves. Martin Umansky, president of ABC's Wichita affiliate, KAKE-TV, remembers being overwhelmed by this network missionary: "The first time I ran across him I talked to him about a rate increase and discovered he knew all about my market, he knew all the statistics. You can't tell him anything." Soon Barnathan had become everybody's free consultant; if a station had a problem, he would solve it. And Barnathan never failed to work for his charges after he had worked them over. He succeeded, for example, in expanding the station break from thirty seconds to forty, thus increasing local ad revenues. Umansky may be embroidering only slightly when he says, "I don't know an affiliate who doesn't love him."

So net net of all this was that by 1962 ABC had a decent lineup of stations, a complete, if still losing, schedule of programs, and some loyal advertisers. Then opportunity knocked on Barnathan's door once again. Capital Cities offered the rising young star (he was then thirty-three) the presidency of its Buffalo station, and ABC countered with the presidency of the television

station group it owned. Julie stuck with ABC — Capital Cities stock would have made him a millionaire today, he says with a what-the-hell smile — and two months later a management shake-up made him the general manager of the network. And that, of course, was where the intrepid frontiersman had to be: The plague of rural sitcoms on CBS had laid low ABC's prime-time ratings, and a swift response was called for.

By the next year, of course, ABC had turned everything around and equaled the other networks' prime-time ratings for the first time. Exactly who was responsible for this astonishing, if short-lived, change of fortune depends on who's doing the talking. Some people credit Leonard Goldenson, who established contacts with the movie studios, which then began turning out popular Westerns. Others credit Tom Moore, who was network president at the time. Barnathan himself shuttles between "we" and "I." Probably his major contribution was the novel idea of throwing all the new shows into the breach in a single week, rather than firing them off one by one as had been the practice. In 1965 ABC's new shows received a forty-five share, and though the network was soon back in last place, it had proved that it could compete.

And at this point Barnathan's skyrocketing career lost some thrust. He had risen high enough that his unorthodox personality suddenly got in the way. His immediate boss, Tom Moore, a Southern gentleman, had little in common with Barnathan. "Tom was slick," says Bob Trachinger, "and Julie was anything but slick." That's one way of putting it; not many men, it is also true, could be comfortable with a volcano as a right-hand man. As the volcano himself sees it, "Moore took all the credit [for the hit season], and then he started to feel I was threatening him. He didn't want me in that spot, so he decided to get rid of me." The next thing Julie Barnathan knew he was out on the wild frontier again, as chief of engineering and broadcast operations — an unwilling exile from Sixth Avenue. And Capital Cities had run out of openings.

"I was livid," he says, with his incurable candor. Like all rebuffs, though, this one had educational value, and Barnathan realized that one doesn't become what the networks like to call "a statesman" without a statesmanlike character. This is not, of course, precisely the way Barnathan himself would put it. "I know I'm not their kind of guy," he now says bitterly. "They want a cookie-cutter." And with his finger he traces on his desk the stamped-out shape of the compliant executive.

Over on Sixth Avenue a slightly different view of the situation is taken. Alfred Schneider, a corporate vice president, shares the general respect for Barnathan's intellect, loyalty, and organizational skills, but speaks of him, to put it delicately, as a diamond in the rough. Informed of Barnathan's cookie-cutter remark, Schneider meditated for a moment and replied, "With all the aplomb and the grandiose part of Julie, I think he has a feeling of inferiority because of his background." So, Schneider concludes, he shouts louder and acts tougher to compensate.

"And now," says Barnathan, "here I was," this analyst, bluff diplomat, and programmer, paddling around the vast pool of engineering with nothing to guide him save his new associates and his innate sense of direction. Nobody, however, gets his coordinates faster than Barnathan, a fact that has impressed his friend Bob Trachinger as the most striking sign of his intelligence. Trachinger recalls seeing Barnathan sitting in his predecessor's office, only days after he had assumed his new position. "The office was stacked high with engineering books, periodicals, texts. . . . And here was Julius Barnathan seated behind this desk with all this stuff around him, all this jargon, none of which he had ever looked into in his entire life, and he said to me, 'Bob, how do I learn this? What do I do?' What was so remarkable about the man was that within two years he took us into color; he mastered the subject, and out of a department that was in complete chaos and disarray he built an organization."

The fact is that, by accident rather than design, Barnathan had once again landed where he belonged: on the frontier. With the mass production of color television sets suddenly commercially feasible, the networks shifted their attention to the technical side as never before. Barnathan, once again his own man, was called upon to turn ragtag troops into a fighting force. And at the time, as engineering vice president Verne Pointer recalls, ABC's technical staff was outnumbered at the other networks by something like seven to one.

Barnathan quickly won over his engineers and technicians, generally an earthy lot, with his frankness and intelligence. He told them what was needed and left the technical side to them. "I knew what I wanted to come out with," he says, as he fiddles with an invitation sitting on his desk. "If I know my come-out I say to the guy, 'Tell it to me in English. Can it do this for me? Will it be able to do that?' If he said yes — fine. If not, then I don't do it." Now he's tossing the invitation from hand to hand, getting excited. "What do I care if it's glass, it's lasers, it's made out of toilet paper? I don't need it!" And with that he tosses the invitation off the desk.

Barnathan and ABC first had the chance to strut their new technical plumage in the 1968 Winter and Summer Olympics. Until that year American broadcasters had regarded the Olympics as dubious fare. But ABC changed all that. The games have spurred many of the network's technological innovations, and in preparation for '68 ABC developed a wireless camera, a wireless microphone, and a slow-motion color recorder. Barnathan didn't invent any of these devices himself, but he realized their importance, bargained for them, and hurried them into readiness. Together they gave the network far more flexibility and razzmatazz, and the notion began to dawn that the Olympics offered an unparalleled opportunity for virtuoso broadcasting. The notion also began to dawn that ABC was reaching technological maturity.

Barnathan and ABC have an ongoing love affair with the Olympics. The network will broadcast both the Winter and Summer Games in 1984 — 220 hours' worth — and expects to blow the world's mind with computer-generated graphics. But Barnathan's first loves — the Games in '68 and '72 — remain the sweetest. As he reminisces about '72, he whispers at first. But soon he's yelling and pounding the table. He did the research, he had the numbers, he convinced Arledge to program the broadcasts as you would a whole schedule — counter-programming, holding the best

THE WIZARD OF ABC

"Barnathan is responsible for much of the visual dazzlement that is ABC's hallmark."

for prime time — and every night Mark Spitz won a different gold medal. He lets out a whoop of pleasure and vindication and fierce joy. "And then you come back home, you're a conquering hero, everybody's going crazy about you, they give you medals, badges, they throw parties for you. You sorta get that feeling. I'll never forget that feeling."

Barnathan received the National Association of Broadcasters' "Engineering Achievement" award in April — a remarkable distinction for a man with no engineering background — and in compiling his achievements ABC singled out the development of the color slow-motion recorder, the hand-held camera, and the use of the "Open-Loop Synchronizing System," which made possible the split-screen technique, among others. But the invention of which Barnathan is most proud, and for which he is best-known, is closed captioning for the deaf.

The network values Barnathan not for an invention or two but because, as he puts it, he knows his "come-out." He has a management perspective: He knows what is wanted to improve the network's look; he can tell his superiors what they can get, how much it will cost, and when they will get it. Like Roone Arledge with news programming, says Al Schneider, Barnathan promised, "Give me the money and equipment and I will give you a first-class facility." And towards this end Barnathan sees every sparrow that falls. He negotiates with unions and suppliers, he watches every nickel, he involves himself with equipment specifications, he knows everyone's problems. He is, says his operations vice president, Phil Levens, "a total company man."

These days Barnathan is thinking about the future, and about how ABC can take advantage of the proliferation of new technologies. Like the other networks, ABC has already made itself a stakeholder in the television revolution, bidding for low-power stations, testing viewdata, conducting a joint venture with sports channel ESPN to provide pay television, and initiating two twenty-four-hour news channels in concert with Westinghouse and in direct competition with Ted Turner's Cable News Network.

Is ABC afraid for the future of network television? Barnathan does not like the drift of the question, implying as it does a contraction of the ever-expanding world in which he has lived, a "total company man," for most of his adult life. The question, in fact, makes him mad. ("He's got a heart of putty," says Phil Levens. "But don't cross him.")

THE WIZARD OF ABC

"I want to tell you something," he says, his voice rising, his belly pointing menacingly at his listener. "Who's going to lay out $22 million [the cost of an hour of prime time over a full season] to get a commitment from a packager? Without the assurance of the advertisers, without the assurance of the clearances? Who's going to do that? What kind of a nut is he? *We* have a distribution system, *we* have the stations, they're in line, and they're willing to clear."

"ABC looks to him to lead it into a future painfully different from the glory days of the networks."

His point is that no one else can afford to make, on a regular basis, the kind of programming that attracts mass audiences. Cable programmers, he points out, have yet to offer anything likely to divert a large body of viewers from network fare. "Sure we're going to lose," he admits. Maybe the networks will be attracting only half the market share by the end of the decade. But, he says flatly, "they will still be the major suppliers of programming up until 1990. After that," he adds in a rare concession to uncertainty, "I don't know what's going to happen."

The networks, in other words, may not be able to control the proliferation of alternative program-delivery systems, but they can dominate those systems by supplying the "software." ABC has managed an early foothold in the new world of pay television with its Home View Network (HVN), which will deliver movies directly to a subscriber's video recorder in the middle of the night. (To avoid copyright problems, most of the tapes will "self-destruct" within thirty days: A coded signal at the end of the movie will instruct a device attached to the subscriber's VCR to stop unscrambling it.) At present HVN is to be available on a monthly basis, though Barnathan foresees other possibilities, such as pay-per-view. He was instrumental in hammering out a number of the crucial details, but for once he would rather not see his role magnified in print. Accused of a sudden bout of tact, Barnathan responds with a story: ABC's in-house magazine asked Dennis Lewin, producer of *ABC Sports*, whether Barnathan's efforts had been important to his success. Lewin, ever mindful of the jealous god above him, responded, "Roone Arledge is a genius." Barnathan explodes in his big, cascading laugh, a laugh that would choke a lesser throat.

If the networks do thrive, Barnathan agrees, it will be in a drastically different technological environment. He foresees, like others, an explosion in the availability of information at home, though he stipulates that it will arrive on a computer screen rather than take up precious time on the television screen. For this reason Barnathan has strongly recommended against the development of teletext, an information system that viewers would probably watch during commercial breaks. He has put ABC to work on high-definition television (HDTV), a computerized system for delivering a sharper picture. Although Barnathan does not think HDTV will enter the home for many years, he expects ABC's HDTV programs to be presented in movie theaters soon.

Much more, of course, will change. But Barnathan stresses that there will always be a network. He cannot imagine it otherwise: Faith makes a man deep, but narrow. Alternative visions of television seem to him downright silly. "Unlike our friend who believes that the medium is the message," Barnathan says over his shoulder, scurrying about the office, "I believe the message is the medium."

Presumably he means that the message is the message. Television, like Julie Barnathan, means what it says. Barnathan has mastered the rules of television like few others: Deliver the equipment, deliver the program, deliver the affiliate, deliver the right piece of audience — you got an advertiser and you got yourself a ball game. A dry formulation, perhaps, but it works and is thus irrefutable. Barnathan knows where all the buttons are located; he's pushed them all. There is a certain aptness to his position as ABC's grand mechanic, down on his knees with grease on his coveralls, grinning from ear to ear as he fixes yet another problem. These days the frontier is the one inside the machine, and Julie Barnathan, as always, is where the action is. ■

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A NEW WORLD

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The Legal System in the Video Age

The new technologies are helping to grease the wheels of justice

WHILE THE DEBATE over allowing cameras in the courtroom drags on state by state, a murder trial in Ohio went to the extreme last March: It was conducted almost entirely on a television screen. Except for the opening and closing statements by the defense and prosecution, which were delivered live, all testimony had been presented on video tape before a three-judge panel (the defendant had waived his right to a jury trial). This murder trial by video still stirs controversy among its participants, but both sides agree that — for civil cases, at least — taping testimony at the convenience of witnesses and lawyers is a boon, and already has reduced this Ohio court's staggering backlog of cases.

Studies show juries can retain lengthy testimony more easily when it is on-screen.

Such uses of video in our judicial system may become commonplace. Perhaps the most dramatic examples have been in the Abscam trials and actress Jodie Foster's on-screen appearance at the trial of John Hinckley. But in more routine cases, too, taping depositions has proven worthwhile. Sick or handicapped witnesses, for instance, can testify on video tape from their homes. Furthermore, inadmissible testimony can be edited out before the jurors are exposed to it. And studies show that juries can retain lengthy testimony more easily when it is on-screen than when it is live.

Harvard law professor Arthur Miller takes a cautious view of taping testimony. "There is no doubt that your perceptions change if you view a witness on a screen. How a witness comports himself or herself on the stand is thought to be very important by many trial lawyers, right down to eye contact." However, when the witness is unavailable, "the visual testimony *is* more impressive than someone reading a transcript, which has its own distortions." He emphasizes that the human element is an important one, and warns that technology could dehumanize the judicial system.

Nevertheless, Miller considers the future role of television in the judicial process inevitable. "I think we're going to see wider use of depositions by closed-circuit television. We're in an energy-conscious environment, and this is one way to reduce unnecessary travel and expense, assuming the technology becomes more sophisticated. I can even see a cable channel devoted to private use: a lawyer in Sheboygan questioning a witness in Texarkana, for instance. In the future, it is possible that motions, pleadings, and other legal maneuvers can be done over a combination of computers and closed-circuit television, with everybody sitting at home base."

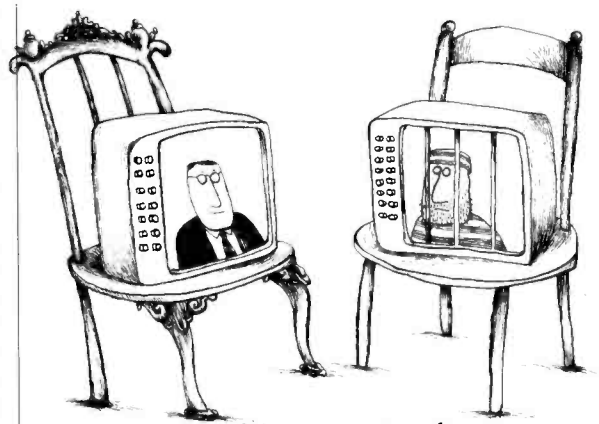

Illustration by Jo Teodorescu

Computers are already doing their part to grease the wheels of justice. The federal courts are well on their way to being computerized, and an on-line, computer-based legal research system called Lexis is now available in many large American law firms. "Anything that facilitates communication between lawyers, clients, and courts," says Miller, "is likely to facilitate settlement or at least increase the speed with which disputes are resolved."

"I can see a lawyer in Sheboygan questioning a witness in Texarkana on a cable channel."

Closed-circuit television is also finding a niche in law enforcement. A promising experiment underway in New York is being followed closely by police departments in other states: After seven years of research and groundwork, Suffolk County has passed special legislation permitting police stations to install a video system for the arraignment of prisoners soon after arrest. The brainchild of Angelo Mauceri, administrative judge of the Suffolk County District Court, and Bernard Burton, president of the company con-

A NEW WORLD

structing the device, Tricom Systems, the video system is expected to speed up arraignments and save close to $1 million a year usually spent on feeding, housing, guarding, and transporting prisoners from police precincts to the courthouse.

So far, Suffolk's video arraignments do not occur in felony cases, and operate in only two of its five precincts, although the system will expand if it proves successful. The hardware and installation cost $1 million, and maintenance is estimated to run $50,000 a year. "Insignificant," Mauceri insists, "compared to the cost of paying the police to guard prisoners at the courthouse and hang around waiting for their turn."

The system consists of a camera and a monitor at the precinct, and, for the judge, a camera, a monitor, and an operator's console in a court anteroom. The prisoner and judge see each other on a split screen. A lawyer can be present, if necessary, and lawyer-client conferences can be kept private. The arraignment, which usually takes only a few minutes, is taped and kept on file for later reference. Burton points out that the tapes would be useful for evidence "if there is any police brutality, since bruises would be visible on the full-color screen, and conversely, tapes would discourage false claims of brutality."

Eventually, mobile units will be dispatched to scenes of foreseeable arrests, such as protests involving civil disobedience. Following a recent demonstration at a nuclear power plant in New York's Suffolk County, there were more than four hundred arrests; arraignment took hours and could have been speeded up by the closed-circuit technology.

In a more controversial application of the technology, closed-circuit television will soon be used for an experiment in crime prevention. The Miami police department plans to install closed-circuit cameras in the city's business district. That this might constitute an invasion of privacy is denied by proponents, who point to the routine surveillance of bank customers.

Closed-circuit television will soon be installed on Miami's streets.

It is probably too soon to leap to Orwellian conclusions about the automation of justice in the United States. Right now, the judicial system is severely handicapped by inadequate facilities, overcrowded courts, and a shortage of judges. Many observers count this overload as a more serious threat to the system — and even to our civil rights — than the possibly dehumanizing effect of technology. If video can rejuvenate the system, they reason, all of us will be better served.

AUDREY BERMAN

Where can you meet Harrison Ford, Ridley Scott, Steve Martin, Sean Connery, Bo Derek, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Frank Oz, George Lucas, Sam Fuller, Richard Brooks, Michael Winner, Stephen King, Nancy Allen, Robert Altman, William Devane, John Landis, Irvin Kershner, William Fraker, John Frankenheimer, Roger Moore, Maud Adams, George Romero, David Cronenberg, Jamie Lee Curtis, Morgan Fairchild, Steven Spielberg and John Milius?

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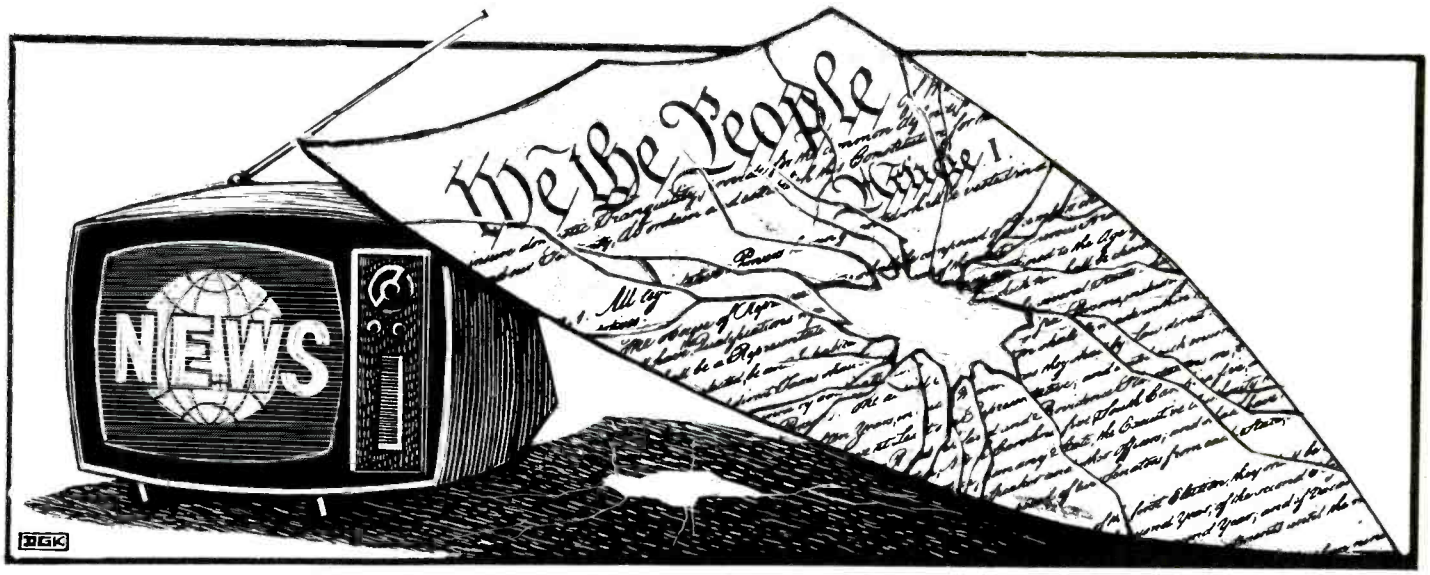
'Congress Shall Make No Law . . .'

by Mark S. Fowler



THE FIRST AMENDMENT to the U.S. Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." I believe that broadcasting deserves the same protection print has under the Constitution.

This view rankles those who would prefer to keep broadcasters on a short tether when it comes to editorial freedom — to keep the Federal Communications Commission holding the leash and yanking the chain every so often. The more historically minded justify the different treatment of broadcast and print with the rationale that space on the broadcast spectrum is scarce. Others bluntly assert that the "impact" of television and radio justifies limiting First Amendment protection.

I do not accept either of these arguments, particularly in light of the clear, sure language of the Constitution and the heavy burden it imposes on those who try to regulate the press.

As to scarcity of spectrum space, in many markets there has never been a shortage of channels, simply a shortage of advertising or other revenues to support more outlets. In those markets where, say, an additional VHF television channel can't be added under existing interference standards, one must ask — as U.S. Appeals Court Judge David Bazelon did half a decade ago — scarcity compared to what? In these major cities, newspapers, not television or radio, form the scarcer medium. Fortunately, advocates of greater content regulation have not managed to lower the standard of protection accorded newspapers to match that accorded broadcasters.

The second argument for leaving radio and television vulnerable is the impact of the two media. According to this theory, the electronic media are too powerful, because they may influence decisions in the political arena or shape values in the home. This "power," however ill-defined by its discoverers, is reason enough to treat broadcasting differently from print. The more effective the speech, the less protection it needs from the First Amendment. But many forms of expression, from hit movies to newspaper exposés, have a great impact in society. If we start to regulate media according to impact, we set a national policy favoring the bland, not the bold. This logic turns the First Amendment on its head.

The impact theory reached its high-water mark in the 1978 Supreme Court's *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation* case, which concerned an afternoon broadcast of comedian George Carlin's "Seven Dirty Words" monologue. Involved was but a single complaint about an FM broadcast heard over a car radio. But the court used the opportunity to subordinate radio and television to newspapers and books on the free-speech issue.

Some would like to see a policy toward television programming based on the inverse of the child-proof bottle cap: Only what is fit for children will be obtainable over the air. It's one thing to schedule adult-oriented programs late at night or to provide suitable warnings; it's another to dilute the content of radio and television fare until it's on a par with browsing material in a pediatrician's waiting room.

It's obvious that I don't feel radio and television should be treated differently from print journalism under the First

Illustrations by David G. Klein

Mark S. Fowler is chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

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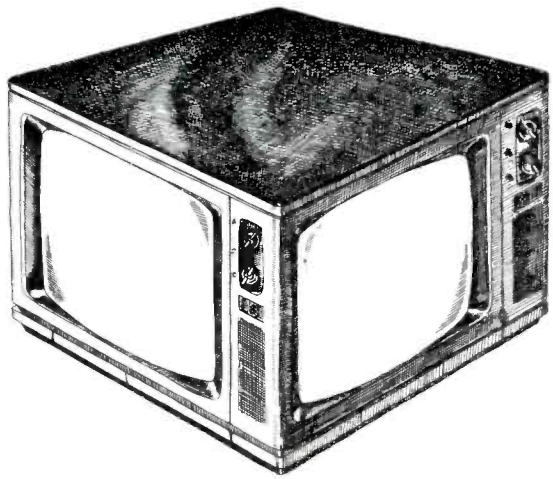

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TELEVISION IS A TWO-WAY MEDIUM

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13 WHBQ-TV MEMPHIS

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Amendment. My conviction leads me to seek an end to content regulation of broadcasting in general. Among these efforts has been my call (joined, incidentally, by a bipartisan majority of the FCC) to Congress for repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and political-speech rules.

Let me be clear: I fully subscribe to the *principles* of the Fairness Doctrine. Covering controversial issues is what the news business is all about. Making sure that all significant sides of an issue are covered is what good journalism is all about.

When editors and producers decide what's news and whether their coverage has presented all sides of a controversial issue, they are exercising editorial discretion. When a majority of politically appointed commissioners — four out of seven — judge the merits of those editorial decisions, they are exercising rights of censorship.

Some, including the editor-in-chief of this magazine, would prefer that the government continue its oversight of television and radio content, to decide when a network has been "fair" or whether a station has spent enough time on a particular matter. This is what I would call a "fair press." What I advocate is a free press.

"In the long run we are better off with a free press, even if it isn't always a fair press."

A free press presupposes that editors, first and last, decide what to cover. Abuses there may surely be. As a political conservative and early supporter of Ronald Reagan, I have not felt that the press was always our ally. Indeed, broadcast journalists have shown a skepticism sometimes bordering on the antagonistic towards those of the right who speak their mind unambiguously.

But I am willing to put up with the abuses and mistakes of the press because I believe that a free press, free to print and broadcast as it chooses, free even to make mistakes, is better than one ultimately regulated by government.

The model of a "fair press" assumes quite the opposite — that broadcast journalists cannot be trusted. And so an FCC must oversee this segment of the press. Find a convenient, if illogical, distinction by which to regulate the medium (such as scarcity) or a politically popular one (such as the impact of programming), and *voilà* — you have a law, indeed scores of them, abridging the freedom of the electronic press.

But if the history of print journalism has taught us anything, it is that this country can survive episodes of inaccurate, biased reporting, whether print or broadcast. No Federal Magazine Commission ordered *Channels* to print this article. And no federal commission should.

In the long run, the United States is better off with a free press, even if it sometimes is not a fair press. Recently President Reagan quoted Thomas Jefferson on the subject of the government and press. "If it were left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government," Jefferson said, "I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Today's media situation is, of course, more complex than in Jefferson's day. Concentration of ownership can pose special problems. And the electronic media play major roles in informing the public and occupying its leisure hours. But the governing principle of a free press ought to remain, despite the complexities. In all media save one it does. It is time to apply this principle to broadcasting.

Hinckley's Other Love Affair

by Daniel Schorr

Would you give your life for a cause?
Would you give your life for a loved one?
Would you give your life to save that television show from being canceled?

Do you care about the children in Cambodia?
Do you care about the children in Harlem?
Do you care about anyone except the children in that situation comedy?

Can you do me a big favor?
Can you do yourself a big favor?
Can you reach over and turn off the television set so we can talk?

The above is Government Exhibit 62CC in the trial of *United States of America v. John W. Hinckley Jr.* It was written by the defendant in 1979, a complaint from a child of the

Daniel Schorr is based in Washington, D.C. as senior correspondent for the Cable News Network.

media age about television's blurring of reality and assault on human values.

More explicitly, Hinckley wrote *Newsweek* in September 1981, five months after shooting President Reagan: "Watching too much television can cause numerous social disorders. The damn TV is on all day and night in most homes and is probably more harmful than movies and books. It is not a good way to pass time because . . . a fantasy life tends to develop the longer a person stays in front of the tube."

Hinckley passed a phenomenal amount of time in front of "the damn TV" before he fashioned a starring role for himself in the media hall of fame. A jury found him insane, but Hinckley's story still reflects the conditioning and incentives for violence offered by a mindless entertainment medium that has turned brutality into a spectator sport.

In college, where most of his schoolmates had started turning from the "boob tube" to campus and social activities, Hinckley increasingly isolated himself until he was spending almost all his waking time watching television. At Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, between 1977 and 1980, he rented television sets from the start of each semester to the end. Don Barrett of Acco TV Rentals told me he was surprised how Hinckley subsisted in an apartment almost bare of furnishings, even silverware. The building manager, Mark Swafford, once entered the apartment to repair a clogged drain and found the young man, deep in food-wrapping litter, riveted to the set, oblivious to the visitor.

In retrospect, it was a clear symptom of alienation. "In the absence of family, peer, and school relationships," reported the National Commission of the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1969, "television becomes the most compatible substitute for real-life experience."

AS A CHILD, the behavioral scientists tell us, Hinckley would already have been bombarded with programming that would have made a shooting seem commonplace, sanitized, and unreal. The Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Jesse Steinfeld, reported in 1972, "A causal relationship has been shown between violence-viewing and aggression." A 1982 update by the National Institute of Mental Health said that ten more years of research have "significantly strengthened" that conclusion.

As his trial disclosed, Hinckley reached out for fictional heroes to emulate. He was Travis Bickle, the gun-slinging *Taxi Driver* of the movies, intent on resolving his identity crisis by assassination or by a shoot-out to "rescue" a teen-age prostitute. He was also *The Fan* of Bob Randall's novel, who, when he felt rejected by an actress, would kill her and himself. And he was David Hubbard's *The Skyjacker* as well as a little of Shakespeare's Romeo.

Demented fantasies? Yes, but Hinckley also contrived to exploit the world of media reality and its reflex celebration of real violence. Those outside the pale, from the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany to urban rioters in the United States, have learned that television selects violence as the royal road to recognition. Anthony George Kiritsis, in Indianapolis in 1977, knew how to get attention when he wired a shotgun to a hostage and said, "Get those goddamn cameras on! I'm a goddamn national hero!"

To some, desperate for media validation of their identities, even suicide seems not too high a price. An anchorwoman on station WXLT in Sarasota, Florida in 1974, depressed about her newscast's falling ratings, shot herself in the head on live television — a theme on which Paddy Chayevsky enlarged in the film *Network*.

Hinckley told psychiatrists he had deliberately calculated the shooting of President Reagan to win maximum media attention. "No crime carries as much publicity as the assassination of the President of the United States," he said. He sneered at Arthur Bremer, who had first stalked President Nixon, for going "down a few pegs" to attack Alabama Governor George Wallace. Hinckley himself, after stalking President Carter during the 1980 campaign, decided to shift to Reagan because of Carter's declining popularity.

His action would elicit the command performances of Dan Rather, Frank Reynolds, Roger Mudd, and other news superstars — America's way, since 1963, of certifying a "historic deed." All over the country, people would tingle in mixed horror and titillation to the familiar interruption, *Special Report*.

Hinckley immediately alerted arresting officers to the treasures in his hotel room — his letter to Jodie Foster and other meticulously arranged exhibits. His first question to Secret Service agent Steven Colo, interrogating him at 7:20 P.M. during network news time on the day of the shooting, was, "Is it on TV?" To Hinckley's evident satisfaction, Colo replied, "It's about the only thing on television."

"That's too bad," Hinckley said paradoxically, "because it's going to affect other people." He was right. As television, again and again, remorselessly, hypnotically, played the video tape of the shooting, at normal speed, in slow motion, and in stop-action replay, the Secret Service recorded an astonishing number of threats against the President. Edward Michael Robinson, arrested in New York, said Hinckley had appeared to him in a dream and told him to "bring completion to Hinckley's reality."

"Hinckley exploited the world of media and its enjoyment of real violence."

Hinckley had, indeed, achieved one reality, thanks to the media reflex: identity and fame. He told the police he felt "relieved" that he had finally done it. He told psychiatrists that he knew he would spend the rest of his life in the spotlight, that he was receiving a "tremendous" number of requests for interviews, one of them from Barbara Walters (whose name he pronounced "Wawa"). He had gone, he said, "from obscurity to notoriety." He talked of writing a book about the shooting of the President. He described his situation to psychiatrists as "a movie starring me and the Reagans, with a cast of doctors, lawyers, and hangers-on." Transported in helicopters and police-escorted limousines past avid camera crews, he said, "I feel like the President now with my own retinue. We both wear bulletproof vests now."

From his jail cell he watched, with fascination, reports of his trial on television. The federal marshals said he was insatiable in his demand for newspapers.

More recently Hinckley told *The Washington Post*, in a telephone interview from St. Elizabeth's Hospital, that because he had been acquitted, he had been deprived of the opportunity to read the sentencing speech he had prepared. What he had not had a chance to say, among other things, was that "My life has become a melodrama," and "the entire civilized world knows who I am."

One awaits with trepidation the day of Hinckley's release and his round of talk-show appearances.

"Fantasies become reality in my world," Hinckley had written in one of his tortured 1979 poems. But he had really done it. The media freak had freaked out the media. ■

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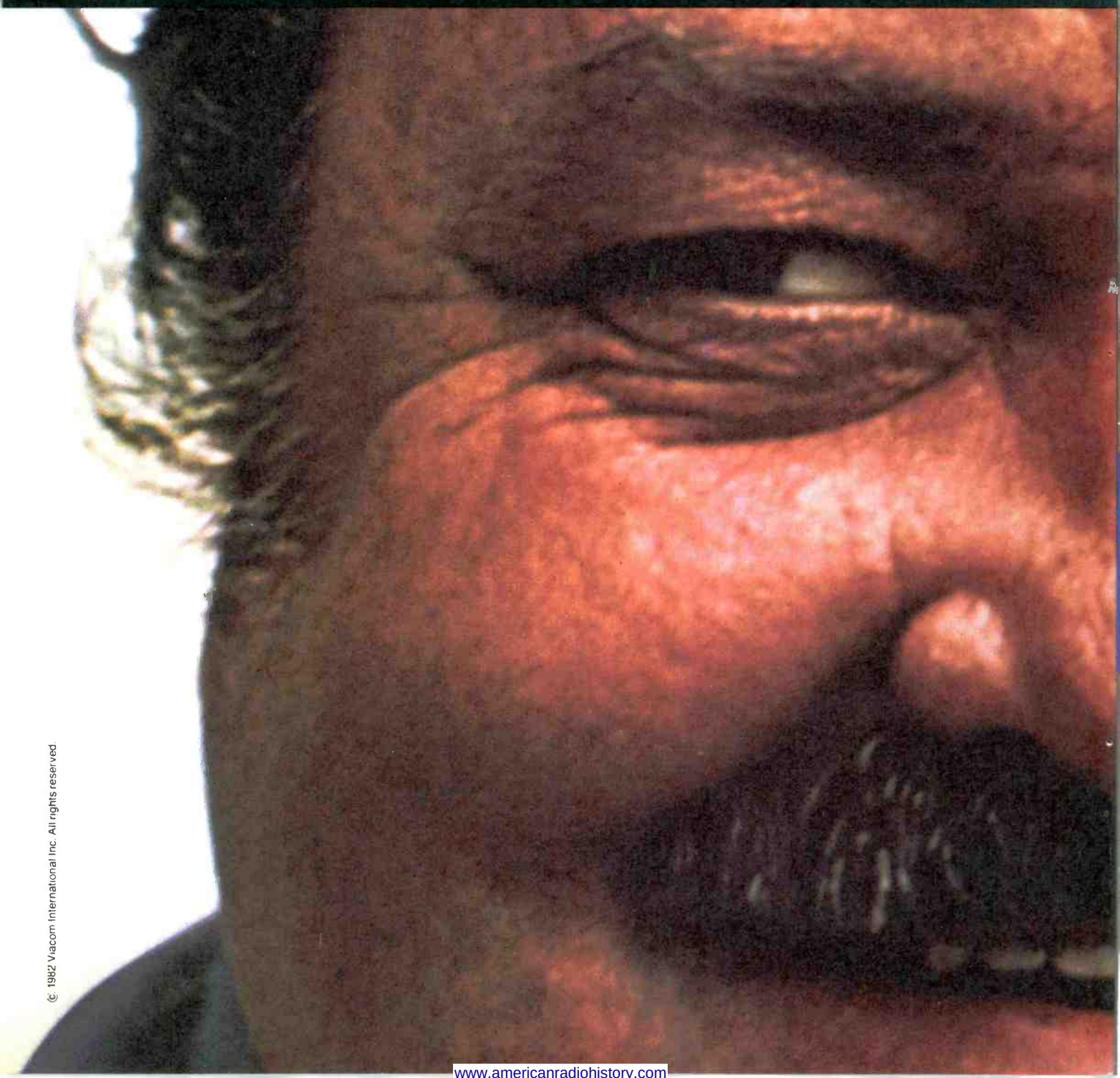

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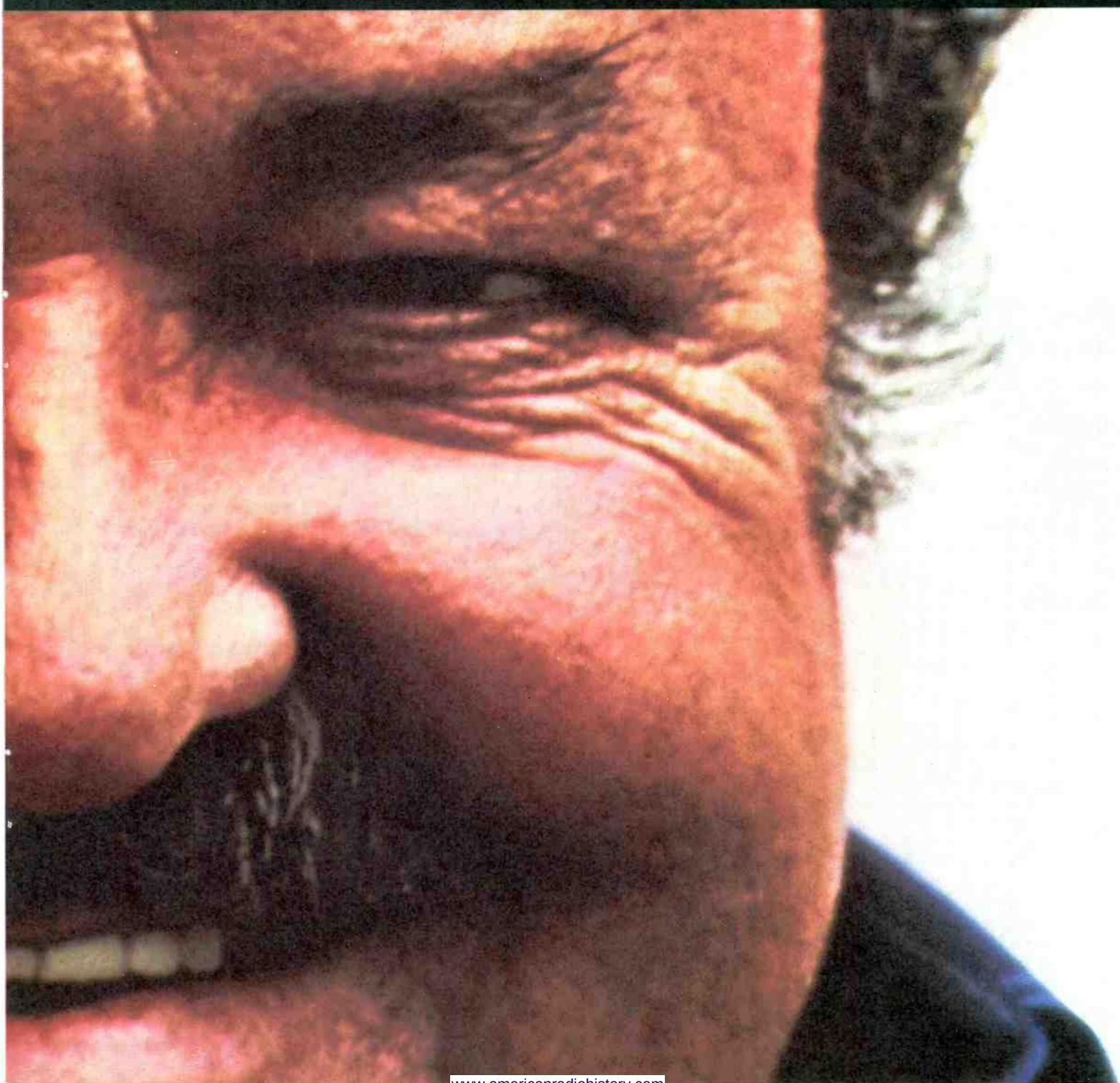

PROGRAM NOTES

The News Boom

Is it worth losing sleep over?

TELEVISION lately has been pumping out more news than ever before — twenty-four-hour news, early-early news, prime-time news, late-late news. In their first year of operation, all the new news services on broadcast television and cable together will add more than 25,000 hours of news programming to existing schedules.

That sounds like a lot. But it doesn't take much viewing to see that more news does not necessarily mean more variety, or even more detail. The Satellite News Channel, for instance, is simply a convenience service, repeating the same stories (slightly modified in order to sound fresh) three times every hour. And the new early-morning newscasts have only adapted for themselves the quick and light formula that made a winner of *Good Morning America*. Still, amid all these snappy and derivative programs, a few are breaking new ground.

Perhaps because Sunday morning is different, *Sunday Morning with Charles Kuralt* is one of these. Since 1979, quietly, with grace and understatement, Kuralt has been showing just how good television news can be. Fortunately, he is not entirely alone. *NBC News Overnight,* which began this summer, and even the latest incarnation of the *NBC Nightly News,* have also dared to resist the trend toward jazzier news. Rather than try to compress the news to deliver as much of it as possible, these three programs put a premium on reporting the news in the best way television can — by letting its pictures tell their stories.

This may seem a simple enough principle, but most news broadcasters assiduously ignore it. Partly because such services as the *Satellite News Channel* and NBC's *Early Today* are modeled directly on all-news radio, they give pictures short shrift. A two-second clip of a tank says "war story." But

Linda Ellerbee and Lloyd Dobyns, co-anchors of NBC News Overnight

even on the typical prime-time network newscasts, images hardly ever stay on the screen long enough for a viewer to get a good look at them. Instead they spin and flash around the screen, receding into one corner only to shoot back out of another, as if the producers don't believe that people really want to see the pictures.

A clue to the meaning of this is the technical flourish that makes the transition from one image to another resemble, of all things, the pages of a book being turned. This is a telling gimmick, for broadcast journalists have always worried that their medium is more superficial than print. As if to compensate, television news attempts the impossible: to convey the same kinds and amounts of news that words do, even though the scripts of most nightly newscasts wouldn't fill the front page of a newspaper.

Instead of trying to overcome this built-in weakness, some newscasts are working to make the most of it. NBC's *Nightly News,* for instance, has lately distinguished itself from competitors by encouraging correspondents to take a back seat to their satellite-transmitted images. NBC's reports from Beirut this summer showed extraordinary restraint in their use of language; words served primarily to put pictures of the city's suffering in context. Correspondents commonly began their sentences with "This is . . ." and let the pictures do the rest.

The great enemy of such reporting, of course, is time — pictures require it but most programs can't spare it. So it is the great luxury of *Sunday Morning* to have ninety minutes of "fringe time." Here, stories are allowed to reveal themselves gradually, often taking as long as twelve uninterrupted minutes. Pictures linger. Silences speak. A correspondent isn't always explaining what you see on the screen before you see it.

NBC News Overnight doesn't give stories the kind of time they get on *Sunday Morning,* yet it has been noteworthy for its wry narration and its boldness in seeking out the day's strongest or most interesting images. Introducing a story on the World Cup soccer match, the anchor says, "This is what most of Europe was watching Monday." A correspondent begins a story on Lebanon saying, "This is the cease-fire . . ." and the pictures let the viewer be judge.

After recapitulating the most important stories from the network's evening newscast, *Overnight* presents stories from NBC's local affiliates. A camera crew is taking aerial shots of a leaking grain elevator bin in Iowa when the silo suddenly explodes. "It blew," they cry. "We got it on tape." One fine story about the space shuttle (put together by John Long, video-tape editor at NBC's Miami bureau) was done without any narration. The work of an editor given time and freedom, it's a purely visual evocation of the shuttle's most recent mission, which did more to convey the flight's excitement than any other news report.

The many extra hours now available for news offer an unprecedented opportunity for television to develop its particular strengths as a journalistic medium. CBS pointed the way with *Sunday Morning*. ABC almost inadvertently developed other possibilities when *America Held Hostage* became an overnight hit, convincing the network to create *Nightline*. But so far, the twenty-four-hour news services and the new early-morning shows have done little with the extra time, relying instead on tested formulas to serve up more of the same. How CBS and ABC will choose to use their new late-night hours remains to be seen. If, like *NBC News Overnight* and *Sunday Morning,* they dare to be different, then they, too, will be worth losing sleep over.

MICHAEL SCHWARZ

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WarnerAmexCable

33 Brompton Place

Cable's 'Creative Freedom'

Libbie Lennie (Patricia), Roberta Weiss (Toni) and Brenda Bazinet (Robin) of 33 Brompton Place.

MUCH WAS MADE last spring of Home Box Office's attempt to pick up *Taxi*, after ABC dropped the Emmy-Award winning comedy series. Although NBC eventually outbid the pay-cable service's $6 million offer, the impact of HBO's message was scarcely diminished: Pay cable was ready to compete with the networks for regular series programming. And, as HBO executive vice president Michael Fuchs suggested at the time, cable could outdo the networks in one important respect: "What we can offer producers," he said, "is a freer creative environment."

If anyone doubts the meaning of "a freer creative environment," he need only look to HBO's principal pay-cable rival, Showtime, which recently introduced two of its own series. Imagine a version of *Dallas* in which, each week, Pam or Sue Ellen exposed a salient part of her anatomy, and you have a fair grasp of the creative concept behind *Romance* and *33 Brompton Place*, cable's first "adult serials."

Showtime's serials tell complete stories in five-episode chunks; four installments are shown in one month, with the climax held over into the following month for "continuity" — that is, to deter subscribers who might wish to discontinue the service. "We feel that the key to subscriber satisfaction is continuity," a Showtime spokesman explained, "plus characters that subscribers will like and identify with."

A bit of sex helps, too. Just as you can depend on J.R. flashing his malevolent smile on *Dallas* any Friday, you can be sure that two or more bare breasts will put in an appearance on every episode of *33 Brompton Place*. Indeed, so obligatory have these breasts become that one wonders whether they reflect "creative freedom" or merely amount to a new convention under which the series' writers must labor.

33 Brompton Place (which, breasts aside, is far more interesting than *Romance)* is about the loves and careers of three young women who share a luxury penthouse on Chicago's Gold Coast. One of the roommates, Robin MacNamara, works for a firm specializing in industrial espionage. They've set her up in the swank pad to lure blackmail victims into her bedroom, which is rigged for photography and sound recording. Robin's breasts are the ones featured in the first episode.

In the second episode, we glimpse those of roommate Patricia Powers, assistant managing editor at *Fox*, a highbrow girlie magazine meant to resemble *Playboy*. Patricia becomes a vehicle for creative freedom during a tryst with a married lawyer. The smart roommate, she gets to deliver all the fancy double entendres. "Counselor, I want to plead insanity," she purrs. "Do you think that you can get me off?" "I can get you off right now," he purrs back.

One would expect the third episode of *33 Brompton Place* to feature the breasts of Toni Teasdale, the third roommate. But Toni is the virgin of the group, an aspiring model who has come to the Big City from a farm town called Kitchener, so it appears that a great deal of suspense will build up around her before creative freedom ensues. Still, new breasts were called for, so her less principled sister was called in from Kitchener for a visit.

Presumably, in future installments of *33 Brompton Place* progress will be made from breasts to other parts of the anatomy. Creative freedom is like that.

That cable's adult serials will spirit away *Dallas* fans seems unlikely, at least for the time being. A serious problem with Showtime's series is that they are produced on low budgets, and they show it. *33 Brompton Place* boasts exactly two exterior shots, used over and over to establish the apartment building and the *Fox* offices; the rest is shot on a sound stage in Canada, where production costs are lower. No doubt to economize on set changes and scripts, producers keep the pace at a crawl. And where the bad writing stops and the bad acting begins is a question too painful to contemplate.

But one shouldn't make too much of these shortcomings. Right now, Showtime's three million subscribers are not enough to provide a financial base for "network quality" production. That could well change, however; HBO's offer for *Taxi* indicates it will. And when it does, the adult serial will have to be reckoned with. Soap operas have traditionally depended on women for their audience, but cable can add substantial numbers of men to that audience, thanks to "creative freedom." Then the adult serial will be unbeatable, and we will look back at *33 Brompton Place* as some kind of landmark.

MICHAEL POLLAN

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The Sound and the Fury of MTV

Cable rock that's not for all ages

by Geoffrey Stokes

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was radio. *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club,* Arthur Godfrey, *Guiding Light,* Henry Morgan, Jack Benny, Fred Allen — in a word, "shows." All of which, mutatis mutandis, went on to become television, while radio became wallpaper. You turned on station X and you no longer got something around which the family gathered, but background — something to listen to while you were going about your daily business. Something to be heard, finally, from different receivers: Dad battling the commuter traffic to the local all-news station; Mom in the kitchen, ironing to "beautiful music," and the kids in their room, pretending to do homework while Little Richard blasted from the portable. There were no "shows," only programming. You want shows? Watch television.

Which, for a while, we did. All in the same room — "the family room," in real-estate parlance — and all at the same time. *I Love Lucy,* maybe, or Ed Sullivan, and to the extent that sitting in the dark and staring forward could be considered shared activity, television had brought us together again. At least until the television sets were produced so inexpensively that every room could have one, and until counterprogramming further fragmented the family. By the late seventies, except for major events like the Super Bowl, or assassinations, we were strangers again.

So one would expect the pendulum to swing again, the market to bring forth a line of products or programming that would once again draw the family together. And one would not be disappointed. Certainly the oversized screens developed by Advent and others signal a step in that direction, and cable itself — especially with the paid-channel options — may work as a centralizing agent, at least until the cost of hookups for second (and third) sets drops. Perhaps most spectacularly, if one believes the commercials on their behalf, the various video games are designed as total-family activities.

But as the left hand giveth away, the right hand puncheth in the face. Even as one Warner subsidiary wants us all to hunker down and play Pac-Man, Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment Corporation has, over the last year, hooked up more than four million American households to something it calls MTV: Music Television. The WASEC people do not anticipate bringing us together.

MTV is aimed with almost terrifying specificity at urban/suburban whites between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four. For twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the channel plays rock 'n' roll. Just like a radio station, but with pictures. That is, MTV doesn't have deejays who spin records, but "veejays" who play video tapes — concert shots, abstractions, mini-dramas — with rock 'n' roll sound tracks. In stacks of three or four, each lasting (like the record that is its raison d'être) about three minutes, MTV airs familiar "progressive rock" supergroups and occasional hints of the outre. Kansas, Rod Stewart, Hall & Oates, the Stones, Joan Jett, and REO Speedwagon are MTV's bread and butter, and the three-minute bites of each guarantee that even the shortest attention span won't wander.

And there is, except for the real problem of repetitiousness (the hits just keep on coming), no reason to be bored. These video tapes are *good* — a cross between *The Last Waltz, The Running Jumping and Standing Still Film,* and SoHo's avantest videogarde. One escapes from a burning building with Heart, joins Peter Townshend in concert, and then is treated to a brilliant evocation of teenage lust by Blue Oyster Cult. The segues are as rapid as a boxer's combinations, and the veejay intervals give welcome, bland relief from the boiling stimuli of the music segments.

The videos, as the tapes are called, have the same claim to art as the music that has inspired them — as well they should, for they come from the same source. (Economically, MTV imitates pop-music radio: The bulk of its programming is provided free by record manufacturers who have very good reason to believe that airplay — and now videoplay — sells records. Virtually everything on MTV is a commercial.) However, it is *not* family viewing; it's fair to say that only the rarest of families is likely to sit down together to watch a Van Halen/Styx/ Kansas segment.

What those wily folks at Warner are doing, in fact, is deliberately providing a service that will repel many, if not most, of the people living in the houses that receive it. On the other hand, they've made it (bang-bang, flash-flash, sexy-sexy) virtually irresistible to those teenagers who already flip on their sets the way they used to turn on their radios, creating a new audience that will explicitly treat video as background. Thus, one way Warner is "selling" MTV to cable operators (in addition to providing it free along with two minutes of local commercial time every hour) is by arguing that it will eventually lead to a growth in second-set hookups.

Which is to say that Dad, faced with yet another shot of Blue Oyster Cult (he wants to watch stock-car racing on ESPN), will spring for the extra few bucks a month to hook up a set in the kids' room (which will be on all the time, and will never, ever, have a commercial for Preparation H).

Unless, of course, kids decide they'd rather listen to records. ■

Geoffrey Stokes is a staff writer for The Village Voice *and editor of* The Village Voice Anthology, *recently published by Morrow.*

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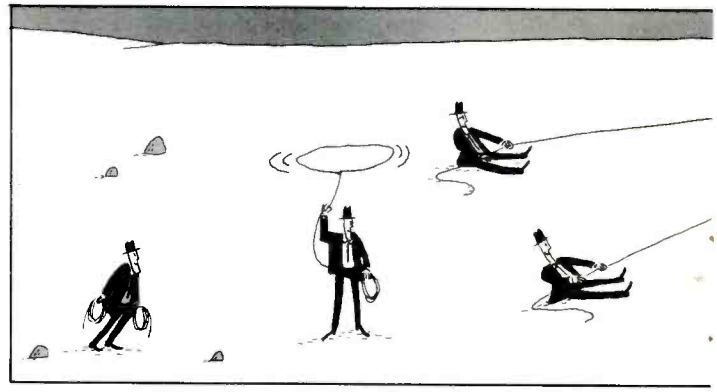
Does the Public Own the Airwaves?

Debating the question that is key to broadcast regulation



The idea that the public airwaves literally belong to the citizenry of the United States has been the basis for much of the broadcasting regulation adopted during the last fifty years. A number of landmark rulings by the courts have also turned on that premise. The broadcast reform movement that flourished in the seventies derived its force from the assumption that broadcasters are trustees of the public's airways.

Although the notion has been disputed in the past by the broadcast industry, its argument was usually dismissed in government circles as lame rhetoric against the demands of public-interest groups. But in today's political climate, which is marked by an eagerness in government to dispose of most regulation, the industry's assertion that the public has no legal ownership rights to the air has gained credence. Clearly, the deregulation of broadcasting is easier if there is no violation of the public's rights to consider.

As the issue comes under debate in Washington, *Channels* has invited a principal spokesman for each viewpoint to make his case:

Erwin G. Krasnow is vice president and general counsel of the National Association of Broadcasters.

Samuel A. Simon is executive director of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting.

NO

by Erwin G. Krasnow

THE PUBLIC-AIRWAVES concept, particularly as it concerns the authority and mission of the Federal Communications Commission, has led to much misunderstanding and confusion in communications law. Indeed, the public-ownership notion is the main reason for broadcasting's second-class status under the First Amendment. According to the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, the argument that the government can control broadcasters because their channels are "in the public domain" — because they use air space — could be applied to regulate speech in parks, since they are also in the public domain. "Yet people who speak there do not come under government censorship."

The radio frequency spectrum cannot be seen, touched, or heard. It has existed longer than man, and like air, sunlight, or wind, cannot be owned by anyone. Does a person who uses a windmill to grind grain or pump water owe the "public" for the use of the wind? What about the sunlight used by those who grow wheat, corn, or other crops? And what about the use of the "public's air space" by aircrafts? The list could go on and on, and in each case it can be said that someone is engaging in a business enterprise by using a "public resource."

Author Ayn Rand brought some common sense to bear on the question of "public ownership" of the airwaves in observing "no essential difference between a broadcast and a concert: The former merely transmits sounds over a longer distance and requires more complex technical equipment. No one would venture to claim that a pianist may own his fingers and his piano, but that the space inside the concert hall — through which the sound waves he produces travels — is 'public property' and, therefore, he has no right to give a concert without a license from the government. Yet this is the absurdity foisted on our broadcasting industry."

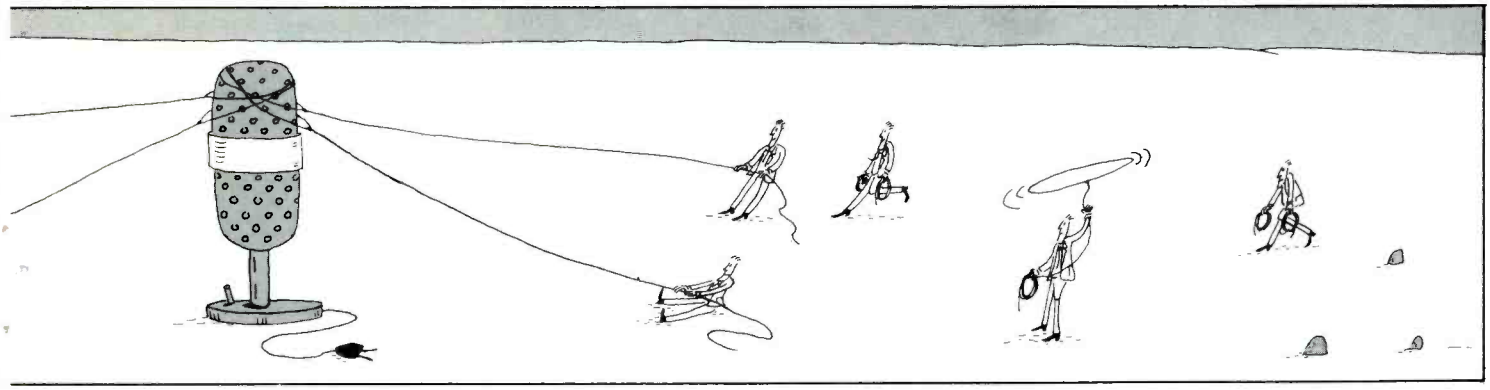
The concept of public "ownership" of the airwaves is demonstrably at odds with Congress's intent in enacting the Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934. Senator Dill, coauthor of the Radio Act, commented: "The Government does not own the frequencies, as we call them, or the use of the frequencies. It only possesses the right to regulate the apparatus. . . . We might declare that we own all the channels, but we do not." Senator Watson, Chairman of the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee, made a similar observation: "We do not own the railroads but we regulate them. We do not own the ether but we control the right to the use of that ether. That is all we seek to control."

The Congressional Research Service conducted a study of the legal problems raised by proposals to assess fees from broadcasters for their use of the spectrum; the group reached the following conclusion on ownership of the airwaves:

> Under past or present legal authority, the notion that the public or that the Government "owns" the airwaves is without precedent. We find no case that so holds. Furthermore, when enacting the Radio Act of 1927, the Congress specifically deleted a House-passed declaration of ownership.

Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, while noting the need for frequency

"Does a person who uses a windmill to grind grain or pump water owe the 'public' for the use of the wind? Someone is making a profit by using a 'public resource.'"



allocation to prevent interference, cautioned the Government against using this as an excuse for regulating the electronic press. "There is justification in the licensing of frequencies to prevent confusion in the technicalities of broadcasting," said Rusk, "but to extend the regulation to the informational function of broadcasting is not warranted." Rusk considered the notion that the "airwaves belong to the people" as irrelevant as saying that the North Star or the Law of Gravity belongs to the people.

None of this denies that the spectrum has a special character and that broadcasters have a special responsibility. But the spectrum is there whether it is used or not; only when it is enhanced by the use of broadcasters and others does it have any value at all to the public. The talent, technical knowledge, and financial resources of broadcasters have added to the value of the spectrum. Without a signal supplied by the broadcaster, the spectrum is just so much empty space.

YES

by Samuel A. Simon

THE PUBLIC owns the airwaves. Our agent, the United States Government, manages the electromagnetic spectrum on our behalf. The public's claim of ownership is found in Section 301 of the Communications Act of 1934:

> It is the purpose of this Act, among other things, to maintain the control of the United States over all the channels of interstate and foreign radio transmission; and to provide for the use of such channels, but not the ownership thereof, by persons for limited periods of time, under licenses granted by federal authority, and no such license shall be construed to create any right, beyond the terms, conditions and periods of the license.

The debate over the public nature of the airwaves should not be reduced to an argument over the meaning of the word "ownership," which is a set of legal relationships or rights of control over property. One is said to have an ownership interest in a property if one has a legally protected right of control over it.

The public owns the airwaves because the United States Government exercises legal control over the radio spectrum. (The radio spectrum is a property — despite efforts by the broadcast industry to deny its existence. It has physical characteristics that are definable and controllable. It exists in nature and is finite.)

The question is not whether the public owns the airwaves, because we do. The question is whether public ownership should be maintained. The alternative is private control.

I believe public ownership is a sound concept, solidly based on the scarcity of spectrum, the practical need for government to act as "traffic cop," and the First Amendment rights of the public.

We have traditionally treated scarce natural resources, like navigable waters and airspace, as communal to all. "As long ago as the Institute of Justinian," reads a Supreme Court decision, "running water, like the air and the sea, were *res communes* — things common to all and property to none." The purpose of treating a natural resource as common property is to preserve for all the benefits of the resource, especially if it is scarce. It would be unfair, if not outright wasteful, to allow only a few to take advantage of the nation's few navigable streams. Similarly, it would be wasteful to allow haphazard use of our radio spectrum — to deny to all the use of the spectrum because of a failure to manage it properly.

Each part of the spectrum is scarce because it can be used for only one purpose and at one time and place. The receivers of the information have been denied access to all information other than that actually transmitted at that time and place. Since it is the public that loses the broadcast opportunities, the public should have some say in determining what transmissions ride the airwaves. They do have a say, through their elected government.

If the spectrum's capacity to carry radio waves for communications were unlimited, the public wouldn't need the protection it has. The government could exercise its function of "traffic cop" and assure that everyone who wanted to broadcast would have an opportunity to do so. But the spectrum is limited; there are only a limited number of broadcast opportunities.

Justice Felix Frankfurter recognized in 1943 that when broadcast opportunities are limited, the government, already playing the role of a traffic cop, must determine the composition of the

"I believe public ownership is a sound concept, solidly based on the scarcity of the spectrum, the need for government to act as 'traffic cop,' and the public's First Amendment rights."

traffic as well. In deciding who may speak and who may not, government must act on behalf of all the people. The spectrum has not changed since 1943, except that space has become even more scarce; there are a hundred million more people with an equal claim on the spectrum today than there were then.

Since 1934, the Supreme Court has recognized the legitimate interest of the public as a whole in a usable radio spectrum. There is unequivocal constitutional authority for the government to manage the spectrum in the public's interest. And I suggest that the government is obligated under the First Amendment to protect our interest in an effective and democratic public communications system. The government is not free, therefore, to turn the system over to private interests and market forces. ■

Illustration by Mark Kseniak

News that Sells

by Harvey Jacobs

I USED TO THINK that the most colossal insult to history in all human history is that commercials are allowed on the news. Now, I'm not so sure.

I remember being irked that the first big television newscast was called *The Camel News Caravan,* in celebration of its sponsor. This was in the early fifties, when John Cameron Swayze each night took us "hopscotching the globe." The Camel sign sat on his desk, always in focus, to remind us that worldliness and smoking go together. News didn't make money for the networks in those days, so having a sponsor for a fifteen-minute frolic with the headlines was a big deal.

Today the news has caught on and become a good business — very economical, as television shows go. You don't have to pay an author or buy rights. The newsmakers work free and don't get residuals. The set doesn't have to be struck and rebuilt day after day. And fortunately, the world produces exactly enough news each day to fill up twenty-three minutes of air-time. Advertisers get the remainder of the half-hour, and they're happy to be in on a good thing.

Commercials on newscasts affect the audience in two vital ways. First, they serve as a break from tension. After war, plague, pestilence, mugging, buggery, thievery, conspiracy, assassination, and cataclysm, there is something reassuring in knowing that Summer's Eve has redesigned its dispenser. Second, since news creates an atmosphere of tension, it provides a felicitous environment for products that promise relief. The result is that each night, between events that can make or break the planet, come bulletins on the pills and salves that conquer headaches, hemorrhoids, athlete's foot, underarm fumes — the whole pantheon of minor distress that flesh is heir to. Any news on the likes of the Ayatollah Khomeini, Khadaffi, the Falklands, Lebanon, Three-Mile Island, and the American economy provides just the right climate for selling solace. So bad news is good news for the advertiser. The advertisers have been lucky for the last twenty years. With our luck, their luck will hold.

As mankind proceeds to destroy the Earth (not recognizing, somehow, that it will lose sales as a consequence), some good souls are working to insure a certain dignity in our final hours. Certain scientists, for instance, are racing to perfect the Viewtron bomb — an eraser of megalopoli that mercifully would hang in the air for a minute-thirty, long enough for one last newscast and one last commercial spot. Which spot will it be? Reports are that bidding is already frantic between Procter & Gamble, for Ivory Snow, and Toyota, for the new Supra.

Well, as I said, I'm not so sure anymore that commercials on the news are such a bad thing. When we watch the news, the real news may not be the chronicle of miserable events laid out before us by Rather, Brokaw, and Reynolds. The real news may be the commercials themselves.

A friend of mine once picked up his telephone and discovered that he could listen in on conversations all across the country. And what were people talking about? What big news was discussed at long-distance rates? Not the crisis in the Middle East. Not the Iraq-Iran War. Not the collapse of International Harvester. People were talking over long lines about Baby's wicked tooth, about what the cat will eat or not eat, about their own little afflictions, about their new cars, about the Cuisinart dear Joe bought for their anniversary.

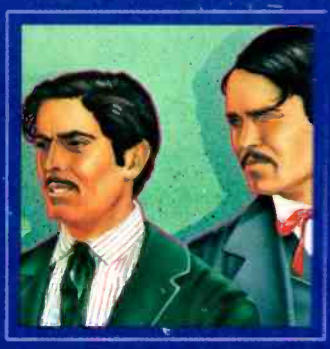
So quite possibly people watch the news not to keep abreast of war, crime, and Wall Street, but to get the latest word on the real things of life — the small scourges of the body, the kitchen, the car. If that is why news has grown so popular then it makes good sense to switch the proportions and do seven minutes of news each night and twenty-three minutes of commercials. Rather than have Rather be the bumper between Beirut and Sanka, have Sanka be the bumper between Super-Strength Tylenol and footage of the medflies eating the Universal backlot.

Contrary to some points of view, the issue is not whether children have trouble sorting out the difference between the human anguish in a war zone and the human anguish of the fat lady before she discovers L'Eggs for portlies. The issue is whether we have struck the right balance in our newscasts — whether we are telling people enough of what they need to know.

John Cameron Swayze left newscasting to become a commercial for watchbands. Perhaps something can be learned from that. ■

Harvey Jacobs's latest novel is The Juror, *published by Franklin Watts Inc.*



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2 hrs.—20th Century-Fox

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2 hrs.—MGM

April 23, 24 & 25
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JESSE JAMES
2 hrs.—20th Century-Fox

April 30, May 1 & 2
Pre-Mother's Day
THE RETURN OF FRANK JAMES
2 hrs.—20th Century-Fox

May 28, 29 & 30
Pre-Memorial Day
THE BLACK ROSE
2-1/2 hrs.—20th Century-Fox

June 25, 26 & 27
Pre-July 4th
BHOWANI JUNCTION
2 hrs.—MGM

August 27, 28 & 29
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GREEN MANSIONS
2 hrs.—MGM

October 15, 16 & 17
Pre-Halloween
KING SOLOMON'S MINES
2 hrs.—MGM

November 12, 13 & 14
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FRIENDLY PERSUASION
3 hrs.—Lorimar

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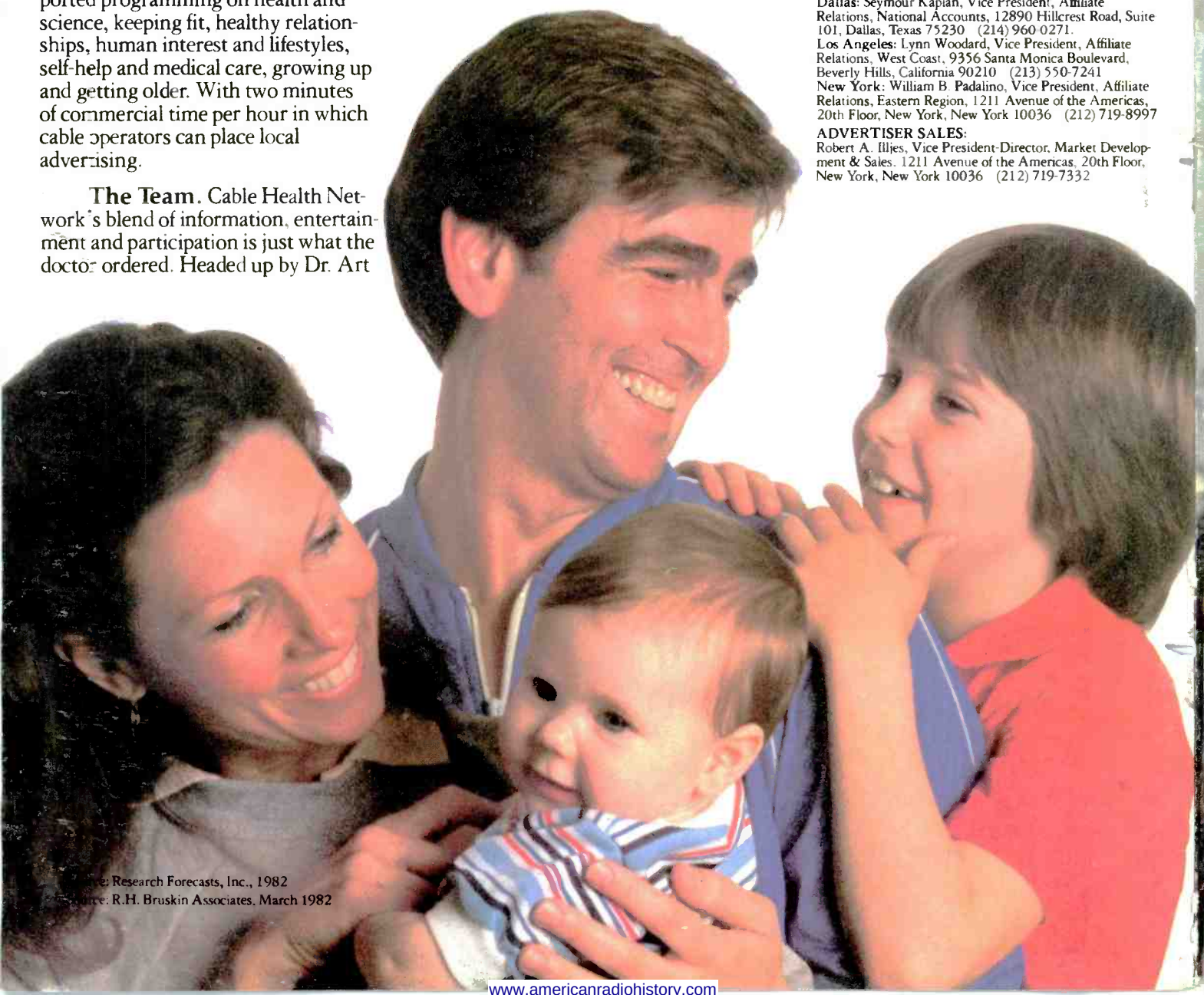

†Source: Research Forecasts, Inc., 1982
††Source: R.H. Bruskin Associates, March 1982