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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

THE JOURNAL OF THE  
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
TELEVISION ARTS  
AND SCIENCES

FREDERICK JACOBI  
HERMAN W. LAND  
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THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
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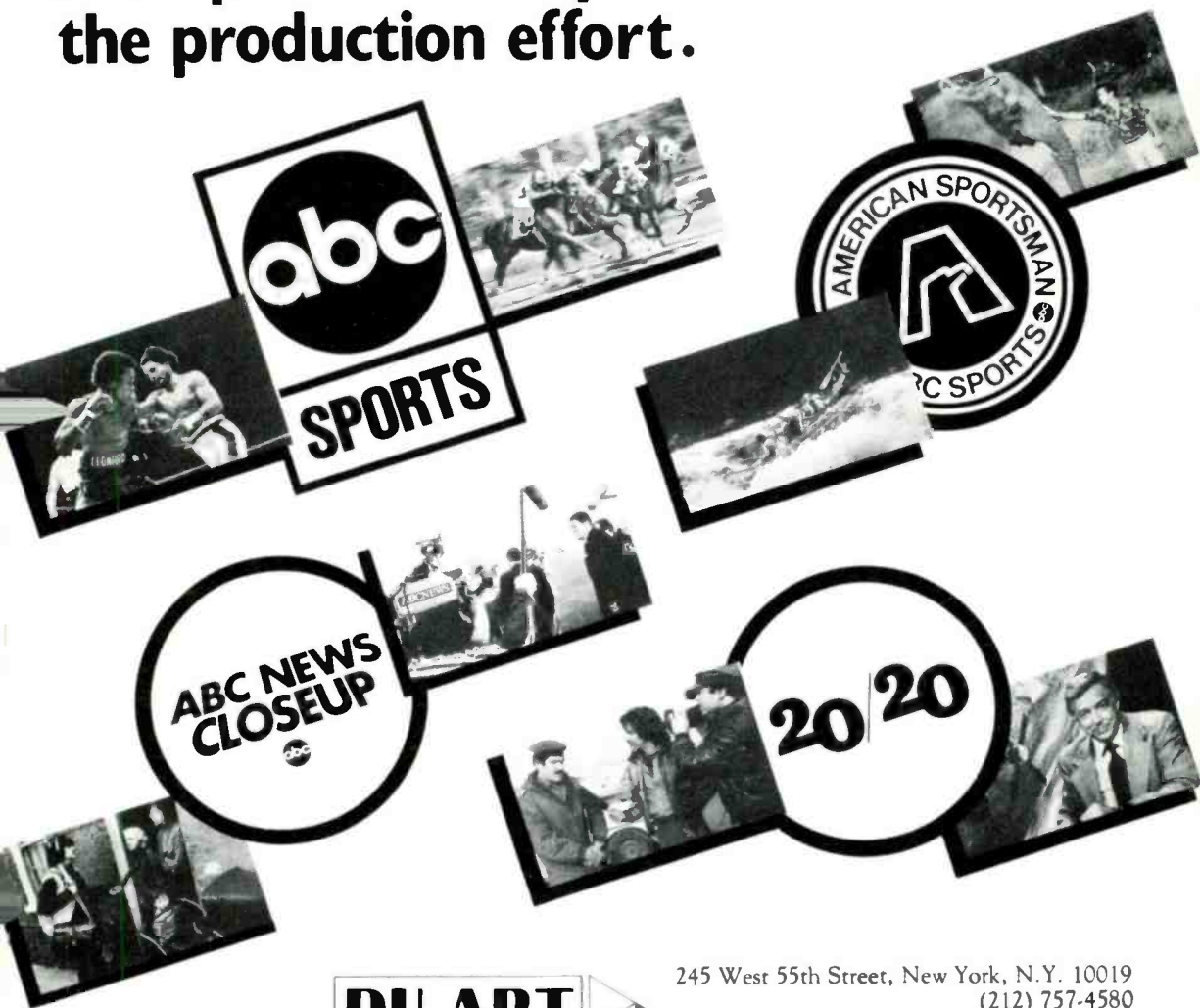
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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

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# **"The public be damned."**

—Wm. Henry Vanderbilt, 1882

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CABLE TV  
IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST.**



# The New Communications: Promise and Threat

---

By JOHN WICKLEIN

All modes of communications we humans have devised since the beginnings of our humanity are coming together now into a single electronic system, driven by computers. Although this new communications system will bring us many benefits, it will also put us in danger of losing our individual liberty.

The focus of the system will be a home communications set (HCS) that looks like a standard television with a keyboard attached. Within it will be a small microprocessor that turns it into a computer terminal as well.

Calling it a "set" seems better to me than a "center" or a "unit" because it has an everyday sound suited to describe an everyday appliance.

I believe it will become as commonplace to turn on the "HCS" as it became to flick on the "TV"—an everyday device that people before World War II thought of as a science fiction.

Our HCS will be served by a computerized network that brings thousands of communications pathways into the home. The information and entertainment it provides will arrive over optical fiber "wires" of glass or from a com-

munications satellite sending signals directly to small dish antennas on our rooftops.

Later models will include a small television camera and a microphone, to make possible video telephone calls. The set will give us news in print as well as the usual video form: it can display either text or pictures on its television screen. If we want hard copies of the printed news, it can produce them quickly on an attached printer or photocopy device.

The set will be able to supply hundreds of channels of television. These will be used for standard commercial programming, service programming for special-interest groups, educational programs, or electronic catalogues on "shopping" channels.

The most important feature of the new communications system, from the standpoint of our society, will be its capacity to be two-way, permitting us to respond over the system to what the system is offering us. Through this interaction, we will be able to make store purchases on credit, pay our bills, do our banking, send our mail electronically, or get emergency medical advice from a doctor who can see and hear the patient; we can be

"present" in two-way continuing-education classes.

The same controls make it possible for us to ask computerized libraries to present text material on the screen, or printout pages from a reference book. The two-way capability can be used to install a smoke alarm connected to the nearest firehouse, or a burglar alarm connected to the nearest police station.

Business adaptations of the set make possible the exchange of messages and video teleconferences between distant branch offices. They form the basis of what data-processing companies have called the "automated office."

The entire system will be tied together by communications satellites.

All the technology to make the system possible has been developed and tested. Each of its many parts has already been placed in service, in pilot projects or commercial cooperation somewhere in the world. A fully integrated home-communications system will be operational within the lifetime of a great majority of the readers of this article. If this seems a short time for so large a development, consider that within one generation, starting in 1946, three revolutionary technologies came into general use: television, the computer, and the jet airplane. The new "instant transaction" technology is likely to change our lives at least as greatly as any of these. This "revolution" is not coming tomorrow; it is already under way.

Many of the new communica-

tions services are now available to the public.

In 1979 the British Post Office (BPO) began commercial operation of Prestel, an information-retrieval service in which users in the home can select, one page at a time, 250,000 pages of textual material for display on a standard television set. All the viewer has to do is attach a small adapter and key pad that connects the television set to a computer through the telephone lines. Since the mid-seventies, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the commercial Independent Television Authority have been broadcasting text services with eight hundred pages of news, sports, weather, travel data, job information, and similar material, all of which are continually updated. In New York, Reuters began using a channel on Manhattan Cable in 1975 to transmit business and financial news in text form to four hundred customers, each of whom could select specific items desired by pressing buttons on a key pad.

By 1980, Warner Amex Cable Communications had signed up thirty thousand customers in Columbus, Ohio, for a two-way interactive television system called Qube. On one of its thirty channels, for example, customers could take part in a meeting being held by their neighborhood association and express their opinions by pushing multiple-choice response buttons on a small key pad that controlled the set. On premium channels, for which they were billed item-by-item, they could choose first-run movies, sports

events not available on the over-the-air commercial television, and college courses taken for credit.

Home computer terminals tying into specialized data banks are now available to information specialists who pay installation and use charges—or news buffs who want to see wire-service stories as they are being sent out. Terminals tied to commercially run credit-data banks are becoming commonplace for use by stores in making instant checks on the “reliability” of customers. Electronic funds transfer is being offered by a number of banks, allowing customers to withdraw cash or pay bills from walk-up terminals. The U.S. Postal Service began testing electronic facsimile transmission of mail between Washington and London via a communications satellite in 1979. NHK, Japan’s public television network, is reaching many homes in the island chain by transmitted signals from their studios in Tokyo to a direct broadcast satellite that relays them to small rooftop antennas.

The electronic merger of communications media was made possible by the discovery that you could marry the computer to the ordinary television set. Its advent has been hastened technologically and financially by three recent breakthroughs: the silicon chip, optical fibers, and the communications satellite.

THE SILICON CHIP was designed by Intel Corp. in California in 1971 and refined since then by IBM, Bell Laboratories, and others. It has, for

practical communications purposes, made computer storage and retrieval of information unlimited. The technique put together layer on layer of circuits, able to process and store bits of information in a chip about a quarter of a centimeter in thickness and a centimeter square.\* Each chip can store as much information as a computer the size of a classroom did in 1960. Because of the incredibly large number of circuits they contain, the chips make it possible to have a fully switched network of home communications sets—so that each set can exchange messages, or video telephone calls—with any other set in the system.

OPTICAL FIBERS were discovered by Bell Laboratories (which earlier discovered the transistor, which led in turn to the silicon chip). Using a drawn glass strand no bigger than a hair, thousands of messages, including computerized data and television pictures, can be transmitted on a light beam from a laser or another light-emitting source. The optical fiber can replace the cumbersome coaxial cable and carry many more television signals and voice circuits. It does this by sending the signal in *digital* form: The sending device, which is a computer, breaks the electronic signal into a stream of bits. Each bit is a pulse of light that reads “on” or “off.” Any electronic information—a television picture, a

\* Eight bits form a byte—a letter or a number, called an *Alphanumeric character*.

(continued on page 11)

We'd like to interrupt  
this Quarterly with  
a couple of important  
words for people in the  
television industry:

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telephone call, textual matter, or computer data—can be converted into these digital bits. The bits are converted back into words and pictures by the silicon-chip microprocessor in a television set adapted for the purpose. A conventional television set receives 92 million of these bits a second to construct its picture. Japanese manufacturers have marketed optical fibers that transmit more than a billion bits a second.

COMMUNICATIONS SATELLITES are space vehicles that orbit the earth in synchronization with its own rotation, so that they appear to remain in a fixed position above a point of the earth's surface. They can receive television, radio, telephone, and data transmissions from a sending station on earth and relay them to a receiving station thousands of miles away. They are capable of replacing telephone landline and underwater-cable transmission across great distances, providing the same services at far lower cost. In a broadcast mode, they can transmit television signals from a national station directly to homes, bypassing local, over-the-air stations.

These three developments, used in an integrated system built around computers, make it technically possible to provide hundreds of communications services to the home and office. Because they reduce costs by factors of from ten to a thousand, they can put such services within the financial reach of

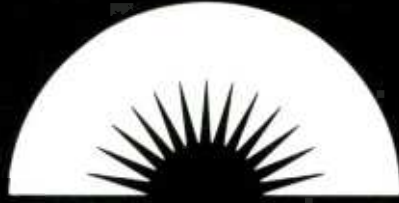
nearly every person, business, or government agency in the industrialized nations. Projected cost reductions are likely to make these services affordable in most less-developed countries, as well.

The miniaturization of computer memories on silicon chips is largely responsible for the amazing and continuing drop in information-processing costs. In 1972 you could get 1,000 bits into a chip costing ten dollars, or a penny a bit. A chip being marketed in the 1980s offers 64,000 bits at 6/1000 of a penny; the 256,000-bit chip produced in prototype reduces the cost of a computer data to 1/1000 of a penny a bit.

A technology that can provide all these services could do much to improve the quality of our lives, to increase our knowledge, our pleasure, and our well-being. If that is so, why not say, "Fine, I want all of them, right now"? Before we do that, we ought to examine the gifts. With many facets of this new communication technology come potentially dangerous capabilities. These can be used, not to lead us to fuller, freer, more satisfying lives but to restrict our freedom as individuals.

An interactive system which supplies us with most of our information and entertainment programming, delivers our phone messages and our mail, carries out all our financial transactions, and senses movement in our homes can be used to invade our privacy and order our activities. The problem was set out in a report to the White

*(continued on page 13)*



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House by the Domestic Council Committee on Privacy:

"Information systems are spreading throughout the public and private sectors of the United States and the world. The question is no longer whether or not we should have [information] networks, but how we could establish them to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency in a manner which will insure their use for public good.

"For many, all of these [technological and developmental] concerns are dwarfed by the questions about the desirability of information systems that involve data about individuals, particularly in light of their potential for political and bureaucratic misuse. How can checks and balances be placed on governmental authority to prevent abuse of such a system?"

To which might be added a growing feeling among researchers and the public that checks must be placed on *private* and *corporate* use and misuse of such a system, as well. Harold Sackman, in his book *Mass Information Utilities and Social Excellence*, says, "The social stakes are too high to let the information revolution pass as just another economic opportunity to be resolved by the vagaries of the marketplace." Yet the tendencies in the United States as the 1980s began *was* to let these developments be decided by the marketplace. No philosophy has been developed on how we should protect ourselves from the unscrupulous use of the new technologies for power or personal enrichment. The Carter administration and

many in Congress had decided that services to society that could be expected to accrue from the new communications technologies should neither be regulated nor brought about by government action. The administration set policy that said the government would not subsidize public-service uses of these facilities but would instead subsidize their private development for profit. According to administration spokesmen, the marketplace would meet the public's needs. But the marketplace reckons only in terms of private gain; the public good comes after that.

Not all technical developments mean automatic progress for the human condition, even if they mean profits for the developers. A good case can be made, in retrospect, for rejecting nuclear generation of electrical power. It was developed after World War II because commercial interests saw that peaceful uses of atomic fission could ultimately become profitable, especially if the government subsidized its taming and development. Certainly, the instant and wide-scale acceptance of DDT by the agribusiness to kill crop-destroying insects was a disservice to humans, since the long-term dangers of poisoning the environment had not been considered.

Judging from historical developments beginning with the Industrial Revolution, technological "advances" would seem to be inevitable. But in the past their inevitability has been hastened when commercial or military interests

have discovered ways to make them pay off financially or in battlefield advantage. It is they who have promoted the idea of the "technological imperative." Without intervention by people concerned primarily with human welfare, such technological changes will continue to be pressed upon us when commercial and military managers decide it will be best for their own interest to do so.

We have to make ourselves aware of such technological "advances" and their dangers to freedom *before* they are presented to us as *faits accomplis*. We can become aware, if we choose to be, in the communications area. Technical discoveries and potentialities are usually discussed and checked out for years before they are adopted by the military or by business interests for commercial development. Television was successfully transmitted in a San Francisco apartment in 1927. Its public presentation came at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

The development process has been speeded, but we still have a little time to do with the new technology what we should have done with radio after World War I and with television before Congress adopted the Communications Act of 1934: examine each part of it critically, then work to impose humanitarian constraints on the way each part is used. One problem is that public-interest groups are less well organized and financed than commercial-interest groups to make investigations and take actions in

their own interests. So, normally, the profit-oriented groups get the jump on the human-oriented. For example, the time is short if we are to have an impact on regulating or preventing the installation of satellite computer networks that can give any business executive anywhere in the country (tomorrow, the world) instant assessment of our potential as purchasers or our potential as loyal employees.

Other information technologies, the prototypes of which have been built and tested successfully, are further away from full commercial deployment. So much the better—controlling a technology before it is generally installed is far easier than changing it once it is in place. Think of the difficulty, now, of getting the U.S. Congress to pass a law that says citizen-action groups in every local community must have access, one night a week in prime time, to frequencies of the "public" airways that are now licensed to commercial stations. Such a provision would have been reasonably simple to include in the Radio Act of 1927, which set up the assignment and regulation of frequencies.

Intervention of groups representing consumers may cause some delay in the general use of the new communications technologies. But that is better for humankind than to allow commercial interests to develop them as fast as marketing opportunities allow, and then, when the dangers become alarmingly apparent, try to rein them in.

Groups opposed to technology perse argue that, since there are no

*(continued on page 17)*



# HOW TELEVISION IS SOLVING A PROBLEM THAT'S BEEN KILLING US FOR YEARS.



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guarantees that we can impose social controls on the developments, we should turn our backs on all advanced technology and return to the simple life. The trouble with the simple life before technology was that most of the children did not survive, and those who did found they had a life expectancy of about thirty-five years. Some of us can go back to the land and live happily on it—and survive to be seventy or eighty. But for the mass of humanity, that is not a viable possibility. Given the number of people competing for life on this planet, *more* sophisticated methods, not less, are needed to insure reasonable access to its goods—intellectual and spiritual as well as material. Much of the new communications technology could, if properly employed, help us achieve that. The benefits are worth the trouble of fighting for proper controls before the facilities are allowed to be put into general use.

But we must not allow ourselves to be manipulated by chance discoveries that are picked up by commercial interests and developed, not because of an inherent, long-term benefit to people but because they promise a substantial profit for the developer in the short run. Nor should we let government officials, in the name of public service, impose a system on us that makes possible more efficient monitoring of our activities.

## THE DANGER OF CONTROL

The biggest threat of a multifaceted, integrated communications

system is that a single authority will win control of the whole system *and its contents*. An agency that gained such control, if left to operate it without adequate restraints, could dictate its contents and decide its political, economic, and social applications. It would be far easier to control what is seen, heard, and read on a monolithic electronic communications system than it is today to control content on thousands of radio and television stations and in the diverse outlets of the printed press.

The ending of the film *The President's Analyst*, in which the analyst discovers that the entire world is being run by The Phone Company, is surreal, but the idea is not. If we abdicate control of the system's content to the government, the Phone Company, or anyone else, the system in time will control us.

It is not likely that if they understand what is at stake, the people will roll over and play dead in the face of such threats to our privacy and individual liberty. The tradition of checks and balances, protection of diversity and regulation of monopoly is strong. But the danger is that because the technology seems complicated, people will leave installation and regulation (or nonregulation) of the new communications to government and business "experts." For all our sakes, this must not be allowed to happen.

At present, in the United States, the federal government and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company are best positioned

to win control over such a system. The inherent powers of the government make it a likely candidate to run it. If it did, the Pentagon would be an influential silent partner—the Department of Defense already controls one-third of the electronic spectrum assigned to satellite and microwave communication. AT&T is a formidable contender because it is *there*: its member companies have distribution lines that pass almost every home and business office in the country. It also has a leg up on the new technologies needed to convert its telephone system into an integrated home communications system.

Another likely contender would be a corporate conglomerate, such as Time Inc., with media operations at its core. IBM would be in the running. So would the commercial networks. Justified or not, it is a political and economic fact of life that the people who provide the financing for the new instrument will try to call its tune. That is true whether the financial backers are a government institution or a private organization. In France, where the government finances the television system, it is the party in power that ultimately decides who will be allowed on the air. In Britain, people who pay for television licenses constitute a pressure on the BBC to give them programming they will be willing to pay for. In the United States, the commercial networks and local commercial stations exercise complete control of access to the medium. Often their decisions on what is seen are influenced indirectly or

directly by advertisers who support the programming. These same advertisers often are the underwriters of programming in U.S. public television, exerting enormous influence on what will be shown on the public system. Federal administrations and Congress, which provide much of the support for the public system, have often tried to influence its programming.

As in these “traditional” technologies, financing of the evolving system raises policy questions involving basic rights and freedoms. Who will be allowed to put their communications (messages, programs, computer data) into the system? What companies, agencies, citizens groups, and individuals will have access to its facilities? Only those who can pay? Those who cannot pay, as well? Should the communications of social-service agencies be carried free, as a public benefit subsidized by the government?

Who will be able to have the system in their homes? Again, only those who can afford the sets and pay for the service? If almost all public information will in time be carried on the system, would not this make two classes of citizens—the information rich and the information poor?

Clearly, information is power. Control of a unified system by the government would greatly increase its potential for restricting information and determining program content. It could give a future administration power over the electorate little dreamed of by Charles de Gaulle when he used

the government-monopoly television system of France to exclude opposition candidates from the air.

Control of both system and content by a private corporation could conceivably lead to its domination, albeit indirect, of the government itself. By shaping and censoring what is seen, read, and heard, a corporation that has a monopoly on the system and its content might be able, in time, to shape the view of the public and of government officials to its vision of what the world is and what it should be.

In 1976 Arthur D. Little Inc. submitted to the White House a report on the future direction of communications. In a scenario, A. D. Little depicted a situation in which AT&T proposes, and Congress agrees, to rewrite the Communications Act to give that corporation a monopoly, beginning in 1991, on distribution of the merged telecommunications media—television, radio, telephone, computer networks, etc. Television and radio stations are taken off the air and transferred to an optical-fiber carrier system, which now carries all telephone, cable, and computer-connected services as well.

The implications of such a development for determining what information gets to the consumer are obvious—it is far easier to control a system in which all information comes into our homes via a single communications set than it is to control what goes out over the air from local television stations, or which comes to us via the diverse outlets of the printed press.

*(continued on page 21)*

AT&T, in its public statements, has said it *intends* to put content into the system, as well as act as common carrier for all others who want to provide information, entertainment, and other services via the system.

And, after a quarter century of dogged fighting, AT&T won the concession from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that would make this possible. It permitted AT&T to offer data-processing services over its network, removing a prohibition against Bell's expansion into the computer field that was set down in a federal court consent decree in 1956.

## COMPUTER-ASSEMBLED DOSSIERS

Anyone who runs a computerized, two-way communication system has a magnificent tool with which to invade our privacy. This, in fact, is the most urgent area of concern in the development of the new communications—including computerized storage and electronic exchange of personal data collected by government agencies, credit rating concerns, personal investigation companies, and private employers.

The reason this is urgent is because here, the invasion is well under way. In the United States, the government keeps 4 billion personal data files in its computers; Equifax Services, Inc., the biggest investigations company, keeps 40 million dossiers in its computer in Atlanta, and transmits them across

# SFP 1980 HIGHLIGHTS

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the country by satellite. In Columbus, Warner Amex Cable's computer "sweeps" the Qube two-way interactive television system once to determine which movies subscribers are watching and what political opinions they are expressing via their interactive response buttons.

These computerized "services" make it possible to develop detailed personal profiles on every one of us that could be exchanged electronically between organizations collecting the data. With a computerized data bank tied in to the home communications set, such dossiers could be made available to anyone who wished to pay the service charge.

One of the great dangers to freedom posed by the new communications system lies in this area of computer-assembled dossiers. Since their inception, commercial and government computer data banks have outdistanced efforts by Congress and the public to regulate their own.

Because the home communications system has two-way audio and video capability, plus switching capacity, it would be able to incorporate the present telephone system (or to put it in terms being discussed by AT&T, the phone system could incorporate the new communications). Transmission of private letters by facsimile print-out or for reproduction on the television screen is also envisioned. Electronic surveillance via computer or phone conversations and written communications could

then add to the "completeness" of the dossiers being assembled.

### THREAT TO PRESS FREEDOM

The question of who will run this system is of major concern in the area of news dissemination. With the electronic merger that is in the offing, it is possible that newspapers, wire services, and television-news organizations will be combined in news operations that generate stories for the HCS, to be printed out as text on the screen or presented as television—filmed, taped, or live. With a unified method of distribution, a system operator would have the capability to impose censorship on transmission of news in any form. If, for example, news selection were placed in the hands of a conglomerate that had manufacturing and service divisions apart from its media functions, the news certainly would be suspect in areas relating to its spheres of interest.

The federal government could attempt to assert its jurisdiction over the merged news facilities through the precedent created by the FCC's Fairness Doctrine. This requires broadcast-news organizations to provide "balanced" reporting of controversial issues in their news broadcasts and documentaries.

Clearly, a First Amendment issue is involved. Newspapers, of course, have no federal rules governing restraints upon their content. If this content is shifted to an electronic-delivery system, they could find themselves under such constraint.

*(continued on page 23)*

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## OTHER DEVELOPING PROBLEMS

Control, with its implications for freedom of speech and the press and for invasion of privacy, is one of the prime concerns about the new communications. But many other serious questions should be raised. Here are a few of the broader issues:

- If we absorb information and entertainment, do our jobs, transact our business and engage in personal interchange via the HCS, how will this affect our social relationships? Will we become stay-at-homes, relating mostly to a machine, or will the interactions on the machine lead us into more personal contacts outside the home?

- Will the new communications collect information from the masses and funnel it to the few at the top, tending to centralize government and industry, or will it be a decentralizing force, providing more information to the populace so that more and better decision-making can be done at the local levels?

- As in other forms of automation, do the new computerized communications constitute a threat to a greater unemployment or will the industries developed from the new technologies provide jobs in greater abundance?

- Will rich countries and multinational corporations use information extracted from the less-developed countries for national and commercial gain, with no return for the country providing the information? Can the poorer na-

tions prevent information from leaving their countries until they can be certain it will not be used to their detriment?

- Will the new technology, by its very nature, manipulate us? Will governments and corporations be able to use it to manipulate us, or will we be able to manipulate the new technologies to serve the good of society?

This last concern gets to the heart of the problem that the communication "revolution" presents to society. It is expressed succinctly in the Nora-Minc report, *L'Informatisation de la Société*, commissioned by the president of France, which stirred vehement discussions as the new technologies were beginning to take hold there:

Is it possible to foresee what forms this revolution will take? Pessimists predict the worst: raging unemployment, increased social barriers, emergence of a robotized subproletariat as human skills are devalued by all-powerful "know-alls," increasingly burdensome hierarchical structures, fearsome possibilities of State control over society thanks to computer storage of information. By contrast, the optimists look forward to a society freed from the brutal constraints of productivity by the data-processing miracle, turned toward pleasurable pursuits, convivial, democratic, self-managing. . . .

In short, will the new techniques strengthen the rigid, authoritarian, dominatory aspects of our societies? Or will they, on the contrary, encourage adaptability, freedom, dialogue?

Only if we counter the threats by developing informed social and po-

litical policies will we be able to reap the benefits of the evolving communications system. Public action is necessary *before* the technologies congeal into a universal, ubiquitous system. By then the essential decisions would have been made, and we would have to live with their consequences.

John Wicklein

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**ELECTRONIC NIGHTMARE:** *The New Communications and Freedom*, by John Wicklein, has just been published by Viking Press, New York. This excerpt has been printed here by special permission of the author. John Wicklein is the

*Associate Director for News and Public Affairs for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. His extensive background includes not only public broadcasting but commercial-station television news, as well as print journalism. He has been Manager of News Broadcasts for WCBS-TV, New York, and News Director for WNET, New York and a reporter for the New York Times. He is a former Dean of the School of Public Communications at Boston University. He has also written and produced many documentaries for PBS, ABC News, WNET and WCBS TV and has contributed articles to the Atlantic Monthly, Sports Illustrated, The Washington Monthly, This Week, Forbes and The Journalism Quarterly.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"Certain days, certain events, certain images belong uniquely to television: lawyer Joseph Welch at last turning on a smirking Senator Joe McCarthy; the riderless horse down Pennsylvania Avenue at the funeral of John F. Kennedy; the Zippo-ignited hooch in a Vietnamese village; the Apollo lunar landing (one giant leap for mankind, seen live on TV); the men and women of the House Judiciary Committee voting on the first impeachment article at the climax of Richard Nixon's Watergate ordeal. These images touched feelings of justice, or grief, or guilt, or pride, or patriotism. They have been stored by television in our collective memory."

—Edwin Diamond  
*Panorama Magazine*

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# Another Opening, Another Show! The New Season.

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By HARRIET VAN HORNE

**A**t the start of another TV season, the burning question seems to be, "Will programming be drastically different this year? Will the fingerprints of pressure groups be all over your screen?"

The news, on the whole, is good. If you approach the '81-'82 season expecting a cascade of sweetly-pretty programs, cleansed of all sex, violence and social significance—owing to threats and demands of the Moral Majority—you will be agreeably surprised. There may be less heavy breathing in the bedroom scenes and a toning down of language but these "reforms" had been contemplated anyway.

Long before the Rev. Jerry Falwell began calling up his troops, parent-teacher groups and certain ad agencies—notably J. Walter Thompson—had been advising the networks to cool the passions, both ardent and violent, and to put a silencer on the pistol shots.

On the three commercial networks the new schedule is realistic, adventurous (in spots) and definitely not geared to the taste of 14-year-old virgins in Tupelo, Miss.

The Moral Majority is taking credit for the demise of "Soap" and "Charlie's Angels," but the truth is that both shows died a natural

death of poor ratings. The Angels ran out of "capers" a long time ago but kept on chasing the Bad Guys in their tight little wet suits. This is not the stuff of great drama and dials began snapping all over America.

The Angels had another problem. A series of hilariously inept actresses, trying to fill the departed Farrah Fawcett's wet suit, depressed the ratings even further.

The axing of certain low-rated shows cannot be attributed to the Rev. Don Wildmon and his busy committee down in Tupelo, nor to his 'round-the-clock vigilantes, a cadre of "moral monitors" whose sets never cooled down. Wildmon's Coalition for Better Television may have scared a few sponsors and created a great uproar in the press, but the sober, respected voices raised in opposition to Wildmon's threatened boycott had an impact, too. Above all, they reminded us that in a free society a boycott by a single pressure group setting itself up as moral arbiter for the nation amounts to censorship, however the Moral Majority may rationalize it. In retrospect, it would seem that the Evangelical Right, with its clearly repressive blueprint for the media, lost considerable prestige in this dust-up.

In any appraisal of a new TV season the question always rises, "How does the new schedule compare with last year?" The new year, to this veteran night-watchman, looks to be a handsome improvement over the old. "There's a lot less foolishness in this line-up," observed one network executive. Translated, that means fewer laugh-track "sit-coms" doomed to vanish after six or eight weeks and no wildly expensive experiments, such as last season's "Supertrain." That one was derailed soon after it left the station, taking NBC president Fred Silverman with it.

In format and technique, there's nothing radically new on the books for fall. The made-for-TV movie again bulks large in the log. The high-budget mini-series—from four to eight episodes—will be with us again. Adventure and suspense series featuring one hour episodes outweigh the half-hour situation comedies. To some viewers, this constitutes progress, and ratings should respond accordingly.

The coming attractions on CBS are especially rich in made-for-TV movies. One is struck by the number of these films based on real-life incidents. "The Children Nobody Wanted" is based on the experiences of Tom Butterfield, who, in 1961, aged 19, became the youngest single foster parent in the state of Missouri. Butterfield, a college freshman at the time, challenged the system to provide a home for young waifs and strays nobody wanted.

"Love Canal," starring Marsha Mason, is based on the crusade of

a housewife named Lois Gibbs, who headed her community's battle to relocate families threatened by the toxic pollution of the upstate "killer canal."

Cicely Tyson stars in "The Marva Collins Story," first brought to public attention on "60 Minutes." Miss Collins is the brilliant young woman who, disillusioned with the laissez-faire methods of the public schools, set up her own academy in the slums of Chicago. Soon her "unteachable" pupils were reading the classics and doing advanced math.

On a somewhat grander scale, CBS will be offering dramatic "specials" in one or more episodes. Tom Conti and Eli Wallach will appear in an adaptation of John Hersey's, novel, "The Wall," an account of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943.

Danny Kaye plays his first serious dramatic role in "Skokie," a drama based on the conflict that ripped a small town asunder last year when members of a neo-Nazi group threatened to hold a rally there. Residents reacted dramatically and their modest living rooms and leafy streets became a battlefield over First Amendment rights.

Another CBS special, "The Lady from the United States," will star Jean Stapleton as Eleanor Roosevelt. The drama focuses on the former First Lady's years as our representative at the United Nations.

Mickey Rooney, once described by Laurence Olivier as "the greatest *natural* actor in America," will display the serious side of his talent in "Bill," the story of a men-

tally retarded adult who is released from an institution after 46 years of confinement. The story was suggested by a real-life case.

CBS also plans specials on Pope John Paul II, Gen. Omar Bradley and a TV movie about an actress who resumed her career after brain surgery and paralysis. That would be "The Patricia Neal Story," starring Glenda Jackson.

The only TV movie that might cause the Rev. Wildmon to heat up his crusade once more is "Secrets of a Call Girl." Ah, but there's a moral to the story! The call girl of the title abandons her old profession and goes off to college. She is a serious student with a fine future when local police, in association with a former client now under police protection, maneuver her into resuming her career of prostitution. Naturally, she falls in love with the young police officer assigned to protect the witness.

Among the new CBS series are "Simon & Simon," about "two brothers who operate a free-wheeling detective agency"; "Shannon," the story of a plainclothes detective; "The Vintage Years," starring Jane Wyman as the matriarch of a rich, deeply rooted family of California wine-makers.

"Closeup: Jessica Novak," sounds faintly like the last Mary Tyler Moore show but the emphasis is definitely not on comedy. This TV newswoman is an investigative reporter—a title that is naturally preceded by the words "in-depth."

Though NBC acquired a new executive chairman this summer,

Grant Tinker of MTM Productions, his appointment came after the new season was already "in place," as they say. Ten new series are on the books, along with some impressive mini-series and TV movies.

There's a Mickey Rooney show, with the versatile Mickey playing an elderly man rescued from a retirement home by his grandson, a college student, who already has one roommate, a tense, very proper chap easily shocked by Gramps and his raunchy ways.

James Arness, who played Matt Dillon on "Gunsmoke" for 20 years, returns to NBC in a weekly police drama. James Garner will be back in "Bret Maverick," now settled down in the town of Sweetwater but once again involved in solving crimes and charming pretty girls.

Gabe Kaplan, who became famous in "Welcome Back, Kotter," will return in a comedy series, "Gabe and Guich." The setting is a country music club in Texas. You can almost hear the twanging of the geetars and the down-home dialog.

There was much to-do about the sexual preferences of the character Tony Randall plays in "Love, Sidney." Originally, the script made clear—"in a subtle, tasteful way," says a network publicist—that Sidney was homosexual. The plot calls for him to play surrogate father to an aspiring young actress and her young daughter. Sensibly, the story line required that Sidney not be viewed as a predatory male with

*(continued on page 31)*



**ABC Television Network**



two young beautiful females at his disposal. Now, we are advised, the passing references to a man in Sidney's life have been excised. If the Moral Majority cares to count this as a victory, fine. This one we'll concede them.

Rock Hudson, whose aging good looks are not enhanced by a shaggy mustache, returns in what is described as a "sophisticated comedy" about a private investigator whose partner is his aggressive young son.

A weekly 90 minute action-adventure series, "Chicago Story," will be written and produced by Eric Bercovici, the gifted filmmaker who brought you "Shogun" last season, and gave the network apoplexy by having entire scenes played in Japanese. "Shogun" ran 12 hours and, to the surprise of most critics, drew handsome ratings.

The new season's equivalent of "Shogun" will be an eight-hour epic recounting the adventures of "Marco Polo." Filming has been going on for months in Venice, Rome, Morocco and China. Sir John Gielgud, Burt Lancaster and Anne Bancroft are in the cast.

If the new series on NBC suggest obedience to an old formula—i.e., "the mixture as before"—the specials evidence a touch of class, a hint of adventure. It takes courage to tackle Norman Mailer's Pulitzer Prize book, "The Executioner's Song," which takes us through the terrible life and times of Gary Gilmore, who died before a firing squad in Utah.

Two other best-sellers will come to life in mini-series that may run a full week. They are "Little Gloria . . . Happy at Last," the story of the famous custody battle over Gloria Vanderbilt; and the Judith Krantz novel, "Princess Daisy."

"Rage of Angels," one of Sidney Sheldon's posh-trash novels, will relate the story of a great beauty's struggle to make her name as a criminal lawyer.

Viewers who will cheerfully skip all the above should be alerted to a chilling four-hour drama, "World War III." The time is 1987 and famine imperils the globe. An insurgent group of Soviet fighters seizes American oil fields and demands vast shipments of food in return for the oil.

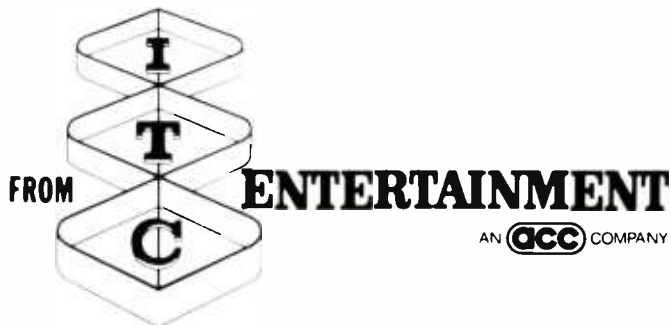
It appears that the made-for-TV movie is now as firmly embedded in the schedule as the evening news and the weather report. The NBC line-up is not particularly distinguished, although it includes a Bette Davis film, "Family Reunion." More typical of the whole is a sci-fi thriller, "Saturn 3," starring Kirk Douglas and Farrah Fawcett as two scientists living alone in a space station and threatened by a deadly robot.

A dozen or so NBC specials will star Johnny Carson, Donna Summer, Doug Henning, Mel Brooks, Steve Martin and—for the 32nd year—Bob Hope.

What of ABC, which last year saw its sex-cum-violence offerings fall sharply in public esteem? Eight new series are in the works, with a heavy emphasis on detective and

*(continued on page 33)*

# Entertainment For The World



adventure plots. "Today's FBI" will update the many FBI sagas that have preceded it. "Code Red" deals with firefighters and police and "Strike Force" has Robert Stack putting on his old detective badge and tracking "the most dangerous criminals."

A late—and, one supposes, very hot—bulletin from ABC announces that the format of "Mork and Mindy" will undergo an important change. Mork will finally marry Mindy and take her off to the planet Ork—"with results that stagger the imagination." Mine remains un-staggered.

ABC's "major works"—the network's own term—sound promising and are decidedly more cerebral than some of NBC's specials. The life and times of "Walter Lippmann" will star Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward. For the rising generation of TV viewers there must needs be careful exposition, making clear that Lippmann was one of the most significant journalists of the period between the two World Wars, a scholar, a philosopher and a fascinating, albeit flawed, man of his time.

Also on the ABC schedule is a film biography, "Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy," and two important dramas, "The Elephant Man," a new TV version of the Broadway play, and Somerset Maugham's "The Letter," with Lee Remick.

New prime-time series on ABC also include "Fall Guy," with Lee Majors as a TV stunt man; and "Open All Night," the trying times of one Gordon Feester, who runs an

all-night diner in Los Angeles. "King's Crossing" is a family saga, with a complex plot suggesting nothing so much as a soap opera allowed to stay up late.

A new element in TV this fall will be cable programs. At present, cable systems claim only five percent of the total audience, but on evenings when a local system is showing something very special, network ratings could suffer a slight dent.

In time, ad men are saying, networks may lose the cream of their audiences to cable. "Upscale people" will be subscribing to some of the hundreds of systems now springing up across the nation. By 1985, demographers predict, network audiences will be older, less educated and less affluent. This year advertisers will spend eight billion dollars in commercial TV. Cable TV expects to realize a mere \$110 millions. But in ten years, Robert Alter, president of Cablevision Ad Bureau, expects cable to be attracting \$2.5 billions worth of advertising while commercial TV's share slips to 75 percent of its present gate.

It is also predicted that cable—"cultural" cable, that is—will siphon off the audience for public television. That remains to be seen.

What remains to be seen on commercial network television this fall, however, simply underscores the inevitable: the more TV programming changes, the more it stays the same. Hundreds of new shows arrive on your screen every season. But you hardly need ten fingers to

count the innovative, the bold new venture. Networks are, after all, a business. Radical departures, they have learned, rarely catch on. The challenge is to scramble old ideas, bring back dear, family faces, and update the tried-and-true.

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*Harriet Van Horne, television critic and syndicated columnist, is contributing editor of Television Quarterly.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

### Freedom and Television

"Our media system is unique. It has a richness, a diversity, a strength, a completeness and, most important, a freedom and independence that make it the envy of the world. But—brilliant as its present and its oncoming technology may be—it is vital that we understand that it is *not* the technology that makes it the way it is. Technology is the most easily transferable of all human achievements. It knows no cultural boundaries; it has no native tongue. It has no character, only capacity. If technology alone made a media system what it is, then the ever-expanding information-rich atmosphere in which we live would prevail everywhere in the world."

"It is clear, then, that technology is given its value by the social system that contains it—and we should all remember that it *can* (and in many parts of the world *has*) become the adversary of the people, not their servant. The circumstances that give our media system its special identity are its existence within the framework of a society which believes in—in fact, is based upon—the concept of freedom of speech, and its position within the arrangement we call private enterprise, which has freed it from governmental support and control."

—Gene F. Jankowski  
President CBS/Broadcast Group  
—At the Hollywood Radio and  
Television Society



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**SUPERSTATION  
WTBS**

**CNN**  
CABLE NEWS NETWORK

# Journalists' Issues v. Candidates' Issues

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By THOMAS E. PATTERSON

Does network television inform voters about the choices they face in a presidential campaign? At one time, the answer to this question seemed obvious: television was not informative because it largely ignored the issues of the campaign.

For example, my studies of the 1972 and 1976 general elections (*The Unseeing Eye, The Mass Media Election*) revealed that the networks were obsessed with the "horse race." The evening news in each of these campaigns contained twice as much information about the candidates' competitive positions, strategies, and glad-handing as it did about their policy stands, leadership abilities, and public records. With so much attention being focused on the election as a race, it seemed hard to believe that the voters were getting from television a clear indication of what the candidates stood for.

The networks' coverage of the most recent presidential campaign, however, has convinced at least one set of critics that television now is a valuable information source. Michael Robinson and Margaret Sheehan of George Washington University monitored the networks' 1980 election coverage and observed:

After Labor Day, issues came into vogue. Between the first phase of the campaign and the first three weeks of October, issues coverage more than tripled in percentage terms. If one takes into consideration the length of the issues pieces that were being broadcast in October, practically as much time on Evening News was devoted to issues as to the horse race.

Robinson and Sheehan caution that the networks played up the issues only during the general election period. When the primaries were being contested, 70 percent of all election news was devoted to the horse race. Nonetheless, Robinson and Sheehan were sufficiently impressed with television's about-face in the fall campaign to conclude that the medium is now "capable of sustaining voters hungry for news about the issues" and provides "serious and helpful portraits" of the candidates.

To me this assessment seems overly optimistic. Robinson and Sheehan appear to assume that whatever the networks say about issues is helpful to voters.

In my judgement, the networks' contribution to the public's understanding of would-be Presidents remains unsubstantial. A basic reason is that, even when television covers "the issues," its informa-

tion is often unreliable. An example is CBS's distorted portrayal of Ronald Reagan's political views in a story broadcast in October, 1980. In the report, Bill Plante enumerated positions that Reagan either had altered or ignored since his nomination. As Plante talked, X's were drawn across Reagan's face to dramatize his apostacy. Plante suggested that Reagan had moved toward the political center in order to gain election.

Plante's story won him the applause of his fellow correspondents as well as the praise of media critics like Robert Kaiser of the *Washington Post*, who liked its "tell-it-like-it-is" message.

But did Plante's story tell the truth? Had Reagan changed? Had he become a centrist? The answer is no, apparent from a reading of the *whole* of Reagan's standard campaign speech in the fall of 1980. He was speaking then mainly of big government, high taxes, and inadequate national defense, which were the same things he had been railing about for nearly two decades. His positions were those of a conservative Republican, not those of the centrist Plante portrayed. Was anyone taken unawares when Reagan, within days of becoming President, proposed great cuts in domestic spending and a hefty increase in military spending? Only a voter who took Plante's report literally would have been surprised.

Or consider television's early presentation of John Anderson. When his strong showing in the Massachusetts and Vermont pri-

maries suddenly made him newsworthy, the networks labeled him a "liberal." But Anderson's record in Congress belied this assessment. He scored only 55 percent on the voting rating of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action, only 39 percent on the index of the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education, and only 22 percent on the liberal National Farmers' Union index. On the other hand, he scored 73 percent on the rating of the somewhat conservative National Association for Businessmen.

For many reasons, voters should not trust too blindly the networks' portrayals of the candidates. One reason is that journalists concentrate on what is new or different about events and people. Thus, when Anderson spoke about a 50¢ gasoline tax and controls on handguns—positions that the other Republican contenders did not share—he became the liberal contender in a conservative field, despite the fact that his positions on most issues were not liberal ones. An obsession with change also helps to explain why network correspondents were so quick to claim that Reagan was trying to manipulate the electorate, even though he had been unswerving in his philosophy in the years when a majority of Americans had no interest in his arguments. Reporters in fall of 1980 simply were not cued to Reagan's central arguments. They were tuned to his mendations and, because of this, made mountains out of what in fact were rather slight adjustments in stance.

*(continued on page 40)*





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The networks subjected Jimmy Carter in 1976 and George McGovern in 1972 to the same kind of scrutiny and broadcast the same message on their evening newscasts: presidential candidates cannot be trusted in their use of issues.

Do candidates lack policy commitment? The evidence clearly says no. Gerald Pomper's study of 1944-1976 campaign pledges reveals that elected Presidents work to fulfill nearly all of their campaign promises and actually deliver on most of them. What journalists take in the campaign to be crass manipulation of the issues is often only the on-going process of issue definition and clarification, as candidates are asked to respond to changing policy situations and public demands.

Reporters and candidates also differ in their views as to what constitutes an issue. When Carter complained bitterly in 1976 and 1980 that the press was ignoring the issues, he was referring to matters of public policy, such as proposals for dealing with inflation.

To the press, however, an issue is simply a point of contention between the candidates, whether public policy is involved or not. In fact, journalists have a special affinity for "campaign" issues, which are disputes that arise in the campaign and have almost no policy relevance. An example from the 1980 campaign was the charge that Carter was conducting a "nasty campaign," a headline story on television for nearly two weeks. Another example was the heated exchange between the Reagan and Carter camps over whether their

candidates would meet in televised debate.

In fact, were it not for such "campaign" issues, Robinson and Sheehan might not have reached their favorable conclusion about television's general election reporting. During September, most of the issue coverage they report was accounted for by "campaign" issues. In October, policy issues, particularly military defense and the economy received more emphasis. Still, the second most heavily reported single issue in October was the debate about the debate, a "campaign" issue.

The special appeal of "campaign" issues to the press rests partly on their conformity with traditional news values—they are unexpected, colorful, and unique. Who would have predicted, for example, that President Carter would descend to a mudslinging re-election campaign?

For similar reasons, television has a liking for what Colin Seymour-Ure calls clear-cut issues. These are issues that neatly divide the candidates; rest on principle rather than complex details or relationships; and can be stated in simple terms, usually by reference to a shorthand label such as busing or detente. An example of a clear-cut issue in 1980 was the S.A.L.T. agreements, which Carter advocated and Reagan rejected.

The press's bias toward clear-cut issues probably owes mostly to its patterned view of events, an outlook best described by James David Barber:

The reporter's raw material is differences—between what was and what

is, expectations and events, reputations and realities, normal and exotic—and his artful eye is set to see the moment when the flow of history knocks two differences together.

Thus the issues on which the candidates disagree are preferred to those on which the candidates agree or on which the differences are imprecise. When Carter and Reagan each insinuated in September of 1980 that the other had racist tendencies, their charges and countercharges rated top billing on the evening newscasts. This is the usual case; my study of the 1976 campaign found that 67 percent of the issue coverage on ABC, CBS, and NBC was devoted to clear-cut issues.

Consistent with this preference, the networks rely on metaphors of confrontation in reporting the issues. Nearly every television story on the election contains words like "clash," "fought," "struggle," "attacks," and "defends." Such words, however, conjure an image of the campaign that is largely a construct of reporters. Most charges made by the opposition are, in fact, ignored by the candidate, for to respond would be to let the other side set the agenda. Moreover, when a candidate does respond to the opposition, it is usually on his terms, redefining more than replying to the argument.

Rather than the clear-cut issues that are favored by the press, candidates rely heavily on diffuse appeals. On some of these, the candidates differ mainly in style and emphasis, as in the common commitment to maintain a healthy

economy. Such issue appeals provide candidates with a way of identifying themselves with the problems that are usually uppermost in people's minds. Candidates also depend heavily on appeals aimed at their separate coalitions. Since each candidate naturally gears his campaign to those interests that already lean toward him and his party, many of their appeals involve assurances of continued support or distributive benefits for a specific group, assurances that do not necessarily clash with those of the opposing candidate simply because he is appealing to other groups.

The extent to which presidential candidates rely on diffuse appeals, and stay away from clear-cut issues, is evidenced in Pomper's study of campaign pledges from 1944 on. He found that only one in ten platform appeals placed the candidates in directly conflicting positions.

Why do journalists play down the issues that candidates are trying to play up? Because the candidates' diffuse appeals lack the qualities prized in news stories. The candidates' general statements about matters such as peace and prosperity are considered too imprecise to permit easy use, and the candidates' appeals to the separate interests within their coalitions are thought too narrow to be of general interest, and their position papers on complex issues are too intricate to summarize easily.

Both television and newspaper journalists are biased against diffuse appeals, but the tendency is

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*CBS CABLE*

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*A CELEBRATION  
OF THE  
LIVING ARTS  
AND THE  
ARTS OF LIVING*

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stronger among television journalists. The networks in 1976, for example, devoted 30 percent more of their news space to clear-cut issues than did newspapers. The networks' extraordinary emphasis on such issues owes mostly to their preference for issues that do not require lengthy exposition and appeal to a diverse audience. Most issue references on the evening newscasts occur in news segments of 20 seconds or less, usually embedded in other news of the campaign. Even newspapers are reluctant to make room for the hundreds of words sometimes required for explicating the candidates' positions on broad issues. With more severe space limitations and a desire to use action film, the networks almost never make room for such positions, thus centering their coverage on clear-cut issues that can be conveyed in a few words.

Modern presidential campaigns place too big a burden on the networks; too much is demanded of them. They are expected by critics and apologists alike to organize the issues facing the voters. Television reporters themselves often claim they can perform this task. And even if they did not want the responsibility, a large share of it is theirs by virtue of the inability and unwillingness of our political parties to carry the burden. When the parties, after 1968, handed over control of their nominations to the voters through primaries, they also cleared the way for the media to act as the principal broker between aspiring Presidents and the mass public.

The network's responsibilities are particularly onerous during the nominating phase of the campaign. At this time, television may be expected to create, through only a few minutes of daily communication, an electorate that can understand the major policy positions of a half dozen previously obscure politicians.

It is an impossible task. The networks simply have no stake in organizing the issues. Unlike the political party, they have nothing directly to gain or lose from whether the electorate sees clearly its stake in presidential choice.

This is not to say that television news is unimportant or that voters do not learn some valuable things from what they see and hear. Indeed, the networks help keep voters abreast of campaign events and make aware of some issues that might otherwise be hidden. Nevertheless, the candidates' agendas simply are not readily evident in television's coverage, for the subject matter of the network news is dictated primarily by journalistic values, rather than political ones.

There is not much that the networks can do to change this condition. They might recognize more fully how their perspective distorts the candidates' platforms and try to limit the tendency. (And the networks have taken steps of this kind in the last two presidential campaigns.) But the networks are guided mainly by their own values, conventions, and organizational needs, and these are certain to dominate their news decisions. The themes that the candidates are

sounding will tend not to be those that command the news.

Candidates are more likely to get their messages across intact on local television. Network correspondents have daily exposure to the candidates' statements, leading to reporting based on each day's new twists. The candidates' routine appeals, however, often are new to the local reporter and hence more likely to be seen as newsworthy. Of course, a candidate will not get enough of this original coverage in any location to assure that his platform will be understood by voters there.

There would seem to be only one sure way of measurably improving the voters' understanding of their choices: give the candidates television time to use as they wish. Evidence from several recent studies (e.g., *The Mass Media Election*) suggests that voters acquire more usable election information from

televised political advertising, televised convention speeches, and televised debates than from watching network newscasts regularly. Many citizens apparently find the unmediated candidate to be more understandable than the mediated one. The electorate as a whole would probably benefit from additional opportunities to watch and listen directly to its would-be Presidents.

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*Thomas E. Patterson is Chairman of the Political Science Department of Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship. He has written numerous articles on the news media's impact on American politics. He is also the author of two books on the subject: *The Unseeing Eye and Mass Media Election*.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"Sports are and always have been the highest and best everyday use of the television medium. Television here gives a large public much of the experience of an event in which trained and dedicated human beings are stretching their capacities. Sports serve the interests of communities by creating subjects of common concern, and of individuals by demonstrating the rewards of effort. They are central to television everywhere, and should be."

—Martin Mayer  
*American Film Magazine*

*we think international*

**TV Asahi**

Asahi National Broadcasting Co., Ltd.

**MCA TV**



# Don't Write Off Public Television

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By FREDERICK A. JACOBI

Of all the premature obituaries for public broadcasting I have read during the past few months, the one I found most engaging was an editorial in *Channels*, a new magazine which actually urged public broadcasting to commit hara-kiri. The event, *Channels* predicted, would be "nothing short of an apocalypse" for commercial broadcasters, who would then be forced to revive the institution at their own expense.

If 280 public television frequencies were suddenly vacated, *Channels* reasoned, they would be claimed immediately by profit-seeking companies. Thus, extant commercial broadcasters would be faced with new competition—possibly a fourth network—plus the requirement "to provide the educational, informational and cultural services they were burdened with before public television took over those unprofitable tasks."

*Channels'* suggestion that public broadcasting go out of business is hardly more extreme than several others which have been in circulation for some time. The obituaries, in fact, began to appear in print long before President Reagan's budget threatened to hammer the last nail into the coffin.

Public broadcasting, the theory went, was already terminally enervated by the impending defection of its audience to pay-cable television, videodiscs and other electronic marvels lurking just around the corner. Public broadcasting, furthermore, appealed only to an elite few, who in the future would be able to select—and pay for—their own cultural programs.

That particular notion was advanced last winter by Bill Safire, a newspaper columnist who knows a good deal more about etymology than about broadcasting. Taxpayer-supported television, he said, "is an idea whose time has come and gone." Just as yachtsmen should pay for their Coast Guard services, Safire maintained, so should discriminating viewers pay for the kind of programming they now watch on public television. "It is time," he concluded, "for noncommercial television to sustain itself against the classy competition in the marketplace."

While I have no argument with this conclusion, I disagree with the basic premise. For one thing, I believe in the democratic principle that every citizen should enjoy unrestricted access to the best that is among us. For another, I do not be-

lieve that the new program-delivery systems are either as universally imminent or as potentially divisive as do some of the other prognosticators. Finally, I believe that public broadcasting—free public broadcasting—is here to stay. The corollary, however, is that public broadcasters must redefine their mission and their methodology so that they can indeed sustain themselves “against the classy competition in the marketplace.”

A thriving alternative to commercial television must continue to play a vital role in American life. It’s ironic that the prophets are spreading their predictions of doom for public broadcasting just when the Niensens show that the number of people tuning in to a public station in a given week exceeds, for the first time, 50 percent of the homes with television sets. Access to that alternative must not be limited to those viewers who can afford to pay.

“While there are indeed many consumers willing to pay for quality television and radio,” the Rev. William Fore of the National Council of Churches said in response to the Safire column, “the public good requires that at least some of those services be available to everyone—not just the rich.”

The other day a New York City cab driver told me that he had never heard a chamber-music concert until he tuned into a live broadcast of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center on WNET, New York’s public television station. Now, he said, he was hooked. So

much for the charge that public broadcasting beams a signal only to the elite, because the cab driver is by no means a lonely figure. The most dramatic recent increases in public-television viewing have, in fact, come in homes headed by a person with less than a high-school education and in homes with an annual income of less than \$10,000.

Just as the obituaries for public broadcasting are premature and irrelevant, so, in my opinion, are the conclusions that the new delivery systems will soon replace free, over-the-air non-commercial broadcasting. Public television now reaches 90 percent of the American public. Cable reaches 20 percent. Even the most ardent supporters of cable do not project a penetration of more than 50 percent in the next ten years. As far as videodiscs are concerned, RCA’s recent launching of its new product line appears to have been something of a fizzle.

In the last issue of *TV Quarterly* Dave Berkman, a communications expert with wide experience in both government service and the corporate world, advanced some “counter-revolutionary views” to the so-called video revolution. Current predictions, he said, are similar to those made in the early 1960’s in behalf of the teaching machine.

“IBM, Xerox, CBS, RCA, GE, Time-Life, Raytheon and Westinghouse invested four billion dollars in ‘hardware/software synergies’ designed to create and service this new, electronic-based system of ed-

ucation," Berkman said. "The 'Ed Tech' revolution failed to materialize because those who conjectured it assumed that because a technology existed, it would be bought by those for whom it was intended." It wasn't, and Berkman predicts a similar fate for the new technology.

Dave Berkman spent many years at the U.S. Office of Education investing public funds in good public-television programs for children. Even if he is only half right about the video revolution, public broadcasters now have their work cut out for them in terms of reaffirming their purpose and redefining their *modus operandi*.

Most agree that their primary purpose is to continue to provide quality broadcast programming for a discriminating audience. But, as my cab driver attests, a discriminating audience is not restricted to the financially elite. Broadcasters have an obligation to the entire citizenry. There are a number of ways in which they expect to fulfill their destiny even as they see the source of federal dollars begin to dry up.

They are, for want of a better label, "electronic publishers." They create and disseminate an editorial product. They publish television programs rather than books or periodicals and their constituency is the viewing audience, from whom they derive an expanding roster of volunteer subscribers. And this is happening throughout the country. For example, last winter's membership drive by public broadcasting stations topped all previous

campaigns and surpassed the 1980 event by 29 percent.

Public broadcasters must also reaffirm their educational function. They must be informative, illuminating and edifying on a wide spectrum of topics and issues. The report of a recent Presidential Commission eloquently articulates this goal.

"This nation cannot afford to neglect the humanities or allow them to be pushed aside by other concerns that seem more urgent," the Panel on the Quality of American Life in the Eighties affirmed. "Today more than ever, the task of the humanities—to make moral and intellectual sense of the world, to prepare citizens who are literate in the broadest sense of the term—is crucial. . . . A National agenda for the 1980's must reflect our deep commitment to cultural activity, to artistic and scholarly accomplishment, to the realm of ideas and the life of the spirit. Even in an era of tight budgetary constraints, it would be a grave mistake to regard the arts and humanities as an indulgence."

It's no secret that we've been overtaken by events. The foregoing is from one of the reports of the President's Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, established by President Carter to guide the president-elect, whoever that might be. Among the recommendations: that the federal government invest more heavily in public television, the best vehicle to carry forward the mandates of the National Endowments for the Arts and

the Humanities. Budget Director David Stockman was still representing the 4th Congressional District of Michigan in Washington when the report was written.

Nevertheless, education remains one of the key purposes. Public broadcasters recognize the national call for a reduction in federal expenses and realize that they must be prepared to accept a proportion of those cuts. Hence they are working hard to transfer some of that tax support to the state, which has a real stake in their expanding activities in secondary and post-secondary education. One encouraging sign: New York state has increased its per-capita allocation for public radio and television from 50¢ to 75¢.

This fall, for example, WNET's School Television Service will offer 30 hours a week of classroom instruction over a period of 34 weeks to some 2,500 schools encompassing some 650,000 students and 20,000 teachers in the tri-state area. Over 60 different series, covering such topics as language arts, social studies, science, arts, mathematics, health and personal development provide a total of more than 1,000 hours of instructional television during the school year. This effort is replicated by most of the other 280 public television stations across the country.

WNET's School Television Service is also involved in the repackaging of selected "MacNeil/Lehrer Reports" for classroom use; the production of a ten-part television series based on a critical-viewing skills curriculum; and a national

teacher-training curriculum on the use of technology for teaching basic skills in the elementary school.

At the post-secondary level, WNET and 55 colleges and universities from Buffalo, New York, to Wilmington, Delaware, recently established the Eastern Educational Consortium to promote the distribution of higher and continuing education by delivery systems of all kinds, including the most futuristic. It is in the area of formal instruction, incidentally, that I foresee the most exciting opportunities for exploiting the technology of the future: the interactive capability of two-way cable, for example; the computerized freeze-frame potential of videodiscs about to come on the market, for another. These electronic marvels may have real meaning for the growing numbers of adults who want to continue their education—for college credit or simply for personal growth—in a nontraditional setting.

The importance of this kind of "extended learning" was dramatically underscored in the last issue of *Television Quarterly* by Rick Breitenfeld, who runs the Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting. He suggested that the salvation of public broadcasting may well lie in its refocusing its sights on discrete audiences with special instructional needs. "If public broadcasters were to concentrate on *services* rather than on *shows*," he said, "it might be easier to state a persuasive case for tax support."

Breitenfeld cheerfully admits that he advocates turning back the

clock. While instruction and training may constitute one important function of public broadcasting in the future, it should not become its sole function. Formal education, in my view, is only part of a much broader mission.

What about commercials on public television? There are those who propose to introduce "limited" commercials—limited as to products advertised, limited as to frequency and grouping. The trouble with these "limitations" is that they become difficult to police. It's the camel's nose under the tent flap. It's being a little bit pregnant. And these arguments for commercials don't take into consideration the costs of selling time—sales staffs, sales-promotion departments, research, the whole panoply of commercial television.

As a practical consideration, a recent survey of members by the National Association of Public Television Stations found that 62 percent of those responding would not take institutional advertising even if Congress allowed it. Most station managers felt that such commercialism would jeopardize their other, more important sources of income. As a matter of principle, one must ask how noncommercial television, if it accepted advertising, would then differ from commercial television.

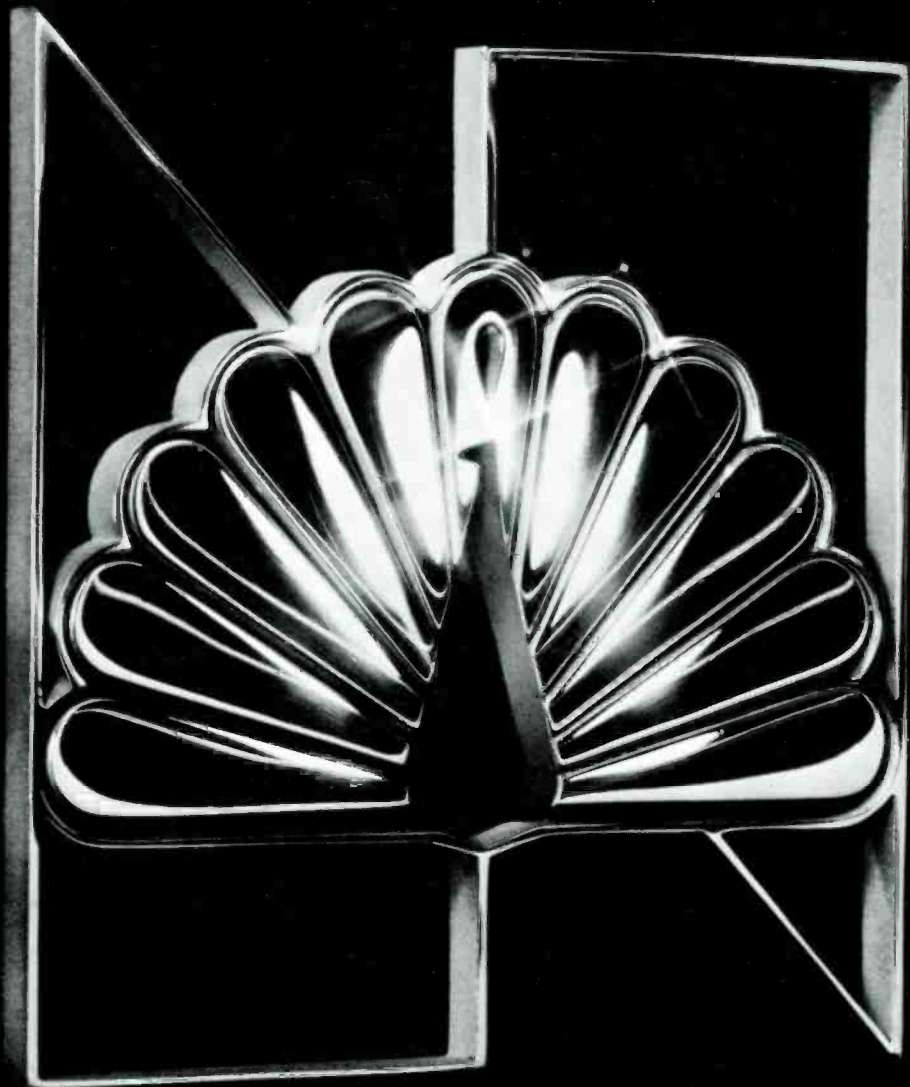
Where, then, does public broadcasting go from here? Despite the claims of the culture-cable aficionados, I believe that free public broadcasting will continue to be the prime purveyor of dance,

drama, opera, symphonic music and hard-hitting current-affairs documentaries to an expanding national audience. In the face of reduced federal funding, it may be that in the future six or eight major public-television production centers—independent stations—will share their aspirations and pool their resources in order to provide the audience with outstanding co-productions. A prototypical arrangement has already crystallized with the announcement of a consortium consisting of KCET, Los Angeles; South Carolina ETV; WGBH, Boston; and WNET, New York to produce a weekly drama series, *Playhouse*, starting this fall.

On the local front each public station must concentrate on the kind of programming that is designed to make a difference in the quality of life in that community. Public stations have a mandate to explore local issues in depth and in prime time; to provide a showcase for local arts organizations; to shed light, not heat, in the dark corners of small towns and center cities; to serve as farm teams for the major leagues; to become, in effect, vibrant local institutions.

To finance all of this, public broadcasters will have to go out to earn their own living. If they are to tap resources, they will have to become imaginatively entrepreneurial—and must be left untrammelled, in the process, by federal legislation. One version of a new Senate public broadcasting bill would have penalized the station by the amount it raises in the com-

*(continued on page 53)*



We Take Pride In  
The Company We Keep.

mercial marketplace. This would, of course, have been preposterous.

Several public television stations are now beginning to capitalize on their programming resources in order to compete in the marketplace. At WNET an Enterprises division has just concluded its first experimental year during which it established a wholly owned subsidiary which offers complete television production and post-production services to a growing number of clients; cleared an inventory of outstanding dramas for the cable, pay-cable and home-video markets; started a satellite teleconferencing service with access to all of PBS's 280 stations, and, in cooperation with WETA, Washington; WTTW, Chicago; KCET, Los Angeles; and WTVS, Detroit, launched *The Dial*, the first national consumer magazine of public broadcasting.

WGBH, Boston, has created Novacom to distribute its programming (and anybody else's, for that matter) in all media; Novacom also represents Francis Ford Coppola for the distribution of several of his films. The Washington station has formed WETACOM, through which it funnels its teleconferencing, industrial video programming and commercial-production activity. KCET, Los Angeles, rents its studios to Hollywood feature-film producers and, in cooperation with CBS-owned KNXT, has begun to test teletext, a form of instant journalism which transmits data on the unused portion of the broadcast signal. WTVS, Detroit, is aggressively seeking clients for telecon-

ferences. Last March the station mounted a 38-city new-car presentation for Ford, which says that it normally tours its representatives for a month to accomplish what the teleconference did in a day.

All of this entrepreneurial activity is not confined to the top ten markets. For example, WQLN, a highly enterprising public station in Erie, Pa., has set up a separate, for-profit corporation, Penn Communications, which handles, among other things, the distribution of cassettes, films, viewer guides, study guides and—so help me—T-shirts for the successful economics series, *Free to Choose*, with Milton Friedman.

It is too early to measure the effect of these activities on public broadcasting's main mission—the creation of quality programs for a discriminating audience—but I believe that these stations have made a start in the right direction.

Is it time for public broadcasting to commit hara-kiri, as *Channels* magazine proposes? I hardly think so, and I'm not alone in this opinion. There are encouraging signs, for example, that locally based corporations are taking a new interest in their communities by supporting local public television stations in a variety of ways. The roster of banks and other businesses which now underwrite the local broadcasts of programs on WNET has increased exponentially in the last two years. That trend appears to be national.

There are other indications that neither President Reagan nor the new technologies will cause the

ultimate demise of public television. But the best reason to stay alive was provided by that cab driver who learned about chamber music on public television. He holds the ticket to the future.

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*A member of the editorial board of Television Quarterly, Frederick A. Jacobi has been writing about television for the past three decades.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

### **The Human Screen**

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

"Consider: In its dealings with the young, television often plays a sleazy Pied Piper to children, will sell them anything . . . and teach them bad grammar in the process. . . . But television also meets the young on their own terms, gives them choice as well as freedom of access, and also provides them—within the glowing, flickering perimeter of the television set—something that throughout history the young have badly needed: a place of their own to exist in, temporarily untalked to, undefined, unimproved."

—"*The Camera Age: Essays on Television*"  
By Michael Arlen (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981)



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Television Overseas:

## Letter from Great Britain

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LONDON.

As the U.S. moves briskly into the new era of narrow-casting, the British are still betting on the old era of broadcasting. Which seems to suggest that the blinkered island mentality has diminished rather less than some might have thought.

The most obvious sign is the plan for a fourth national television network, slated to bow late next year. In the following year, the present commercial channel, or ITV network, expands its broadcast day with a three-hour morning equivalent of NBC's *Today* show or ABC's *Good Morning America*. At this rate, we can expect round-the-clock TV here by the year 2000.

New technology and carrier systems are acknowledged by the British, but ever so warily. A pilot payable venture is due to begin soon on a two-year trial basis, but with fewer than a million households hooked up, and with the censors hemmed in by provisos (no advertising, no big national attractions, no movies less than a year old), it's fairly certain they won't be able to throw much of a scare into BBC or ITV. Broadcasters, moreover, remember how the government pulled the carpet out from under a promising earlier payable trial in its panic to preserve the status quo for on-air television.

Satellites? In theory the government's all for it and recently said so, but Margaret Thatcher and her dour band of fiscal Puritans are refusing to kick in so much as one old shilling toward the cost of a domestic bird, and without treasury support it's apt to remain a distant gleam despite hopes of getting one aloft by the middle of this decade.

A local version of QUBE? There's nothing like it in sight. Only home video among all the new tech seems to be making any real headway here. Cassette players are selling (or renting) briskly with an estimated 500,000 now in use. But except for movies, software is lagging, with producers handicapped by the absence of royalty agreements with the talent unions. Actually, the commercial ITV stations have an agreement, but at prohibitive commercial terms that so far have kept them out of the market except for a trickle of non-royalty material—documentaries, public domain music, etc. Public BBC is still negotiating an acceptable agreement of its own. And film producers are working out a new contract with actors and musicians that will cover ancillary media for the first time.

If the British seem leery of, or at least cautious about, the brave new

world of new tech, one reason may be their emotional commitment to what most of them regard as the world's best system of television, and the fear of what cable and satellites might do to it. They take the medium seriously here, as witness the frequent pique and denunciation it inspires. Their best actors, writers and directors do not scorn to work for it. The creative climate is relatively congenial, and the degree of artistic latitude allowed is often remarkable. And sometimes so is the programming that results.

Another factor is the huge capital investment in broadcasting. Unlike the U.S. networks, which serve primarily as carriers, the British chains actually produce most of their own stuff, around 85 percent of it, not counting feature films. A lot of jobs as well as a lot of money are at stake, as well as national pride in what is certainly a most original, not to say eccentric, system. As great British inventions go, almost everyone agrees that BBC is one of the best.

So for the moment at least, on-air telecasting retains its protected status, a three-channel affair comprising BBC's two networks plus the commercial ITV channel of 15 regional stations ranging from Ulster Television to Channel Television serving the islands off the French coast.

But a fourth network is on the way. It will offer anywhere from 35 to 50 hours of programming a week and operate as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which licenses,

regulates and censors commercial TV and radio in the United Kingdom.

Channel Four, the new network, like ITV, will carry spot advertising. It will be strictly a carrier, however, not a producer, with programming supplied by a variety of sources including the ITV stations, freelance producers and foreign syndicators. No one quite knows yet how it's all going to "play," only that it will be angled to an upscale audience in competition primarily with BBC's limited-hours second network. The latter is the TV equivalent of an "art" film exhibitor, though its programmers frequently have a demonstrated ability to attract substantial audiences.

Channel Four otherwise appears to be one of those patented British compromises that backfired, at least as far as the independent stations are concerned. Claiming they had the manpower and spare production capacity, the stations originally sought the Channel Four franchise for their sole possession, thus obtaining what they've long wanted—two-channel parity with BBC. Instead, the government surprised everyone by awarding sole custody to the IBA, and on condition that the programming input should come from a mixture of suppliers on a quota basis. As balm, the ITV stations will constitute the single largest input bloc, and will also have sole control over, and profit from, the sale of air time. But for those concessions they're also expected to provide all of the

channel's start up costs, which at current values figures to be in the vicinity of \$150 million or more.

The stations will also have to come up with ongoing financial support in the form of an annual subscription. For thus carrying the fiscal can they will be eligible for substantial tax relief, but even so the new channel is going to cost them a great deal more than they ever bargained for.

Despite Britain's current soft economy, the ITV managements continue to register buoyant spot billings, helped to some extent by a profusion of confusing discounts. But they face stiffening media competition. Fragmentation may be a slow process in broadcasting, but not in the advertising trade. Something like an advertising explosion is underway here, with new papers and Sunday supplements leading the way.

Loud and clear are the complaints of advertisers and their agencies as the stations jack up their spot rates despite circulation losses to BBC. The public company, by virtue of inherent flexibility and some shrewd scheduling and counter-programming, has contrived to more than hold its own in the ratings at a time when it's under financial strain and trimming program budgets in an attempt to make its limited income stretch. But for all their gripes of wrath, the fact remains that for anyone who wants to advertise on television, ITV is still the only game in town. And not even the advent of Chan-

nel Four will end that monopoly, though it may induce some conflict for the stations' sales staffs.

As for that new morning show slated to premiere two years hence on the ITV channel, the eccentric English have done it again. Instead of just letting the ITV stations program what they saw fit in those early hours, the IBA chose to hand over the lease for the whole channel to a single new licensee. This amounts to sub-letting the channel at a time of day when its normal tenants don't occupy it, but very well could have. The explanation for this oddity, which in effect creates yet another broadcast bureaucracy, is that the IBA wanted to spread the wealth around a bit more.

Anyway, the morning strip will run from 6 to 9 a.m. The company that won the franchise over seven other contenders, AM-TV by name, is headed by Peter Jay, the former ambassador to Washington and a journalist whose specialty is economics. Also associated in the firm is peripatetic TV personality David Frost (who presumably will also appear from time to time), with a number of prominent London newscasters and other familiar faces already under contract. The original plan was to get on the air next year, but the IBA, fearing too much fragmentation of the TV economy too quickly, wants to see Channel Four securely launched first. Thus, AM-TV's wake-up number is stalled until the fall of 1983.

*(continued on page 61)*



We send you our best.

Shows like *Hart to Hart*, *Dallas* and *Starsky and Hutch* reruns scored impressive ratings this spring. But the most impressive performer on British TV has to be a twice-weekly soap called *Coronation Street*, which usually tops the rating derby. An "off" week is when it only places third or fourth (or both), though even Lee Rich would be thrilled with an offish week like that if he had a show that had been running 52 weeks a year since 1960. *Coronation Street*, produced by Granada Television in Manchester and cleared by the full ITV network, is a leisurely cliffhanger about a "typical" working class community in the north of England, also known as "Granadaland."

When one of the show's characters dies, has a birthday or marries, heaps of mail pour in with condolences or congratulations, as the case may be. Vast acres of space in the tabloids cover each and every dramatic turn of events in "the street." The show has long since qualified as a British legend, and its signature tune (corny) is as familiar to millions as Elgar's "Land of Hope and Glory." Now in its 21st year, there's no reason to suppose it won't still be running in the 21st century—if there is one.

*Coronation Street* did run on a few American stations several years ago, as an experiment. But it didn't catch on. The accents are too thick for American audiences, and the characters and setting don't appeal to USA audiences. Still, BBC and the British commercial programmers like Thames, London

Weekend, Granada and others will continue to be an important source of supply for PBS (even if eventually the public network may only get its BBC product second-run) and probably for the new cable "culture" networks, and for specially organized groups of commercial stations, like those developed by Mobil. Eventually, American viewers may even come to learn that not all UK imports they have come to admire, are from BBC—many Stateside viewers still think their beloved *Upstairs, Downstairs* was produced, not by London Weekend but by BBC.

Well, what are the prospects for more tasty bundles from British TV for Americans in the future, whether they find them on public, cable or commercial outlets?

For one, *Smiley's People*, a now-filming sequel to John Le Carre's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, with Alec Guinness repeating as the troubleshooter for Britain's secret service. But this time, Paramount, which jointly financed the original series, isn't involved.

Then there's a show which aired here earlier this year called *The History Man*, a four-parter on sex, politics and sex on the campus, which minces few four-letter words and in its softcore way manages to be as sexually blunt as anything that has yet graced the public air in Britain. Catnip for the Moral Majority, absorbing drama for the immoral minority, with a stylish performance by Anthony Sher as a leftwing rogue of the faculty.

*Oppenheimer*, a BBC docudrama series on the father of the

A-bomb in which Sam Waterston is starred as the scientist whose career came under a security cloud, met with moderate success recently. The scenario fails to sustain, but there are some fine evocative moments and several excellent performances, including Waterston's.

Nearing completion is filming on *Churchill, the Wilderness Years*, another miniseries covering the pre-war period when Winston Churchill was in political limbo. Robert Hardy stars, and the plot includes Winnie's visit to the U.S. in the 20s when he met and became friendly with park bench philosopher Bernard Baruch.

What effect, if any, the current unrest in the streets and the continued economic decline here may

have on the quality of TV programming is difficult to assess. Meanwhile, at least for the near future, dear old British television will continue to go along its old-fashioned broadcast way, even if it does neglect the new-fangled technology. And maybe that's not so bad, at least for Great Britain.

—JOHN HIGHGATE PUTNAM

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*An American journalist who has been based for many years in London, John Highgate Putnam is a close observer of the British television scene. Currently, he is working on a new book on British manners, mores and the lively arts.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"Folks who are deaf or hard-of-hearing are finally enjoying TV. That's because of something called closed captions. A deaf person can buy a decoding device that, when attached to the TV set, reveals subtitles on the screen for such programs as *Cosmos*, *Nova*, and *Masterpiece Theatre*. Last year public television aired some nine hours per week of such captioned programs. Three foundations have donated \$125,000 toward the costs of the captioning, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting also generously supplies funds. Sears Roebuck, which sells the decoders, contributes a royalty for each unit sold to help pay for the captioning of public TV programs."

—*the Dial Magazine*





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## REVIEW AND COMMENT

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**Portraying The President**, By Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar. *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 358 Pages; \$9.95

Washington is a place where nothing ever seems to get smaller or simpler despite the best efforts of all the new arrivals who come prepared to stamp out and/or clear up the mess. The Washington media complex, so much a part of the structure of the town, follows the same pattern. The News business is flourishing in Washington. There is more of everything—people, equipment, money, competition, tension and frustration.

The White House press office now is struggling with the problem of how to reduce the number of people who have permanent White House press passes. To date, more than seven thousand of the prestigious passes have been issued. On Capitol Hill, the number of TV news crews has grown so much that once-spacious hearing rooms are inadequate.

Another of the continuing sagas of Washington perseverance against great odds is the effort by news organizations to get adequate parking arrangements on Capitol Hill.

Until the Nixon administration launched its attacks the Washington media operated in comparative peace and quiet. What press they got tended to be favorable, but now

after covering four troubled administrations through 16 troubled years, the Washington reporters are getting an historic amount of critical scrutiny. In the best of worlds reporters, like press agents, should not be part of the story. But now reporters are a large part of the Washington story and there is no turning back.

Two political scientists, Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, have given six years to their attempt to explain the Washington news corps in terms of White House news coverage.

Their book is not for the casual reader looking for exciting inside tales of Washington. Robert Redford is unlikely to find a movie script in it. However, it should be welcome to academics, Washington reporters and organizations which need information on who does what to whom in and around the federal government.

It is a noteworthy effort to explain to the unknowing just how the American news machine keeps people posted on the presidency in a nuclear age. My complaints with it include its bits of American History of Journalism for College Freshman style writing, its bloodless accounts of the Washington reporters and its superficial treatment of television and its Washington history and position.

Social scientists are fond of analyzing and codifying any aspect of

society they encounter. The authors acknowledge the view of "many White House reporters and officials that their relationship is subject to too many intangible and unpredictable factors to permit a systematic analysis." Nevertheless, they plow on and conclude "the argument here is that the White House and the news media are involved in a continuing relationship rooted in permanent factors that affect both sides no matter who is president or who is doing the reporting." Then the authors decide that despite all the *sturm* and *drang* between both sides "presidents and news people depend on each other in their efforts to do the job for which they are responsible."

This is a major revelation only to those who have gotten hung up in the anti-media rhetoric of recent years, or who have been misled by some occasional snarling questioning at White House news briefings.

Nothing changes the fact that our country is still involved in what some prefer to call the international balance of terror and so the White House, as the center of our power, is usually the best source of news day in and day out. If that is oversimplifying, consider the approach of the authors who obviously have been overexposed to White House staff image makers. They view the White House and its relations with the press through a humorless glass as though they are trapped in the ice of some public relations workshop.

Strategies for manipulation by presidents and their people with counter attacks by the media are presented in a clinical atmosphere devoid of considerations of all the forces White House image-shapers and the media cannot control, like foreign governments, acts of God, unpredictable people in and out of government and the common sense of the American people.

Twenty pages of the book are taken up with a survey of 25 years of White House stories in the New York Times and Time magazine and 10 years of CBS News reports. Stories and pictures are analyzed for tone (categories positive-positive, negative-neutral, negative-negative), total number and time (favorable or unfavorable stories between 1953–1965, 1966–74 and 1974 and 1978). This is a marvelous example of a mind-boggling technique of journalism evaluation which has been called "weighing it by the pound." Eric Severeid coined the famous portrayal of TV news executives being bitten to death by ducks. A more horrible end will come to all us newsfolk if the Grossman-Kumar kind of analysis becomes any more widespread.

When you try to write this kind of book there are lots of traps. If you talk to enough White House aides you might start to believe the media conspiracy theory—that all reporters are a bunch of overpaid, undereducated vicious types who don't understand what's good for the country. But the media power is limited; there is no way the me-

*(continued on page 69)*



# *Fine Tuning.*

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dia, no matter how eager to do so, can put a good face on Watergate, or a Bay of Pigs or the excesses of Lyndon Johnson or the misjudgments of Gerald Ford or Jimmy Carter.

The authors uncovered sentiment among past and present White House reporters that Steven Early (FDR), and James Hagerty (Eisenhower) were regarded as successful press secretaries. The authors however brush both men off as having functioned in an earlier, less complicated time and infer that they would not have succeeded these days. I didn't know Early, but I saw Hagerty in action during the last two years of his eight-year term (no other modern press secretary has served that long). I would cast a loud vote for Hagerty on the basis of credentials that are effective in any age: honesty, extensive experience as a respected newsman before his White House assignment, the complete respect and backing of the President and all his men, a devotion to the President he served and a complete lack of ego or ambition to serve in any other government post. Let the record show, too, that Hagerty kept his promise that he would not write a book about his experiences as long as any of the people he served with were alive.

In focusing on seven White House reporters from seven different media, the authors uncover some interesting detail that should interest students and working journalists. But I think the book would have benefitted from a closer, more personal look at some of the White

House reporters who through the years have risen above the pack.

The wire service reporter who did this best was the late Merriman Smith of UPI. Smith covered the White House from the last years of FDR through the early years of the Johnson administration. He was a tireless worker and talker who was hooked on show business. He was one of the regulars on the early network talk shows, with Jack Paar and then Johnny Carson, and later Mike Douglas. Smitty blossomed on those shows, not only because it created needed supplement to his meager wire service income, but because he loved being a star.

Smitty enjoyed covering the White House and in all those TV appearances he glamorized his job and White House reporting. The White House world Smitty projected was full of earnest hard-working reporters ever-ready to display their courage and skill by asking tough questions of the nation's leaders. Smitty almost single handedly may have started the idea that covering the White House is a glamorous way to spend your time.

Hundreds of reporters who have suffered through hours of boredom on the White House press room couches or standing in roped-off areas at airports waiting for the president can offer impressive rebuttal to Smitty's view.

Then there was Peter Lisagor. Peter, who died of cancer in 1976, covered Washington for the *Chicago Daily News* for 20 years. Peter worked his way to Washington through the normal newspaper

channels but once there, grew into one of the most respected if not the most respected reporter in town. He was a fine example of the reporter who had the skill, strength and wit to keep Washington and all its trappings in perspective. He never let it overwhelm him and he never let it strip him of his simplicity or his ability to see through the clouds of Washington rhetoric. One of his colleagues said of him, "He was the one who helped us all because he would say, 'hey wait a minute, let's not go overboard on this.'" There is no reporter on the Washington scene today who performs that service. Lisagor was the kind of Washington journalist Grossman and Kumar do not explain in their book.

Peter Lisagor was a unique in his own time as George Will is today. Will, who, curiously, is not listed in the book as a major commentator in Washington, is the first real triple-threat man in American journalism—a star in newspapers, magazines and television. A George Will has much more influence on a White House news policy than numbers of organizations which have reporters fighting frustration in the press room.

The authors do not get into the important subject of courage and dedication in reporters or news organizations. Apparently in their interviewing of reporters, the authors didn't get anybody talking about how it is when the most powerful man in the free world makes a fuss over you, puts his arm around you, insists on dancing with your wife, calls you at all

hours asking your advice, invites you to the ranch or a trip on the Presidential yacht or into the oval office for a friendly chat. There are few men in journalism, no matter what their station or income, who can always take that in stride and not be influenced to some degree. But let's hear it for those journalists who have had that experience and have not let it corrupt their judgment!

The book reports various bits of evidence that the growth of television in the past 20 years has been the most important development in White House news coverage, but strangely the authors don't get a handle on the whole subject of network television news in Washington.

Network anchormen are discussed in just two pages. A third of that space is given over to criticism of anchormen and TV news by mostly unnamed print reporters and White House aides.

Print attitudes about television die hard, especially in Washington. I remember back in the early days of the U.S. space program overhearing two wire service reporters who discussed how they had followed an historic space flight by standing at a ticker and being thrilled by the flow of bulletins. They preferred that to watching a TV set nearby which was carrying pictures—the real thing. Those young reporters have their counterparts today and some of that attitude is reflected in this book.

The authors report they spent much time over a five-year period observing the White House press



office operation. I wish they had spent at least five months observing a network news operation in Washington. They report the enormous impact television has had on Washington news, but they display a superficial acquaintance with the subject.

The appendix of interviews they conducted contains no mention of some of the men who are available who were in positions of power when network television news was growing into the indispensable national resource it has become: Bill Small, now the head of NBC News, who ran the CBS Washington news bureau from 1962 till 1974, Julian Goodman who presided over NBC News Washington operation in the later 1950's and the NBC News and NBC itself in the 60's and part of the 1970's.

David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite had enormous influence on what the nation learned of government through television for more than 20 years. Eric Severeid, told millions of viewers what to think about every president from Truman through Carter.

The last two CBS Bureau Chiefs in Washington—Sandy Socolow, the current Executive Producer of the Dan Rather News, and Ed Fouhy, now second in command at CBS News, also could have helped broaden the authors' understanding of network news philosophy in Washington.

American journalism like American democracy itself, is free form. If there are to be powerful network news operations in our future we

need to know and understand the men who are going to be deciding how the nation will be best served by TV news.

Since the authors fell into that trap about TV news stories being too short to be effective, I would like to urge a national moratorium on the practice of measuring TV news effectiveness in terms of the length of the story. Richard Salant, a man who played a major role in TV news for the past 15 years at CBS, and since 1979 at NBC, has fought many good fights for our industry. Unfortunately, many years ago he handed the opposition a weapon they still use to this day; Salant once pointed out that the amount of news in an average CBS News with Walter Cronkite would not fill up half the front page of the *New York Times*. I suspect that comparison will outlive us all.

Never mind that for years and years, thousands of first-rate Cronkite news programs imparted more information, more effectively, in less time than any other means of communication available to man. Let us remember, too, that the scene of Richard Nixon leaving the White House in disgrace took only 15 seconds to relay to the audience, the Reagan assassination attempt just about 20 seconds and Jimmy Carter in tears the morning of his defeat even less than that.

Network news critics often see their target as a vast, well-financed, well-oiled, well-planned machine. Some humorist with more skill than I could make a career of charting the network's

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struggling progress in their news divisions. There is no pattern for many of their personnel moves. The hit-and-miss system at all three network news operations could have been enough to destroy all three, but the fates have smiled on them. There still is no system of training or developing talent, either on-air or management talent.

At the moment, of the three network Washington bureaus, only one is headed by a chief of extensive Washington experience—Sid Davis of NBC has been in Washington since 1959 as a reporter and bureau chief for Group W and since 1979 for NBC. Jack Smith, the Bureau Chief for CBS is brand new to his job after a distinguished career as Bureau Chief in Chicago. ABC also has a brand new Bureau Chief, Bill Knowles, who was promoted from ABC's Atlanta Bureau.

Given the above, I invite network news critics to find a pattern of "conspiracy" in the development of network bureau chiefs. A couple of social scientists might end up in tears of frustration if they tried to establish a pattern to the network's assignment of reporters to the White House. At best, it could be described as enlightened expediency.

As each year passes, the network news organizations become more bureaucratic; no one seems to have the answer for that fact. Roone Arledge has received a lot of attention mainly because he has gotten ABC News up to speed. However, Arledge still hasn't solved his anchorman problems, although his

leadership has inspired an energy the other two networks sometimes have trouble generating. But the problem for all three network news organizations is that ABC's *Nightline* is the first good new idea since CBS thought of *Sixty Minutes* back in 1968. Expanding the nightly news to 45 minutes or an hour is not a new concept, but it probably will be the next idea whose time has come in network newsland. When it happens, it will be another opportunity for those in power in Washington to think of new ways to take advantage of the extra time.

As network news executives and reporters wrestle with all those new challenges, cries of manipulation may be heard throughout the land. But hopefully, the republic will not fall and the social scientists will be ready to survey it all and unfortunately "weigh it by the pound."

—JIM SNYDER

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*Jim Snyder covered the Washington scene for nearly two decades, first as Bureau Chief for Group W during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years, next as the Washington producer for The CBS News with Walter Cronkite, then as News Director for Channel Nine in the capital. In 1977 the Washington Chapter of the Academy gave Snyder its Board of Governors Award for his contribution to TV news. He is now News Director for WDIV, Detroit, as well as Vice President for News of the Post-Newsweek stations.*

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**The Camera Age: Essays on Television,** By Michael J. Arlen. Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981, 337 pp.; \$13.95.

*"It is through criticism . . . that the race has managed to come out of the woods and lead a civilized life. The first man who objected to the general nakedness and advised his fellows to put on clothes, was the first critic."*

E.L. GODKIN

*"A critic is a legless man who teaches running."*

CHANNING POLLOCK

*"Criticism should not be querulous and wasting, all knife and root-puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind."*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Less than half-way into an analysis and dissection of *Manoeuvre*, Frederick Wiseman's *cinéma-vérité* documentary about a U.S. Army battalion on duty in West Germany, Michael Arlen discovers Wiseman's purpose in a blinding flash of revelation.

"And then I saw it," Arlen writes, "for it was so simple, really, so plainly there to be seen; in fact, I had been making such an effort not to see it! What Wiseman's camera had been giving us was not so much a glimpse of 'ordinary men' . . . as a look at *men without masks*."

With this phrase, Arlen has inadvertently provided the key to his extraordinary collection of essays on television, culled from his contributions to *The New Yorker* over the past five years. Because what he has managed to do—and what no other critic of the medium has—is to strip away television's mask,

probing beneath the surface in search of reality. Indeed, this quest is the recurring leitmotif of his work.

"I titled this volume *The Camera Age*," Arlen writes in his introduction, "because I believe that some of the most interesting questions being raised right now by television have to do with fundamental matters of perception. It has been evident for some time in this country that we have gradually shifted to television as the primary source for our perceptions of the world . . . More and more, we see what the cameras see. Our interests become determined by what the cameras are interested in."

In these reflective pieces, Arlen has drastically redefined the role of the critic. The late Dr. Charles Steinberg, surely broadcasting's most erudite publicist, noted in *Television Quarterly* a few years ago that "television reviewing has essentially developed as reportorial journalism, and only rarely does it involve aesthetic judgment." Arlen is unique in that he applies not only aesthetic judgment but also a philosophical and social value system to his perceptions.

The Arlen definition leads one to ponder about what role, in fact, the television critic should play. That of guide for the consumer, conscience of the industry, entertainer, gadfly, reporter, voyeur? Until 1969, when CBS led the pack in permitting advance reviews of selected programs, critics were not allowed to reveal their opinions until the morning after a show had

aired. In the days of live television, this situation was, of course, inevitable, but it did lead Jackie Gleason to remark that television critics were people who reported traffic accidents to eye-witnesses. Even though it has meant risking a bad advance review, the system in effect for the past dozen years seems to have benefited both the public and the purveyors.

Do critics have an effect on the industry? Twenty years ago Gilbert Seldes, writing in *TV Guide*, expressed the belief that critics actually exerted an influence on network decision making, and cited a couple of examples in support of this remarkable thesis. I'm inclined to think, however, that the evidence on this score has been pathetically slim over the past two decades, and that advertisers and organized pressure groups have far more clout than do the critics. To be sure, there are still some self-appointed watchdogs, for the most part investigative reporters turned reviewers, who flail at what they perceive as the venality of commercial broadcasters or the pusillanimity of public broadcasters. The power of these writers to effect change, however, does not compare with that of the drama critic who can make or break a Broadway production with a two-fingered tap on the typewriter.

Should the television critic try to be an entertainer in his\* own

right? While a bylined column is certainly a legitimate showcase for the writer's personal tastes, he does have a responsibility for preventing his own idiosyncracies from completely dominating the space. One reviewer is a self-made comedian who wields a burlesque bladder with a hand heavier than that of any of Mr. Minsky's comics. The result is just not very funny and often oversteps the bounds of good taste. I miss the tempered-steel wit of a John Crosby. Of course when a reviewer rubs shoulders with celebrities, enabling the reader to become a vicarious voyeur, the writer is quite properly performing the role of critic-as-entertainer.

One could argue that the intellectual demands made on the television critic are much heavier than those made on his colleagues at other desks. The broadcast reviewer must be an expert on dance, drama, literature, world affairs, sports, medicine, sociology, science, urban blight, politics and heaven knows what else. On the one hand it is logical that since all of this information is distilled for broadcast and squeezed through the tube, it should become the sole purview of the television critic. On the other hand all of these images derive from other disciplines and other art forms which have their own professional journalist/observers. It is a rare event when a newspaper assigns a dance critic to review televised dance.

(*The New York Times* actually assigned its distinguished labor reporter, A.H. Raskin, to cover the

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\*With apologies to the several well-known women television critics, the masculine pronoun is here and hereinafter used generically, for simplicity of language and not for reasons of sexism.

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1966 television revival of *Pins and Needles*, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's hit revue from the Depression. He loved it, but that kind of specialization hasn't happened since.)

Arlen is paying attention to television as a social force. He explores its impact on our life and seeks out the root causes for the overwhelming popularity of certain programs. In this endeavor, he has few peers. In stripping away television's mask he makes some remarkable discoveries. Take, for example, "Smooth Pebbles at Southfork," a brilliant essay about *Dallas*. Arlen has invented the rationale of "destabilization" to explain the global impact of this series. "Its characters don't so much lack manners as lack a stable relationship to manners," he writes. "Since the characters are destabilized, they can do anything. But since they answer neither to God nor to any known framework of social conventions, it's hard to know whom or what they answer to."

Central to Arlen's social probing is a search for reality. Whether it's the chilling story of his contretemps with CBS News over his criticism of the coverage by *60 Minutes* of alleged corruption and political chicanery in Wyoming; his recognition of Frederick Wiseman's deft editing techniques; the ambivalence of independent documentarians about the practice of journalism; the institutionalization of "soft" news in the service of commerce; the blurring of news and entertainment values or the selling of a politician as if he were

a soap powder—Arlen pushes aside the veils and lays television bare.

A word about form: Arlen's figures of speech are graceful and sharp. He delivers his insights in elegant and wonderfully original packages. "Wiseman's nonfiction resembles certain modernist musical compositions," he writes. "The work is clearly not without artful design and interior structure, but both design and structure appear to be unfamiliar ones."

His metaphor of airplane travel is particularly felicitous: "Watching most commercial television involves similar passivity, and even a similar sense of the experienceless voyage."

There are times when Arlen rattles on at greater length than seems absolutely necessary. His discursiveness, however, generally serves to deepen the social commentary. Unlike his movie-reviewing *New Yorker* colleague, Pauline Kael, he does not load his essays with a lot of arcane backstage information about the business at hand, a habit I find irritating beyond belief.

Some of Arlen's essays work better than others. He can be guilty of a certain archness. From time to time he bends over backwards to examine television programs which are probably unworthy of his attention. On balance, however, *The Camera Age* is an important work.

With Orwell and *1984* as a frame of reference, Arlen contemplated the public broadcasting satellite-transmission plan when it was proposed five years ago. It didn't worry him. "Technology, after all, is still man's handiwork," Arlen con-

cluded. "Man is the one to keep an eye on." I can imagine no more vigilant a statesman than the author of this collection.

—FREDERICK A. JACOBI

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**Stay Tuned** By *Richard Levinson and William Link, St. Martin's Press, 253 pages, \$11.95.*

Renewed fundamentalist and advertiser attacks on network programming once again raise the specter of pervasive censorship, spreading unease through television's creative ranks. An agency friend of mine says flatly that when the onslaught comes, advertisers and agencies will simply collapse—an allegation which is sure to be stoutly denied by some advertisers, even though they may, at the same time, accuse the networks of being irresponsible in the matters of sex and violence. Looking at the Falwell-Lear confrontation, one wonders whether we are indeed entering a dark period of creative oppression or moving, albeit with much strain and groaning, toward new levels of social responsibility. *Stay Tuned* has much to contribute toward sane discussion of this and other issues of concern to those who create or administer the programming America sees.

To begin with, the greatly talented authors, the writer-producer team of Richard Levinson and William Link, have produced an entertaining, highly readable personal history that in part is at the same

time a documented account of the ceaseless struggle of creative people and their supporters to expand the medium's horizons in the face of stubborn institutional inertia. It is heartening to report that along the way they have had some impressive successes.

Not that they started out with a mission. Similar Philadelphia boyhoods, nourished by comic books, radio and movies, later by the usual pop adolescent fare, led them to a career dedicated to the possibilities of "popular culture." Perhaps this is what enabled them to succeed, to develop into exemplars of quality and substance in television drama: they came to the medium not as members of an intellectual elite but as representatives of the mass audience, expanding their awareness of the world while they grew in skill.

"If there was a common thread (to the experience of their boyhood) . . . it was the love of popular culture in all of its many forms. As our tastes become more sophisticated we broadened and deepened the range of our reading, but even the major novelists and playwrights didn't have quite the same visceral appeal as the movies, the radio and the popular songs. When television arrived on the scene it was not with the force of revelation; rather, it was an easily integrated part of our everyday lives—it seemed an amalgam of everything we had been doing . . ."

Still, it wasn't long after they entered the medium that disquiet set in. In 1959 they left New York for Los Angeles. "Our anxieties about

finding work quickly gave way to concerns about the nature of the work itself. Most of the shows of the time . . . required little more from a writer than a knack for coming up with 'springboards,' or story premises, and a rough sense of structure. Writers were tailors, cutting bolts of cloth to a rigid set of specifications. They were provided with an existing group of characters and a format, and any flexibility within these parameters was severely limited. The key words were 'jeopardy' and 'conflict,' and the emphasis was almost totally on plot. Much of this is still true today." Most painful was the isolation of the writers from the production itself; they had a marginal involvement, at best.

Among the early shows on which Levinson and Link had a chance to sharpen their writing skills were *Bourbon Street*, *Johnny Ringo*, *Sugarfoot*, *Hawaiian Eye*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Wanted Dead or Alive*, *Black Saddle*, and some short-lived series a few cuts above, such as *The Westerner* and *Slattery's People*. Discouraged by their professional existence, the young collaborators embarked upon an "appallingly pretentious idea,"—they would spend half the year among the theaters, books and restaurants of New York, the other half earning their keep in the West's television trivialand. The conceit ". . . had its roots in a particular kind of blind spot: the belief, ours as well as others, that 'good work' could only be done between the covers of a book or on a stage. It simply never

occurred to us that something of merit could be conceived for television." Not long afterwards, they were back in Los Angeles.

Ironically, since then their professional lives have been distinguished by a passionate insistence, in deed and word that something of merit indeed can be conceived for television, and that far from rejecting quality, the great audience out there is prepared to embrace it. The proof is a yard-long list of credits and enough trophies and awards. The bit of the record that serves as the book's spinal cord reads like a television drama honor roll: *Columbo*, *My Sweet Charlie*, *That Certain Summer*, *The Execution of Private Slovik*, *The Gun*, *The Storyteller*, *Crisis in Central High*. Using a variety of techniques, from straight narrative to production diary and TV script, Levinson and Link follow the project from birth as idea to tortuous realization on the screen—an approach that personalizes what in other hands could be a series of polemical statements and allows us to understand the complexities, and to gain an insight into the dynamics of the process through which a program actually comes into being.

It is difficult to disagree with most of their conclusions and comments, for they are not doctrinaire zealots, but creators, who from the outset, have accepted the medium as it is, not to be raged at, but to be shaped, despite its organizational bias against change. The simplicity of their treatment of difficult, sometime tenuous, subject matter

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is deceptive; what we get, rather than long discussion, is a distillation of their rich experience which tends to mask the sophistication behind it. Moreover, they offer no simple solutions to ushering in the creative millennium, but seem to understand that the good fight always has to be waged by determined individuals who combine talent with energy and persistence. All this is made quickly evident in their tale about *My Sweet Charlie*, which started them on their writer-producer career.

The authors had completed a script for *The Whole World is Watching*, the first TV drama to deal with the student movement of the late sixties. From this experience they had learned not only that they "were exploiting an important social phenomenon by using it as window dressing to sell a series," but also that "Television can usually deal with an intimate personal story better than a large scale event." One can only hope that writers and producers who confuse social comment or preachment with art will listen to these two practitioners and learn, as they did: ". . . it caused us to realize that the television writer could respond to his times with other-than-trivial entertainment. The trick was to do it without polemicizing, without self-congratulatory grand-standing and without putting the audience to sleep. There was also the matter of convincing the networks that such material didn't have to necessarily fail in the ratings."

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That last sentence will remind many a producer of exasperating sessions in network offices when shows that departed from the norm were evaluated and found wanting. In the case of *My Sweet Charlie*, everything seemed against the project: the "soft" story lacking conventional "action," the essentially passive nature of the relationship between pregnant white girl and escaped black prisoner and the potentially explosive racial factors. Surprisingly, it was the head of MCA production, who succeeded in convincing NBC after two unsuccessful tries to go with *Charlie*.

The Sid Scheinberg performance in this instance and in other cases reported in *Stay Tuned* may come as a surprise to those who long ago dismissed Universal as the great television "sausage factory" formidably organized for profits rather than quality. Executives like him, are not presumed to be attracted to quality, certainly not to pioneering ventures seemingly doomed to failure. Still, the fact is that individual consciences do sometimes function in the corporate enterprises of the television industry, and that, at times, they do prove able to push a normally intractable system a notch or two ahead. Another executive to emerge positively from these pages is Barry Diller, who when in charge of ABC's film division was responsible for his network's support of *That Certain Summer*, the controversial story of a homosexual

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father's relationship with his son. "Decisiveness is not a hallmark of network executives," the authors observe. "So they were at a loss when after reading a few sentences of description, Diller said: "I like it. You have a deal."

It is to Sid Scheinberg that Levinson and Link owe their start as a writer-producer team. He handed them their new assignment with almost innocent casualness. But the wily Scheinberg knew, they felt, that his organization was strong enough to carry them and to compensate for their inexperience as producers. The significance of the move, they immediately realized, was the new relationship they would enjoy with their own creative product, for they would henceforth have full authority over the production itself. The writer-producer trend, it must be said, is one of the healthiest developments in the recent history of the medium.

Even a large and complex organization can be moved to aspire to better things. Levinson and Link, noting the collaborative nature of television program-making, comment that *Charlie* "wouldn't have been possible without the support and resources of a huge, general-service studio with close ties to the network." Somehow the entire company, from Scheinberg to the assistant editor, sensed that the film was an attempt at something different and made a commitment to it.

Networks also can sometimes be moved away from rigid convention, even for purely esthetic reasons. The authors cite two exam-

ples. The first involved the grim ending of *The Execution of Private Slovik*, a moody piece which needed complete silence during the credit roll. One of the authors had been watching a TV movie at home and had heard the familiar voice of Ed McMahon intoning the list of guests appearing that night on *The Johnny Carson Show*. The thought of those rich tones hitting the viewer over the Slovik credits was more than he could stand. The next morning, Levinson and Link got on the phone and succeeded in getting NBC to kill that night's promotion spot. *Slovik* went on as planned.

The second victory called for even greater network flexibility. "But what makes the game sometimes worth the candle are the occasional surprises, the goings against the grain, and it should be noted in fairness that these moments do occur." They are referring to the length problem of *Crisis at Central High*, which Time-Life had committed to as a three-hour film. When completed it was clearly too long—but one does not tamper with such holy structural matters and program lengths, given advertiser commitments and requirements of the schedule. Nevertheless, several days after the office screening, Bill Self, CBS executive in charge of TV movies, informed the authors that they would be permitted to deliver a two-and-half hour film. The recut version easily proved superior. Say the authors: "CBS's decision, based purely on Self's creative judgment, cost the network hundreds of thousands of

dollars. It was one of the rare and refreshing cases where taste and good sense prevailed."

They do not usually prevail. In describing the tortuous course of *That Certain Summer* from concept to screen, the authors comment: "*Alice In Wonderland* has always been a handy frame of reference for the television business. It and Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* are required reading when one tries to understand the inverted logic and frequent absurdities that are encountered on the journey from idea to final answer print. A grounding in Kafka and Machiavelli is also useful."

A tension prevades this book, accounting, I think, for its special flavor; it is a reflection of the continuing inner turmoil brought on by the conflicting pressures of commerce and conscience, best seen in their treatment of the violence question; this alone makes the book must-reading both for those who are determined to tackle the dragon and those who may be forced to act the dragon's role in professional life. Their admirable, if controversial, solution to the dilemma is to accept personal responsibility for what they create.

Some may argue that in practice this means to engage in self-censorship. Anyone who has attempted to act on the premise of responsibility knows how difficult it is not to play God, for what one is grappling with is the presumed impact of the medium. Indeed, it is an extraordinarily difficult path the writer or producer of good con-

science to pursue, yet is there any other course to follow?

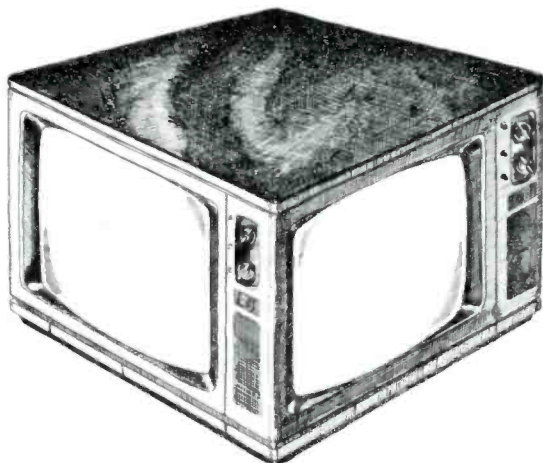
Levinson and Link have demonstrated that it is possible to be both responsible *and* creatively successful, even in such a sheer entertainment as *Columbo*, to which they devote a fascinating chapter. Among other insights, we gain some into the personality of the almost accidentally cast Peter Falk, who emerges as a formidable presence in the series. We learn that *Columbo*, derived from their stage play *Prescription: Murder*, was to be fashioned in the tradition of "the classic mystery fiction of our youth, the works of the Carrs, the Queens, and Christie . . . our show would be a fantasy" rather than a realistic police procedural. The most significant decision, perhaps, was to keep the show nonviolent. It would be "dependent almost entirely on dialogue and ingenuity to keep it afloat."

Both esthetic and moral factors led to this conclusion. Far more than a desire to emulate the English drawing room mystery, that appears to have prompted *Columbo's* design. The considerations which led to this decision are evidenced in the telling of the how-and-why of Levinson and Link's film *The Storyteller*, about a TV writer's attempt to face up to the potential impact of the violence he depicts on impressionable and unstable viewers. In this chapter we are treated to excerpts from a thoughtful and sensitive script, together with a brief but balanced account of the opposing views of

(continued on page 89)



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TV's critics and defenders. The authors report that their own personal debate about TV violence had started years before the national discussion had reached crescendo level.

It was the murders of John and Robert Kennedy which "made us pause and take stock of our work for the first time in terms of its social and political implications." They began to ask themselves questions about their possible influence, whether there was any connection between what they were turning out—and they had been churning out the blood-and-guts stuff along with the others—and the increasing crime rate and teenage murders. Finally, they asked: "... what were our responsibilities, if any, considering the vast audience we reached?"

Their conclusion: "We eventually came to believe that if television could sell products it could also, by dint of repetition and over a period of years, influence to some degree ideas and attitudes." They had no evidence that this was actually the case; the judgment was "unsubstantiated and visceral," but it led to a "unilateral decision to keep violence out of the shows we wrote and produced."

This is where the relentless moral probing by the protagonist of *The Storyteller* eventually winds up; Levinson and Link decided that his conclusion would be similar to their own. The specific formulation is worth emphasizing: "He would continue with his work, but he would find a way to fashion his entertainments without the use of

violence. As a corollary to this, and just as important, he would make clear that his choice was a personal one and he would not presume to impose it on anyone else... It seemed to us that this was the only possible conclusion, not only to the climax of the script but also to the violence debate itself. All concerned had to recognize that it was a matter of personal responsibility."

What of the future? I know that Levinson and Link are troubled, along with many others, about the recent threats to creative freedom. I hope this won't lead to their discouragement, for their force and intelligence are more needed now than ever before. It is not necessarily the case that the veil must descend as oppressively as some fear. Perhaps we will simply experience more of what we have always had to live with in this medium. It may also turn out that the progress made to date is fundamentally irreversible.

The situation is far from hopeless when a new RCA chairman selects as his NBC network chairman an individual whose program record is one of great distinction and who has already expressed himself as ready to take the pressure groups in stride.

May I suggest that the authors of *Stay Tuned* reread their own final comments, in which they cast doubt on the cultural cornucopian promises of the new technologies. They seriously question whether the multichanneled society will be free from censorship. "Perhaps an entertainment Utopia lies just over the horizon, but it's more likely

that if new corporate structures replace the old, then new limitations and restrictions are sure to follow . . . And so we will be back in the company of the devil we know, complaining about it, vilifying it and watching every day."

And trying to make it better!

—HERMAN W. LAND

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*Herman W. Land is chairman of the editorial board of Television Quarterly.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

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"The people expect the networks to provide them with program diversity so that they may have a choice. When asked whether they agree or disagree with the question 'Television networks have an obligation to provide the viewer with a wide range of choices, leaving it up to the viewer to decide what programs are appropriate to watch', only seven and one-half percent of the total population disagreed with the statement. More importantly, seven out of ten agreed that the TV networks should provide a wide range of choices. . . ."

"Along with the notion of choice, we found people reject any special interest group activity which would potentially diminish the viewers' choices of television programming, or which would force other people's standards on them."

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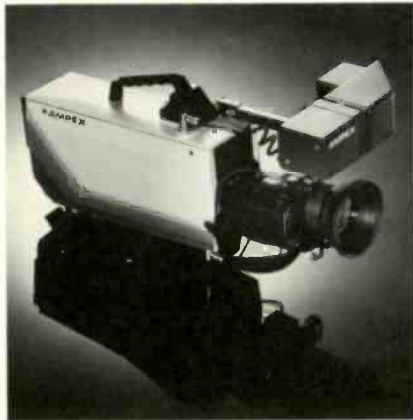
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