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THE LARRY KING STORY

by Arthur Unger

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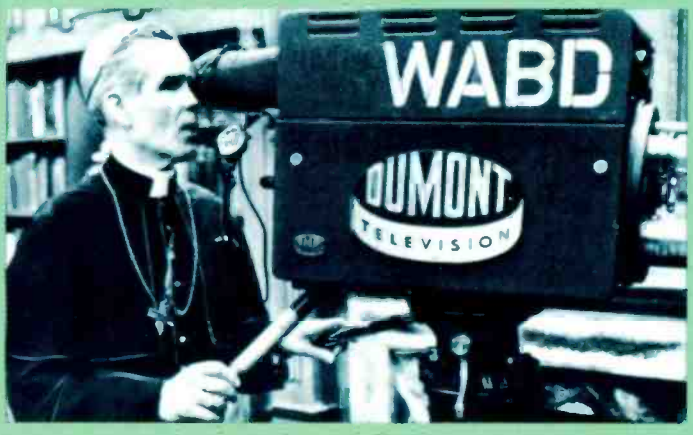

BISHOP SHEEN vs MILTON BERLE
by Mary Ann Watson

UNDERSTANDING HDTV
by Fritz Jacobi

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HIGH DEFINITION TELEVISION: AT THE STARTING GATE OR STILL AN EXPENSIVE DREAM?

BY FRITZ JACOBI

We are poised at the threshold of a new era in television, say some electronic prophets. It's going to be the biggest thing since the advent of color TV and the VCR. Others look at it with caution and skepticism: who can afford it, who will drive the demand—the consumer, the set manufacturer or the program producer? And when will it happen?

The issue is high definition television (HDTV). In this watershed year, *Television Quarterly* examines HDTV from a variety of perspectives—economic and social as well as, unavoidably, technological. Many questions remain tantalizingly unanswered, but there is no doubt that a monumental effort is under way to blast HDTV off the launching pad.

Last September WRC-TV, the NBC-owned station in Washington, DC, became the first station in the country to simulcast in high-definition television on one channel and in NTSC on another (NTSC is the current system of transmission in the USA, the standard for which was established more than fifty years ago by the National Television System Committee).

The live simulcast, under real broadcast conditions, took place during the late afternoon news and was displayed at a press conference on two sets, side-by-side. The difference between the two systems was dramatic: on the HDTV screen it was like looking at the real thing through an open window; on the NTSC screen you could see the lines and the picture

was murky by comparison.

The timing was no accident. This test took place on the eve of the sixth annual HDTV update meeting conducted by the Association for Maximum Service Television (MSTV), a 37-year-old station-supported organization whose mission is to maximize the technical quality and reach of television signals. MSTV, which started paying attention to HDTV in the 1970s, has for the past five years been concentrating on terrestrial—the conventional over-the-air-broadcast—as the best medium for this potentially very exciting new technology. And NBC is part of a consortium which has developed one of the four HDTV systems, from which the FCC will select a winner this year.

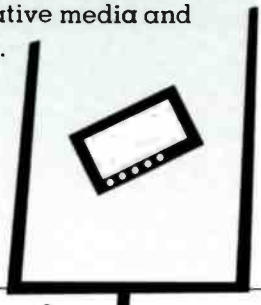
The mood of the MSTV meeting was upbeat. Said FCC Chairman Alfred C. Sikes: "Developments here and overseas make it clear that (HDTV) is not only the future but the present ... Five years of debate has given way to action," noting that manufacturers are developing both transmission and receiving equipment in order to be ready for the day when HDTV becomes a reality.

"We are on the eve of Digital Advanced TV," he said. "We are talking about real technological innovation. As demonstrations over the past six months have resoundingly shown, ATV offers crystal clarity and sound resonance—two significant improvements that remind me of the transition to the compact disc. When CDs first appeared on the scene, many claimed that only classical music buffs could tell the difference between a CD and a good tape. U.S. consumers proved them wrong. Today, just seven years after their introduction, compact disc players can be found in about 40 percent of all U.S. households. In short, consumers *do* care about quality."

Former FCC Chairman Richard Wiley, who chairs the FCC's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service—the outfit that will decide which system will be recommended to the FCC as the new HDTV standard—noted that the U.S. "went from dead last to world leadership in advanced TV. While sensing "some equivocation" in the broadcast industry because of the expense of conversion and the uncertainty of marketplace reaction, he said he believes that "broadcasters will bring HDTV over the finish line."

THE FCC GOALS FOR HIGH DEFINITION TV

- Superior HDTV picture and sound quality.
- Reliable and robust performance for broadcasting.
- Low NTSC interference required for broadcasting.
- Coverage area greater than or equal to NTSC and high accommodation.
- Most flexible scope of services.
- Greater interoperability and extensibility for future growth.
- Lower cost for broadcasters, alternative media and consumers.



Despite the cheerleading, notes of apprehension and caution were sounded at the MSTV meeting. Small station managers in particular are worried about the cost of conversion—estimated by some experts at upwards of $10 million. One broadcaster pre-

dicted that "we'll end with an enormous debt load and will have to diminish the quality of our service."

Capital cities/ABC President Daniel Burke warned about "the possibility of undermining the universal over-the-air system of television by not thinking through every possible consequence of changes now being planned ... If small stations cannot afford the cost of conversion and go dark—and if no one comes in to replace their current owners—a significant portion of the national audience could disappear from the networks' coverage capacity, perhaps forever. Could this mean the end of a universal, free over-the-air delivery system as we know know it? ... The real dilemma of HDTV is that it holds such seductive promise but is not yet, and may never be, consumer-driven at its core ... The difference is not nearly as dramatic as the change to color TV and is visible to most only on sets larger than 30 inches."

And Gregory Chapados, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communication and Information, said that "implementing HDTV is going to cost big money" at a time when the economic position of broadcasting is weak.

On balance, however, the tenor of the MSTV meeting was positive. To the broadcaster who complained about the potential cost of conversion, FCC Chairman Sikes replied: "If General Motors hadn't upgraded its plant it would be dead today."

MSTV Chairman W.P. (Bud) Williamson, himself a UHF broadcaster in a relatively small market (Youngstown, Ohio), believes that HDTV "offers an exciting up-side potential. Clearer and wider pictures, better sound and more vivid color may enable us to deepen and extend the public's commitment to our services and more effectively to promote our medium to advertisers." He does not want to see broadcasters left behind if the new technology catches on.

George A. Vradenburg III, executive vice president of Fox, Inc. and chairman of the ACATS Implementation Subcommittee, sees HDTV "as a means to strengthen our affiliates, not just to preserve what's there." Noting that the Fox affiliates are mostly UHF, he sees advanced digital television as "an opportunity for growth."

Michael J. Sherlock, President of NBC Operations/Technical Services, predicted that the first receivers will be in place in the fall of 1995. He added that the new WRC-TV transmitter used in the September 30 simulcast had been built for under $500,000.

Another engineer, Joseph A. Flaherty, senior vice president/technology for CBS and chairman of the ACATS Planning Subcommittee, said that when we changed from black-and-white to color we had to change everything—cameras, transmitters, everything but the audio console. Comparing that transition to what be believes to be the imminent conversion to HDTV, he pointed out, "You can't go backwards."

Nevertheless, despite the enthusiasm and the vast investment in research and new technology, broadcasters and other professionals are still asking fundamental questions about HDTV: what is it, who needs it, what impact—if any—will it have on production techniques and programming, when will all of this happen who are the principal players, what is it going to cost and will the public be willing to pay for it?

HDTV: WHAT IS IT?

Imagine a television screen without visible lines, even close up. Imagine looking at TV from a distance of eight feet and seeing an image so sharp you think you're looking at the real thing through an open window. Imagine a moving picture

plainer, points out: "All the systems are similar in that they all use a compression technique that predicts motion from one frame to the next and performs computer-like manipulation of the picture. All are similar in the use of the 6-megahertz band, but they differ in the data rate that is sent and the precise method of encoding the bits."

What is important, he told me, is their respective immunity to noise and NTSC interference. In order to ease the transition for conventional broadcasters and set owners, the FCC will allocate a second channel to each station applicant, who will then be required to broadcast the same program simultaneously in NTSC and HDTV for a limited period of time (see timetable box).

The key is to avoid a sudden drop-off in picture and sound quality at the limits of the service area. Reitmeier claims that the consortium's system is immune to the sudden drop-off effect because it incorporates a safety net in its signal. Reitmeier says it is less susceptible to what is known as the "cliff effect"—total loss of the video and audio—near the edge of the coverage area.

In February Advisory Committee Chairman Wiley invited the proponents to join in a "grand alliance" to develop a single system out of the existing four. While on the surface the likelihood of these fiercely competitive organizations consolidating their efforts may seem remote, in actual fact they have been conducting informal talks among themselves for years. Wiley"s move provides them with all the right incentives, among them significant financial considerations: if they turn down his offer, each proponent will incur additional millions of dollars in further testing costs. Whatever happens, it is now unlikely that a final system will be chosen before the end of the year, or even later.

THE REFEREES

- Advanced Television Test Center (ATTC), and industry-sponsored laboratory under contract to the FCC.
- Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service (ACATS) will decide which system will be recommended to the FCC as the new HDTV standard.
- Association of Maximum Service Television (MSTV), 37-year-old station-supported organization whose mission is "to maximize the technical quality and reach of television signals."
- Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC), an industry committee working out production standards for the new television.

WHO NEEDS IT?

There is general agreement among the experts that the quality of HDTV will—at some point in the future—create a consumer demand for the service. The main area of disagreement is on the timetable. Tufts' Russell Neuman believes that "HDTV will become popular like the CD, which is growing through a combination of quality and fashion. But the transition from NTSC to HDTV is not so psychologically important as the transition from black-and-white to color TV, so we don't anticipate such a dramatic growth curve."

Larry F. Darby, a consultant to government and the private sector who has prepared several reports on HDTV, believes that the public will be willing to pay a premium price for the service, even if the first commercially available sets will cost between $3,000 and $5,000 (today's Japanese sets cost nearly $8,000!).

"It's more a question of when rather than whether," argues Darby, an economist and a former head of the FCC's Common Carrier Bureau.

With respect to a recent study purporting to forecast a large popular demand for HDTV in the immediate future, Darby says, "That is ridiculous. Nobody knows. Basically we're trying to forecast the demand for a product nobody has seen. This technology is either going to fail or it is going to succeed. Either way it is going to fail or succeed as have past new technologies. If it succeeds it will follow the pattern of color television, the VCR, CDs and stereo—not necessarily in that order. If it fails, it's going to be like the picturephone and it's not going to happen."

A note of caution is sounded by Bob Zitter, senior vice president for technology operations at HBO, which has been paying serious attention to HDTV.

"From our consumer research we question the intensity of public interest in HDTV," Zitter said recently. "The only people who will benefit from it are the manufacturers of consumer electronics. Broadcasters and program producers aren't going to make any new money out of HDTV for a while."

Zitter believes that HDTV will be driven by advancements in large-screen TV development. The public is interested in size and cost, he said, adding that the consumer doesn't see any point in investing more money in a screen smaller than 27 inches. He said that HBO will enter the field only when manufacturers can offer the public a reasonably priced projection or large flat-screen television.

HOW WILL HDTV AFFECT PRODUCTION AND PROGRAMMING?

What impact, if any, will HDTV have on programming? Experts see three areas that will be enhanced by the new technology: special effects, the recording of live music concerts and sports broadcasts.

Barry Rebo, a former TV cameraman, heads a New York-based studio that has emerged as an international leader in the development of high-definition programming. Having produced many programs, including a 20-part musical series, for airing over Japan's HDTV system, Rebo was deeply involved last year in *Fool's Fire*, an American Playhouse production based on Edgar Allan Poe's story "Hopfrog." Filled with unique special effects, the PBS production was one of the first true marriages of high definition and film. The total budget for *Fool's Fire* was $1.5 million. Film opticals would have cost three times that much, Rebo estimates.

"HDTV can create extraordinary special effects in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost of conventional Hollywood film technology," said Stuart Samuels, an independent producer and HDTV consultant who produced the first HDTV-originated program to win any Emmy (*The Orchestra*, shown on PBS in 1990). He explained that HDTV allows for "seamless matting," which means that it can include many different layers of information inside a frame. With HDTV a producer can create special effects in real time, ie. live in the camera. Examples are Sony's advanced-system special effects in *Honey, I Blew Up the Kid* and NHK's contributions to Peter Greenaway's bizarre film *Prospero's Books*, starring Sir John Gielgud.

Samuels, whose music videos represented the first real use of HDTV in the U.S., notes that while concerts can have a long life as software they are difficult to shoot either on film or on NTSC.

"HDTV is a far better medium for capturing opera, rock concerts and other live musical events," he says. "You get a better product and can really extend its life."

He pointed out that last year's Hollywood Bowl 40th anniversary concert featuring The Sting and this year's Bob Dylan concert at Madison Square Garden were shot in HDTV, "down-converted" to NTSC and used on regular broadcasting channels.

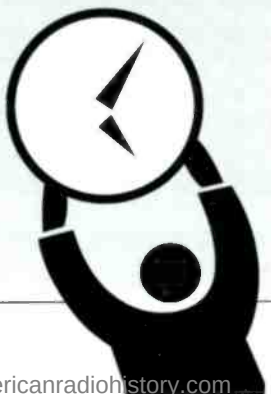
HDTV's 16:9 aspect ratio (the screen is nearly twice as wide as it is high, the shape of a movie-theater screen) and its greater clarity are real advantages when it comes to broadcasting sports. Playing fields are rectangular, not square. And HDTV offers much greater clarity than NTSC. The 1996 Olympics will be a real test of the potential impact of HDTV which may give as big a boost to the sale of sets as last summer's NHK Olympic broadcasts. More than 10,000 sets were sold in Japan, each costing nearly $8,000.

George Page, executive editor and host of PBS's acclaimed *Nature* series, believes that the rectangular aspect ratio of HDTV will have a heavier impact on filmmaking than will the greater clarity of the picture. "In natural history documentary filming we have always gone for the highest quality pictures," he said, "but the perspective has been wrong. The real challenge of HDTV to filmmakers and directors will be how to fill that frame in the future."

THE TIMETABLE

The FCC recently extended its high-definition TV timetable by one year, but reaffirmed its commitment to convert the industry to HDTV by the year 2008. The following deadlines have now been established. The clock starts running when the standard or allotment table becomes effective, whichever is later. The cumulative time from the starting point is within parentheses.

Application	
three years	*(3)*
Construction	
three years	*(6)*
50% simulcasting	
one year	*(7)*
100% simulcasting	
three years	*(9)*
Conversion	*(15)*



WHEN IS IT GOING TO HAPPEN?

"If the technology is successful," says Larry Darby, the former FCC official, "it will take six to seven years to reach one percent of household penetration and another five or six years—providing that there is a good growth rate—to reach 50 percent of the population. The notion that 50 percent of U.S. households will have HDTV receivers five years from now is without basis or common sense."

In a study he completed four years ago, "Economic Potential for Advanced TV Products," Darby wrote: "To get an idea of the potential development of the market, it is useful to look at half-dozen different consumer electronics technolo-

gies—computers, home computers black-and-white televisions, color televisions, VCRs, TYRO dishes, projection TVs, stereo component systems—and ask one simple question: How long did it take for them to hit one percent household penetration? After introduction, it took about six to eight years.

The second question is: What happened after these products hit one percent household penetration? Compound annual growth rates were between 20 percent and 50 percent. After a little more than a decade, for example, almost two-thirds of the households in the United States have a VCR. That is rapid diffusion."

Darby hasn't changed his mind in the last four years. "While the regulatory and technical factors are now favorable to the development of HDTV," he said recently, "the economy is sour, consumer demand is off and nobody is in a hurry to buy a receiver that may cost $6-7,000. Of course nobody knows what a receiver will cost in the future. Manufacturers will surely price them below their accumulated R&D costs. It's really a chicken-and-egg problem. You have to have programming to stimulate the sale of sets but you also need to have a distribution system in place."

General Instrument's Bob Rast is a bit more sanguine. "If service begins in 1995-96," he says, "receivers may cost between $4,000 and $5,000. It will take another four years, to the turn of the century, to get the price down below $2,000."

WHO ARE THE PRINCIPAL PLAYERS?

There are three key groups of interested players: the set manufacturers, the program distributors and the signal distributors. For the set manufacturers, HDTV is seen as a possible stepping stone back into the consumer electronics marketplace, until recently dominated by the Japanese and the Germans. For the programmers, while the United States currently dominates the world market, this creates a dollar-import problem for us and a cultural problem for the rest of the world. As for the signal distributors, the Japanese have a satellite system for their analog signal, the Europeans have yet another system and the United States will undoubtedly adopt a digital system this year. The U.S., incidentally, is the only country which is attempting to deliver HDTV over the air. The other systems are transmitted via either satellite or cable.

Some experts believe that the manufacturers are pushing HDTV. W. Robert Tirman of Digital Equipment Corporation, recently a visiting fellow with Harvard University's Center for Information Policy Research, says: "Watch the television manufacturers. They are driving HDTV and have a clearly identified strategy for a succession of advanced TV receivers to replace the embedded base. The computer industry, while expressing concern over HDTV's evolution, has yet to articulate a clear, affirmative role for itself.

"In many cases, firms such as Sony, Thomson, Philips, Sharp and Goldstar also sell other consumer electronics products such as videocassette recorders and players, videodisc players, camcorders, personal computers and audio systems. When one considers the overall equipment market for HDTV, it should be noted that Thomson, Sony, JVC, Philips, and perhaps some others as well also manufacture cameras, videotape recorders, monitors and other equipment for broadcast, film and video production industries. That these manufacturers are bullish about HDTV would be an understatement."

Not everybody agrees that the industry has been driving the process. Joel Chaseman, chairman of the Ad-

vanced Television Test Center—the group that is testing the five HDTV systems to be considered by the FCC—says: "The Electronics Industry Association has only been concerned about the fairness of the process. We are people with a mission. Tirman's conclusion is wrong. Our charter is very focused: to respond to the FCC's and the industry's need for an objective test center for HDTV systems, treating all equally and impartially."

The former president of the Post/Newsweek Stations and a veteran broadcaster, Chaseman founded the Center five years ago with this objective. A private agency, ATTC is supported by the three commercial networks, PBS, the Association of Independent TV stations, MSTV, NAB—and the Electronics Industry Association.

"Our engineers performed the test, uniformly applied to each of the systems," Chaseman says.

WHAT'S IT GOING TO COST?

"It's hard to go back to conventional TV after you've watched the Olympics for a while on high-definition," a Japanese electronics industry analyst told *Washington Post* reporter T.R. Reid last summer. Reid noted, however, that the new sets that can display these pictures cost about as much as a car—they range from $8,000 to $24,000. And, as previously noted, it will be many years before consumer demand brings these prices down.

As to costs for the industry to convert its studios and transmitters, they will indeed be high, according to the engineering community. "Just about everyone you talk to in the industry is dumfounded by the staggering costs associated with the implementation of HDTV," according to Joe Fedele, manager of technical operations and chief engineer for WCBS-TV, New York.

Writing in *Electronic Media*, he said: "Estimates range as high as $12 million for the top markets. High-end ENG cameras alone will cost between $200,000 and $400,000. The cost of camera lenses is anywhere from $18,000 to $126,000. You can only imagine what studio and production equipment will cost. Some of the estimates I have heard indicate that we'll be paying between four and five times more for high-definition production equipment."

So it's no wonder that station owners are made nervous by the prospect of HDTV. At last fall's MSTV meeting, Bruce McGorrill, chief executive officer for WCSH-TV, Portland, Maine, said: "We're going to be forced to spend $5 million to $10 million, with little or no opportunity to recoup that investment for a long time. And 15 years from now we will be back where we started, with one channel in an increasingly multichannel environment, but with an enormous debt load."

Other participants disputed these cost estimates. NBC's Michael Sherlock said WRC estimated that just over $1.5 million would pay for the encoding equipment, transmitter, transmission line and the directional antenna temporarily installed for the first public simulcast of live programming over both standard analog and digital HDTV channels last fall. And Nat Ostroff, president of Comark (a subsidiary of Thomson Consumer Electronics, an ATRC partner), said that the 50kw transmitter Comark donated to the demonstration would cost less than $500,000.

While these problems remain unresolved, by the end of the day-long Washington meeting of the Association for Maximum Service Television, many participants seemed genuinely sanguine about the future of HDTV. "Many today see HDTV as more threat than promise, particularly in the near term," said MSTV President Margita White. "But broadcasters, judging by

what we've heard here today, may already have much of the flexibility we are asking for."

On last September's live simulcast in Washington, WRC-TV General Manager Alan Horlick said, "Nobody is excited about spending money but no one wants to hold back technology, either." As part of the program, men and women on the street were invited to watch the live demonstration and then asked for their comments.

"It's like being there," said one woman.

"It's like you can reach in the screen and pull out the images," said another.

And a man said: "If I had the big money I'd pay the big money."

That about sums it all up: "If I had the big money I'd pay the big money." Will the consumer demand be there 10 or 15 years down the road? As an elderly relative of mine used to say, "How do I know how I'm going to feel on a day like tomorrow?" ■

Fritz Jacobi, who has been writing about television since the days of Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca and Howdy Doody, bought his first color set in 1969 so that his wife could really see what Julia Child was doing to that sauce. He has worked in executive positions at NBC television, WNET and Columbia University's Business School.

VIEWPOINT

Researching Violence

"There's no shortage of major studies on the effects of television violence. Among them: the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1968); the Surgeon General's Report (1972); the National Institute of Mental Health (1982); and the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence (1984). The NIMH states the consensus: 'Violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs.'

"One of the most ambitious and conclusive studies (conducted by Dr. Leonard D. Eron and others) examined a group at ages 8, 19, and 30 in a semi-rural county of New York state. The findings: the more frequently the participants watched TV at age 8, the more serious were the crimes of which they were convicted by age 30; the more aggressive was their behavior when drinking; and the harsher was the punishment they inflicted on their own children.

"Essentially the same results emerged when the researchers examined another large group of youths for three years in a suburb of Chicago. And when they replicated the experiment in Australia, Finland, Israel, and Poland the outcome was unchanged."

—*TV Guide*
special report on
violence on television
August 22, 1992

AND THEY SAID 'UNCLE FULTIE' DIDN'T HAVE A PRAYER ...

His was only a simple one-man show, but the charismatic Bishop Sheen cut into Milton Berle's ratings, and also won the 1952 Emmy Award for the Most Outstanding Television Personality, competing against Durante, Murrow, Godfrey and Lucille Ball.

BY MARY ANN WATSON

The benevolent bishop broke every commandment of prime time television and became one of its biggest stars.

"He's a dead duck," was the consensus among industry insiders when the DuMont television network made the dubious decision to put Fulton Sheen on the air Tuesday nights at eight—opposite Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre*.

In 1952 television was still a grand experiment, but some givens had already been established. In the evening hours, everyone knew, people wanted to see bonafide entertainment. Dancing girls, singing stars, comedy sketches, and enthralling dramas were the diversion of choice. So a weekly half-hour talk by a man of the cloth didn't hold much promise.

But DuMont, the home of "sensibly priced" programming that gave smaller sponsors a chance to advertise on TV, had some time to fill. When Cardinal Spellman of New York broached the idea of giving Sheen a slot, the network was game.

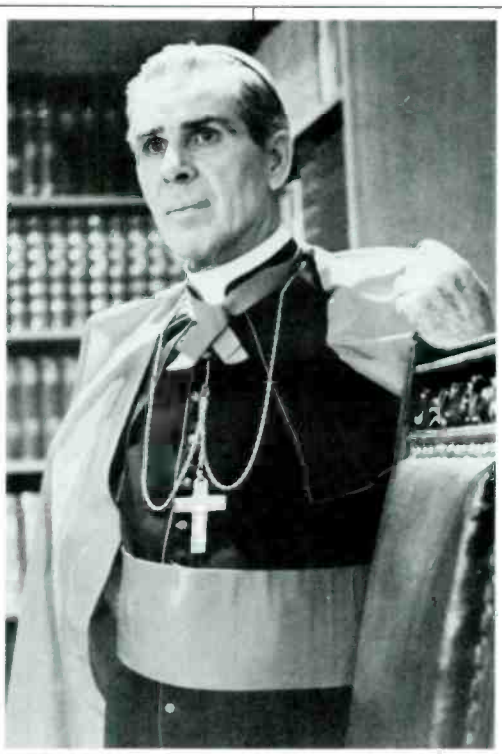
The proposed prelate, who was fifty-seven years old, was hardly a neophyte behind the microphone. For more than two decades, as Sheen advanced in the Church, he also grew in stature as an orator on NBC's radio show *The Catholic Hour*.

Chris Witting, who was head of DuMont network operations, was familiar with Sheen from the radio program. "I was always very impressed with his voice and his diction," Witting recalls. There seemed to be little risk in giving him the graveyard spot. "Berle really had the hour," Witting figured. And CBS was challenging with Frank Sinatra.

"It would be doing public service—and at least we'd have something on the air" was the network attitude about the new show, remembers Melvin Goldberg, the director of re-

search at DuMont when *Life is Worth Living* premiered on February 12, 1952.

But the low expectations were premature. An unanticipated chemistry occurred at the Adelphi Theatre in midtown Manhattan when Bishop Sheen took the stage to meet his audience. Not many Tuesday nights passed before the big-gun competition began to feel a little squeeze in the Trendex ratings. Within a month NBC and CBS dropped almost five points each.



Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

While Milton Berle cavorted in drag, Sheen glided on set in full-blown regalia—a long cassock, a gold cross and chain at his breast, a purple cape flowing from his shoulders to the floor, and a skull cap, called a zuchetto, perched on his graying hair. The visual impact was dramatic. On the small screen the bishop looked loftier than his five feet and eight inches. Chris Witting recalls, "The dress was all Sheen's idea. He was a showman."

With a boyish smile of acknowledgement for the applause of the studio audience, Bishop Sheen would begin his talk by saying something like, "Friends, thank you for allowing me to come into your home again."

Then, by way of anecdote, ("The other day I was in an elevator in a department store . . . "), he'd introduce the topic for the evening, which was always a universal theme, such as humor, art, science, or the nature of love. In his autobiography, *Treasure in Clay*, published shortly after his death in 1979, Sheen recounted his technique: "Starting with something that was common to the audience and me, I would gradually proceed from the known to the unknown or to the moral and Christian philosophy . . . When I began television nationally and on a commercial basis, I was no longer talking in the name of the Church." His TV messages were always ecumenical parables, never direct presentations of Catholic dogma.

Each week Bishop Sheen spoke for twenty-eight minutes without notes or a TelePrompter from a simple set designed to look like a rectory study. Occasionally he would write a word or draw a diagram on a blackboard, the way a university lecturer might to emphasize a key idea. When he moved away from the slate and addressed another one of the three cameras, a crew member—out of TV viewers' sight—would wipe the board clean. It became a running gag on the show that Sheen had a divine helper assigned to erasing duty—"my angel, Skippy."

Some of Sheen's personal friends and admirers who knew the true depth of his erudition, winced to hear him make corny jokes on TV. "I'm going to buy my angel a bottle of Halo Shampoo," he quipped one night.

Skippy, he explained to viewers, was a union man. He belonged to Local 20 of the Cherubim.

Bishop Sheen became hot copy. *Life* and *Look* and *Time* magazine ran flattering feature stories. The number of stations carrying *Life is Worth Living* jumped from three to fifteen in less than two months. Fan mail flowed in at a rate of 8,500 letters per week. There were four times as many requests for tickets as could be filled. The sponsor, Admiral, which paid the modest production costs in exchange for a one-minute commercial at the open of the show and another minute at the close, was feeling the gratification of someone who does a quiet good deed and ends up getting the key to the city.

Milton Berle had little choice but to be good-natured about his rival's escalating success. Referring to his own sponsor, Texaco, Berle said about Sheen: "We both work for the same boss—Sky Chief!"

NBC soon began to covet its neighbor's success and tried to persuade Bishop Sheen to leave DuMont. But if there was any temptation to jump to a bigger ship, the new celebrity's loyalty overcame it.

As National Director for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, an organization which sponsored Catholic missions throughout the world, Bishop Sheen discovered his television exposure was a fund-raising bonanza. Gifts ranged from dimes taped on index cards to will bequests of considerable sums. It would be a mistake, though, to assume that Fulton Sheen was a precursor to latter-day TV evangelists who hoodwink the faithful for personal reward. Solicitation was not the foundation of the show.

Bishop Sheen reflected: "In the course of years, thanks to gifts that were spontaneously sent, returns for the missions ran into millions of dollars, every cent of which found its way to some poor area of this earth for the building of hospitals and schools."

As with any television personality, Bishop Sheen received all sorts of requests. Children asked for a hat like his or if he might give a poor girl a pony, which he did. One letter came from an aspiring actor named Estevez. Although in later years having an ethnic surname would be an asset to a screen career, in the 1950s it was still a hindrance. So, the young man wanted to know if he could borrow the Bishop's name. He became Martin Sheen and ascended to stardom.

By Halloween of the Bishop's first season, if a kid went trick-or-treating wearing his sister's Brownie Scout beanie, his dad's cummerbund, and a satin cape that went with his mother's evening gown, everyone knew he was supposed to be Bishop Sheen.

Milton Berle had little choice but to be good-natured about his rival's escalating success. Referring to his own sponsor, Texaco, Berle said of Sheen: "We both work for the same boss—Sky Chief!" Uncle Miltie even shared his celebrated moniker and dubbed the Bishop "Uncle Fultie."

The amazing appeal of a priest's simple show is one of the anomalies of American television. There's a bit of flawed mythology, though, about Bishop Sheen.

Some enthusiasts would like to believe that Sheen actually surpassed Berle in the ratings. But this was just not the case. Berle's was always among the highest-rated shows on the

tube and *Life Is Worth Living*–airing on a network with so few affiliate stations–couldn't really compete in that league. But Sheen's stature was not measured by ratings alone.

Nominees for the 1952 Emmy Award for Most Outstanding Television Personality included Jimmy Durante, Edward R. Murrow, Lucille Ball, Arthur Godfrey, and His Excellency, the most Reverend Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. When Sheen's name was announced as the winner, he claims to have been stunned and at a loss for words. Realizing that gracious winners credit others for their success, Sheen accepted the statue by saying, "I wish to thank my four writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

Few evaluations of Fulton Sheen's adroitness as a television performer fail to mention his compelling eyes. "His naturally hypnotic eyes look even deeper under TV lights," reported *Life* magazine. *Time* claimed, "They are one of the most remarkable pairs of eyes in America, looking out from deep sockets, pupil and iris almost merged in one luminous disk which creates the optical illusion that he not only looks at people but through them and at everything around them."

The first time Fulton Sheen ever appeared on TV was in 1948 as a guest speaker on the Sunday morning series *Television Chapel*, which aired on WPIX in New York. Edward Stasheff directed that broadcast and remembers being amazed at the clergyman's relationship with the lens: "His whole technique was the magnetic effect of the way he looked into the camera. I hate to use a cliche, but the word is 'telegenic.' He was made for the medium."

More than forty years after *Life is Worth Living* went on the air, when viewers are asked for their recollections they invariably mention Bishop Sheen's penetrative gaze. Marvin Epstein, an Ivy League-educated young man who was also a graduate of a rabbinical seminary, watched the program as a game, anxious to find the holes in the theological reasoning of the Catholic Bishop. But what he experienced was "an instant mesmerization with this guy's eyes—they came through with magnetizing incision."

Students of rhetoric have analyzed Sheen's style and noted that he used theatrics befitting a cathedral pulpit only sparingly in the TV studio. Thunderous flourishes, he understood, worked against personalized speaking. "The several thousand people in the Adelphi Theatre are not my audience, not the people with whom I try to set up a rapport," the Bishop explained. "My words are aimed at little family groups seated about their television sets in their own living rooms."

A keen sense of timing was another critical factor in Sheen's TV performance. One of his TV directors, Hal Davis, remembered: "Truly uncanny was his ability to pace himself so shrewdly that he could build to a climax of emotion at the precise second. He never required time cues, as I remember it, but worked from the clock set above the floor monitor."

The Bishop moved about spiritedly as he spoke, seldom remaining in a fixed position very long, but rather striding across the set. There were no blocking rehearsals for *Life is Worth Living*, though. Sheen shifted freely, but knew how to telegraph his moves to the director by looking over to the direction he was about to travel.

The only non-extemporaneous segment of the program was the closing. Each week Sheen prepared a peroration of precisely two minutes. He always would end his remarks by lifting both arms up and out at waist level with palms directed heavenward and saying, "God love you."

"He wound it up on the nose every time," Melvin Goldberg remembers. "None of the techs could believe it."

Mastery of the mechanics of television speaking alone, however, cannot account for Fulton Sheen's ability to sustain audience interest. It was, of course, the content and context of his message that touched a responsive chord in so many Americans at mid-century.

The generation that had lived through ten years of the Great Depression and sacrificed for the duration of World War II matured with prescribed exigencies. First came the fight for survival in a cruel economy. And then the national purpose was simply and totally to defeat the enemy. But what was the sustaining goal now that the challenges had been met and the defining crises had passed into history?

The hunger for normalcy, for convention, for predictability and order was a natural craving in men and women whose young lives had been so unsettled for so long. Once the pieces were picked up, though, and the country was back on an even keel, there was an emptiness that accompanied the stability. People who for decades had meaning and purpose imposed on them now had to discover for themselves profundity in everyday living.

Mastery of the mechanics of TV speaking alone, however, cannot account for Fulton Sheen's ability to sustain audience interest. It was the content and context of his message.

Sheen intuited the void in modern Americans. He sensed their frustration and aimlessness. His remedy was a spiritual life with assured values. On the very first broadcast of *Life is Worth Living*, he stated the premise of the series succinctly: "Life is monotonous if it is meaningless; it is not monotonous if it has a purpose."

What he offered in his television talks was the opportunity for viewers to find purpose in their lives—not through a particular religious creed, but through belief in a personal God. Marvin Epstein, whose admitted anti-Catholic bias was strong, was nonetheless attracted to Bishop Sheen: "I found myself wondering, 'How could he be making pronouncements which no person could reject, regardless of faith—because they simply made such maximal common sense?' "

Fulton Sheen was not the only one popularizing religion in the early 1950s, however. It was an era in American culture of great interest in spiritual matters. Evangelist Billy Graham appeared on ABC for fifteen minutes each week on *Hour of Decision* and had become a preacher of enormous celebrity and influence.

In 1953 the six top sellers in nonfiction included four books that were religious or spiritually inspirational: the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, *A Man Called Peter*, and *Life is Worth Living*, a collection of transcriptions of Sheen's TV talks. The Bishop's appearance as a *TV Guide* cover boy in October of that year naturally did nothing to hurt the sales of his book. (The fiction bestseller list, by the way, included *The Robe*, *The Cardinal*, *The Song of Bernadette*, and *The Left Hand of God*.)

Bishop Sheen also reflected the American ethos of his time through his pronounced belief that world communism was an evil force and atheistic governments were anathema to moral

law. He was fervent in his anti-communism, but not a McCarthyite. He didn't spread paranoia; he reassured viewers that a democratic system with faith in God at its foundation would prevail and endure. "Within fifty years," Fulton Sheen predicted in 1953, "communism will be a dim memory."

By early 1955 *Life is Worth Living* was at the height of its popularity, reaching 5.5 million households each week. And Sheen was receiving scads of honors and awards. But DuMont was in trouble. Unable to get a full complement of owned-and-operated stations in top markets, the economies of production could not be made to work favorably. Losses mounted. Finally, DuMont had to pull the plug on its network operation.

Bishop Sheen quickly found a new home for his show on ABC. In the fall of 1955 *Life is Worth Living* also moved to a new night. The shift to Thursdays was made "in order that I can hear Milton Berle," Sheen sportingly announced to the press. The clergyman's new competition was the *Bob Cummings Show* on CBS and Groucho Marx on NBC with *You Bet Your Life*. The Bishop's following began to shrink.

In his last season on network television, 1956-57, ABC moved Sheen to 9:00 p.m. on Mondays—opposite NBC's *Medic*, a popular anthology-style drama starring Richard Boone, and *I Love Lucy*, the number-one show on television, which averaged a 43.7 rating for CBS. At the end of that season Fulton Sheen decided to devote himself to "other work for the good Lord."

His retirement from television didn't last very long, though. In 1959 Sheen was back with a syndicated show called *The Bishop Sheen Program*. The format was virtually the same as *Life is Worth Living*, but the series was recorded on videotape and distributed by National Telefilm Associates. A second syndicated series in the same format appeared on a handful of local stations until 1968, by which time Sheen's style had been eclipsed by a social and cultural revolution.

But in broadcast history and American history Bishop Fulton J. Sheen remains first and foremost an icon of the 1950s. His surprising success reveals what Americans in the atomic age wanted so much to believe—that the life of each individual has purpose and meaning. And television is truly a blessing. ■

Mary Ann Watson is an associate professor of Telecommunications and Film at Eastern Michigan University and a member of the national advisory committee for the Museum of Broadcast Communications. She once gave up TV for Lent.

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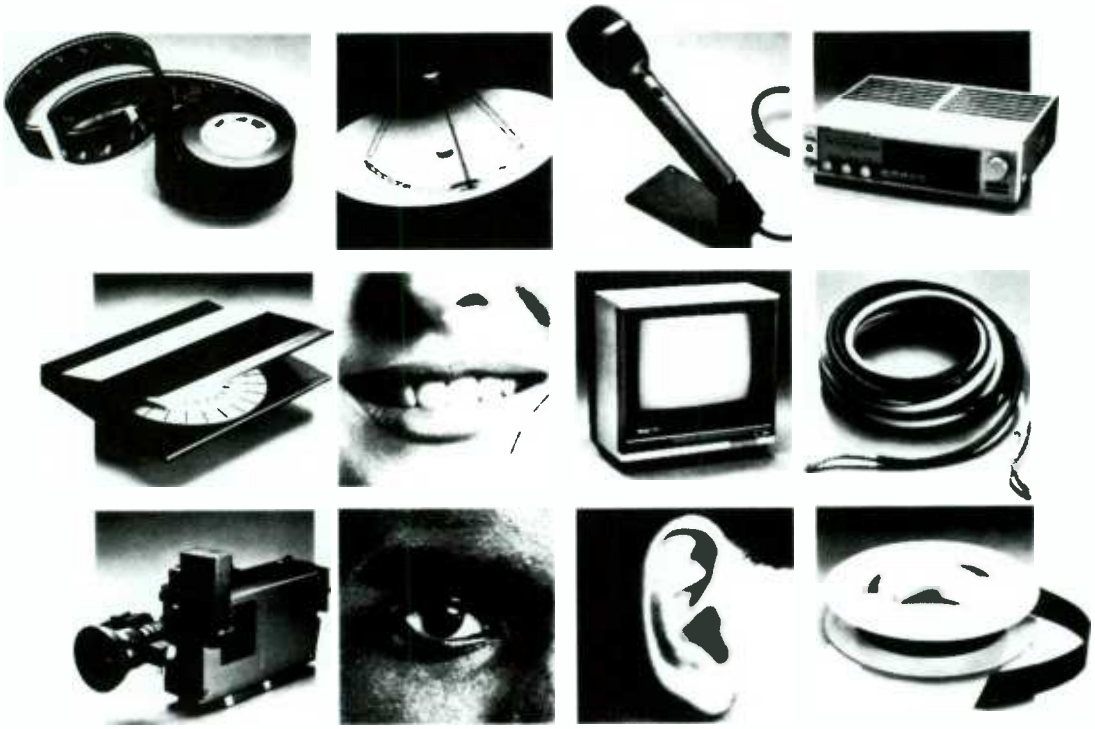

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LARRY KING: "EVERYMAN WITH A MIKE"

Television Quarterly's special correspondent, Arthur Unger, interviews cable TV's prime interviewer—CNN's "top banana of talk-show hosts," Larry King. "You gotta have curiosity," he says.

BY ARTHUR UNGER

When CNN talk-show host Larry King was visiting Israel last fall he went to the Western Wall (sometimes called the wailing wall) to pray for peace and whatever else talk-show hosts pray for (maybe a Jackie Onassis interview?). Next to him at the sacred stone wall was a rabbi with skull cap and religious sideburns.

"Larry King!" he exclaimed. "Tell me, what's with Ross Perot?"

Obviously, word has spread throughout the world as well as America about this "top banana of talk-show hosts." His one-hour Larry King Live interview show is viewed internationally on CNN, and his three-hour radio show airs on almost 400 stations. Despite the fact that a "mere" four million viewers see the TV show on cable's CNN, he has become so important that CBS's *60 Minutes* with an audience of around 40 million felt he was important enough to devote a segment to him.

Perhaps the most famous of his on-

screen encounters was the night he asked Ross Perot if he would ever consent to run for president and Perot answered that if followers registered him in all 50 states, he might run. That started an avalanche of call-ins—thousands of listeners responded and Ross Perot ended up on the November ballot ... after several more appearances on King's show as well as other talk-shows, having learned the lesson that the right candidate can eliminate the middle-men of political commentators and network newsmen by appealing directly to the viewer-voters on talk shows rather than serious news shows, anchored by argumentative "experts."

On election day, according to King, Perot called him and said: "I just wanted to thank you for one helluva ride."

Well, a lot of personalities have had "one helluva ride" with Larry King. In addition to most major entertainment, cultural and newsworthy personalities, King has become the focal point for political figures, interviewing such top figures as Perot, Clinton, Bush, Gore, Cuomo, Bradley, Quayle, etc. He has won numerous awards for his mix of celebrity interviews and topical

discussions—most notably the cable Ace award for best interview talk-show host in 1986, '87, '88 and '89 and '90. Inexplicably he lost out on that honor in 1992, the year of his greatest triumphs.

At his request, we arranged to do this interview at his favorite restaurant, Duke Zeibert's, a lunch spot where many of Washington, DC's political figures hang out and where, as I discovered, he is recognized by everybody ... and most come over to chat. I arrived early and was seated at what the maitre d' said was Larry's favorite table at the head of the room where he could see and be seen by all who entered. But, shortly before King arrived, the maitre d' came over and embarrassedly announced that he would have to move us since the owner of the Washington Redskins had called to reserve that table. I didn't tell that to Larry King when he arrived as the occupant of the table wandered over to say hello. But, I realized that in DC, power has its own priorities.

Larry arrived wearing a jacket over his trademark suspenders. As we began to chat, John Sununu walked in and came over to say hello to Larry. "What did you think of Clinton's speech?" Larry asked.

"I still don't know what he's saying," Sununu replied. "It was very dramatic," Larry insisted. "So is Hamlet," Sununu said. "Well, Hamlet has had a long run ... " Larry retorted as Sununu retreated to his own table.

The waiter dashed over with a box of Manischevitz matzohs, which Larry proceeded to munch on before he was brought a salad, chopped up almost like baby food. I gathered that this has been his lunch since his bypass surgery convinced him he had to change his unhealthy eating habits.

It is rumored that King makes close to $4 million a year on his radio and TV contracts and gets $35,000 per lecture on the talk circuits. Born in 1933 as Lawrence Harvey Zeiger, he was brought up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. He has written a book about his early years which explains many of his attitudes, the title being very revealing in itself: "When You're From Brooklyn, Everything Else Is Tokyo."

His early career started in Miami where in the midst of his apparent success on local radio, he was involved in controversies and eventually went into bankruptcy before he started over in his most recent incarnation. He has been married six times with one annulment and five divorces, currently lives alone in a chic apartment in Arlington, VA., near CNN headquarters.

How does he get so many important people to appear on his show? He has a simple answer which may be very true: "People trust me and know I will not embarrass them. And I never try to be anything but me. "King tries to play down his egocentricity by constantly referring to himself as "we." But, more often than he might like, the "I"s pop out.

He says he never prepares for interviews except by reading five newspapers a day, asks questions any average guy would ask, then listens to the answers. He insists he is after feelings rather than facts.

Larry finds it hard to understand why some critics say he is a backscratcher, an interviewer who plays softball. He attributes those attitudes to professional jealousy now that he has proven to be such a success. "They never said things like that before Ross Perot," he points out. The Ross Perot interview in which Perot more or less declared for the presidency came on February 20, 1992 and, according to King, "really opened up the system" as well as the floodgates of politician appearances on his show.

He is not a heavy thinker and doesn't pretend to be one. And he is a better interviewer than interviewee. Try as I might to draw him into a deep

philosophical discussion of his role in the increasing importance of talk shows and viewer call-ins in our society, he would only say that it all came about because he was at the right place at the right time.

It is rumored that he has been offered the late-night spot on ABC after Ted Koppel, and CBS has also been wooing him. But, King remains loyal to Ted Turner, a man he admires although probably disagrees with politically. Larry labels himself a Stevenson Democrat while Turner seems to be leaning much farther right. Although since Turner's marriage to Jane Fonda, there may have been a leaning farther left.

Larry King works very hard. His radio show has moved to daytime, so he is on the air three hours per day, from 3 to 6 p.m. And then the TV show goes on at 9 p.m. It's tiring and he insists he loves it all but hints that one of these days he may be forced to give up one or the other. And he makes it clear that it will be the radio show.

"I never want to stop doing the television show," he says. "If, God forbid, I ever became president, I'd keep right on doing the show. Maybe I could call it 'Larry King Live From The White House.'

As we leave Duke Zeibert's, Larry King shouts goodbye to many people at various tables and others shout farewells from far off tables. It's apparent that he loves every greeting, every handshake, every sign of recognition. If he doesn't stand much chance of becoming president of the USA, for the moment at least he is the reigning King of the talk-shows.

Following is the conversation with Larry King. There has been some minor cutting and several changes in chronology, but all the answers are verbatim.

UNGER: *Recently, Ed Turner, President of CNN News paraphrased Andy Warhol's statement that in the future everybody will have 15 minutes of fame. He said that sooner or later, everybody will host a talk show somewhere, sometime. How do you react to that?*

KING: Even though there's a lot of talk about talk shows these days there's still room for more. You'd think a lot of people would get on the bandwagon. I don't understand it. It's a wonderful thing to host a talk show. No matter what, because you're having a good time. I mean, a guy gets on the air, some of them spew their own opinions, some of them are whacko right, whacko left. From my point of view, I wouldn't change places with anyone. I get to interview great people. I can ask them anything I want. A lotta people would want to do that. And from a television standpoint, it's very cost effective.

UNGER: *How do you account for the enormous impact of your show in 1992?*

KING: I didn't do anything differently last year than I've always done. It was just a magic time and place ... and, of course, Ross Perot. Don't forget, we are the only worldwide talk show and that has a lot of impact. If we were to give any credit, it would have to go to Perot. He triggered it all when he said he would run if people wanted him to ... getting all those people involved. Then Clinton came on our show June 4th. He was running third.

The public feels an association with the show. Even though you may not call in, you feel you can. It's not a stuffy press conference or a speech in Congress ... it's just you and me. Clinton brought that you-and-me quality to it. Perot had it, too. Bush didn't have it. The impact? People watch the show and talk about it the next day. The other media helped us by picking up what was said. If we did something at night, the next morning *Good Morning, America* would do it or *The Today Show.*

UNGER: *Would Clinton make a good*

talk-show host?
KING: Clinton would make an excellent talk-show host because he is curious. And he knows how to listen. Now, if he could just keep from being too wordy, he'd be terrific. He had a great manner. He could do the Donahue show ... pinch hit for Donahue.

UNGER: *Perot?*
KING: You know, you can't succeed in politics if you don't communicate on TV. Perot's the master. You don't have to look great. You can have big ears. Perot had magic. He communicated. He would make a good talk-show host where there were no guests ... just his opinions. Perot is not curious enough. Great guy. Well, there are lots of people who are great and don't make good talk-show hosts. You gotta have curiosity. We have curiosity.

UNGER: *Is there a difference in impact between radio talk shows and TV talk shows?*
KING: Oh, yeah. I do both. TV has much more impact because TV's the most important media ever.

UNGER: *Do TV viewers tend to call more than the radio talk-show listeners?*
KING: I don't know the answer to that. Not many television shows take calls. We're always bombarded with calls, but there's no way to judge it because we're on almost 400 radio stations all over the world, so we're never without calls.

UNGER: *How can you judge whether your calls are from organized groups. How do you screen calls?*
KING: Well, on radio we don't screen at all. On television, they screen. I've never seen an organized thing on television. I think it's too hard to get in. I don't know how you could organize it. On radio, you could organize it, if I plug a guest all week as I did when Vice President Gore appeared. So, I guess that Clinton could call a bunch of people and say, "Start flooding the lines today early. Let's get in, and tell Al Gore how much we loved my speech." You can see through it. You're sharp enough, you're doing it all these years. Where the radio talk show can come into play is if something occurs that most of the public doesn't like and gets up in arms over, then they can react instantly, stirred up by radio all day long. With these shows proliferating all over America, the Senate and the Congress react. Something that's emotional, that everybody's against.

If it's a close vote, I don't think we have any effect, as on the abortion debate. None. We can talk until we're blue in the mouth, we know how you feel about abortion. But if you're a legislator and something happens today, I can trigger the whole public. I can get them warmed up.

UNGER: *How about somebody like Rush Limbaugh? He makes a positive effort to get his listeners to respond with telephone calls.*
KING: And they do, but the impact is almost nil. In the case of Zoe Baird, everyone was miffed. It was indefensible. Other than that, Rush is wildly opposed to Clinton; Clinton got elected. He's opposed to Clinton's budget plan; it's gonna pass. Also, you know where the reaction is coming from. If I'm a legislator and I get 800 letters and cards and they're all conservative, I know. If 8,000 letters came in tomorrow saying Clinton's speech stunk, and I'm a legislator, I know that's organized.
UNGER: *Clinton told you on air that if he were elected he was going to appear once every six months on your show. Do you think he's going to live up to that?*
KING: I would have no reason to doubt it. I can see no indication why he wouldn't. When you think about it, you'd be crazy not to. He's great at communicating and it's a wonderful way to communicate. Not only that, it's

a worldwide impact. We're on cable around the world. So, Clinton's got something to say that he really wants Saddam Hussein to hear, that's a pretty good way to deliver it.

UNGER: *You say this was the right time for your show, but will that always be the case?*
KING: I think it will. The one thing about the history of talk shows is, they hold. I can't think of one successful talk show that's gone off the air. They last forever. The reason they last forever is the world changes every day. And you've got the daytime talk shows that feed off the need of people, that show you live people. Daytime talk shows, when you think about it, work better than soap operas. Why would I want to watch a soap opera? I'd rather see the guy that slept with the goat.

Then you've got our show. Ten years ago there was nowhere in America that you could have seen Jack Kemp reacting to the President's speech, taking phone calls. We had it. And if you like the show and you participate, the subjects change as quick as events change. You almost are fail-proof. You'd have to do something nutty. Ted Turner was saying to me last night: "You're a worldwide staple. You're the best known person on CNN." Now, you think about it. Why would somebody in England be watching when I do a show about Georgia changing its state flag, which we're going to do soon. They're interested. People like people talking. If the host can keep it moving, the conversation is interesting, the public's involved.

UNGER: *Well, what is it about you that makes you so successful? Is it some special quality you have?*
KING: I gotta have something. I don't know what it is. I'm inquisitive. I'm alert. I'm curious. I ask good questions. I ask short questions. I ask questions the public kind of feels a sense of. I think I'm kind of an Everyman.

UNGER: *How about the other talk show hosts? Could we just run through them and you give me quick reactions.*
KING: Yeah.

UNGER: *Donahue.*
KING: I like Phil a lot. He's an original. Everybody who has a studio audience and runs around and takes questions from them is imitating Phil Donahue. I've discussed this with him—right at this table, in fact. I don't like when he goes into the things that I guess daytime TV has to go into, because I think he's in sense way above that. He told me that he'd like to change places with me. He once said, "When I die, I'd like to come back as Larry King." He'd like to do Jack Kemp tomorrow. He can't do Jack Kemp tomorrow for an hour because that ain't gonna play in the day. He'll get buried in the numbers.

UNGER: *Oprah Winfrey?*
KING: I never get to see her much. She's very, very audience-aware. She has a great way of absorbing herself with the audience. But the public associates with her because she's not threatening to women. She's like an Everywoman. She's also, in my opinion, a very talented actress. She should do more with that.

UNGER: *Geraldo Rivera?*
KING: Geraldo used to sit in for me. I'd like him better with serious issues but he's not going to do that. I enjoy Geraldo as a guy. He's a great guy and it's hard because emotionally, I really like him, but his shows seem to pander, too. But Geraldo really believes that that's journalism—that a lot of what he does is journalism. And, to me, it's—how would you describe it?—I'm trying to find the word ....

UNGER: *Maybe the answer is what you once said in describing what you do: You said, "I'm not a journalist, I'm*

an interviewer."

KING: Right, I'm an interviewer. I'm a Style section. Now, sometimes the Style section makes news. Under the strict sense of journalism as I interpret journalism, a journalist goes to the fire, observes the fire and comes back and tells me about the fire largely from his point of view. But it's the only point of view he can have. A journalist will have no sacred cows. I've seen some terrific journalists who can't interview their way out of a paper bag but can write a story. They can go to the fire and describe that fire. Boy, wow! but they wouldn't know what to say to the firemen. So there's all types of journalism. While I was a front-page journalist this year and did journalism, I'm really the Style section. I do feature interviews. Sometimes they make news, but I don't go on the air thinking of myself as "This Is The News." I've never thought of myself as a news person. But over the years, a lot of news has resulted from what I do. This year is a classic example. What I do is what I've always done which is I ask—I'm just real curious.

UNGER: *Lawyer Edward Bennett Williams once said that he never asked a witness a question to which he didn't know the answer.*

KING: I'm the opposite. I never ask a question if I know the answer. A lawyer should never be surprised. If he's surprised, he hasn't done his preparation for his case. He's gotta be in control. When I interview Kemp, I don't want to know in advance what Kemp thinks. Because I want to react to his responses the same as the audience does. I don't like to ask things that I'm not curious about. I'm well prepared.

UNGER: *I've heard that you don't prepare for interviews.*

KING: Well, life prepares me. I read five newspapers a day. I've got a thee-hour radio show today. I know that Gore is on and the former Counselor of the Economic Advisors. I don't know who else is on. I'll know when I get there. I get in and the producers have some little blue slips there that say "Kemp served as HUD secretary for such-and-such a year, etc." They also give some reports, and I tend not to read them. But the facts are there. I can always use them. But my preparation ... of course, I know who Jack Kemp is and I know his philosophy.

UNGER: *Do the producers know you so well that they know who to book?*

KING: They also know that a good mix is important. They know that if they give me politics every day, I'd be bored. They also know I'd never turn down a guest, because I'm curious about so many people. But I think I'm pretty easy to book for.

UNGER: *It has been said that you have such curiosity that everybody seems interesting to you.*

KING: That's true. And I can't explain that. That's a gift I had at birth. You can't teach that. When I was a kid, I can still remember asking, "Why does a bus driver want to drive a bus? What's the job like? What do they make? What's the toughest part of that job? What bothers him the most? What are the rewards? What do they think of when they drive on a bus?" I was six years old.

I'm still the same. The producers tell me, "Larry, tonight on the radio, you know what we got? We got a Greyhound bus driver. He's the guest. Just want you to talk about the life of a bus driver." One of the best shows I ever did years ago was with a plumber. Just a plumber. He was in the audience and I brought him up. I did 45 minutes with this guy. "What are the rewards of plumbing?"

UNGER: *One of the things I object to with David Letterman is that he tends to sneer at his guests. He used to bring on the elevator operator at NBC and poke fun at him because he won an*

award for the Best Elevator Man.
KING: David is a humorist. And his goals are different. That's not an interview show. You see, David Letterman is not a talk show. David Letterman is an entertainment show who uses talk as a vehicle.

UNGER: *How about Jay Leno?*
KING: Not as much an entertainer as Letterman, but an entertainer. Carson was an entertainer.

UNGER: *Regis and Kathy Lee?*
KING: They're a lot of fun. They're not serious but they have a wonderful rapport and there's a thing about them that makes them highly likeable. There's a lot to be said for that. They don't solve the world's problems. They're not the world's best interviewers and I don't think they'd say they are. But they suit that medium well. They come easily into the room. They're themselves.

UNGER: *Which is true of you, as well.*
KING: Most of the really good ones are themselves. The secret is there's no secret.

UNGER: *How about Joan Rivers?*
KING: She's a comedienne. Her material is very funny and some of the stuff she does is pretty good. But she's an entertainer not an interviewer.

UNGER: Maury Povich?
KING: My preference for Maury is as a newsman. He's a wonderful anchor—one of the best local anchors I ever saw. And I think he anchored *A Current Affair* terrifically. He had sarcasm. He didn't take himself seriously. As a talk show host, he's okay, but I'd rather see him do more serious things than he does. Maury is a talent. He's a terrific newsperson. The camera likes him. I just feel for him. I'm not a fan of tabloid television, and when someone I like a lot does it, I'm disappointed. So, I wouldn't mean to hurt Maury by that, I mean to praise him. He's working beneath his talent.

UNGER: *How about Montel Williams?*
KING: Nice guy. There was a funny bit on that new show *Homicide.* In the opening episode, a homicide detective is questioning a suspect and he says to him, "Why aren't you answering my questions? Whaddya want to do? You wanna talk to Larry King? You don't wanna talk to Montel Williams? I'm Montel Williams, here." It was funny.

UNGER: *Montel takes himself very seriously.*
KING: Too seriously. I gather people like him and that daytime mix. He's kinda the black Oprah, but he does take himself seriously.

UNGER: *The* black *Oprah?*
KING: The *male* Oprah.

UNGER: *Black was funnier.*
KING: Oprah's color-less. You don't think of her as either black or white.

UNGER: *How about Sally Jessy Raphael?*
KING: I know Sally a long time. We worked together on radio in Miami. She also is a much better interviewer than this show lets her be and, I guess, of all of them, hers is the most tabloid talk, isn't it? I gather any strange thing can get you on there. So, I'm not a fan of those shows.

UNGER: *I wonder how the bookers find these strange people.*
KING: Where they find them ... Look at what Jenny Jones has accomplished. Jenny is pretty. I know her producer real well. I understand why they changed the show to be more tabloidy, but I liked the older one better. The funniest thing I've ever seen done was a *The Washington Post* column which listed 50 subjects. Just subjects. And it said, "Twenty-five of these actually were on television this

week. Twenty-five were not. Pick out the twenty-five that were." And then it gave you the answers. In all cases, the twenty-five that were, were crazier than the twenty-five that were not.

I'm on the treadmill one day and you can't get off a treadmill once it starts. You've gotta go through the whole exercise and Sally Jessy comes on. I didn't know she was coming on. Now, I have a clicker on my thing so I can change the channel—on my treadmill. Sally comes on and this is actually what she says: "Today, a subject I've thought about a lot: older men who sleep with their mothers. Today we have a 50-year old man who sleeps with his 70-year old mother; a 30-year old man who sleeps with his 60-year old mother; a 20-year old man who sleeps with his 40-year old mother. We'll be right back." And I said to myself, "Oh, I thought about that a lot, too. I go around thinking about that a lot." Thank the Lord I had my clicker.

UNGER: *Who were some of your best interviewees?*
KING: Frank Sinatra, Mario Cuomo, Bette Davis and the New York paraplegic police officer, Steve MacDonald.

UNGER: *And the worst?*
KING: Zsa Zsa Gabor, Lisa Sliwa, Anita Bryant, William Rusher. Talk-show Hell would be having Lisa, Anita and Rusher as guests for the rest of time.

UNGER: *Do you think the trend towards tabloid TV is a temporary trend?*
KING: Nah. There'll always be those stories. I used to think that they gotta run out of stories. Buy they won't. They have their place. It's a sad commentary, but you had to know it was coming. You know, as television proliferates, you're gonna have all these channels to fill.

UNGER: *Do you think they fuzz the line between real news and—*
KING: —And junk. Or they invent it. Anybody in television sees what they're doing.

UNGER: *The ultimate, I guess, in obscuring the line was the NBC-GM fiasco.*
KING: Giving NBC all the allowances, there was no excuse for it. I can't even give them an out. It was the natural extension of tabloid mentality.

UNGER: *Do you think we are going to see more of the talk-show feel on the evening news?*
KING: Yes. I wouldn't be surprised to see Sunday morning shows start taking calls. I felt very good when we were copied all year. You know, the *Today* show's Katie Couric took her first phone call on the *Today* show and said, "I feel like Larry King." I felt very proud that suddenly they found the format that we'd been doing all these years—Turner had been doing it in prime time. Let people call in, and you can move through calls and the television viewers will watch. You'll see more of that.

UNGER: *What amazes me, especially on your show, and on C-Span is the quality of the callers. How do you manage to get that quality?*
KING: There's a lot of bright people out there. I've known it for a long time. There's a lot of stupid people too. But there's a lot of bright people who ask very good questions. For example, the simple question of Bush: "Where do you live?" Broder wouldn't ask that. I have nothing against David Broder; but he wouldn't ask "Where do you live? Houston or Kennebunkport?" The simplest questions are the best.

UNGER: *What are some of the best questions you've asked?*
KING: I said to Quayle, "What if your daughter got pregnant?" Very good question. It's a good question for a lot of reasons. One: before that he had

said, "You know, if my girl needs her ears pierced, the school has to call me for permission, but if she needs an abortion, they don't. Isn't that crazy?" So, my logical next one was, "What if she did need an abortion. How would you handle it?"

Now, it's a wonderful hypothetic. Hypothetics are good questions. It's a wonderful hypothetic because it forces the person to think about what they would do in a situation. And they cannot say, "No comment." You can say "no comment" to "What happens if Belgrade invades Tunisia?" But your own daughter? What would you do? You cannot say, "I have no comment" to that.

UNGER: *Was the Bernie Shaw question to Dukakis about what he would do if his wife were raped in that same category?*

KING: Sure. It was a fair question. Dukakis got hurt by it because his laid-back personality was showing through. Cuomo, who is as liberal as Dukakis, his answer would have been, "I'd kill the guy! Now, I don't think I should kill him. If he's eventually caught and has a trial, he should do time. But if I got 'im, I'd kill 'im. Maybe I'd have to pay a price for it." That's the correct answer.

UNGER: *How did the first Ross Perot interview in which he said he might run come about?*

KING: John Siegenthaler was then editorial page editor of USA Today. I write a column for them every Monday. He called me and asked if I knew a guy named John Jay Hooker from Tennessee. I knew the name. He'd run for Governor, he owned Minnie Pearl chicken places and he was a very liberal Democrat. An interesting guy. Siegenthaler says, "Well, can I have Hooker call you? I know you're interviewing Perot like Thursday night. He's got something interesting to tell you." I said, "Fine."

Hooker called and said, "You know, I have been encouraging Ross Perot to run for President. Why don't you ask him?" I said thank you—the whole conversation was a minute. Then there was a report in the paper somewhere that Perot was thinking about it, because they put it in the intro to the show, which I don't write, the producers write. Perot was booked because of Bush's State of the Union speech (he was going to respond to it). He was on the night after Pat Buchanan was on and Buchanan had just done well in the New Hampshire primary. So, Perot was certainly not the story of the week. But in the producer's script for the opening, it said: There are whispers that he is thinking of the Presidency... And I said as my first question: "Welcome back to *Larry King Live*. Are you running for President?" And he said, "I am definitely not." I was a little taken aback. I thought he'd say, "I'm thinking about it." I said, "Well, I spoke to John Jay Hooker this week and he says that you're interested." And he says, "Well," something to the effect that "a lot of people have asked me, but I am not ..." I think he said "constitutionally" or "emotionally" suited to it.

Midway through the show, I asked him again and he said no. At the end of the show I say "We've got about five minutes to go. People have been calling in. I saw that his ego was rising. I saw that he was enjoying this. He was being asked his opinions about things foreign and things domestic and I said: "Are there any circumstances under which you would run?" And that was a very good question because if you say no to that, you eliminate all future inquiries. And he said, "If I get on the ballot in all 50 states, I'll run."

His wife later told me she was watching in a hotel room and couldn't believe it. When Ross left that night, I was going to do the radio show and he was going back to the hotel. He said to me, "You think we'll get anything out of this?" I said, "Beats me." We never gave a phone number. He had no 800 number. And then, that night on the

radio show people started calling in, saying, "Where do we reach Ross Perot?" I didn't know where to direct them. And then CNN called the next day and says, "You know we're getting bombed with calls here." And then Perot called me a week later and said, "Do you know how popular your show is? Do you know that volunteer groups are springing up all over the country—all from your show?" I thanked him. The rest is history.

UNGER: *He has said that you had one of the most important jobs in the country.*
KING: Yeah, he said that to me too. That's because of the impact CNN has had; the fact that it's worldwide and watched by world leaders; the fact that something happens on it. While only 4% of the cable population may be watching, they are a kind of 4% that carries over to the next day. It just works, because it's still a show. The difference between us and C-SPAN—and I like C-SPAN a lot—is that they are not a show—just a desk and two people sitting; that's all it is. We're a show. Music. We're produced. We're exciting. We're talked about, we're viewed, and I have never seen anything like this last year. Everywhere I go, there are people coming over to me who watched that show. So, I would call it an "impact show." I truly wouldn't trade places with anyone. I really mean that. There's not one person in the business whose job I would change with tomorrow. Not one.

UNGER: *Is it fair to say that we are becoming a talk-show society?*
KING: We are. We're becoming involved—and with computers and push-button phones and redial and are getting more involved. I think it all started February 20th last year when Perot went on our show. If we take any credit, it started there. The rest was all a wave caught off that.

You know, if no Perot campaign started off that, I don't think this would have been a story. So, for that part, we take credit. We started it. Then it grew and then, as Clinton said when he came on my show the first time: "I'm here because you're the guy who brought us Perot and I saw it. Well, I've done talk shows a lot, Larry, all over the country. I must have done 100 talk shows in New Hampshire. I've never done a national one in prime time." And that changed the ball game.

UNGER: *How do you decide to extend an interview or cut it short?*
KING: You know within the first three minutes if it's going well. Sometimes, the producer will say, "Go an extra five minutes. This is terrific." Or I'll say, "I'm gonna go an extra five minutes." Or even go the whole hour. Within the first three minutes you can tell a good guest from a bad guest. You don't know what news you're gonna make, and you don't know the impact, but you know right away. Nixon's doing us again when he comes back from Russia.

UNGER: *Why is he a good guest?*
KING: Because he's brilliant, he's brooding, he has all the elements you want.

UNGER: *Who would you like to get in the future?*
KING: J.D. Salinger because he's never spoken in all these years. I loved all his books and it amazes me why someone would go and live like a hermit. Jacqueline Kennedy. Al Pacino. Michael Milken...

UNGER: *I've got just about every story written about you. I'll read you the positive adjectives first, then the negative, so you don't get depressed. Comment on each.*
KING: Okay. But I don't get depressed.

UNGER: *"Everyman with a microphone."*

KING: I'm Everyman. I'm a high-school graduate. Didn't go to college. I'm just curious about everything there is.

UNGER: *"Ingratiating without toadying."*
KING: Absolutely true. I don't toady to people, and I know I have a manner that makes people respond to me.

UNGER: *"Pays attention. Listens to what people have to say."*
KING: Every second.

UNGER: *"Doesn't try for effect."*
KING: Completely true.

UNGER: *"A blend of wide-eyed innocence and cynicism."*
KING: I suppose that's true. I know I'm innocent. I'm not worldly. You know, I should be. I mean, I'm 59 years old. I've been in my business 35 years, but I still have a little wide-eyed innocence, and I have some cynicism that I hope doesn't show a lot.

UNGER: *"People trust him because they know that he's not going to embarrass them."*
KING: I never want to embarrass anyone. My role is to learn, and I've never thought that I knew more than the guests.

UNGER: *"He combines gossip, comedy and curiosity to produce an exciting and thoughtful show."*
KING: Gossip occurs. People will say what they hear. We do very little of it. I thing that I did gossip in the book, "Tell it to the King" where I wrote stories about things that were told to me. But I wouldn't think my show's gossipy.

UNGER: *Are you an interviewer who makes news or a newsman who does interviews?*
KING: I'm an interviewer who makes news. Good question and that's the correct answer.

UNGER: *Now, we're going to some of the negatives. "A political back-scratcher."*
KING: I don't know what that means. I have respect for people who run for office. I have respect for people who put themselves on the line. We don't do that. A lot of broadcasters have an easy deal. We criticize, knock, and go home. But we don't have November 3rds. Yeah, there are rating periods, but ... We don't have a November 3rd. But George Bush had a November 3rd. Jimmy Carter had a November 3rd, and Reagan—they all had November 3rds wherein they got rejected or accepted. I have a great deal of respect for people who go into that battleground. "Back-scratching?" ... But on the other hand, even though I'm, for example, personally politically liberal, I have great respect for and friendship with many conservatives.

UNGER: *"Monumental ego."*
KING: You know, the weird thing about that is, I can't find any interview where I use the word "I." And the measure of ego is that. I remember once *Look* magazine long ago did a test of public people and their egos. It went: How long in all the public speeches and things, did people go without saying the word "I"? And most of the people had 12 seconds. Kissinger was 18 seconds. Eleanor Roosevelt, four hours between her "I"s. I don't use the word "I."

Now, in an interview, if you're asking me am I good at what I do? I remember once I asked Gleason if he was conceited and he said, "Absolutely. I'm very funny. It's a conceit to go on television. I am saying to 40 million people, ' you're going to laugh at me.' That's conceit." But it's confidence. I have confidence in myself. I know I'm good at what I do. But I never let my ego, hopefully, get in the way of what I do.

UNGER: *"Unashamedly plugs books of guests."*

KING: We must receive 50 books a week and we book one author, maybe two. I would figure if the producer has said, "We've got 50 books; two of them are worthy of being on," I ought to mention them. And another reason I mention them for is to save the staff headaches. If you don't mention a book a lot and the guest is interesting, you get killed the next day with "What was the title of that book?" So, it may be called a "plug," but I'm doing it as a public service.

UNGER: *"Doesn't ever kowtow to prestige and pomposity."*
KING: I do not. I hope that's true. I think that's true.

UNGER: *"A political backscratcher who plays softball."*
KING: I don't know what that means. I ask the same questions I've been asking ... You know, it's funny to me to feel defensive. I won the Peabody Award, I'm in the Hall of Fame, I got Ace Awards and until this year, you never heard the term "softball" ever used for me. Ever. Never. Find one quote where "softball" was used before 1992. You won't see it. Not once.

Something happened this year. I got too much attention. I was on the front page of *The New York Times* too much. The conventional press has said that we asked too easy questions. I confront them: "What *didn't* I ask? What area *didn't* I cover?" The fact that I ask it differently than them ... you could say that's softball if you read it out of context. I've talked to Sam Donaldson a lot about this. Now, Sam is a news-hardened interviewer. Sam has no interest in the "whys." And he's wonderful at it. I don't care. I'm NOT Sam Donaldson. I'm Larry King.

UNGER: *Would you ever consider more of a straight news show?*
KING: I wouldn't want to get bogged down in just doing news. I love what I do. I love the chance that we can do everybody, that we can do in one week, Jack Kemp and Kenny Rogers, and the Vice President. I don't know what I would do differently than what I'm doing. And I've never done news. I'd like to anchor a news program for one day.

UNGER: *One day?*
KING: One day! I'd like to do the weather for a week. And sports—I've always done sports. I'd like to do baseball.

UNGER: *Aren't you doing another book about the way to the White House?*
KING: I had talked to the publishers and we were ready to make a deal, but I don't think I'm going to do it because I'd have to reveal too much of stuff that was privy to me. Well, maybe when I retire I'll do a book, but I learned a lot of things this year off the air. That might be unfair to people, so I don't know what I'm going to do with it.

UNGER: *Compare Bush, Perot and Clinton on TV.*
KING: They were all excellent talk-show guests. Bush got to be good. Because he was just Bush. You know, I had a great time with him. I had a great simpatico with him, and I got him to say things maybe he didn't want to say. Perot was the best. He spoke in the language of people the best, and he is definitely someone you would call "Ross." Big key to Ross Perot: You never say "Mr. Perot." If you met him right now and he sat down here, in one minute, you'd say "Ross."

You wouldn't call Bush "George." And Clinton, some might call him "Bill;" but you tend to call him "Governor." But Ross was great. Clinton was very good. Bush was very good. They were responsive. Quayle is a good talk-show guest, too. Gore is the most studious and the least into feelings. So you gotta go another route with Gore. When you take him through

what happened with his kid, and then you break that side down first, then you can have a good time with him—an open relationship with Gore.

UNGER: *Do you think it might be possible to have a national talk show at 6 p.m.?*
KING: That might do very well. For example, we do very well on the West Coast where we're on at six o'clock right against all their local news.

UNGER: *Do you think maybe the networks' dinner-hour news is outdated?*
KING: No, no. But I watch it less because I know the news from 5 o'clock. It is fascinating how quick the changes are occurring. It's a great time to be in this industry.

UNGER: *Despite the proliferation of cable channels, aren't we always going to have consensus regarding one or two shows that everybody wants, like the Super Bowl?*
KING: It has to be an event.

UNGER: *People want to be able to talk to each other about what they watched last night.*
KING: No sitcom will do an 80 share anymore. The only thing that will do that well now is Super Bowl. If I got a national interview with Jacqueline Kennedy, maybe. It would be an event.

UNGER: *What seems to be happening is that specialized television—"niche" television —with comparatively small numbers of viewers is coming into its own.*
KING: Might be. Howard Stringer of CBS told me that: "You know, we can put *Larry King Live* on at 10 p.m. and we'd make more money than we make from *Dallas*. Because you would cost us $200,000 a week. *Dallas* costs us $2 million a week. And while the numbers of *Dallas* would be better, when we broke it down to real profits you'd make more profit for us. But we're in an ego business, so we couldn't stand having a 5 rating with you when we had a 30 with Dallas. But the 5 could bring us more income than the 30."

I'd rather be CNN's Ted Turner now than the president of NBC, ABC or CBS.

UNGER: *Why?*
KING: As Turner, I've got five networks, going on six. I changed the world. I'm a power broker and I'm opening bureaus when they're closing bureaus. I've become the news world today. And I married Jane Fonda and that might be first. And I'm born the same day as Larry King.

UNGER: *Larry, would you say you're a happy man?*
KING: Me, I'm happy. I haven't fulfilled my personal life yet. You know, I've never been good at that. I've had long-standing relationships. I love my work. I love what I've attained. I'm happier than I've been. But totally happy? Yeah. I would say I'm happy. [long pause] Fairly content. Milton Berle once said, "In relation to what? What's the alternative?" I'm happy I'm alive.

UNGER: *I once asked Ingrid Bergman what was the secret of her happiness and she said, "Two things: good health and bad memory."*
KING: Great line. But, my memory is too good to be totally happy. ■

In seventeen years of writing about television for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Arthur Unger won national recognition as one of the medium's most influential critics. He is also known for his revealing interviews with TV, stage and film personalities.

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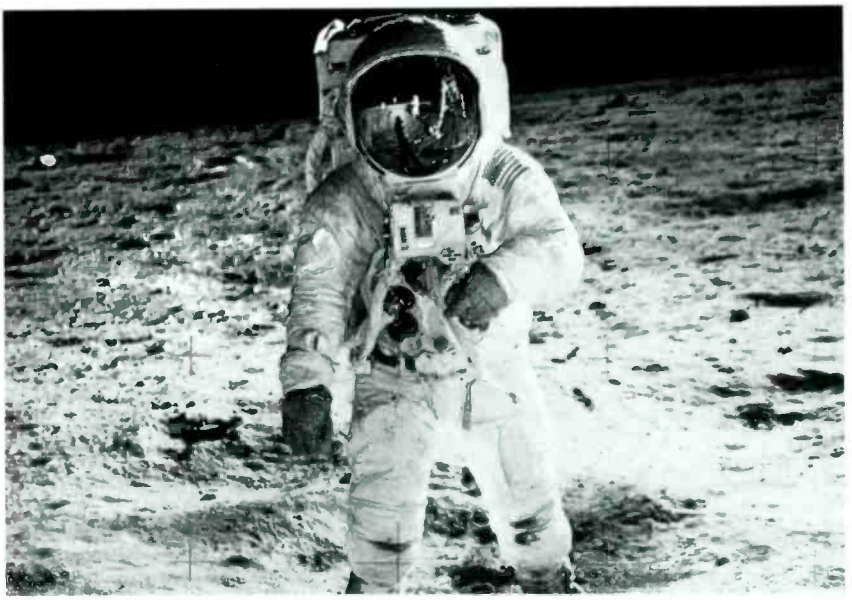

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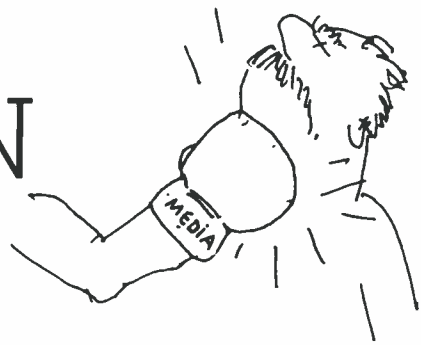

Norman Q. Reader

BY JOHN L. HESS

As a tightfisted old coot myself, I can sympathize with the craving of broadcasters for an audience that has, shall I say, more future and less frugality. I can, as the saying goes, understand why they dissemble their love for the old folks, but why must they kick us down the stairs?

Here, for a mild example, is Jeff Greenfield of ABC News. Polled by *The New York Times* on what snacks viewers should serve during Presidential debates, he suggested gruel. "The audience for debates skews old demographically," he explained. "So you're looking at people who buy denture creams and laxatives, an audience of incontinent denture wearers that eats accordingly."

Greenfield was funning of course, but dozens of our eminent colleagues are not funning at all when they dump on the elderly. They don't mean to be mean; rather, they are expressing righteous indignation at a generation that they have been led to regard as "GREEDY GEEZERS" *(the often quoted headline of a ferocious *New Republic* cover), as an "extraordinary powerful," "sophisticated," idle and rich special-interest group (Rolodex-pert Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute, on *MacNeil/Lehrer*), as "The 800-Pound Gorilla Vs. the Hungry Baby" (*The Washington Post*), as "rapacious" (George Will) or as "elderoids," a word coined by one of the many geezer-bashers who frequent the op-ed page of *The New York Times*.

A question: If we seniors are as rich as Norman Ornstein says we are, why

* Webster 2d defines geezer as "A queer old fellow; an old chap; an old woman (Slang)." Oxford English Dictionary calls it dialect, and defines it "A term of derision, applies to elderly people ..."

don't broadcasters want us for an audience? And if we're so powerful, why do we keep losing out in Washington? Read on.

A curious feature of recent political coverage has been that while both major parties have been committed to leave Social Security alone because that's what the public wants, the media persist in keeping it on the front burner. In 1988, as the Times observed, the issue of capping Social Security was "a litmus test for political courage among political reporters." So they made a hero of candidate Bruce Babbitt (remember him?). In 1992, they gave high marks for the same reason to Paul Tsongas, whom they never identified as a lobbyist for the insurance industry. He failed, too. But if the voters objected and the politicians flinched, the media never did.

News people are busy. When complex issues arise, they scan the computer back and spin the Rolodex for specialists whose credentials and financing they seldom scrutinize enough.

On *Meet the Press* last September 12, Andrea Mitchell challenged Senator Bob Dole to fess up that the next Administration would have to cut Medicare and Medicaid, which he bravely did, adding that it would also have to cut other "entitlements" (a dreadful word, meaning mostly Social Security). He must have been amused, not only because Medicare and Medicaid were already being cut but also because, once again, the watchdogs of the media were hounding the politicians to do what they dearly wanted to do.

On a *20/20* just before the election, John Stossel found a geezer so greedy he could not see why he should take a cut in benefits he'd paid for all his life. Stossel decked him with the zinger that he would get back all he'd paid in only three years—implying that he'd be a freeloading bum after that. At the close, Stossel repeated the figure to Hugh Downs. *Three years.* Downs looked appropriately shocked.

Leslie Stahl sacked another leech with the same chop on *60 Minutes* a month later, but used a different number. In a segment designed to prove that the budget could never be balanced unless we cut Social Security, she told this old parasite, twice, that he'd get back in *four years* all he'd paid in during the previous 50. So there.

It's confusing. Cokie Roberts has put it at 12 months, George Will at two years, David Gergen at 3 1/2 years. So what is the right number?

None of the above, really.

It's not just that the hustlers who whomped up those numbers overlooked the employers' share of the payroll tax or inflation or interest foregone or taxpayers who die early or otherwise fail to qualify for benefits. It's that the number is irrelevant.

Social Security is not a savings plan but an insurance system, and a remarkably successful one. Unlike Federal insurance on bank deposits, it has never cost the Treasury a penny; on the contrary, it has been earning a stunning net profit of $70 billion a year, while sustaining masses of elderly or disabled Americans and their widows and children in a modicum of dignity if not ease.

Now if John Stossel's or Leslie Stahl's or Cokie Robert's or David Gergen's or George Will's house burned down, surely he/she would consider himself/herself entitled to more than a refund of insurance premiums. So why do they believe that Americans, upon reaching 65, are entitled to no more than a refund on

their F.I.C.A. taxes?

Clearly, they never thought of it that way. News people are busy. When complex issues arise, they scan the computer bank and spin the Rolodex for specialists whose credentials and financing they seldom scrutinize enough. If all the respectable media are saying the same thing, why question it? One, two, three, four years—what's the difference?

A companion trick with numbers has had a dramatic effect on the distribution of the tax burden among Americans. That is the continual assertion that Social Security is going broke—next year, in 10 years, 20 years, 40 years, what's the difference?

The ploy was first used successfully, I believe, in 1977-78. It permitted the politicians to "rescue" the system by notching down the benefits and notching up the payroll taxes. The public was assured that this would keep Social Security solvent through the rest of the century.

Four years later, I heard NBC's economic correspondent intone on the evening news: "A time bomb" ... is ticking ... in Social Security." Soon President Reagan and his numbers-faker, David Stockman, were proclaiming that Social Security would be bankrupt by about the next August, 1983.

The ticking that NBC man heard may have been the meter on the Federal budget, following the great supply-side income tax cut of 1981 (the one that was supposed to balance the budget in three years). The crisis in Social Security was a hoax, designed to cause the media again to hail as a "rescue" yet another cut in benefits and yet another increase in payroll taxes.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), who shepherded the "rescue" through the Senate in partnership with Bob Dole, was amused years later to observe that Social Security wasn't anywhere near broke at the time. He referred to some $30 billion owed to Social Security by the military, in addition to its cash reserves.

Even this may be considered beside the point. It may well be argued that Social Security cannot go bankrupt, any more than the Government can go bankrupt. Social Security is a social contract backed by the full faith and credit of the United States. That is more than can be said of bank deposit insurance, yet our pundits have not clamored that depositors should not or would not get all their money back. But they have persuaded many young Americans, like one on Leslie Stahl's show, that Social Security will run out before they reach 65. Stahl did not contradict him, the way she contradicted the old geezer who thought he had earned his modest pension.

The theme of war between the generations was pitched to the media as early as November, 1982, at the height of the fake Social Security crisis, in a cover piece in **Washington Monthly,** *accusing the elderly of "Taking America To The Cleaners."*

Stahl and Stossel did not reply to questions about their sources, but Stossel did consult, and put on his show, a representative of the main source of scores, perhaps hundreds, of geezer-bashing diatribes in the media over the past decade. This was an office in Washington that began under the heavy title Americans for Generational Equity (AGE). Common Cause has listed among its

donors such defenders of equity as General Dynamics, Rockwell, TRW, Big Steel, ITT, Metropolitan Life and none other than the U.S. League of Savings Institutions, the lobby for the savings-and-loans.

The founding chairman of AGE, Senator David Durenberger (R-Minn) stepped down after having been scolded by the Senate for some financial fiddling, and was succeeded by Richard Lamm, the former Governor of Colorado who was famous for telling the elderly ill, "You have a duty to die."

AGE was then folded into a like-minded outfit with a catchier name, like Association of Baby Boomers. This is ironic, because all its efforts have been directed, with considerable success, toward making Baby Boomers pay more tax and get less benefits. Indeed, the outfit has predicted bloody war in the streets, literally, if today's Baby Boomers try to collect their Social Security benefits from the next generation. (Thus *Fortune* magazine put it in 1987, citing AGE as its principal source.)

The theme of war between the generations was pitched to the media as early as November, 1982, at the height of the fake Social Security crisis, in a cover piece in *Washington Monthly*, accusing the elderly of "Taking America to the Cleaners." It charged, among other things, that the average beneficiary got back all he'd paid *in 19 months*.

The magazine's editor, Charles Peters, has used the figure 2 years. The author of the article, one Phillip Longman, has since disseminated different guesstimates, in a career with AGE and its successor, and in cahoots with Neil Howe of the National Taxpayers Union, who has in turn collaborated with Peter G. Peterson, the financier, who has made an avocation of attacking Social Security. You've seen their work all over the op-ed pages, in magazines and on the airwaves, under their own names and under the names of all manner of commentators.

A theme of this propaganda is that the elderly are undeservedly rich. The *New Republic* article that gave us the title GREEDY GEEZERS said we shlep around town in golf carts because we're too lazy to walk. Now, it should have occurred to our journalists to wonder why a campaign mounted by conservative interests should be so harsh about perquisites of the rich, like Social Security and Medicare. One gets the impression that the hospital wards are crowded with millionaires, and country-club dues are paid with Social Security checks. One might ask, if the rich are getting more than their share, why not simply raise their income taxes? In an influential article in *Atlantic* in April, 1992, Howe and Longman dismissed that idea in three words: "It won't happen." Not if they can help it, surely.

It is a tribute to the success of Social Security as a safety net that journalists are so easily persuaded that old Americans live on Easy Street.

It is a tribute to the success of Social Security as a safety net that journalists are so easily persuaded that old Americans live on Easy Street, which is where Stossel went to tape them. In fact, about one in eight old people live below the poverty level—roughly the same as Americans as a whole—but the figure would be one in two old people if their Social Security checks did not come. No more than 1 in 20 of the elderly may be considered as well off, barring catastrophic illness, and no more than 1 or 2 in 100 rate as really rich.

Before Social Security, the elderly were the poorest and most forsaken age segment of the population. Since then, their relative position has stabilized, thanks entirely to the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)—in contrast to the children of the poor, whose welfare benefits have been eaten away by inflation. This permits the geezer-bashers to accuse us of snatching food from babies. They propose therefore to cap or eliminate the COLA and institute means testing of some sort—allegedly to soak the rich but effectively to transform Social Security into a welfare program, hence politically vulnerable to further cuts or repeal.

Among media people, it is an item of faith that Social Security escapes "reform" because of that 800-pound gorilla, the geezer lobby. In proof, they cite the 32-million-strong AARP, and recall the way angry geezers made Congress repeal catastrophic Medicare in 1990.

As it happens, AARP also operates as a multi-million-dollar mail-order house dealing mainly in insurance and pharmaceuticals; it *favored* that Medicare amendment (which contrary to published reports imposed taxes on all the elderly, and elderly alone), and it *opposes* a single-payer national health insurance system for Americans of all ages, which most of the elderly enthusiastically favor.

There are other organizations of and for the elderly. A couple are money-raising rackets; others are sincere, amateur, poorly funded and generally ignored by our busy journalists, who prefer to deal with pros who can deliver a fast sound bite. AARP is precious to them because they can quote it, proving they are fair, and cite it, with its 32 million customers, as proof that they, the journalists, are bravely fighting a monster—defying what one contributor to the Times op-ed page described as the "gray muzzle", which he defined as "silence extorted from political leaders on the issue of Social Security reform."

Muzzle there is, but the writer misidentified it. In one six-month period, I counted five articles on that page bashing the geezers, and none defending them. (When I reported that, two writers informed me that they had been invited to contribute to the discussion but their pieces, which turned out to defend the geezers, had been rejected.)

MacNeil/Lehrer did a little better. In eight segments on the catastrophic Medicare issue, it allowed one fairly knowledgeable critic of the bill to be heard, once. I did not count the number of proponents, nor the errors of fact, which were numerous.

So come on, colleagues, give us a break. Or rather, give everybody a break. The same issue of fair, balanced coverage confront us this year on such basic issues as health care. Here too the debate has been dominated by well-heeled lobbies, and most journalists seem more or less confused. I'd straighten them out on it if I had the space and the time, but actually, I'm too busy trying to straighten out my medical insurance forms. ■

John L. Hess is a former *New York Times* correspondent, television and radio commentator, syndicated columnist and author. He says "You may call me a geezer, but not especially greedy."

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TALK SHOW BOOM: WHAT'S NEW, COPYCAT?

Hosts cash in on the power of babble as new faces and ideas are added. But after 16 months of watching, a critic finds the changes are not enough. As more shows compete, a shakeout is likely.

BY SARA WELLES

After more than a thousand hours of watching syndicated daytime talk shows last year, I am no longer the innocent viewer I was when *Television Quarterly's* editor assigned me to monitor them and keep a journal as the basis for a serious look at the genre.

I'd been a magazine and book editor and a corporate executive. Friends in TV dismissed the shows as "garbage." But I was housebound for many months after back surgery, and so I decided to do the watching. As I noted in the last issue, while there was a surfeit of sleaze and tease, I also saw some riveting discussion of social issues. Then last Spring, the talk shows seemed to expand into the political campaign, racial dialog and debate, social justice and injustice, police brutality and coverups, sexual harassment, health frauds and safety issues. It looked as though syndicated talk programs might be evolving into something other than a relatively cheap and oh-so-profitable tower of blah. Maybe...

So what's new in 1993? Are the shows living up to their earlier promise? I ended Part I wondering whether I was hooked, and deciding: not quite. But while not as housebound as last year, I've found enough interesting changes to keep sampling and analyzing the talkers and their programs.

One change this season is the entry of Rush Limbaugh and his flagrant partisanship to daytime syndicated

talk. The traditional talk host tries to maintain a semblance of fairness and objectivity, to present both sides of an issue—if only to sidestep legal suits or provide on-camera debate. Not so Limbaugh, whose weekday half-hour talk mercilessly bombards the Clinton administration. Chubby Limbaugh, with the support of a hard-core following from his radio call-in shows and his book, brings hardball conservative commentary to talk television.

He opens with a billboard proclaiming America is being held hostage for the 30th Day, 31st Day, 32nd Day, et seq., asserting that we are hostage to the Clinton Presidency. The hostage device can be devastating—"America Held Hostage" graphics, counting over 200 days during the Iranian crisis, contributed greatly to President Carter's defeat in 1980.

Limbaugh's February 9 half-hour, for instance, was an unrelenting attack on a three-week-old Administration. Showing headlines about "Nannygate," he made a case that the nomination of Zoe Baird for Attorney General was dropped not because of sexist attacks or her hiring illegal aliens, but because she agreed on some issues with Dan Quayle rather than Bill Clinton.

Asserting that Kimba Wood, whose nomination was also withdrawn, was interviewed by Hillary Clinton for 90 minutes but by the President only a short time, Limbaugh called Clinton "the first president castratee in history." Minutes earlier he'd accused Clinton of infidelities. Limbaugh urged, "Mr. Clinton, if you want to fix this, take the Department of Justice back from your wife."

A master of the political lampoon, Limbaugh uses the whole bag of rhetorical verbal and visual tricks, fair or not.

Showing clips of Vice President Gore on a Sunday interview program, Limbaugh used on-screen inserts of himself shoveling—his metaphor for "that's bull—." The visual distraction and audience laughter effectively destroyed the sense of Gore's statement. Limbaugh likes video tricks such as supering a Pinocchio nose on the President and having it grow across four TV monitors.

Limbaugh denies political aspirations, but one audience shot was a closeup of a woman's campaign pin, "Limbaugh '96." He disarms by laughing at himself; he jocularly showed a photo of Mount Rushmore with himself installed alongside the monumental presidents. He quoted a *Newsweek* article that the Clinton team dropped an appointee because "The dreaded name of Rush Limbaugh was invoked." He clearly relishes the "dreaded" soubriquet.

Rambo Limbaugh claims he's "balanced" because he's counteracting "all the liberalism" that's been on the air. Where he's coming from is reflected in some ads his show attracts for the *Conservative Chronicle*, William Buckley's *National Review* and Limbaugh's own monthly publication. Whatever you may think of his right wing populist stance, Limbaugh does make clever use of computer technology for comic effect and character caricature. He is funny, but I wince when serious political debate degenerates to the level of cartoony gimmicks. It's entertainment, not logical debate; it promotes laughter, not lucid thought.

THE EARLY "SOB SISTERS"

The traditional daytime talk show deals with a personal dilemma or need. It presents people in conflict and emotional pain, bewildered and seeking advice. This genre has a long ancestry although its current quintessential practitioners—Oprah Winfrey and Sally Jessy Raphael and, of course Donahue—were preceded more directly by the '20's, '30's and '40's newspaper advice

Unabashed copycatting: a 44-year-old woman married to a 14-year-old boy went from Sally Jessy to Donahue to Springer. Her talk career may not be over.

columns like Dear Abby and Ann Landers (both still around), Dorothy Dix and Advice to the Lovelorn. Nathaniel West, author of the classic novel "Miss Lonelyhearts", labeled them "agony columns." Historically, today's hosts also have ties to the newspaper "sob sisters", female writers relegated to report on court trials and to write tear-jerkers about women's tragic or bizarre experiences. These popular features brought fame and fortune to journalists like Adela Rogers St. Johns and Dorothy Kilgallen.

The veteran mainstream, as well as the new talk shows—Maury Povich, Jane Whitney, Jerry Springer, Montel Williams, Jenny Jones, *et al*—essentially follow the classic " sob sister" tradition. But on the changing talk programs I caught this season, an individual's dilemma or personal problem is no longer seen as isolated. For Sally, for example, as for some newer hosts, it now has a social dimension. We are told we need to see it as a public issue.

The hosts have differences in personality, individual touches and angles. Oprah is one of the people, a commoner right there with the rest of us. Oprah projects herself as a working gal, a career woman. Sally isn't about careers, but is a mature and warm-hearted counselor. Sally could be an ideal aunt who has the admirable charm and decency of the well-brought-up suburban matron. She *understands.*

She's always truly sympathetic, totally direct and honest. She never laughs at, accuses or insults her guest. Sally has had personal troubles, but more like those of an upper-middle-class person. Were I striving for upward mobility, I'd like to have Sally as my mentor.

Sally used to be heavy on tearful guests and tissue hankies. Last Fall when Regis and Kathie Lee had two guests pretending to weep copiously, and pelted them with tissues, their audience was as delighted as I with the satire. Sally may not have felt she was the target, but she has shown fewer sobbing guests. She still binges on some subjects. I became sated with her mother/daughter conflicts—over makeup (too much or too little), staying out too late, teen dressing too sexy, mother dressing too drab or too sexy, and every permutation of mother/daughter confrontation.

She stooped a lot during Sweeps last year. To mention one instance, she brought on big-breasted dancers who perform in men's clubs. The most impressive bra size belonged to a Topsey Curvey (size 90 ZZZ). The troupe included a Kayla Kleevage, Guzzy Boobies, Honey Melons and Tiffany Towers. The troupe also did a dance in which bosom swinging was the most prominent movement.

But Sally's range is broader since the Los Angeles riots. She had several strong shows about racism and police brutality. In an exploration of hatred on campus she dealt with a dismal racial brawl which caused most of the college's black students to leave; she put on an Afro-American undergraduate who decided not to be forced out in the face of KKK threats. Her show has undergone more change than many

others in terms of adding social dimension.

During this February's Sweeps, for example, she presented a program on AIDS, which is claiming the lives of more heterosexual women. She also brought back a guest who in 1991 had said changing his sex from male to female had been the greatest event in life; this year the same guest felt the operation was a terrible mistake.

"SOB BROTHERS"

Although Geraldo Rivera bills himself as an investigative reporter (and his early documentaries earned him that reputation), I consider him a "sob brother." His show sometimes does a laudable investigation, but unfortunately most of the time he digs at a dismal level.

All mainstream talk programs do some probing and research on their subjects; Geraldo tends to wallow in people's agonies. I got a clue to his taste for the seamy on my first day of watching when the producers of several talks appeared on Joan Rivers' show. Geraldo's producer said the reason so many Americans watched the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings was not that they were concerned about Thomas' appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, but because they wanted to hear the "dirty sex details."

"Dirty details" the limit of people's interest? I think such narrow, off-the-mark thinking explains the often offensive flavor of Geraldo's menu. When Geraldo's stance on camera is smirking, smug, superior and exploitative, he makes you want to hit out at him, even against your will.

I call Maury Povich "sob brother" as a protest, because I think he could aim higher than he dares; he does intellectual slumming. I keep feeling he's a much stronger journalist and more intelligent than he wants to let on. The trouble is his subjects are trivial or trivialized, and his big-brotherly absorption with insignificant intimacies of guests somehow offends me.

Last Spring, when Los Angeles and other cities were exploding, Povich failed to catch up with the riots. On May 4 he did put on one of his better shows—on divorced fathers who do not support their children. But he took only scant notice of the shocking social dimensions in a quick summation, and his interviews were mired in personal "you did/you didn't" recriminations.

Surely Povich can do better: After last May's news stories about a black child taken from white adoptive parents because of the race difference, he aired a thought-provoking and moving program. He showed clips of the screaming child being dragged by a social worker from his loving parents who'd raised him from infancy.

Maury posed the issue: Does a black child adopted by a white family lose identity as a black? One black woman argued that it does; another claimed adoption by whites was better than life in an orphanage. A white author said most cross-race adoptions take place because there are more black children for adoption than black families (who do adopt many) can absorb. The subject was significant; Povich explored it in depth.

And during the silicone implant scare, Povich used the case of a hypnotist to alert women to the dangers of scams. Maury skewered his guest, an ex-policeman who claimed he enlarges breasts by hypnotism for a $1,000 fee. A woman M.D. said two women testifying for such enlargement had been hypnotized into the belief and that the claims were a sham. Povich ended with a timely warning that the silicone scare made deception easier to sell as "another option" and advised women to see their physicians.

Too often though, Maury's subjects still are trite and trifling. During this

The talk shows are neglecting vast areas that would be of public concern. They are so overwhelmed by the bizarre that the commercials now seem more real.

February's sweeps he put on women who claim their dates are jerks and men's counterclaims. The low level of debate was dismaying. With his journalistic and broadcasting background, Povich knows how to be more significant. I wish he were.

UNABASHED COPYCATTING

The talk shows are openly imitative of each other. Competing hosts support each other generously and borrow from each other freely. The same subject, and sometimes the same panelists appear over and over, and not only when a book, movie or performer is being promoted.

What do you do, Oprah asked, when your dream man turns out to be your father? What do you do, Geraldo promos, when your dream man turns out to be your father? Donahue features obese men, Sally Jessy parades large women. Sally Jessy shows male dance strippers and Donahue's male strippers do their act in front of their shocked parents. On Regis and Kathie Lee, Ivana Trump trumpets her book, and then Oprah trumpets Ivana.

The copycat list could go on. There's been the fascinating progress of a 44-year-old woman who married the 14-year-old boy (her son's friend), abandoning her other children and husband. She went from Sally to Donahue to Springer; her talk-panelist career may not be over yet.

The hosts also play every variation on a theme. True accusations of rape, false accusations. Women raped by their doctors, by their therapists, by religious counselors. Girl children sexually abused by fathers, boy children sexually abused by mothers.

To some extent, the fact that shows pursue the same topics and guests is not as negative as it seems. Relatively few viewers see all the talks or as many as I did on my watch. Since one broadcast of even the highest-rated show, Oprah, is seen by only one-eighth of the viewers, its content will be new to seven-eighths of the potential audience. But as some viewers will have caught an earlier version, producers will try for a fresh angle or a carry-forward subject.

There are several explanations for the endemic copycatting. One is that producers play musical chairs in working among the shows. But the sameness may have more to do with scraping for sensational themes within the narrow spectrum of subjects on which the talks have chanced their ratings.

Another factor is that talk shows are the medium of choice for swarms of publicists promoting new books, movies, records, actors and musicians, as well as institutions and causes. For the talk show bookers, the promoters provide manna—free stories, experts and angles for a genre that devours material voraciously in a hungry maw. It makes for a strong symbiotic relationship in which the PR people play a role in setting the talk show agenda.

As a current way of broadening their perspective and getting away from "talking heads," some hosts are

trying new visual techniques. One approach is the use of tape clips from their earlier shows (long a feature on Donahue). Another is the use of graphics to underline or explain the social dimension of a problem. A compelling visual device on a recent Jane Whitney program on the effects of rape said, "By the time this program is over, 75 women will have been raped." Montel Williams, in a recent program on racial prejudice, used the graphic statistic that hate crimes are up by 24%.

Programs are also going outside the studio. Jerry Springer took his cameras to a woman's shelter in Wisconsin to interview an abused-mother who fled there with her two small children. Another segment recorded the moving interview by an assistant district attorney of a woman who'd been repeatedly beaten by her husband. These clips stressed the message that women can escape from an abusive situation and society can protect victims.

THE NEWCOMERS

Jerry Springer, ex-lawyer, ex-Mayor of Cincinnati and continuing news co-anchor in that city, rolled out his syndicated talk show slowly in 1991 and enjoys having as his executive producer Burt Dubrow, who guides the successful Sally Jessy show. His company is Multimedia, which also distributes Donahue, Sally and Limbaugh. Three times weekly now, Springer flies between Cincinnati and Chicago, where he tapes two programs at a time.

There's been speculation that Springer is being groomed against the day Donahue retires. I hope Donahue goes another six years to beat the 30-year Carson record. In any case, Springer has been doing a creditable program. He's not afraid of hot current social and political issues.

This January Springer tackled the timely question, "Are women being short-changed in the political process?" He took up the cases of Zoe Baird, whose nomination as Attorney General was withdrawn after she revealed she'd employed illegal aliens, and Carol Mosely-Braun, elected as the first black woman to the U.S. Senate although accused of improprieties related to her mother's Medicaid status.

One guest said women entering the political arena are more vulnerable, because in their roles as caretakers of children and parents they confront confusing regulations on domestic help and long-term nursing care. Springer agreed that judging women by a double standard is grossly unfair, and a woman in his audience said her concern was not with trivialities some members of the press pursue, but with substantive questions like "what is this politician going to do to help the unemployed?"

Springer is serious. His personality is warm, likable and mature. He doesn't try to be clever or to make jokes. He stays away from sleaze ("I won't be dancing with Chippendales," he promised.) On Election Day he dealt with inner city violence by gangs and police roughing up young-

Three times a week, Springer flies between Cincinnati, where he co-anchors a news program, and Chicago, where he tapes two talk shows at a time.

'I suffer from Blabbitis, but when friends condemn the genre wholesale I find myself defending it. The programs do deal with some worthwhile issues.'

sters. He pointed out, in a unique feature of his shows, a short finale editorial, "We hide the poor, until the city burns."

Typical also was his ending a program on verbal abuse: "One human being inflicting purposeful pain on another can be just as hurtful as blows which are physical and often more permanent ... Those who receive verbal abuse don't have to take it. Whether it's your boss or your spouse, you ought to make it clear that you are a person before you are either an employee or a wife. That the conversation is over as soon as it becomes abusive."

Another personality launched in 1991 was Montel Williams, an ex-U.S. Navy intelligence officer who studied Russian, Chinese, international security and engineering at the Naval Academy. Black, bald-pated, lean and athletic, Williams reminds me of a more delicate Louis Gosset Jr., who played the tough drill sergeant in *An Officer and a Gentleman*. But he started low-keyed and tentative. He was sympathetic, gentle, sensitive.

Although few of his subject broke new ground, I liked an early program on children whose allergies turn them violent. He showed the children sitting quietly onstage and then tapes of them having a seizure after exposure to an allergy-causing substance. Mothers reported being blamed for misdiagnosed "psychotic" problems and a pediatric allergist offered advice on getting help.

Another Williams show dealt with hermaphrodites, people born with attributes of both genders. I was impressed by his dealing with this as a serious medical subject rather than a bit of sexual voyeurism. The program was closely copied by Jerry Springer, who used two of Williams' guests as panelists, and by Povich, who also picked up the theme seriously.

By last Spring Williams was more assured, but his subjects were mostly derivative. During May Sweeps he arranged married couples in a mock boxing ring to discuss why they fight; offered "makeovers" with new hairdo's, cosmetics and high fashion; featured prostitutes who justified their profession and wanted it legal; interviewed gossip columnists on how they obtain their dirt.

I should also note that Williams did a topnotch program on racism last May; he was almost as timely as Donahue. And this year his program on the growth of hate crimes, in which he tackled white, black and Asian bigotry, was absolutely first rate. Williams' heart was really in these programs and it showed. If Williams is ready to forge his own way, maybe he should listen to himself more often.

ANYONE FOR FUN?

Has anyone broken the daytime talk mold? A few have tried. Jenny Jones, a blonde standup comic, tried something different when she started in Fall 1991 with a light-hearted talk hour. She did lampoons, career women interviews, beauty and other how-to's, polls, a running contest for

baby pictures for which she created gag lines.

She shared concerns urgent for the 30's-to'40's crowd. She dealt with infidelity, insecurities, child-bearing decisions, dirty divorce tricks, and sex. Young marrieds' sexual curiosity was much on her agenda. Jenny had a delightful sense of the absurd. I found her delicious, high-spirited and hoped she'd be around for a long time.

In one early show, for example, Jenny opened with a skit on "joys" of motherhood—washing dirty diapers, burping an infant who throws up on her best power suit, etc.—then interviewed career women who chose to remain childless, dealing with real dilemmas for career women bumping against the biological clock. On another day, she asked, "Does Your Sex Drive Match Your Spouse's?" and reported that in 67% of cases, the answer is No. When a biologist suggested that the age of men's strongest sex drive doesn't match the time of their competency, Jenny mourned, "What a waste!" Still she always managed to look farm-girl apple-cheeked and innocent.

For a while, Jenny was different. But her ratings in her original format weren't going up fast enough. At renewal time it was nip and tuck whether she'd survive. Then in 1992's May sweeps, I saw that Jenny had drifted into Sally's sob sister mode with a show about step families—happy and sad histories. To bring up her rating, evidently it had been decided Jenny had to do a more mainstream show.

By 1993, subjects tend to be sensational, rather than comic, although her manner is still light. On a Monday she dealt with men who said their wives trapped them into marriage by getting pregnant. Tuesday she was into incest confrontation. Wednesday she dealt with husbands who can't stop cheating on wives and Thursday's guests were 40-year-old women who like teenage boys. Jenny's Nielsen ratings have gone up. She's still charming, but we lost some lively daytime humor.

SOME LIGHTER SHOWS

The Punch-and-Judy show called *Live! Regis and Kathie Lee* has passed the rating test. It eases viewers into starting the day. But when I first watched it, I was, to be truthful, mystified. During Sweeps time they competed against sex-changees, transvestites, satanic cults, nymphos, et al, but with what appeared to be light banter. No strippers? No sleaze? No dirt? They didn't seem to be even trying. What was their secret of success?

I followed them for several months; their topics stayed frothy. Regis clearly had senior billing, held the cards on who and what's next, and Kathie had second billing, but would get in a well aimed verbal peck. Regis pretended he must ride with that, making him her straight man, gallant but exasperated. I noted that their guests tended to be actors and actresses, singers and musicians and that male guests were often easy-on-the-eyes.

The challenge to be relevant becomes crucial as competition increases for station availabilities, viewers' time and tighter advertising budgets.

Trying to avoid 'talking head syndrome', the producers are using more graphics, tape inserts and traveling outside the studio.

Eventually, I began to like their shows. One week last May, they celebrated Regis' 30th anniversary on the air and Kathie narrated an album of his comedy clips. I discovered what an amusing man he can be. I especially enjoyed his impersonation of a strip dancer and, in a white wig, his takeoff on Donahue. I wrote in my journal, "Am beginning to acquire a taste for their style. Or am I just getting satiated with the steady heavy diet on other talks?"

I've also become involved with their personal lives, marriages, children, Kathie's pregnancy, Regis' health. Recently, when Regis was hospitalized for an angioplasty operation, he was really funny on his return. He argued that they had booked no sleaze for the Sweeps, but wasn't it great that he'd come up with a cardiac problem in time for National Heart Week?

Because their program is live and they often display morning paper headlines, one gets a sense of connection to the real world. But they stay light. Typically Kathie acts endearing toward Regis and then suddenly slaps him down. Last year, talking about why she needles Regis, she confessed she didn't know why but that somehow he brings it out in her. Maybe that makes the show work. I'll turn it on while I take a second cup of coffee.

Joan Rivers might have clicked if she had inherited Johnny Carson's latenight slot. She's an experienced comedienne, outrageous, quick and just plain pratfall funny. For daytime, I find her show, in which she combines boy/girl skits with interviews and celebrity gossip, the wrong message in the wrong place. And if I were giving a back-handed award for the most explicit show of last May's sweeps, I might present it to Rivers. That program may have told everything I might have ever wanted to know about alternative sex but didn't have time to ask. And then some.

She brought us details about a middle-aged couple whose sex life had lost something after 20 years of marriage and who started a swinging club in their home. Next she hosted a pair of "mistresses" from a club that offers sadomasochistic pleasures.

One "mistress" turned out to be a male in drag. He told Joan women as well as men visit the club, that the mistresses give pain "only if requested." But the mistress has to know what she's doing, how far to go, and stop when asked. He handed Rivers a wicked-looking cat-o'-nine-tails. She flipped it across her wrist and said it hurts. He agreed, it can do serious damage unless you know how to use it. The expertise is in the wrist.

Moving on to some men from a "Long John Club", Joan heard that clubmembers have to be well-endowed to join. The minimum: nine inches. Ruler in hand, Rivers measured off nine inches and, in her softest *faux naif* voice, from time to time asked her producer for permission to say this or that on the air. Of course, he always says yes.

Trade paper ads for Rivers are headlined "Gossip Gossip Gossip". Her inside-dirt segments are in the tradition of the tabloid and radio columnists like Louella Parsons,

Hedda Hopper and Walter Winchell of the 1930's and 40's. But Joan's ratings have drifted down. Perhaps a nighttime slot would help.

Lacking in daytime television is a syndicated talk dealing seriously with ideas and cultural issues. The nightly PBS series *Charlie Rose* is rebroadcast at 2 PM in my area, suggesting there's room for more literate talk during the day. Rose is known for his years on the CBS *Nightwatch* and other programs; he did a syndicated talk show that was short-lived in the '80's.

Now I find him always interesting, mature, informed in dealing with public events, controversies, authors, etc.

Sometimes his hour covers three or four subjects. Many are memorable—for example, Rose's unscheduled interview with Salman Rushdie, under a lifetime sentence of death for writing *The Satanic Verses*, who made a poignant plea for freedom of expression and help.

FAULTS & FALSE FEARS

Talk shows have been faulted for being tawdry and sensational, interfering with the legal and political processes, and for dealing with trifles rather than big political/economic issues. When I look at the range of subjects, however, I find mitigating facts. They have helped correct legal injustices, probed police brutality, discussed crime and how we deal with it, spotlighted bigotry and explored health issues. Regretfully, they mostly failed to examine the pro choice/pro life issue that polarized the country, and the only program I caught on abortion was Donahue's.

Yet when talks stray into politics, some journalists express concern, fearing that politicians can use talk shows to duck tough questions. True, talk audiences may be less informed than journalists, but we saw amateurs ask hard-hitting questions of presidential candidates and even redirect the content of campaign debate. We need a better informed citizenry and that requires *all* media and forums—press conferences, political reporters, commentators and the talk show amateurs.

The genre is faulted as not adequately reflecting the news that interests people. I checked the January, 1993, talk programs against the same month's *Times Mirror News Interest Index*, a poll that asks people how closely they followed stories in the press and on air. The big-interest events were GIs sent to Somalia, the economy, START Treaty, Clinton's appointments and economic conference, Bush's pardons, war in Bosnia. You'd never know from the talk shows.

Except for Limbaugh's lambasting, they were blind to political/economic events. The only headline subject I caught on the talks was the ninth-place story, Prince Charles and Diana's separation. I had to go back over a year to recall a program on the recession, when Donahue hosted 200 workers who had lost jobs.

The news interest poll found that two out of five Americans saw at least one of the three network movies on Amy Fisher. The lurid case, with its mix of sex, infidelity, a shooting and juicy legal jousting, also provided material for several talk shows. News that does get on their agenda tends to be sensational, like the Kennedy/Palm Beach trial, which sparked programs on rape, and headline stories on child molestation and abuse, which triggered shows on those subjects. The operative question seems to be: Can the subject be translated into terms that hook the home viewer?

There are vast areas, however, that the talks are neglecting. Perhaps it's my background on mass magazines and editing a consumer publication, but I believe daytime audiences may be open to more factual, realistic and constructive reports on working, child

It's not just the appeal of sleaze. The talk show is the basic form of television—a human image and the warmth of the human voice.

care, economics, and, yes, what's going on outside the home. These subjects can be made relevant to most viewers.

That challenge becomes more crucial as more new shows compete for the limited number of station availabilities and viewers' shrinking leisure time. Not to mention tighter advertising budgets.

MORE AND MORE TALK

Fate may have given talk shows low status, but they offer high stakes. So newcomers keep coming. Two fledgling hosts who entered the field in 1992 are Jane Whitney and Vicki Lawrence. Both are pleasing.

Blonde Jane Whitney is hard-edged, a strong, energetic, subtle interviewer who will show her personal feeling. Some typical Whitney subjects: medical mishaps and malpractice, sexual harassment of children. She works hard to be informative (using graphics). No real departures from the usual here, but a richer mix of serious material. She probes deeply into panelists' emotions giving us a kind of hands-on group psychotherapy session.

Vicki Lawrence, a veteran comic actress from the Carole Burnett programs, is warm and closer to the entertainment world, originating from Los Angeles. A typical telecast this February was "growing up in the spotlight." If featured actors who had played young siblings on TV sitcoms. The chit-chat was good fan material and also offered some insights into child/family relationships.

But there are other newcomers coming this Fall. Columbia Pictures' Ricki Lake (she was in ABC's *China Beach* and the film *Hairspray*) will go after younger demographics. Two black hosts, Les Brown and Bertice Berry, have been given firm commitments. Brown is a motivational speaker and trainer who stresses people's need to take an active role reshaping their lives. His new show is distributed by King World, which syndicates Oprah. With Oprah dominating afternoon schedules, Brown will be positioned as a morning personality. Bertice Berry, a Ph.D. in sociology, has been giving some 200 speeches and lectures a year and doing stand-up comedy. She plans to use humor as an essential ingredient in an issue-oriented show.

The genre has become so popular that cable's Entertainment Channel now runs *Talk Soup*, a daily half-hour of talk show highlights.

There already has been some shakeout. For example, the *Cristina* show was rolled out with fanfare and might have met the special needs and experiences of our growing Hispanic population. But the show soon creaked into the same subjects as mainstream talks, and was canceled after 11 weeks. I'd caught some of Cristina's Spanish-language programs, which continue. I found these more interesting, even though I couldn't follow the dialogue as well, because these programs and studio audiences dealt candidly with the problems of first-generation immigrants.

To sum up: In the coming shakeout, and the failure rate *is* high, which shows survive and which sink will, of course, depend largely on how viewers express their views with their dials and remote controls. How do I feel after some 16 months of monitoring? I suffer some from blabbitis resulting from over-exposure to talkdrivel and talkdirt pollution. Yet when friends continue to dismiss the talk programs out of hand and wholesale, I find myself defending them. I often argue that there is enough worthwhile to draw millions of viewers.

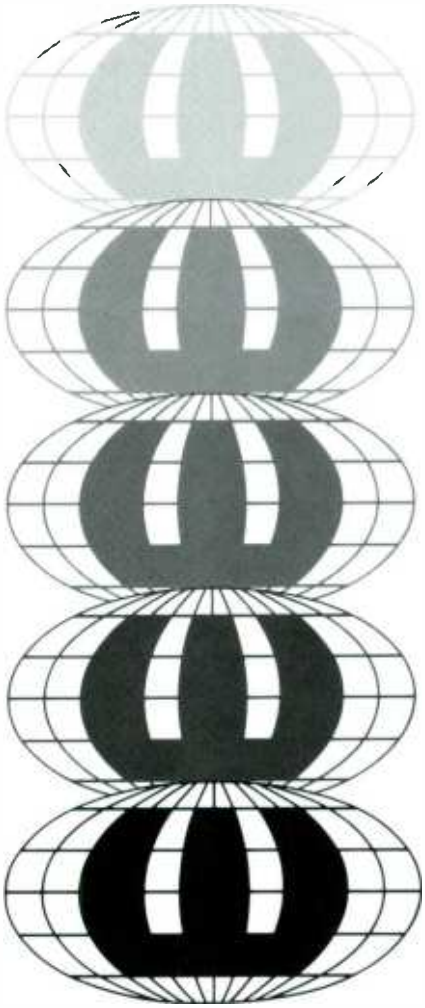
I find myself pointing out that there's all the hype about the coming of *interactive* TV, but that the talk programs are giving us interaction between show and audience right now. I argue that in their way some programs frequently do serve as a forum of ideas, a mirror of and an influence on American life. It's not surprising that they've flourished. It's not just a response to sleaze. The genre is, after all, the most basic form of television, the picture of a human being, the sound of human communication. Talk was a key format in television's infancy; pros even now recall early personalities like Faye Emerson, Wendy Barrie, Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg.

I've heard myself saying that intellectuals might be less snobbish and more involved in this area of pop culture. I also think the producers would do well to raise their own standards, learn to use more flair and showmanship to explore subjects of broad concern, and attract more informed, diverse and dissenting individuals to the studio audience.

The category of syndicated talk shows has zoomed from eight in 1990 to 13 this season. And the number of viewers to the average talk show has risen to over 4,000,000. I wonder what will happen when the competition gets tougher, whether the proliferation will bring us a Tower of Babble or help us benefit from a diverse, pluralistic society.

My own viewing is increasingly selective now, but I check in from time to time, even though this assignment is over. I expect to keep sampling. I think the current program changes, small as they may be, are for the better. Maybe talk shows will keep improving. Oh yes, my back is better, too: small changes, but definite improvements. ■

Sara Welles was vice-president in public affairs for Citibank/Citicorp after a long career in magazines and publishing. She co-authored *Born Female* and several other books and was articles editor of *Woman's Home Companion* and a senior editor of *Mademoiselle, House & Garden* and other magazines. She was a winner of a National Press Club award.



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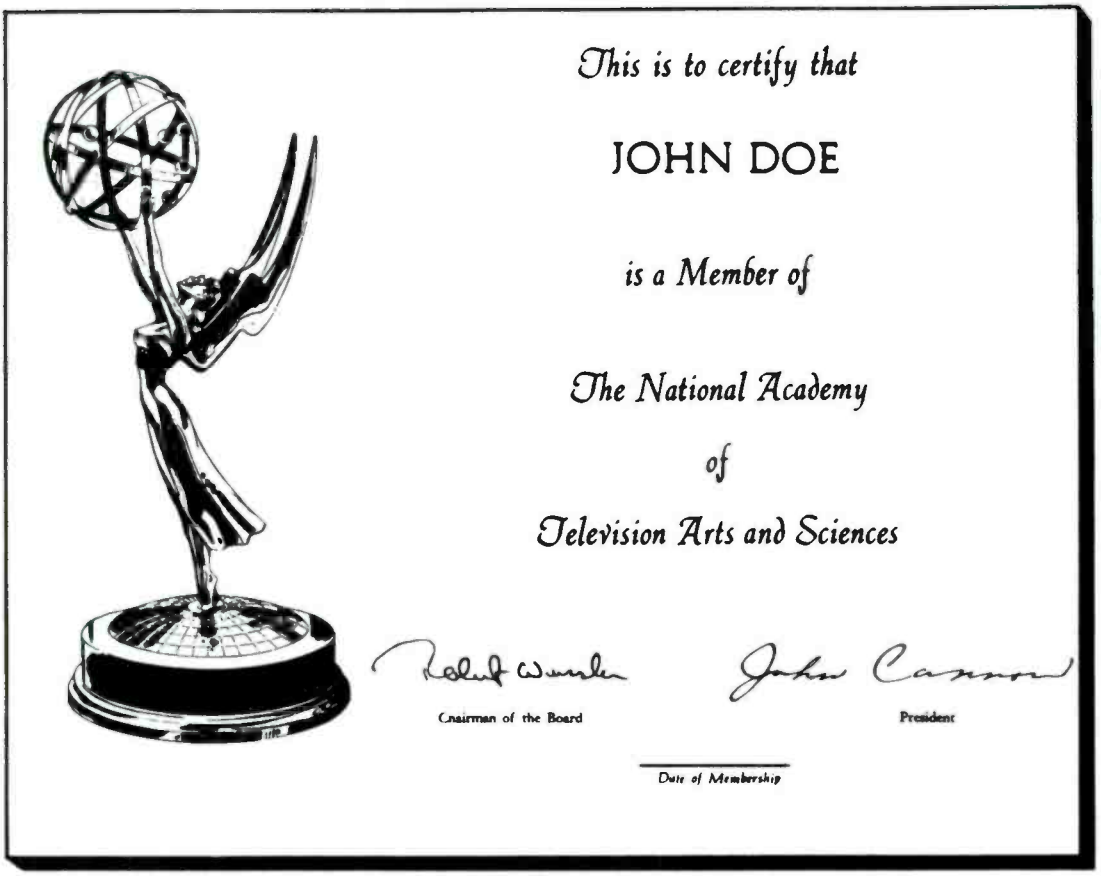

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ALBANIAN ADVENTURE: TELEVISION ON A SHOESTRING

BY BERNARD S. REDMONT

Tirana, Albania

As we walked across the vast Skanderbeg Square in brilliant sunshine, my new friend, Albanian TV journalist Agron Bala, gripped my arm and cried, "We Albanians are like people who have been shut up in pitch darkness for 50 years, and suddenly the doors and windows are thrown open wide, and the light is so dazzling that we can't make things out clearly yet."

It was an appropriate image.

For three weeks, I had been working as a consultant and Volunteer Executive at Albanian Television, on an assignment from the International Executive Service Corps. In the poorest country of Europe, once the most rigid dictatorship of the communist empire, Albanian TV is letting the light in.

Bala had just produced the first 30-minute segment of a series on Europe, with the cooperation of the European Community. It was a beautiful job, narrated and edited by him in Tirana, with material he had gathered in Brussels.

"You see, we Albanians want to join Europe," he said.

Albanian TV staffers are performing daily miracles with the most meager, primitive and obsolete equipment imaginable. They earn salaries equivalent to $20 a month.

As a former CBS News correspondent and former journalism/communication dean at Boston University, I had been asked to advise Albanian TV news

directors and staff. They sought help in improving their news production, reporting, writing and general coverage. Homer Lane, ex-general manager of the CBS affiliate station in Phoenix, Arizona, had made an exploratory trip a few months earlier.

TV Director Qemal Sakajeva and his aides affirmed from the start that they wished to maintain an independent, democratic, non-partisan approach to news broadcasting, in the Western manner, although the TV here was a state-operated public enterprise.

Deputy Director Leka Bungo remarked to me, "After 50 years, reform is difficult, but our duty is to keep the TV out of the hands of the politicians." Were they being candid, or telling an American what they thought he would like to hear?

There is as yet no private TV competition within the country, but Albanians are able to pick up Italian and other nearby TV broadcasts on their sets. And program directors look forward to the early establishment of at least one additional channel, private or public.

Albanian TV is slowly emerging from the totalitarian habits of the former communist system into a democratically oriented pluralistic system within a slowly developing market economy. The legacy is disheartening.

A former head of Albanian radio and TV, Todi Lubonja, had been imprisoned for 17 years on charges of subverting the state. His son, Fatos Lubonja, had also spent 17 years in prison on political charges, and just before my arrival in Tirana told a harrowing story of the dictatorship's horrors, in a report in the publication *Index on Censorship*.

Albania has been subjected to foreign domination for centuries although it fought constantly for independence. Albanians always considered themselves a distinct ethnic group, with their own Indo-European language and culture. They are the direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians who were the first and oldest inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula. In 1912, after 450 years, Albania finally won independence from the Ottoman Turks.

Albanians have kept a warm spot in their hearts for the United States. Through the years of the King Zog regime, Mussolini's conquest, German occupation and the cruel despotism of the Enver Hoxha and Ramaz Alia dictatorships, they never forgot the support they received from President Woodrow Wilson for their independence.

Albania had been a satellite of Stalinist USSR, Yugoslavia and China, in turn. This little country, one of the smallest in Europe and not much larger than the state of Maryland, had been second only to the Soviet Union among Eastern European nations in the amount of its programming for radio listeners abroad, transmitting in 17 languages 24 hours a day. But TV was another story.

The revolutions in Eastern Europe filtered in late, spurred by student demonstrations at the end of 1990. Elections in March 1992 resulted in the victory of the Democratic Party. A physician, Sali Berisha, became President.

But the economy of the Land of the Eagle, as Albanians call their country, is in a shambles. The landscape is disfigured by 300,000 to 800,000 (estimates vary) one-man bunkers which dictator Hoxha, in a paranoid frenzy, ordered his hapless subjects to construct. Hoxha conjured up the specter of an ever-impending invasion by the U.S. and the West.

The country was left in squalor. More than half the people are unemployed. The infrastructure is devastated. Things break down and don't get repaired. Food supplies are scarce.

Albanian TV reflects this misery. Denouncing "immoral" foreign TV broadcasts, Hoxha once said that "having a TV set is like keeping a whore in the house," but he started Albanian TV to combat foreign transmissions. Experimental TV began in 1968, first three evenings a week from 6 to 9 p.m. and later daily. The Chinese helped to construct the TV building.

Until the recent flowering of democracy, Albanian TV featured mostly interminable political speeches and propaganda, a habit that persists in today's penchant for "talking heads." Foreign programs had been avoided because of their depiction of expensive consumer goods, fancy clothes, fine food, cars and luxurious homes. No individuals were allowed to own private cars in Hoxhaland. That has changed. Television sets and cars have become the consumer items of choice.

By late spring and early summer of 1992, five or six hours of daily programming had expanded to 11 hours—from 12 noon to 11 p.m. And more on weekends.

By the end of 1992, the TV was broadcasting five newscasts a day—at 12 noon, 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Some run 30 minutes, others 5 to 10 minutes, although stories are often repeated.

Footage from overseas comes via a satellite dish that can pick up CNN, RAI One and Two from Italy, Francophone TV from France, ITN World News and Sky TV from Britain, German TV and Washington's official Worldnet.

The news department uses material not only from the state-run Albanian Telegraphic Agency, but also from Reuter, Agence France-Presse, the Italian ANSA and the New China News Agency.

The professional staff, mostly young, is hard working, enthusiastic, and eager to learn Western ways. News director Shkelqim Alia met with me daily, encouraged me to sit in on the morning assignment meetings, and arranged two large seminar sessions which I led. One was a weekly editorial conference for self-criticism, which I was asked to chair.

TV Director Sakajeva asked me to participate as part of a six-person jury to judge the qualifications and performances of 35 candidate TV journalists, from whom two or three were to be selected in a national competition for staff jobs.

Much of the time, I acted as field producer with Albanian crews covering stories in and around Tirana. My aim was to achieve wider understanding of good professional journalistic practices and ethical standards. We worked together on news formats, leads, interviewing techniques, delivery, writing to visuals and video and audio coordination. I emphasized the importance of fairness and balance and broadening the spectrum of what was considered news.

Many spoke some English and others French, Italian or Russian, so I managed even when no interpreter was on hand. My wife, Joan, worked as a volunteer English teacher at the TV headquarters.

One of those who interpreted frequently was a young woman TV journalist, Vjollca Vokshi. In professional competence and presence on camera, she could rival the best of the West. Vjollca writes, edits and reports foreign news—she has carried out assignments abroad—speaks English and Italian, and anchors daily newscasts. Like 70 percent of the Albanians, Vjollca is a Moslem, but she says she is "indifferent to religious practice."

Reis Cico, another foreign news expert and broadcaster with a vague resemblance to Peter Jennings, had covered presidential trips to Germany and Austria and speaks with authority

about Bosnia-Herzogovina, Kosovo and the Islamic world.

Parliamentary reporters Amalia Dhamo and Timo Luto are seasoned professionals. Producer-reporters Pirro Vesho and Artjan Tepelena, though younger, handle the control room chaos with aplomb.

Everybody agrees the biggest problem is technical resources. Almost everything is in short supply—cameras, electronic editing equipment, videotape cassettes, desks, chairs, even copy paper. The news department has no dictionary.

Archives are sparse, because videocassettes are erased and reused. The newsrooms have no clocks, although the control room has. The entire TV headquarters has only three typewriters (manual)—and as for computers, forget it.

During my stay, only two field cameras were available in Tirana, so reporters were rationed and had to stand in line for crews. Camera crews often worked on six stories every day. ENG equipment is mostly 3/4 inch Sony Betacam and German Bosch antiques.

Only a few old vehicles are available to transport crews to story sites, and gasoline is in short supply. Provincial correspondents have to work with ancient hand-held wind-up cinema cameras, and not much film.

When devastating floods hit the interior of the country during my stay, TV journalists scraped together footage by hitch-hiking on a Defense Ministry helicopter.

The TV headquarters doesn't have a single Teleprompter. Anchors usually work with handwritten scripts, and frequently have to decipher another journalist's handwriting.

Still, the news is somehow covered and aired.

Albania uses the German and Italian PAL color system but can convert from the French Secam and the American NTSC.

State budgetary funds are scarce for every purpose, and are doled out parsimoniously to the TV. Hope was widespread that the highest priority would be given soon to improving and modernizing equipment. The role of television in accurately and completely informing the people in a free and democratic society is more than obvious.

Albanian television authorities said they would be grateful if equipment could be donated by American foundations, corporations, networks or TV stations upgrading their own material and discarding still valuable hardware. NEARO, The New England Albanian Relief Organization, fax (508) 885-7659, would ship it to Tirana.

Better organization of work and professional training is another need, although many of the journalists are outstanding.

Mentalities need to change, and this does not come quickly. Old habits of fear and timidity have to be discarded. More imagination and innovation also are needed. Reporters often asked me how to resist pressure groups, official or otherwise, while maintaining sound news judgment.

Sometimes, without a standards and practices code of any sort, they followed the notion that "anything goes." I was told that before I arrived, the television showed a re-enactment of a particularly gruesome murder, with pictures of the murderers clutching their weapons, an assortment of iron bars. There was also coverage of a public hanging of the killers.

Even in the brief time I was present, TV reporters became more visually oriented, began to understand they had to curb the habitual, dull meetings with "talking heads," in favor of more visually interesting material and "show and tell" rather than just tell. Stories became briefer, and there were more of them.

Editors began to think about better

story selection, with a broader range of subject matter and more attention to the day-to-day concerns of the average person. This meant more human interest, food availabilities in markets, fluctuating prices and inflation, housing, electrical energy, education, crime, fires, traffic accidents, strikes, pollution, medicine and health, women's concerns, cultural news, religion, new enterprises, and particularly more investigative reporting.

Power outages lasting hours or even days, cuts of hot water, heating or even water supply were so prevalent that reporters no longer considered them news.

Meteorologists were also in short supply, and weather reports were perfunctory. I suggested personalizing the weather with an on-camera figure. An earlier American visitor had suggested getting Swissair to sponsor the weather (it flies to Tirana, as does Alitalia), thus earning commercial revenue as well. As the economy develops, more commercials will be aggressively sought to provide needed income.

Albanian television has no "ratings" system but is mulling the idea of "focus groups" to identify viewer likes and dislikes. Nobody has taken a census of how many TV sets are in use, but huge numbers have come into the country lately through relatives of Albanians living abroad, and many TVs are on sale in shops. There is no use tax, as is the case in many European countries.

With proper antenna adjustment, viewers can pick up neighboring transmissions from Italy, Greece and the former Yugoslavia. In fact, some say that Italian and to a lesser extent Greek TV transmissions were a factor in the overthrow of the Communist regime in Albania. Once TV receivers became available, the Hoxha dictatorship was unable to prevent the infiltration of programs from abroad. Albania is only 45 miles from the heel of Italy, and less than two miles from the Greek island of Corfu.

Programming today is burgeoning, under program director Robert Papa, who has observed at the BBC, and has absorbed huge amounts of U.S. broadcasting know-how through books and magazines. Papa anchors and produces his own weekly variety show called *Focus* which is heavily influenced by MTV.

He schedules a movie every night, at 8:30 p.m. Often, it is an old Hollywood product, aired in a kind of triple-play version—the original American film had been dubbed into Italian for its showing in Italy, and to this the Albanians then added subtitles in their language.

Children's hour is usually from 5 to 6 p.m. One day it aired a Laurel and Hardy cartoon. Every day there is a foreign language lesson from 4:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., usually English from the BBC or Italian. Afternoon soap operas or series shows are generally Italian-dubbed, with Albanian subtitles.

Papa had been using an old Christian Broadcasting Network serial, *Another Life*, but conceded that it was crude and badly produced, and he planned to eliminate it. He suggested the main reason it was used was that it was provided free.

Sports is a major feature, mostly soccer and some football. Folk music is also popular. One Saturday night, I watched a locally produced variety show with erotic dances, a disco dancing competition, and contemporary rock music, hard and soft, that could have been aired anywhere.

Plans are being discussed for a second state TV channel, to be furnished entirely with satellite material from abroad.

I was told this was technically and practically feasible without delay and at little extra cost. Papa would like to use massive amounts of CNN in origi-

nal English on this channel. He thinks he may start using CNN late nights without translations in 1993 on the existing public channel, even before any decision is made on a second channel.

A verdict on a second channel that would be privately owned awaits authorizing legislation. It has been reported that the Italian Berlusconi group is interested.

In a nod to pluralism, Albanian TV has a Board of Directors of 11 "external" members with proportional representation by party—seven from the Democratic Party, three from the Socialist (ex-Communist) Party, and one from the Social Democratic Party. It also includes five "internal" members, the top brass of Albanian TV and radio, and one representative of the working journalists.

The system is far from perfect. The heavy hand of the state is still evident. But now that the tyrants are gone from Tirana, glimmers of daylight are beginning to glow on the tube. Stay tuned. ■

Bernard S. Redmont is the author of the recently published book, *Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent*. He reported from Moscow and Paris for CBS News, and for Group W, Westinghouse Broadcasting Company.

"QUOTE... UNQUOTE"

President, King & Media

"... By March 18th, when Bill Clinton spoke at the Radio & Television Correspondent's dinner, the new President had held twenty-five sessions of one kind or another with representatives of the provincial media but he had not held a single press conference with those seated before him. They were his hosts, but he would not play host to them, with a full-dress press conference in the East Room, until March 23rd. The President was hardly embarrassed or apologetic.'You know why I can stiff you on the press conferences?' he asked. 'Because Larry King liberated me by giving me to the American people directly.'

"We're not pleased, it's really true,' said Karen Hosler, a Washington correspondent for the *Baltimore Sun*, who is the president of the Whit3e House Correspondents' Association.

• • • • •

"... 'Larry King' has become Clinton's metaphor for the diminishing influence of the Big Media."

—*The Syndicated Presidency*
by Sidney Blumenthal
The New Yorker
April 5, 1993

"FUNNY YOU DON'T LOOK JEWISH..."

THE IMAGE OF JEWS ON CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN TELEVISION

BY ALBERT AUSTER

Michael Steadman, Miles Silverberg, Dr. Joel Fleischman, Stuart Markowitz, Arnie Becker, Jack Stein, Marty Gold, Jerry Seinfeld, *Brit* and Bar Mitzvahs: suddenly prime time American television programming is awash with Jewish characters and references to Jewish traditions and customs. How does one account for this sudden outpouring of Jewish images onto American television screens, and even more important what does it mean?

Needless to say, this is a far cry from the days of the Hollywood Jews who routinely changed the names of their actors from Bernie Schwartz to Tony Curtis and Sophia Kosow to Sylvia Sydney, and steered clear of any topics that might even remotely remind audiences of their Judaism. Similarly, the network Jews, though they never hid their Judaism didn't flaunt it either. It wasn't too long ago that CBS founder William S. Paley reportedly gave up a chance to invest in the hit Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof* because it was "too Jewish."

By the same token the network Jews

rarely, if ever, produced shows that contained Jewish characters or Jewish consciousness. And although *The Goldbergs* flourished on both radio and TV, it only survived because it was well within the limits of ethnic comedy established by *Amos n'Andy*. *The Goldbergs*, however, was more than matched by closet Jews such as Jack Benny and George Burns, whose Jewishness was submerged within the context of their eccentric and essentially gentile ensembles. Indeed the only way the mostly Jewish writers of *Your Show of Shows* found to express their yiddishkeit was with shtick such as naming a samurai character, in one of their parodies of Japanese films, *ganza mishpocha*.

Things hadn't changed much even in the mid-seventies. Certainly, no one went as far as network execs did in the sixties in laying down the law to Carl Reiner when he submitted the original script for what would later become, after it had been "de-Jewishized" and "Midwestized", the *Dick Van Dyke Show*. Nevertheless, the overriding trend was for hazily defined ethnicity. Thus, as Danny Arnold the creator of *Barney Miller* explained about his leading character, a New York City police precinct captain, "We never said Barney was Jewish and we never said he wasn't. We deliberately called him Miller because it was an ethnic-nonethnic name."

This practice even extended to other ethnic groups. For instance, Norman Lear, who is Jewish, patterned the character of Archie Bunker in *All in the Family* after his father, and the character was played by Carroll O'Connor, who was unmistakeably Irish. Nonetheless, Archie was neither Irish or Jewish. Just as mysterious was the ethnicity of Alex Reiger on *Taxi*, and the medical examiner *Quincy*, both played by actors, Judd Hirsch and Jack Klugman respectively.

The only exception to this rule was the CBS sitcom *Rhoda*. Rhoda was a spinoff of the fabulously successful *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, in which Rhoda Morgenstern (Valerie Harper), a transplanted New York Jew, was Mary's self deprecatory, man-hungry best friend and upstairs neighbor. Resettled in New York in her own sitcom, and surrounded by a supporting cast that included her equally self deprecatory, weight and man-obsessed sister, Brenda, (Julie Kavner), and her intrusive, overpossessive mother, Ida (Nancy Walker), *Rhoda* was a definitively Jewish character, although she often presented a stereotypically unflattering portrait of Jews, and especially of Jewish women.

Despite this, *Rhoda* was at the cusp of a very important sea change in the depiction of Jews on American television. At once thoroughly assimilated herself, there was yet about her, as well as her mother and sister, reminders of some of the negative cultural traits ascribed to Jews. In this sense *Rhoda* was more symbolic of the assimilated Jews of the 50's and early 60's who never really felt totally accepted by American society, rather than the younger Jews of the late seventies and eighties, whose experiences of Israeli military victories and the civil rights movement had created a greater sense of self esteem and self awareness. Indeed, when this was combined with Jews greater visibility and success in the classrooms and boardrooms of America it led to a higher degree of assertiveness and within a relatively short time a better image of Jews on television.

The turning point for the depiction of Jews on American network television came with the presentation of the 1978 nine and a half hour NBC miniseries *Holocaust*. *Holocaust* was alternately denounced as trivializing an "ontological" event by Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel and praised by critics such as Tom Shales of the *Washington Post* as "the most powerful drama ever seen on TV".

Unlike previous pop-cultural at-

tempts at dealing with the Holocaust such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Judgement at Nuremburg*, which universalized the Holocaust and turned it into a symbol for all humanities and this century's pain, NBC's version produced by Herbert Brodkin reflected those apocalyptic events through the prism of a Jewish and a German family. Thus, the miniseries was able to reflect personalities, events and themes that hitherto had been largely neglected or ignored.

Most notable of the series' elements was the depiction of the upper middle class Weiss family. Thinking themselves completely assimilated into German society and attempting initially to ignore the gathering Nazi darkness, this family couldn't help but strike a chord among American Jews—a chord that previously had been struck by the events of the prior decade that included the Middle East Wars of 1967 and 1973, which aroused fears of another Holocaust; and the terrorist hijacking at Entebbe, where Jews had been separated from other passengers aboard the airplane.

Holocaust *was probably the first exposure many Americans had to the complexity of the Holocaust, showing as it did the extent of the Nazi crimes.*

The series took the Weiss family through some of the horrific events on the road to the "Final Solution" such as Kristellnacht, Babi Yar, and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It then followed the family's destruction in Buchenwald, Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz. And finally with the war over, the last episode left the family's sole survivor, the youngest son Rudi (Joseph Bottoms), poised on the brink of emigration to Palestine.

Paralleling the story of the Weisses was that of the German Dorf family. Finding himself unemployed, Erik Dorf (Michael Moriarity) joins the Nazi party and soon becomes an indispensable aide to Reinhard Heydrich (David Warner), the chief planner of the annihilation of the Jews.

Seen in the U.S. by approximately 120 million people—and later the winner of 8 Emmy awards—*Holocaust* was probably the first exposure many Americans had to the complexity of the Holocaust, showing as it did, the extent of the Nazi crimes, the complicity of some Christians, and even the Christian church in those crimes, as well as the related underlying theme of the creation of the state of Israel as part of the reparations for the Nazi crimes.

Holocaust heightened the awareness of Americans to the crimes committed against the Jews by the Nazi regime. In addition, it legitimized the presentation of Jews and Jewish subjects on television.

After *Holocaust*, there was a steady stream of made-for-TV movies of rather high quality such as *Playing for Time* (1980) and *Skokie* (1981) both of which dealt with the Holocaust, albeit from different perspectives. Leaving aside arguments about the propriety of casting PLO supporter Vanessa Redgrave in the role of Fania Fenelon, the heroic survivor of Auschwitz, or the wisdom of giving exposure to the American Neo-Nazi movement in *Skokie*, these made-for-TV movies presented Jews in a much more realistic and even heroic posture then had previously been the case.

Following these three remarkable miniseries and made-for-TV movies about the Holocaust, the Holocaust became a staple of American TV in films and miniseries: *The Wall* (1982), the dramatization of the John Hersey novel about the Warsaw Ghetto; *Wallenberg* (1985), the story of the

Swedish diplomat who aided the escape of thousands of Hungarian Jews in the last days of the war; *The Beate Karsfield Story* (1986), about the famed Nazi hunter, who captured Klaus Barbie; *Escape from Sobibor* (1986), the story of the revolt and escape of over 300 inmates from the Sobibor concentration camp, and *War and Remembrance* (1987), ABC's 30 hour 100 million dollar epic of the World War II that featured particularly graphic and gruesome scenes filmed on location at Auschwitz.

Although each of these programs captures a different part of the Holocaust story, one theme in particular seems to distinguish them from the earlier Holocaust movies or miniseries, and that is they all eschewed the portrayal of Jews as tragic victims and Christians as motivated by expediency . Indeed, these later miniseries and movies represented Jews as either tragic heroes or Job-like figures, and reflected the fact that not all Christians acted badly.

Ironically, the sense of tragedy that suddenly clung to Jews as a result of the Holocaust dramas didn't immediately translate into more complex and diverse roles for Jews in prime time TV. This, however, would change with the advent of Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll's landmark *Hill Street Blues*. It was conceived by then-NBC President Fred Silverman as a program that would combine the grittiness of the film *Fort Apache* about a police precinct in New York's South Bronx with the comedy of the police sitcom *Barney Miller*, and the documentary intensity of Alan and Susan Raymonds' *The Police Tapes*. Bochco and Kozoll would turn *Hill Street Blues* into a highly unusual and innovative cop show.

Interweaving handheld camera movement with carefully filmed sequences that focused on the lives of cops rather than crimes or criminals, in stories that did not simply end after 50 minutes and sometimes even eschewed happy, or morally reassuring endings, *Hill Street* captured the imagination of a large and adoring audience for upwards of seven seasons. Among its other interesting elements, *Hill Street* also sprouted a veritable rainbow coalition of racial and ethnic characters. Two of these were Jews: the undercover cop Mick Belker (Bruce Weitz) and the deputy commander of the precinct, Lt. Henry Goldblume (Joe Spano).

In many ways both of these Jewish characters were stereotypical, but stereotypical on *Hill Street* always came with a large dose of eccentricity and a huge dose of qualification. Thus, Belker was a cop who would never be accused of overcivility since his most frequently choosen means of subduing criminals was likely to be biting an ear, and his favorite form of address to his usually lumpen "perps" was "hairball" and "dogbreath." Nevertheless, this tough cop was reduced to jello by an off-camera Jewish mother, who would have made Alex Portnoy wince.

By the same token, Henry Goldblume was supposed to have been the quintessential Jewish liberal, who, in twelve years on the police force, hadn't fired his pistol; until his captain ordered him, he hadn't even loaded it. Henry's liberal faith was continually challenged, however, by the despair and destruction of the urban jungle. And more often than not his liberal response was hardly distinguishable from a conservative one.

This pairing of Jews with quite different stereotypical traits was to become a Bochco trademark, appearing again in his follow up to *Hill Street, LA Law*. Needless to say, it was also used by John Falsey and Joshua Brand in their version of what was supposed to be a *Hill Street* in hospital whites, *St. Elsewhere*.

Here the characters that were juxtaposed were the aging, and terminally

ill (initially) patriarch, Dr. Daniel Auschlander (Norman Lloyd) and either the idealistic Dr. Wayne Fiscus (Howie Mandel), the amorous surgeon Dr. Ben Samuels (David Birney), or the tubby resident Dr. Elliot Axelrod (Stephan Furst).

These combinations permitted producers such as Bruce Paltrow and Steven Bochco to get the most mileage out of their Jewish characters. It also allowed them to balance what might be considered a stereotypically "negative" Jewish trait against a "good" one, so as to avoid any criticism for portraying Jews (or for that matter any other ethnic group) in an unfavorable light. An even more important result of this duality, was the perception of Jews whose professional competence was unquestioned and whose unique cultural traits entitled them to a respected place in the culturally pluralistic worlds of urban ghetto police precincts and charity ward hospitals.

Perhaps the penultimate achievement of the Bochco formula was the good Jew/bad Jew combination he forged in *LA Law*. Here the contrast was between the short, cute, cuddly, Jewish tax lawyer, Stuart Markowitz, (Michael Tucker), and the sleazy divorce attorney, Arnie Becker (Corbin Bernsen).

In this arrangement, Markowitz achieves the Portnoyan fantasy of romancing and finally wedding his law firm's tall, beautiful gentile litigator, Anne Kelsey (Jill Eikenberry): in addition, he is the possessor of unusual sexual secrets (the still unrevealed "Venus Butterfly"). On the other hand, Arnie is presented as a handsome rogue, whose idea of the meaningful relationship is a quickie on his office couch.

Unfortunately, despite the higher visibility the Bochco formula afforded Jews on American television, it rarely gave them the opportunity to confront any Jewish issues. Indeed, Arnie's Jewishness is merely a label and probably less important for any insight that it offers into him than the Gucci label on his shoes.

As for Stuart, except for his mother-in-law's vague anti-semitic mutterings prior to his wedding, and his defense of a Rabbi in a circumcision malpractice suit, Stuart's Jewishness has rarely come up; his intermarriage doesn't even raise the issue.

If there seemed to be a kind of unofficial quota on Jewish characters in *LA Law*, the barriers everywhere else seemed to fall. Whether it was the result of the wave of tolerance that had become so pronounced in America from the seventies on, the success of ethnic comedies such as *The Cosby Show*, or the willingness of besieged network programmers encountering declining audiences to take an occasional risk, the number of Jews and the reference to Jewish customs in programs on prime time American television jumped appreciably.

Consequently, on an episode of the hit ABC sitcom *The Wonder Years*, about growing up in the sixties, a comparison was made between the WASP coming of age 13th birthday of the show's main character Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage), and the tradition rich heritage surrounding the Bar Mitzvah of his best friend, the nerdy Paul Pfeifer (Josh Saviano). By the same token the angst-ridden world that was once inhabited by Woody Allen is now also being tenanted by comedian Richard Lewis as the tormented Jewish magazine writer Marty Gold on *Anything But Love*.

In addition, there is the yuppie producer of *Murphy Brown's FYI* Miles Silverberg (Grant Schaud), who is constantly referring to his Judaism or being twitted about it, not to mention the New York Jewish doctor, Joel Fleischman (Rob Morrow), stranded without even a good Jewish deli or Chinese restaurant, in the remote Alaskan town of Cicely, in the CBS series *Northern Exposure*.

This season (92-93) CBS has added

Love and War to its lineup, a new sitcom whose homebase is a restaurant, but neither deli nor Chinese, and its male lead is a Jewish character Jack Stein, played by Jay Thomas. Unfortunately, with the exception of an occasional yiddishism spoken to the camera (the sitcom breaks the fourth wall) and an episode that featured the "December dilemma" (Christmas vs. Hannukah) not much has been made of Jack's Jewishness.

Instead *Love and War*, which debuted after *Murphy Brown's* much ballyhooed rebuke to Vice President Dan Quayle, has relied on the contrast between Jack's short swarthy ethnicity versus his lover "Wally" Porter's (Susan Dey) tall WASP blondness. However, the contrast between the Jewish journalist, Joe six-pack Stein, and the yuppie restauranteur Porter, and 90's dialogue like, "your condoms or mine," might have just the right flavor of populism and elitism to make it the sitcom of the Age of Clinton.

Chicken Soup *was cancelled after seven shows, much to the relief of Mason, and perhaps everybody involved with it.*

Of course, the presence of a Jewish character doesn't guarantee success. The best example of this was the egg laid by the ABC sitcom *Chicken Soup*. Hoping to repeat the success of Jackie Mason in his 1987 Tony award winning one-man Broadway show *The World According to Me*, Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner—who had already achieved sitcom success with two other former standup comics, Bill Cosby and Roseanne Barr—decided to cast Mason in a sitcom as former pajama salesman Jackie Fisher, who moves in next door to an Irish Catholic widow with three kids, Maddie Peerce (Lynn Redgrave), and promptly falls in love with her.

Despite having the lead-in of *Roseanne* and a great deal of pre-premiere publicity and even credible ratings, *Chicken Soup* was canceled after seven shows, much to the relief of Mason and perhaps everybody else involved with it. The ostensible reasons given were that the show cost too much to produce and that it was losing about one third of the audience it got from *Roseanne*.

This was, however, only partially the truth. From its very beginnings ABC execs expressed misgivings about the show being too "urban" and Mason's accent too "Jewish". These anxieties were compounded by a totally unbelievable story line that had Jackie, a man in his late fifties and looking every day of it, moving in with his mother and becoming a social worker.

In addition, there was as much chemistry between Mason and Redgrave as between two ice cubes (their notion of an affectionate gesture was to hold each other by the arms). And finally there were the opening and closing monologues by Jackie that had more kvetching in them than the bite that was the hallmark of his stage performances.

Mason's complaining and whining actually points to the most glaring defect in the whole potpourri of glaring errors that surrounded the production of *Chicken Soup*. The producers of the show had tried to make Mason lovable, which he decidedly is not. Actually, his humor is based on a biting sarcasm and a sometimes almost cynical exploitation of racial and ethnic differences.

As a matter of fact, from his earliest controversial days on TV when he was supposed to have given the finger to Ed Sullivan, to his insensitive remarks during the 1989 New York Mayoralty race (probably an additional factor for

his abrupt cancellation) when he called the Black candidate for Mayor, David Dinkins, "a fancy *shwartze* with a moustache," and then denounced the Jews, who would presumably vote for Dinkins, as having guilt complexes, Mason is anything but lovable. His stock and trade is being topical.

None of this even marginally made its appearance on the TV show. The nearest it came to being topical were lines like Jackie's mother's remark when he announced to her that he was seeing a *shiksa* that, "Why couldn't you be gay like everybody else?" Indeed Marcy Carsey in the *New York Times* was quoted as saying "This is not a show that takes a position on issues."

Unfortunately, this was exactly why the show failed. Which isn't meant to imply that the producers should have made Jackie into some kind of a neo-conservative Sholom Aleichem, or the Yiddish version of Archie Bunker. But they might have been slightly more adventurous in exploring ethnic issues or differences.

In the final analysis, it is this factor that is the most serious missing element in the new image of Jews presented on American television. Clearly, there is now no need to hide a character's Jewishness (the one glaring exception to this, proving that old habits die hard, is Roseanne Arnold (who is Jewish), but whose program although depicting her as delightfully slobby working class, has "de-Jewicized her"; nor is there much reticence in referring to Jewish customs; yet there is still no real discussion of issues that relate to Jews.

For instance, American television has never produced anything even remotely comparable to British television's production of Frederic Raphael's *Glittering Prizes*, and its exploration of common everyday anti-semitism. Nor has there ever been a program such as the same author's *After the War*, produced by Grenada TV, which, in the process of dealing with its characters' Jewish identities, also explored their attitudes toward the state of Israel.

That program even had its thoroughly assimilated hero, Michael Jordan (Adrian Lukis), commenting about the '67 war that "I was naive enough to imagine that Israel might do something never before done by the winning side: stick to the fine promises they made before they had won." Nothing in *Operation Prime Time's* 1982 hagiographic portrait of Golda Meir, *A Woman Called Golda*, which won an Emmy for Ingrid Bergman, comes even close.

Add to this list any exploration of the relations between Jews and Blacks, or Palestinians and Jews and you begin to get a clearer idea of how far American television still has to go before it presents a real image of Jews. Nevertheless, there is still one issue that American television has dealt with that does present a more complex image of Jews and may even give us some insight into some of the strengths and weaknesses of TV's new image of Jews. This issue, as old as Anne Nichols' play *Abie's Irish Rose*, and even television's own *Bridget Loves Bernie*, is intermarriage.

Although it appears on the surface to be something of a rather well-worn theme of American popular culture, intermarriage nonetheless still gets to the very heart of a significant American ideal—the melting pot. It also touches upon, as no other subject can, the issue of whether or not it is possible for romantic love to transcend tradition and centuries of cultural conditioning and religion.

In previous stage and screen efforts, the mariage itself, or the birth of children, were enough to resolve the problem. However, as anyone familiar with intermarriage knows, marriage and children are just the beginning of

the problem. In fact, as Paul and Rachel Cowan tell us in their fine study of intermarriage in their book *Mixed Blessings*, there are "time bombs" lying in wait throughout such a marriage that can permanently damage or even destroy it.

The only recent American TV program that has gone to any significant lengths in dealing with this subject has been the ABC drama series *thirtysomething*. Recently canceled after four seasons, *thirtysomething* was reviled by many as the ultimate in yuppie whining. So strong, in fact, were some reactions to the show that when one of its seven major characters died in an episode one response was, "one down and six to go." On the other hand, many critics saw it as the best dramatic series on the air and lauded it for having brought, in the words of John O'Connor in the *New York Times*, "painful moments of self-scrutiny and doubt as close to the level of an art form as weekly television ever gets."

Thirtysomething, had two Jewish characters, Michael Steadman (Ken Olin) and his cousin Melissa (Melanie Mayron) who is also the only Jewish woman character in American prime time. It was Michael, however, who was the object of the series' shows about intermarriage. Michael was presented from the very beginning of the series as a totally assimilated Jew. Married, with initially one child, to Hope (Mel Harris), a Christian, his best friend Gary Shepherd (Peter Horton) was also Christian, as was his partner in a small advertising agency Elliot Weston (Timothy Busfield).

Yet Michael's Jewishness came up continually throughout the series. Thus, in the show's very first season, Michael and Hope were confronted by the "December dilemma", in which they had to decide whether or not, and if they did, how to celebrate Christmas and/or Hannukah. Then in the second season, in a highly acclaimed episode called "The Mike Van Dyke Show", Michael, faced with a crisis of faith when Hope is injured in a serious automobile accident, finds solace in the synagogue.

In the first of these episodes, the problem is resolved in an O'Henry story fashion when Michael brings home a Christmas tree and Hope lights a Menorah. In the second, Michael acknowledges his need for spiritual comfort, and a belief in God. Whatever the merits of both of these shows (and they were considerable) neither probed as deeply into Michael's Jewish roots, nor did they illustrate the limits of American television's depiction of Jewish issues as the series fourth season premiere episode which dealt with the birth of Michael's son, Leo, and his *Brit*.

To some extent, *Brits*—or traditional circumcision ceremonies—have become the bathroom joke of contemporary American TV. For example, on a recent episode of *Cheers*, the *Brit* of the son of the pompous psychiatrist, Dr. Frazier Crane (Kelsey Grammar) and his Jewish wife Lillith (Bebe Neuwirth) turned into sheer farcical anarchy. Similarly, on *Northern Exposure*, the sixty year old restaurant owner Hollings (John Cullom), consulted with the Jewish Dr. Joel Fleischman about having a circumcision done when his 19 year old lover (Cynthia Geary) made him self conscious about not having had one.

In comparison to this frivolousness, *thirtysomething*'s presentation of Michael's son's *Brit* is a serious and sensitive study of a Jew's coming to terms with the meaning of that tradition. In addition, it is something of a tale about the reconciliation of different generations of Jews.

In the episode, Michael is confronted by two problems: one is the immediate assumption of almost everyone around him that he is going to have a *Brit* for his son, compounded by Hope's initial resistance to any thought of the idea. Second is his rage, which borders on the oedipal, at

his mother's brash new boyfriend, Dr. Ben Teitelman (Alan King).

After an initial period of ambiguity, Michael comes around to the idea because as he puts it, "It feels like something I'm supposed to do." Hope, beside raising both intellectual and emotional objections, finally asks Michael the most fundamental question of all: "If our son is going to be a Jew, I want to know why, and what it means for him and for you."

Consequently, the rest of the episode concerns Michael's attempt to answer that question to both his and Hope's satisfaction. The answers he finds are plentiful. They include a rabbi's pronunciation that the *Brit*, "keeps the covenant with God," and that "It is the symbol of a connection with previous generations." Ultimately, however, Michael comes to understand that he wants the *Brit* because he wants his son, "to be part of something," and because he also wants to be, "part of something."

In comparison to what television has done, or perhaps it is more correct to say *not* done, in regard to Jews, anyone seeing this episode would be hard put to admit that it wasn't a sensitive and intelligently written episode. Therefore, it might at first glance seem to be nit-picking to criticize it.

Yet there are certain logical inconsistencies that strike one immediately. For example, why is it that Hope, who had been so adamant about having a traditional Christmas for their daughter Janey, in the "December dilemma" episode never once raises the issue of baptism for Leo, and surrenders so easily to his having a *Brit*?

Invariably, this leads to an even larger question. Why has the series never mentioned the issue of conversion? For example, in Dr. Egon Mayer's definitive study of intermarriage, *Love and Tradition: Marriage between Jews and Christians*, he points out about intermarriage and conversion that," Increasing numbers of intermarriages are conversionary rather than mixed marriages." He also states that in at least one third of these marriages the Christian partner converts to Judaism as compared with 10% Jewish-to-Christian conversions.

Before *thirtysomething*, TV had dealt with the issue of conversion, but only in an extremely muter fashion. For instance, in NBC's dramatic series *A Year in the Life*, which debuted about a year before *thirtysomething* and was something of a model for it, one of the middle class Gardner clan's daughter', Lindley (Jayne Atkinson), was married to a Jewish patent attorney, Jim Eisenberg (Adam Arkin), who wanted her to convert after the birth of their first child. The issue was left hanging, however, and never really resolved.

The absence of any mention of conversion on* thirtysomething *and its* sotto voce *treatment in* A Year in the Life, *leads one to believe that the subject is still too hot for American television to handle.

The absence of any mention of it on *thirtysomething*, and its *sotto voce* treatment on *A Year in the Life*, leads one to believe that the subject is still too hot for American television to handle. Even a show as sensitive, intelligent and as well written as *thirtysomething* can't get away from the fact that an episode about conversion is a no-win situation. If the Jewish partner were to convert, there would undoubtedly be loud protests from the Jewish community, as there would undoubtedly be from the Christian

community if the reverse occurred. *Thirtysomething*, which always had more of a cult following than a mass audience, could not risk the potential danger of alienating a sizable segment of an already comparitively small audience.

Conversion isn't the only troublesome issue *thirtysomething* raises. Even more significant is the image it conveys of Judaism and American Jews' relation to it. Thus, it merely pays lip service to the ideal of Judaism as a coherent system of morals, ethics, and tradition that constitute a way of life and faith, and instead presents it as a kind of salad bar of holidays and customs that Jews can pick and choose from at will. Similarly, one doesn't know whether Michael's search for the meaning of Judaism in his life is a sincere commitment to a future Jewish identity and way of life, or is nothing more than an expression of his yuppie individualism in traditional garb?

In this sense *thirtysomething* and the other series that feature Jews so prominently these days, function less to improve the image of Jews, as to inject Jews into the mainstream of American's television's newly discovered cultural and ethnic pluralism.

To portray Jews without any real comment on the true nature of their religiosity or any of the social issues relevant to them, however, is the same as emphasizing the middle class nature of the Huxtables of the *Cosby Show* or the black college students in *A Different World* without really dealing with them as African-Americans.

Conforming with the changing image of Jews on American television in general, was a scene from an episode of the television series *The Trials of Rosie O'Neill*. The series produced by Barney Rosenzweig, whose previous success with the feminist cop series series *Cagney and Lacey* had marked him as something of an innovator in American television, contained relatively few initial surprises, until Rosie's (Sharon Gless) boss Ben (Ron Rifkin), was introduced. Lo and behold, he turned out to be an Orthodox Jew, who wears a yarmulke.

Certainly the prospect of having a regular character on a series television show who is an Orthodox Jew is astonishing to anyone familiar with the history of TV's portrayal of American Jews. That surprise might have been tempered by a scene from a later episode in the same series, in which Rosie, her African-American colleague Hank (Dorian Harewood) and her boss are celebrating Rosie's victory in a case that involved a civil liberties issue. When Ben proposes a toast "... to Thomas Jefferson!" Hank, however, objects because, "Jefferson was a slaveholder." Ben quickly changes the toast "... to the Bill of Rights!"

This scene provides us with a sharp insight into the dilemma facing the image of Jews on American television. On the one hand, Jewish characters no longer need to hide their Jewishness. On the other, they are being presented as merely the stars of, as one critic, Todd Gitlin put it, "television's great drama of assimilation."

The question then becomes whether the image of Jews on American television will be just one of the great success stories of assimilation, or whether the more complex issues of religion, culture and politics that confront Jews—and mark their uniqueness—will ever be dealt with. Of course, that question won't be answered immediately. The hope is that the answer isn't contained in the old Yiddish proverb that "When you're good they eat you up." ■

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"WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT": POSTMODERNISM AND TELEVISION

A viewer's guide to a different way of looking at style and substance, politics and culture — and past, present and future TV. *The Simpsons*, for example, are PoMo. So is David Letterman.

BY RICHARD CAMPBELL AND ROSANNE FREED

Post-Modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Its best works are characteristically doubly-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism.

– Charles Jencks

In a downtown office, co-workers huddle around a Watchman as Geraldo investigates bisexual bigamy. In a Saudi desert, General Schwarzkopf's TV explanation of "smart" bombs looks suspiciously like instructions to a new Nintendo game. At a conservative fund raiser, a real vice president engages in a debate with a fictional television character. In a hospital locker room, med school students watch *Northern Exposure* and long for a frozen future practicing in an Alaskan utopia. On a suburban street, white teens sport Malcolm X caps—like the one Michael Jordan wears on ESPN's *Sportscenter*. And during the 1992 campaign, president-to-be Bill Clinton stumps on MTV, plays the sax on *Arsenio*, and tells Donahue to mind his own business.

As the examples suggest, contemporary popular culture is taking us for a roller coaster ride, one that's shaking up architecture, fashion, literature, manners, morality, music, war, politics, and, most visibly, television. Newfangled attitudes toward oldfangled ideas are shattering modern distinctions between document and drama, craft and commodity, science and sentiment, past and present, high and low culture. Some people are getting woozy, while others are enjoying the journey. In this article, the tag we assign to the ride is Postmod-

ernism, variously (mis) understood as a Yuppie disease, a bad reaction to the sixties, anything that's cool, or the latest academic buzzword, like Political Correctness.

A brief list of items slapped with the postmodern label includes MTV, Nike ads, Disney World, camcorders, *Northern Exposure*, Madonna, Fax machines, David Letterman, *USA Today*, *Twin Peaks*, Michael Jackson, Levi ads, remote control, *The Simpsons*, shopping malls, *In Living Color*, and the Energizer bunny. Is this evidence that the postmodern condition is pervasive, or just proof that its spotters and supporters are congenitally confused?

Many critics would opt for the latter. For them, postmodernism is one of "the ususal suspects" to blame for a panoply of sins—from gangster rap to *Married ... With Children*. Like obscenity, PoMo's definition is especially elusive: we know it when we see it. Our essay sidesteps the conventional paranoia and conceptual resistance postmodernism breeds. Offering a kind of *Baedeker's* guidebook through the brave not-so-new wilderness, we describe a common set of postmodern characteristics on television as a reaction to various modern conditions and ideas.

THE TV FEATURES OF POMO

Spy magazine once offered tips for recognizing "PoMo" on television: "Do the characters talk to the camera sometimes? Does the program have a 'look'? Does it remind you of an old TV show, only it's insincere and has better production values?" *Spy's* facile humor spots the target, but misses the mark. It's just another way of saying, "I know it when I see it," without grappling with PoMo's most salient features. Sociologist Todd Gitlin says postmodernism is "more than a buzzword or even an aesthetic; it is a way of seeing, a view of the human spirit, and an attitude toward politics as well as culture."

For a semi-coherent picture of television's postmodern style and "way of seeing," we start with two warnings. First, there's no question but that the television medium itself is a postmodern beast with a high-tech, satellite uplinked, remote controlled noggin and the life blood of consumer-generated advertising dollars pumped through its veins by multinational media conglomerates. When it comes to content, however, much TV fare—like most contemporary architecture—remains complacently modern (we'll explain more about this distinction later). For example, nightly network news shows beamed from functional command and control centers celebrate modern scientific surveillance. A parodic version of *Nightline* may crop up on *The Simpsons*, but until Bart actually replaces Ted, television's nod to PoMo is the exception to the reign of Modernism.

And secondly, postmodernism is no butterfly primed to have its wings pinned. The technique of trying to define and categorize PoMo style is a decidedly logical, rational and *modern* critical practice—the very essence of what postmodernism wants to resist at all turns. Nevertheless, we forge ahead in the spirit of postmodernism, aware of the contradictions and the tangled web we can never completely unweave.

RUN FOR THE BORDER

Though you couldn't dance to it, the sound of Berliners chipping away at the Wall was an anthem for postmodern politics. These places where boundaries meet and spill into one another are where most of the postmodern action is . Writing for *Rolling Stone*, Jon Katz stepped in the middle of another border feud by pitting Old News

("pooped, confused and broke") against New News ("dazzling, adolescent, irresponsible, fearless, frightening and powerful")—a media battleground where public debate and knowledge about the issues of daily life were just as likely to come from *Oprah, Entertainment Tonight* and Bart Simpson as from *Meet the Press, Nightline* or Dan Rather.

"Increasingly, the New News is seizing the functions of mainstream journalism, sparking conversations and setting the country's social and political agenda," Katz argued.

Consider the gender blurring of Pat on *Saturday Night Live*—is s/he a man or a woman? In music videos like "Black or White," Michael Jackson attempts "to be raceless and genderless and ageless—Mr. Postmod, right down to the Postbod," as one critic observed. And is Geraldo an investigative journalist or a trashy talk show host? He's both in Katz's "new information culture."

In fact, during the spring of '92 *Nightline's* Koppel abandoned his big, modern command desk and temporarily relocated to a church in South Central L.A. after the acquittal of the cops who were caught by a camcorder beating Rodney King. For a postmodern moment, *Nightline* and Koppel, interviewing gang members, church leaders, community activists and folks-next-door, looked a lot like *Donahue* or *Oprah* or *Geraldo* on the road.

Certainly, television is a fertile breeding ground for genre confusion. Categories once chiseled in granite melt in a swirl of crossover jargon: docudrama, infotainment, infomercial, dramedy. As signaled by the recent storm over the blurring of fact and fiction in JFK, modern critics find some of TV's hybrids to be downright treasonous. They patrol these distinctions as if the popularity of *A Current Affair's* voyeuristic news burlesque or *Twin Peaks'* surrealist soap opera—and now *Murphy Brown's* single motherhood sitcom—had replaced Communism as the next great threat to democracy and freedom.

On television, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was a postmodern prototype breaking down cultural order through a lunatic mixture of music hall farce and Cambridge tutorial. Today, *Wayne's World* does the same thing when public access cable guru Wayne Campbell asks, "I can't remember who said it, Kierkegaard or Dick Van Patten ... if you label me, you negate me." Nowadays, TV PoMo attempts to level the modernist division between elite and mass culture at every turn.

Rejecting modernist tendencies to enshrine classic texts and recalling nineteenth century farce, *Moonlighting* parodies *Taming of the Shrew*. *The Simpsons* mounts a musical version of Tennessee Williams' *Street Car* starring Marge. And MTV promos have lately featured everything from avant garde European animation to actors reading selections from Kafka.

Which leads many critics and audiences to despair over the way art and commerce mingle provocatively at postmodernism's party. But the PoMo condition argues that, in fact, all art is commodity under the rules of advanced capitalism. Especially the so-called serious high art of opera, ballet and theater marked by the upper and upper-middle classes as their own in twentieth century America, and strategically subsidized and priced so only the "right" folks can afford access. The $82 million Van Gogh original locked in a private Japanese vault is no less of a global commodity than the cartoon Mona Lisa appearing in a pizza ad.

For many, Spike Lee is the consummate PoMo artist, the flesh and blood version of equally knotty movements across cultural distinctions. A major "artistic" filmmaker who directs rap videos, Levi commercials, and PBS documentaries, Lee is also a Harvard lecturer, a talk show spokesman for

African-American culture, and the Michael Jordan wannabe, Mars Blackmon, in the Nike TV commercials. For Lee, "X" marks the spot, and he moves that spot any where he likes. Spike Lee knows no boundaries.

ORIGINAL REJECTS

Postmodernism knows no shame, either, as it borrows, plunders, and steals (usually from modernism). It casts the present using molds from the past, whether we're talking about the neo-Gothic church spires of the PPG (Pittsburgh Paint Glass) corporate cathedral, the '90s repackaging of '50s sitcoms on *Nick at Nite*, or the phenomenal way-off Broadway success of *The Brady Bunch* scripts now being staged as campy theater. Even the Eisenhower-era leather jacket classic film, *The Wild One*, endures a grade-school twist on *The Simpsons* when Principal Skinner poses that standard authority question, "What are you rebelling against?" Little Lisa Simpson rumbles back in her best Brando, "Whadda ya got?"

Perhaps no one bears the brunt of the modernist attack on PoMo's refusal to be original—on its promotion of style over substance, and calculation over inspiration—more than Madonna. Her multimillion dollar Time Warner deal, her *Sex* book and *Erotica* video, plus her ubiquitous television appearances on MTV, *Arsenio* and *Nightline* present inviting targets. One writer assailed the pop diva for inventing herself "as a mutable being, a container for a multiplicity of images." But there's more than Xeroxing for its own sake going on in Madonna's aesthetic. Her music videos, rejecting a modernist tendency to obliterate the past, deliberately conjure up pop culture icons like Dietrich and Garbo in all their idealized glory. But she recontextualizes them with a contemporary spin.

Unlike the original model, the Marilyn Monroe of "Material Girl" coquettishly rejects her wealthy suitors at will. And more recently on *Saturday Night Live*, Madonna did her best Peggy Lee, then satirized Sinead O'Connor by ripping a photo, not of the pope, but of Joey Buttafuoco ("the real enemy") in mock irreverence to the network obsessions with the Amy Fisher Story.

But in spite of its emphasis on styling and appearance, postmodernism is not stupid. In fact, postmodernism's populist fascination with borrowing, copying, surface and style serves as a powerful critique of modernism's elitist fixation on uniqueness, authenticity, depth and substance. Modern critics just don't get the postmodern point—that PoMo isn't supposed to live up to the often upper crust, traditionally masculine, stubbornly European, fixed-for-all-time standards of a modernist aesthetic.

Sure, postmodernism isn't original in the way media critics mean it. What *is* original about postmodern style is the way it thumbs its collective nose at the very idea of originality as a conveniently snobbish label based as much on social class as on the timeless depth of universal artistic standards. For postmodernists, the concept of artistic originality too often creates an artificial hierarchy celebrating the "best" as the most original (read: belongs to the elite few) and the "worst" as the most formulaic or derivative (read: belongs to the duped many). And Madonna often levels the differences—in her "Open Your Heart" video, the modern English prof takes notes along side the macho voyeur as she performs her peep show dance.

What's particularly noticeable and often troubling in PoMo, especially on television, is the source of its aesthetic energy. Unlike high culture's modernist canonization of driven, prophetic, lonely artists, television (not to mention motion pictures and

the music industry) produces its products usually through corporations and by committee. The mythic notion of a struggling writer or poet honing his (but not usually her) craft to create unique masterworks of transcendent power is undermined in postmodernism. PoMo, more messily democratic and capitalistic, often absorbs and dilutes the rugged modern individualism of the artist within the crass collectivity of producers and images.

PASTICHE, OR DISNEY AS GOD

Maybe the most breathtaking experience of postmodern paradox is at Disney World, where in the words of architecture historian Ethel Goodstein, "The paradigm of the small town, Main Street, opposes the ethos of the urban agglomerate of the future, Epcot Center; a sentimentalized past, Frontierland, juxtaposes a surrealistically promising future, Tomorrowland; the simple fantasy of the carousel collides with the celluloid spectacle of the mousecartoon." What are these experiences doing in the same place, except as creations from the mind of cartoonists and theme park entrepreneurs? This is pastiche: the wild, wanton, creative (depending on your attitude) opposition of styles, often ripped—like collage cut-outs—from their original contexts.

In television, pastiche issues from the remote control, ad zapping, and channel hopping. Pat Robertson on the Family Channel commingles with hedonists on the Playboy Channel, and a CNN report on Sudanese starvation segues disturbingly into a commercial for meatier dog food. For some modern sensibilities, the juxtaposition is inappropriately (and immorally) disordered; for postmodernists, such juxtaposition is simply the way of the world.

MTV, which redefined the TV commercial in the 1980s, holds the pole position where pastiche is concerned. This network virtually defines visual disorder; a ceaseless succession of disconnected 3-minute mini-musicals celebrate the sense of fragmentation and incompleteness that directly challenge the modern search for universal wholeness. As *Esquire* magazine noted, "MTV has learned that it must beat the competition image for image, split second for split second, throughout the day—in this new world, a half hour might as well be a lifetime, and linearity is a truly outmoded concept."

The rowdy collages of MTV images and MTV-inspired ads confront the American melting pot myth with the variegations of multiple cultures tossed together but still distinct—as in the Budweiser spot where street-wise MTV rappers encounter corn-fed auctioneering farmers.

MULTICULTURAL 'ANARCHY'

This rumpus between "melting pot" and "salad bowl" points of view spills over onto college campuses, too, in the struggle over what it is that professors are supposed to teach. Postmodernism invokes the pluralist "many" without attempting to make them "one nation under God"—for some folks, just the opposite of the notion of Univers (al) ity. Modernists like George Will and William Bennett, heavily burdened and threatened by Women's / African-American / Latino / gay / Native American Studies programs, see a bad moon rising over the status quo standards of American History, English Literature and Western Civilization.

Some television programs, in fact, share the same progressive impulse as university curricula. *Northern Exposure*, for example, presents both a fragmented yet united community, incorporating a macho ex-astronaut

who oversees a remote Alaskan town founded by a heroic lesbian couple and now populated by Indians, outcasts and adventurers. The local white DJ, who in one show contemplates becoming a "person of color," shares a father with an accountant, his African-American half-brother. The two frequently have each other's dreams. In one December episode, characters celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah, along with Korean and American Indian rituals, in a single complex narrative.

Certainly the visions of bi-racial, liberal-conservative, May-December coupling and "lovely lesbian ladies dancing on the parquet floor" (to use an old lyric from the Amazing Rhythm Aces) invite both criticism and praise as they both celebrate and sell multicultural harmony. Many supporters of postmodernism, in fact, argue that among its best promises are the reexamination of utopian possibilities and the recouping of progressive notions of community. The communities represented in *Northern Exposure*, in Madonna's videos, and yes, in Ray Charles' Diet Pepsi ads, tolerate differences and challenge inflexible ideas of other communities intent only on keeping out differences and oddballs.

CAN YOU SAY SELF-REFLEXIVITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY? (WE THOUGHT YOU COULD)

One of the most visible, and often annoying, features of postmodern products is their habit of calling attention to the devices of their own construction. Annoying, because self-reflexivity destroys our suspension of disbelief in the magic of the moment; pleasurable, because it tweaks our anticipation and cynicism by adding a whole new level of self-centered amusement. Turning to the viewers, the romantic leads on *Love & War* make sly insider comments on the ongoing state of their relationship.

Partly to poke fun at pompous network hierarchy, NBC's *Seinfeld* enacts a script about a stand-up comedian who NBC wants to create a sitcom. David Letterman mocks GE toasters, shoots rubber darts into the camera lens, and saunters backstage ("Ladies and gentlemen, it's dog night in the control room"), taunting the shabby enterprise of show biz and his/our own involvement in it. Such self-reflexivity reached its zenith in the Letterman/Leno on-camera monologues satirizing their varied treatments by their GE-NBC bosses during CBS' successful bid to hire Letterman.

As if to say "So, what else is new?", critics of PoMo's blithe spiritedness (forgetting that postmodernism rejects originality) point out that the Marx Brothers (in film) and George Burns and Ernie Kovacs (on television) also made ironic comments to the camera/audience. True enough, but such self-references were always a rarity, an exotic drop in an ocean of straightforward storytelling. With postmodernism, almost every trip to the tube promises the viewer a primetime betrayal of modern artistic coherence.

Is this campy commercial for real, or will the Energizer rabbit come marching across the screen dressed as the Lone Ranger? Should we read Jerry Seinfeld's sitcomic "life" as the inspiration for his stand-up "routine," or is it the other way around? And our favorite subversion: at the tail end of an episode of *Parker Lewis Can't Lose*, Parker's new love advises him to hurry up and kiss her or they'll miss the beginning of *In Living Color*, the show that once followed Parker on most of your better Fox affiliates.

And intertextuality? The idea that we understand and make meaning from culture because of our depen-

dence on other and older texts—books, magazines, news, songs, movies, and television shows among them. For example, ABC's *Civil Wars* used a female character to critique—tongue -in-cheek—the show's own TV heritage, some of its predecessors:

"What Newton B. Minow says about TV being a vast wasteland is more true than ever. Shows like *L.A. Law*, for all the critical acclaim, create falsely glamorized portraits of materialistic, vapid, and sexually amoral heroes. *China Beach* is mawkish, earnest and self-indulgent. *Thirtysomething* is narcissistic, elevating the trivial to the monumental ...

You've watched *Northern Exposure*? Well, that show uses what can be called a Dickensian tapestry of character ... And in all that what comes across is a kind of frothy badinage."

Modern melodramas like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* seldom referenced other aspects of culture as if characters in these programs never read books, watched TV, followed news, went to movies, had religion or went to school. Their lives were consumed instead by modern alienation and individual problems.

Part of "getting" postmodern TV like Letterman or HBO's *Larry Roberts Show* (with Garry Shandling) is grasping cultural and TV references, especially to *The Tonight Show* as modern talk show prototype (Paul Shaffer's PoMo send-up of Ed McMahon, for example). *Murphy Brown* drags real-life personalities like Connie Chung and every morning female news show celebrity into its fantasy domain. But in postmodern times, reality can also turn the tables. Witness Ronald Reagan usurping Dirty Harry's "Go ahead, make my day," Bill Clinton claiming Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop Thinkin' about Tomorrow," or, better yet, Dan Quayle casting Murphy Brown as the arch villain in a political parable about the Breakdown of Family Values.

What exactly is the point to postmodernism's navel-gazing? Media critic James Wolcott presents this (intertextual) interpretation of prime time's most intertextual show: "*The Simpsons* offers the best satire of our media world. Like *Mad* magazine, it takes a 'What, me worry?' attitude to the decline of Western Civilization. It parodies pop culture, and our complicity in pop culture—our willingness to be suckered by media hype." The Simpsons indeed picks up our cultural debris from the side of the road and brings it along for the ride: monster trucks, infomercials, the shower scene from *Psycho*, talk show therapists, the finale to *An Officer and a Gentleman*, Slurpies, the seduction scene from *The Graduate*. *The Simpsons* captures our love-hate relationship with cultural white noise.

SA(L)VAGING THE PAST

Postmodernism's view of history comes in two flavors—ironic or nostalgic. The postmodern project, in part, attempts to recover, in its own spirited or satiric terms, certain traditions and mythologies—romanticism for one—that modernism tried to bury. The 1989 mini-series *Lonesome Dove* (brought to you by Motown bought by MCA bought by Matsushita) recouped sentimental fragments of Manifest Destiny to redefine the often racist and sexist formulas of the traditional Western. Robert Duvall, as ex-Texas Ranger Gus McCrae, was a throwback to both Walt Whitman ("I loaf and invite my soul") and to the macho cowboy hero rescuing women and killing Indians.

At the same time, he embodied a contemporary feminized, postmodern heroic ideal (for this hybrid Western melodrama, the majority of viewers were women). Not for Gus the stereotypical male-bonding of a *Bonanza* or the dusty loner of the Clint Eastwood kind—this craggy old cowpoke sought out the conversation and companion-

ship of womenfolk. He also read the Bible, valued Latin, forgave the Blood Indians who shot him, and favored domestic life: baking biscuits, educating cowboys, and keeping pets (though he raised pigs instead of cats).

On the other hand, television can reinvent a nostalgic community that's either explicitly in the past (the 1950s extended family of *Brooklyn Bridge*, and the 1960s adolescent entanglements of *The Wonder Years*) or feels like it should be (*Parker Lewis*' comic-book vision of high school). If people get annoyed by the utopian slant, they miss the way PoMo replaces the realist, angst-ridden themes of modern alienation with playfully unabashed portrayals of places as we might like them to be.

What's at stake in this impulse to nostalgia, however, is crucial. Radical postmodernism deliberately scorns one "virtue" of a certain modernist perspective, namely, rationalism. Postmodernists argue that the kind of Enlightenment rationality that bolsters science gave us amazing modern conveniences like A-bombs, high-rise housing, and IRS-like bureaucracy. In their stead, postmodernism celebrates the recovered ideals of a downsized, multicultural community/tribe, and the mythic beliefs discarded by modern science. Paraphrasing Chris the DJ on *Northern Exposure*, rationalism nailed magic to the cross of modern science—and it's time for a resurrection.

There's hardly a more apt symbol for the acceptance of mystical or marginalized values than *Northern Exposure*. Weekly, the hapless modern man—in the guise of cosmopolitan Jewish doctor, Joel Fleischman—fights the power of premodern philosophies. When Fleischman's medical miracles typically fail, a pungent native potion cures the local flu epidemic and a hip tribal medicine man correctly diagnoses a problem patient: She's simply "shedding" her skin.

POSTMODERN

Fox, CNN, MTV
Nickelodeon
L.A. Law
David Letterman
Peewee's Playhouse
The Simpsons
Roseanne Arnold
Moonlighting
Frank's Place
Michael Jackson
Twin Peaks

St. Elsewhere

Northern Exposure
Ren & Stimpy
Miami Vice
In Living Color.
SNL.

Hard Copy
Donahue.
Oprah.
Geraldo
Money Python.
SCTV.
Kids in the Hall
Brooklyn Bridge (TV show)
Ice T
Newhart's series finale
"It was just a dream"

Laugh-In

MODERN

ABC, NBC, CBS
The Family Channel
Perry Mason
Jay Leno
Mister Rogers' Neighborhood
The Cosbys
Florence Henderson
Hart to Hart
Cheers
The Jackson 5
Dynasty,
Dallas
Ben Casey,
General Hospital
Marcus Welby
Tom & Jerry
Dragnet
Laugh-In
Flip Wilson,
Carol Burnett,
Sonny & Cher
60 Minutes
Mike Douglas,
Merv Griffin

Bob Hope Specials

Brooklyn Bridge (the structure)
Mr. T
Dallas's resurrection of Bobby "It was just a dream"
The Ed Sullivan Show

While honest-to-God modern Alaskans occasionally complain in print of the show's lack of realism (and who'd have thought TV was *unrealistic*?), *Northern Exposure* features ghosts visible only to Indians, or displays the psychic connections between long-lost brothers (one white, one black). But utopian PoMo can come with a price: for every progressive TV remembrance of a neglected spiritual past, we also find a channel starring a Jim Bakker or Jimmy Swaggart, the original sinners, capitalizing on the lost soul as commodity enterprise.

SAMPLING TECHNOLOGY

At the same time postmodern reverts to a sentimental yesterday (*MTV Unplugged*, which nostagically spurns electronics for rock's acoustic past), it can also hype a hi-tech today with all the trimmings. *Northern Exposure*, for example, often critiques modern conveniences, but also has honored the computer, the satellite dish, the film camera, the motorcycle, and a state-of-the-art, environmentally safe "bubble" house. The postmodern condition frequently welcomes aspects of technology, absorbing them fundamentally in multi-function remote controls; in rap music's sampling and synthesizing; in FAX, E-Mail and car phones; in ubiquitous computerized homes and businesses. If TV's marvel of modern medicine was Steve Austin, the Bionic Man, then PoMo's model must have been Max Headroom, the Electronic Man.

The techno bear hug may be uncritical, but it can still be ironic. *Late Night* with Letterman transforms technology into "a festival" that keeps the tube spinning with miniaturized Monkey-cams, roller-coaster thrill-cams, and a 360-degree revolution of the TV image. Letterman's carnival effects also recall the shaky (though

less ironic) cinema verité style of AT&T or Levi Docker ads, taking viewers across fragmented, unstable terrain where none have gone, or even wanted to go, before.

Modern art and literature (*The Waste Land* and *Brave New World* come to mind) often provided a stern and powerful critique of modernity's myth of progress and technology's potential to alienate us from each other. PoMo often argues the opposite, that with technology we can experience a world—McLuhan's global village—in which great distances of time and space are collapsed, instantly and vicariously transporting us all over the place to all sorts of cultures.

There are, of course, fundamental contradictions in PoMo's technological embrace. First, the same society that can produce a multiple remote control can also produce a Nintendoesque "smart" bomb. Second, as modern art and literature point out, new machines do eliminate employment and physically isolate, although they can bring us together for an electronic "town meeting." The postmodern condition is full of such contradictions, and in its most disturbing forms, both revels in and reveals our inability to resolve them.

CONTRADICTION—DEAL WITH IT

At the level of popular culture, Michael Jackson offers a sexless, raceless icon proclaiming "It don't matter if you're black or white") when his own physical alterations may argue otherwise. In a similar contradiction, critic George Lipsitz points out that African-American culture—especially in music, film and television—is becoming central to mainstream culture at the same moment that the economic gap widens between rich and poor, white and black.

There is also contradiction in PoMo style between tendencies toward technocracy, randomness and incoherence simultaneous with impulses to recover a more decorative, romantic, utopian past. Blurring the sacred and the secular, Philip Johnson's PPG building presents the playful facade of a Gothic church housing a sleek corporate headquarters made—not of stone—but of modern glass, steel and concrete. Critic Michael Pollan once condemned *Miami Vice's* visual glorification of an arty crime and cocaine lifestyle (the Lamborghinis, silk suits and such), while presenting stories that preach against it.

And feminists among other critics point out the contradictions between rap's often progressive racial politics and its regressive sexism and violence. "Rap music," Cornel West says, "is the exemplary postmodern phenomenon. Smoothly packaged for mass consumption in the name of militant opposition to the status quo, the dominant forms of rap music reflect basic contradictions in American life: violent sensibilities alongside pleas for peace, women's degradation beside calls for freedom, technological ingenuity juxtaposed with impoverished visions of the good life and pretentious posturing in the face of pain and suffering."

• • • • • •

The debate goes on then between PoMo's progressive and regressive possibilities. On one hand, we might envision the fragmented postmodern condition as a renewed form of liberation, kicking the blankets off a smothering, hierarchical social order. Competing against this is a Pac-Man postmodernism that reinforces and intensifies the insatiable appetite of global capitalism that feeds off the varied, high volume product lines that postmodern culture can generate, such as video cassettes, CD's, cellular phones, FAX—and television programs.

What's wrong with this picture? For one thing, the postmodern landscape can't be sketched with modern dualisms like good and evil, artificial and authentic, progressive and regressive. Conventional, "either/or" ultimatums just don't cut it in a media environment where almost anything goes. Postmodernism then is a "both/and" proposition. In fact, Henry Louis Gates Jr., in a post-election *Time* essay, used such language in implying Clinton's ties to multi-culturalism and postmodernism:

" 'On the one hand, on the other hand—you can't govern that way,' an exasperated George Bush complained of his Democratic rival. But isn't such a balancing of interests precisely what effective governance consists of? What ... Clinton may understand is that to overcome a legacy of division, we must move into an era of two hands. Down with either-or. Up with both-and."

To put this kind of distinction in perspective, we have to recognize how modernism historically begets postmodernism.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Back in 1956—the year *Gunsmoke* broke into the Top Ten—for the first time in modern history, the service sector deposed the manufacturing sector as the number one private employer in a domestic economy. As described by Charles Jencks, the evolving postmodern scheme—variously called the Post-Industrial Society, the Information Age, or the Third Wave—was not only evident in the new shape of the economy, but in the transformations that would slice and dice our conceptions of a coherent, modern world.

Take technology, for example. In 1962, Don Knotts won the second of his five Emmys as the goofy deputy on *The Andy Griffith Show*, just as the launching of AT&T's Telstar ushered in the new era of satellite transmission. The rapid appearance of integrated technologies—computers, software, mobile phones, FAX—facilitated a flourishing global communications network. Eventually, climate controlled teleconferences between decentralized branch offices superseded blood, sweat and toil on the assembly line as a defining symbol of American corporate culture.

Politically, the '50s' myth of a classless consensus gave way to the class, gender, and ethnic consciousness of the '60s and '70s: Archie, J.J., Chico, Laverne and Shirley all demanded their place in the sun. In 1977, Mary Richards, liberal feminist career woman, became television's first prophetic victim of the Reagan Era, losing her job in a post-buyout corporate housecleaning.

By the '80s, a thousand far-flung points of light were commissioned to shine after Washington dismantled and deregulated its own centralized guiding beacon. Barney Fife—like the myths of small-town life—seemed long gone as we called on a privatized *Equalizer* to right our wrongs. Mayberry's Andy Griffith became a prime-time, big-city lawyer. (But in the "both/and" aesthetic of postmodernism Barney and Andy survive nicely on cable.)

Thus, in the bewildering wake of almost four decades of kaleidoscopic economic, political and cultural changes, postmodern television, like postmoderism in general, can be understood as a sly but necessary variation on themes and styles of the modern era, feeding on the spent energy of modernism. Like a slow motion earthquake, electronic postmodernism has gradually dislocated the modern print-based ground on which we stand.

An upstart cable channel provided postmodern rumblings in 1981 by endlessly cycling pop music videos for

an audience of suburban teens. For a while, the subcultural influence of MTV was greater than its actual viewership, since you had to be (coaxially) wired to get the picture. But in 1984, producer Michael Mann invented the terminally stylish *Miami Vice*, and gave millions of network television viewers their first major seismic reading of the changes.

More than a fashion statement, *Miami Vice* was a sparkling synthesis of postmodern themes that continue to thread their way through popular culture. The first (with a nod to McLuhan) was the displacement of the print-oriented linear narrative by the visual explosiveness of electronic media. Postmodern *Miami Vice* disrupted the rules of TV storytelling. The show was both hailed and assailed for its music video digressions, its post-*Dragnet* dialogue, and its minimalist plots (there was actually only one). Dazzling cinematography supplanted characterization. In a 1985 article, critic Michael Pollan wrote:

"Vice is the first prime-time program to elevate the image above the word and, in doing so, it has invented a television more of sensation than of sense ... Miami Vice *[is] a place where old-fashioned literary concerns—logic, plausibility, the whole bland business of cause and effect—don't seem to matter very much."*

Miami Vice's decorative flourishes also struck at the heart of postmodern/modern tensions in architecture and design. Modern architecture has celebrated the vertical power and lean functionalism of concrete, steel and glass. In this century, skyscrapers replaced steeples as the city's highest landmarks, just as science replaced spirituality as the urbane cultural ideal.

The elaborate adornment of Gothic, baroque and rococo gave way to the rectangular "universality" of modernism, with its ticky-tacky suburbs, boxy public housing projects and soaring, interchangeable city skylines. What began as a liberation from religious and Victorian tyranny became a soulless monster in itself. Charles Jencks says that the symbolic "end" of modern architecture came in 1972 when the award-winning Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis was dynamited as an uninhabitable living space for its low-income resident.

And 1972 remains significant for television as well. *M*A*S*H*, arguably the first postmodern TV show with its fragmented casts and multiple plots, debuted and began blurring the boundary between comedy and drama, between the sublime and the mundane. It remains the prototype for its postmodern spinoffs from *Hill Street Blues* to *St. Elsewhere* to *Wonder Years* to *Frank's Place* to *L.A. Law* to *Northern Exposure*, probably the most richly textured program in television history.

What might this all mean to us, the home viewers? More confusion, perhaps: politicians jamming on *Arsenio* instead of pontificating on *Meet the Press*, commercials snidely reminding us that we're couch potatoes, sports stars endorsing Nikes, Reeboks and Afrocentrism in the same breath—a vague sense you've wondered into a hall of mirrors where every TV image is a reflection of a reflection of a reflection ... and everything is stamped with a price tag.

So let's get real—broadcast television exists through the good graces of American consumerism (even PBS must court the power of corporate underwriters). What's truly amazing about the best postmodern moments on television is that they exist at all; that subversion, sensationalism, resistance, spirituality, feminism, ethnicity, fragmentation, and—as Jencks

notes—"wide choice" erupts (in whatever co-opted form) through this commercialized medium of television that's so often bashed by modern critics for having never lived up to its cultural promise.

The best lesson of our contemporary condition—what Todd Gitlin has called "the democratic, vital edge of postmodernism"—is that in a society like ours, "promise" and "culture" are not inflected as singular nouns but are plural and contradictory, at once making our world more confusing and compelling than it's ever been. What we need to nurture in our conversations on television and about television, are the moments that continue to challenge the ossified hierarchies and foster genuine democracy. ■

Richard Campbell teaches media criticism in the Department of Communication at the *University of Michigan. He is the author of 60 Minutes and the News: A Mythology for Middle America* and, with Jimmie Reeves, co-author of *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-Cocaine Crusade and the Reagan Legacy*, forthcoming from Duke University Press.

Rosanne Freed works as a TV producer, director and writer in the Detroit area. While finishing her master's degree at Michigan, she also served as the major research assistant on *Cracked Coverage*.

"QUOTE... UNQUOTE"

Quantity and Quality

"Ronald Reagan asked voters in 1980 if they were better off than they were four years earlier. Are TV viewers better served than they were 10 years ago? There are a lot more networks now—all those cable channels—and yet the pickings on a given night often seem slimmer. It could be that as the quantity of television goes up, the quality actually goes down. If so, then the 500-channel era just around the corner promises to be a LIVING HELL.

"One more sad note comparing then & now: Among the TV movies that aired in the '82-83 season were two about a fairy-tale affair— ABC's *Charles and Diana: A Royal Love Story* and CBS's *The Royal Romance of Charles and Diana*. They're still making TV movies about those royal romances, but the gild is off the lily. Ten years can be a long time."

—Tom Shales
The Washington Post

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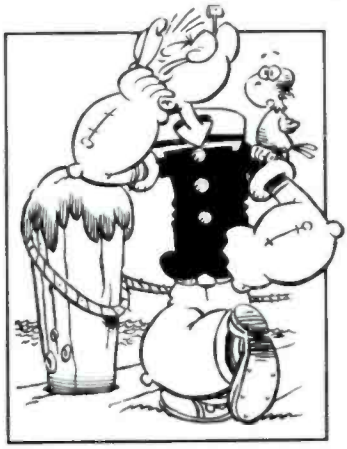

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REVIEW & COMMENT

TELEVISION NEWS IN PERSPECTIVE

BY BERT R. BRILLER

Of Media and People
By Everette E. Dennis
Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA

The NBC News/General Motors flaming truck episode was covered by all three networks. The charge of "rigging" and the apology raise a lot of questions, a few of which were included in the network newscasts and print reports—How much can the public trust the pictures it sees? How much are producers enhancing their footage to get better pictures? How much hype is resulting from competition with other organizations and the blurring of lines between the hard news programs and the TV news magazines?

One of the media analysts quoted on Dan Rather's newscast was Everette E. Dennis, Executive Director of the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University (new name for the center which was previously affiliated with the Gannett Foundation).

Dennis is often sought for soundbites or fuller explorations when media themselves become subjects of media coverage, and with good reason. He can look at the issues broadly, from three perspectives: (1) with the eye of someone knowing the field of journalism from within; (2) as an academic who has studied the media with the more objective disciplines and tools of the social scientist; and (3) with an appreciation of the stake the public has in how media do their job.

Dennis' *Of Media and People* brings together some 38 long and short essays written for other publications or occasions and newly edited for this useful book. It is divided into seven segments. The first part, On Media Performance, includes a discussion of fakery. It deals in part with allegations that CBS allowed faked footage from Afghanistan to slip through its screening process on the evening news. Dennis recalls that ABC News used a dramatic re-creation of an alleged incident in reports on accused diplomat Felix Bloch. Cases like these call for increased vigilance in TV newsrooms. As Dennis observes, "Their reputation and our intelligence about the world depend on it."

Another piece in the section examines the pitfalls that open up when a journalist becomes an insider, such as a Pat Buchanan, who argues that reporters become more knowledge-

able when they serve in government. The issue is not a simple one. Dennis counsels that at a time when there is a revolving door between government and the press, "It is important for the ethics of media organizations to be clearly stated and understood."

The second section, On International Communications, focuses on the increasing globalization of the media—and especially of television, as this publicaiton has frequently discussed. His view of what is happening in the Third World and in the countries once behind the Iron Curtain is broad, and he points out that there "is still little media content that serves more than one people and one culture," except perhaps on CNN and the BBC. And he makes the point that as Americans look at the changes taking place in Eastern Europe, they should ask questions about their own press freedom.

How journalists are and should be educated is the theme of the third section, in which Dennis highlights the need for better training to become a public concern.

The fourth section, on how all media are converging into a single electronic, computer-driven system, is as timely as current headlines on a telephone company buying cable systems, and as challenging as the future of interactive television, entertainment and data services. As text, data and images combine, the borders between media dissolve and they have more in common.

Dennis sees convergence as fostering globalization and giantism, with the growth of multinational media behemoths, but as also making possible the era of desk-top publishing and the proliferation of newsletters and computer bulletin boards. He urges study to understand and confront the consequences of convergence. With the explosion of electronic news gathering technology in television, Dennis feels we need more than ever, creativity and experimentation. And focusing on the people media serve, he calls for studying the audience and its needs on a level much deeper than quantitative ratings.

What is considered news, what is covered and why, is the area explored in the fifth part which looks at specific fields, such as the coverage of the Presidency and thorny subjects such as race relations, rape, mental health, art and culture. The sixth section focuses on the media industries and their economics. In an essay on television at the age of 50, Dennis assays the medium's accomplishments—breath-taking technically, but less attractive on the scale of maturity and quality. He criticizes the growth of "trash TV" and "crash TV," mindless games and inane sitcoms contributing to a downward trend in television entertainment. In the hope that some channels and advertisers will target a more discerning audience, he cites the long track record of commercially successful quality programs.

The final essays deal with the Gulf War. Dennis notes that the war confirmed television's preeminence as source of news for most Americans. He particularly salutes CNN for delivering the news most expeditiously and efficiently. But he points also to important lessons that must be studied, voicing the admonition that war coverage is necessarily multifaceted and complex, requiring stories about politics, economics, geography and social custom. He also cautions that the news technology available to journalists is both a blessing and a curse, and that it does not necessarily build public confidence in or support for the media's performance.

Because its scope is so broad, many of the essays compressed in its 187 pages call for expansion. Fuller discussions can be had in Dennis' other books, notably *Reshaping the Media: Mass Communication in the*

Information Age, now in its third edition. Also insturctive is *Beyond the Cold War*, which Dennis co-edited with George Gerbner of the Annenberg School for Communication and Y.N. Zassoursky, of Moscow State University. This volume, which includes material from a bilateral conference in the former Soviet Union, examines the Cold War and its consequences from a journalistic/communications perspective.

Because ecological issues raise so much concern, television producers and journalists will find a wealth of hard facts and a wide range of opinions in *Media and the Environment*, a 266-page book co-edited by Dennis. A thoughtful essay by him examines some of the dilemmas journalists face in covering environmental news seriously and sytematically—especially when it can sometimes be "a snore" and sometimes raise almost unresolvable controversy.

Dennis' books and the Media Studies Center's publications are must reading for working journalists, scholars and citizens who seek a deeper knowledge of television's role in the age of information. ■

Bert Briller was a vice president of ABC-TV and Executive Editor of the Television Information Office.

A JOURNALIST'S MEMOIR

BY ROD MacLEISH

Risks Worth Taking: The Odyssey of a Foreign Correspondent
By Bernard Redmont
University Press of America: Lanham,MD

There was a period of transition in the 1950's when broadcast news was reinventing itself. Radio journalism, several decades old, was giving way to television news which was trying to become something more than radio with pictures.

The networks' shift of emphasis to television journalism—in money, manpower and management—reduced network radio to five minute newscasts and a few longer programs such as the CBS morning news. Most of the network radio news programs lacked imagination; their stories were replays or leftovers from television.

Paradoxically, however, during that same period radio journalism was having a revival that went largely unnoticed in the shimmering glamour of TV news. The renaissance was the work of individual independent stations and broadcast groups. The pioneer and most enduring of the new national and international radio news operations was started by The Westinghouse Broadcasting Company in 1957.

Under the leadership of its president, Donald H. McGannon, and its vice president for programming and news (life was simpler back then), Richard Pack, Group W—as Westinghouse eventually renamed itself—

established a Washington News Bureau followed by a Foreign news service with staff correspondents scattered across the world from Saigon to London. They were heard only on Group W's seven radio stations including three all-news operations in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

The pace and purpose of this new radio journalism were different from those of its network predecessors. Group W correspondents were expected not only to cover the news, but explain its meaning. Commentators and news analysts were added as the Group W/Westinghouse news operations grew and matured. Celebrated journalists developed in this highly professional milieu—Andrea Mitchell, a brilliant political reporter at KYW, Philadelphia, James McManus, White House correspondent during the Watergate years and George Armstrong who covered Italy and the Vatican for Group W.

Among all the men and women who wrote, reported and probed the world's sensibilities for Group W, one correspondent came to personify the ideal of this rich, new radio journalism. His name was Bernard Redmont. He was Group W's Paris bureau chief for many years as well as a war correspondent in the Middle East, a prophetic observer of eastern Europe and was active in many other important areas and events.

To his colleagues, Redmont was a gentle, meticulous man, a brilliant reporter and linguist and an unapologetic idealist who had suffered for his principles—he had been a victim of the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy years. His life seemed to his friends and admirers to be an endless evocation of Henry Adams' self-described perpetual search for an education. Redmont was also the resident wise man in the Group W organization—and in that stable of local, national and foreign correspondents there was an unusually high quota of exceptional practitioners of the journalistic calling.

Bernard Redmont's life was far richer, more harrowing and fascinating than the 15 or so years he spent with Group W. Born in New York, he and his beautiful, deeply intelligent wife, Joan, lived and worked in Latin America, the United States and Europe. For years they were stranded in Paris without regular jobs or passports, thanks to the witless savagery of McCarthyism. After the demise of Group W News, the Redmonts went to Moscow for CBS News. Still later, Bernard Redmont became a popular and—the word is justified—great teacher of journalism at Boston University's School of Communications.

He was later elevated to dean by the university's adamant, hard-driving, eccentric president, John Silber who ultimately ordered Redmont to undertake a project that violated basic journalistic and academic principles. Redmont refused, was forced out and—as he had all his life—walked away from a personally threatening crisis with ideals and his dignity intact.

In the course of this rich career, Bernard Redmont knew and wrote about great men from Albert Schweitzer to Charles de Gaulle. He also understood what he called "the importance of unimportant people." His work continues as, with his agelessly elegant wife, Redmont travels the world, writes, consults, and continues to do what few journalists do well—thinks.

His recently published memoir, *Risks Worth Taking; The Odyssey Of A Foreign Correspondent* is one of the most riveting autobiographies by a reporter that this reviewer has ever read. It combines all the qualities that make its author such a compelling man. The range of subjects is one of

the book's principal delights; from a fascinating chapter about a Dutch psychic named Pieter Hurkos to a scene at a luncheon table in Paris where President John F. Kennedy asked French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville advice about Southeast Asia—as Dean Rusk and Bernard Redmont listened. There are illuminating conversations, inside tales of the Paris negotiations over peace in Viet Nam and a hair-raising description of being incarcerated with other American correspondents in Cairo as the Six Day War began, and Egyptian mobs in the streets howled for American blood. Best of all, there are chapters of "Reflections", the considerations of a first-class mind about the Middle East, Europe and the second half of the 20th century.

What is so gratifying about *Risks Worth Taking* is its innate detachment. This is not the work of some aging vedette of broadcast journalism-cum-showbiz telling us how important he was/is. Rather, Bernard Redmont's elegant literary style makes the reader feel that he is present at a civilized dinner table listening to that most irresistible of all social phenomenon, a quiet man talking.

Journalistic memoirs are, themselves, risks, and many are not worth taking. Great events are covered by swarms of reporters. They are transient moments in the chain of many events that eventually meld together as history. Retelling some of them by most reporters who were there is usually a reminder at best or a tedious rehashing of uninteresting yesterdays at worst.

To succeed, a journalistic memoir must give us new revelations or insights into old facts. It must persuade us to see the fragmented past in the larger context of generations; it must make sense of cause and effect as they accumulate across the continuum of the century. *Risks Worth Taking* by Bernard Redmont is that sort of memoir, from its chilling re-evocation of Father Coughlin's anti-semetic broadcast demagoguery of the 1930's to a final, beautiful essay on the woman who has shared his life, thought and adventures, Redmont has presented us with two things; insight into our times and their people—and himself. He emerges from these pages as a decent and reasonable man whose tumultuous life has not discouraged or stained its principled core.

Journalism schools teach—or purport to teach—people how to practice Bernard Redmont's craft. *Risks Worth Taking* is mandatory reading for anyone who was, is or wishes to be a journalist because it tells the world why the reporter's trade, practiced at its best, is more than a craft. In the hands of its greatest practitioners it is a calling, a vocation if you will, of the professional witness as servant to a world that is often unwilling to see its own reflection in the mirror of its actions. ■

Rod MacLeish is a novelist and co-anchor of Monitor Radio's *Daily Edition* heard on public radio stations nationwide. His distinguished career in journalism also includes many years as a correspondent in Washington and overseas.

AN INVITATION

Television Quarterly is looking for articles. We welcome contributions from readers who have something to say and know how to say it. Some of our pieces come from professional writers; others from professionals in the broadcast media who want to write about what they know best — their own field of expertise, whether it's programming, news, production, or management.

We especially want articles which deal with television's role in our complex society, and also its relationship to the new technology.

We feel too, that one of our functions can be to add to the developing history of television, particularly as told by individuals who have contributed to shaping the medium. We believe such historical articles can be valuable for much more than nostalgia since they can illuminate present and future television.

We are formally called a journal, but although some of our pieces have come from the academic community TVQ might better be described as a specialized magazine (we don't go in for complex footnotes, nor do we have peer review of contributions). But we don't consider our audience a narrow one; we like to describe ourselves as a publication for concerned professionals — writers, actors, scholars, performers, directors, technicians, producers and executives.

If you send an article, please observe the basics: typed, double-spaced, 2 copies and a return self-addressed envelope. If you have an idea and want to sound us out before you write an article, send along a few descriptive paragraphs.

Address your article or presentation to:

Richard M. Pack
Editor
Television Quarterly
111 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

CORRESPONDENCE

To The Editor:

I was saddened to read Mr. Bernard S. Redmont's *Manipulating and Managing the Media in the Gulf War*. This broadcaster's review did not develop the root causes of how the media got into their dilemma. It also did not advance the media's credibility.

I was skeptical when Mr. Redmont immediately took the position of absolutes—the media can do no wrong, and the government can do no right. Using hate language is also a poor conduit for criticism. Calling the U.S. government near-totalitarian and its military officers incompetent is inappropriate.

Faults in great quantities can easily be found, I am sure, on both sides. Mr. Redmont did indict the media later for timidity and greed, but chose not to develop a critically important view. Many viewers, for example, were shocked as news media peppered generals for the invasion's time and place. Even *Saturday Night Live*, not known for pro-government satire, made fun of the media's questions. The press lost its war in the Court of Public Opinion before the first U.S. shot was fired . . .

Problems of wartime censorship Mr. Redmont mentions, of course, need answers. But media shortcomings must first be addressed. Ignorance, poor preparation, greed, and controversies over depth and objectivity, for example, must go. Public support can then be improved. Media will win. The press, simply, needs its own long-term improvement campaign.

Solutions will not be found through breast-beating the First Amendment, a we-can-do-no-wrong attitude, and a frontal assault. Resolution lies in the self-analysis and improvement only leaders the stature of Mr. Redmont can provide. Only then can media enhance public support and truly solidify their First Amendment rights—and improve our nation.

—David L. Geary,
Bolingbroke, Georgia

Bernard S. Redmont Replies:

I share some of Mr. Geary's views on the shortcomings of the media, and regret that he did not read carefully my essay-review. Nowhere did I say or even imply that "the media can do no wrong, and the government can do no right." Nor did I "call the U.S. government near-totalitarian and its military officers incompetent."

I did echo the well-documented books under review and the well-substantiated accounts describing the "near-totalitarian fashion" in which the Pentagon functioned during the Gulf War and recounting the instances in which some military officers acted incompetently.

I recommend to Mr. Geary that he read carefully *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* by John R. MacArthur and *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War* by John J. Fialka, and re-read my review. ■

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