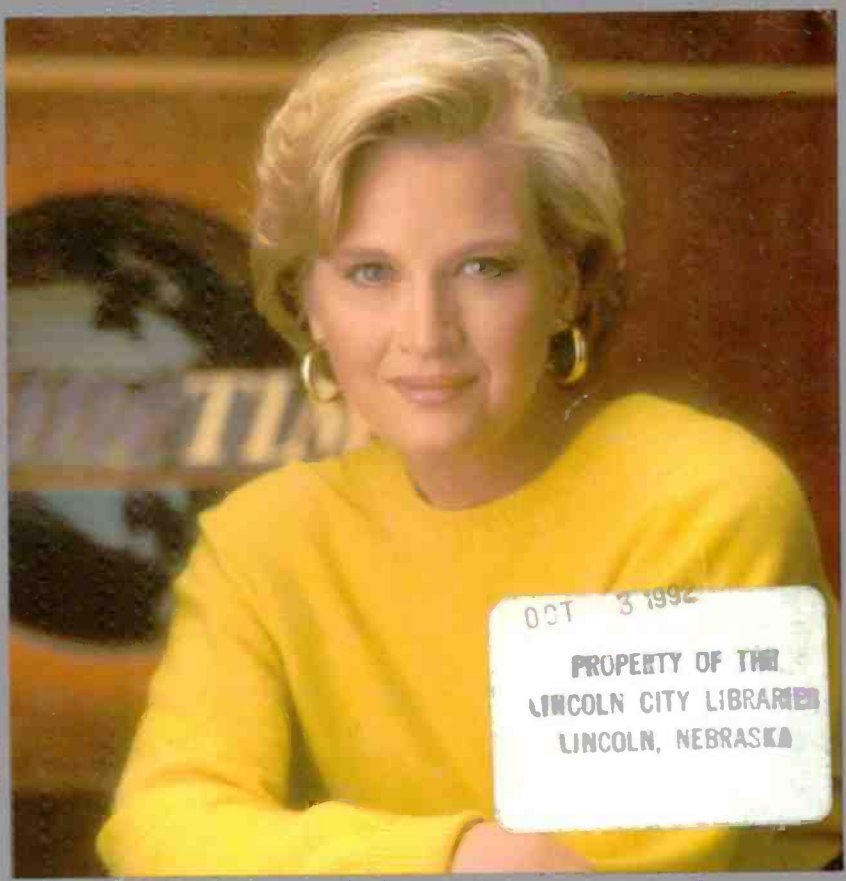
TELEVISION QUARTERLY

$5.00
VOLUME XXVI
NUMBER 1
1992

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES



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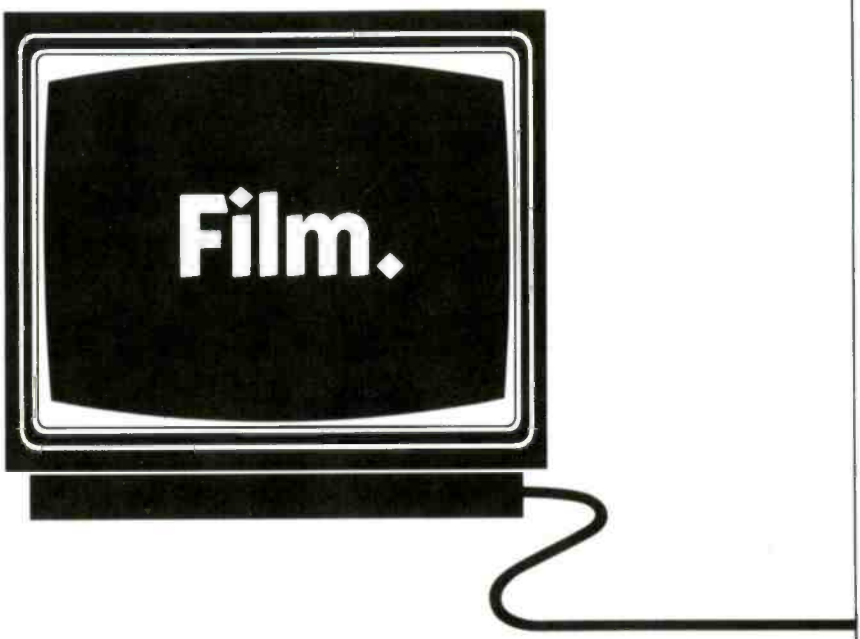

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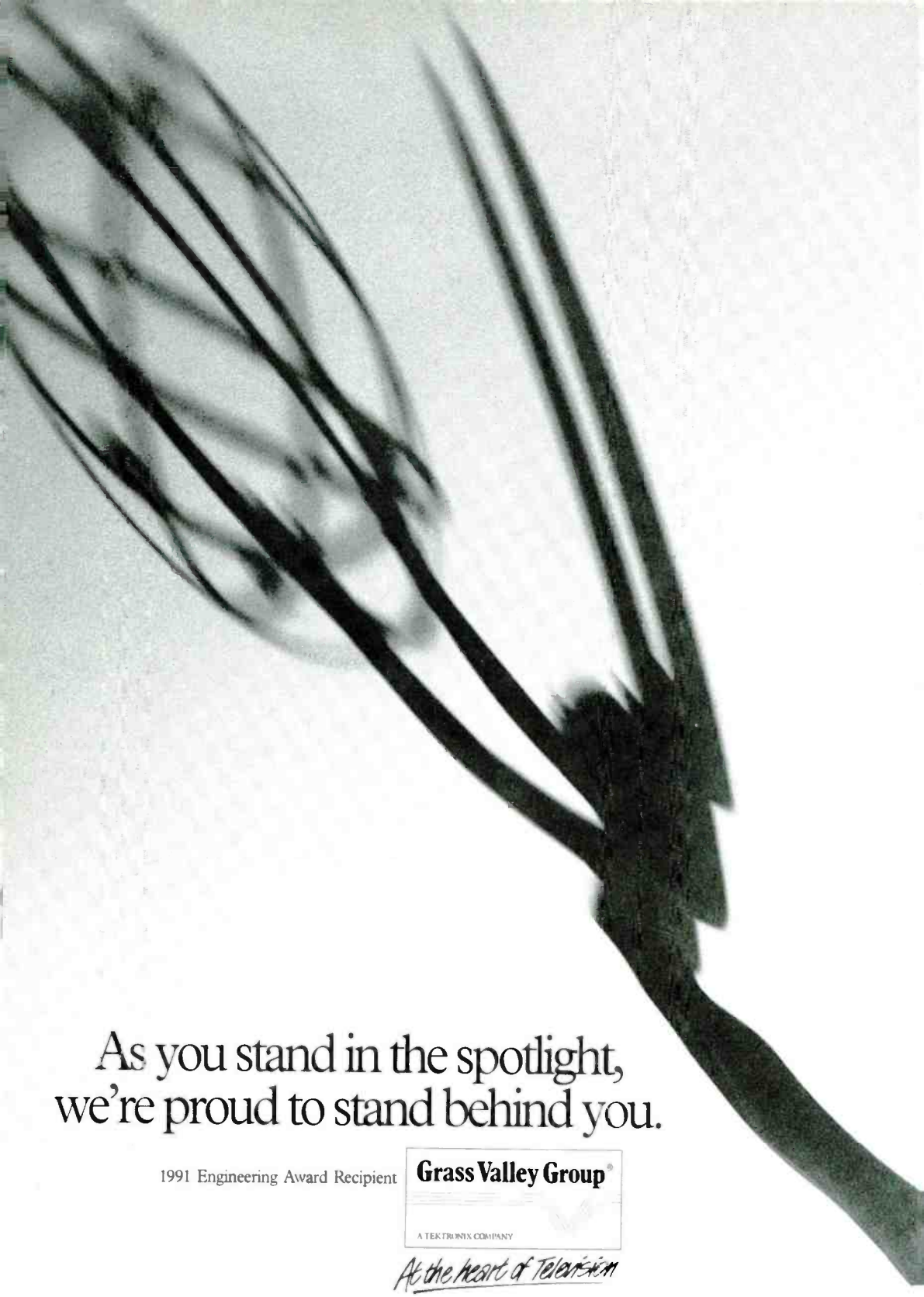

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Without television, modern society—especially mass society—would be blind to all the world except what could be experienced personally up close.

There are times and circumstances in which that might be a good thing, in which limiting our vision to what we can see and feel and understand personally might serve us better than the expanded vision of television—at least in the short term, in crises when we need to focus on immediate survival, on damage control. In times of crisis, television can both inform and betray us, giving us critical information we need to function and survive, but also painting a picture of danger that may be false at the time, although self-fulfilling as time goes by. In this way, television may not only be the most important technology of the modern world, but the most ambiguous.

The ambiguity is becoming increasingly obvious and increasingly troublesome. The Gulf war revealed in no uncertain terms that, with worldwide instantaneous live coverage from both sides of a conflict, television is now a very ambiguous player in international politics. In hostage situations like the hijacking of TWA Flight 847, when hostages showed sympathy for their captives on network news and begged the President not to use force to try and rescue them, television changes the circumstances it reports on. Again ambiguity; is television our eyes on the world, or a trick mirror that changes what is to be seen?

A new kind of Television Heisenberg Principle is emerging from television's ambiguity: whatever is televised is changed. This is an ultimate kind of ambiguity, because we are dependent upon television for information, but in collecting, transmitting and receiving that information we change it in ways we don't understand or even know. Through television, reality itself becomes ambiguous.

The Rodney King case displayed this ambiguity in spades: the role of television was literally Jekyll and Hyde, good and evil, critical and destructive. To understand television's role in the Rodney King case and the Los Angeles riots, we must understand this ambiguity and approach television, not necessarily with cynicism, but with fundamental questions:

- did television cause the riots?
- did television exacerbate the violence?
- is there something deeper about television and the post-Rodney King violence we need to understand?

DID TELEVISION CAUSE THE RIOTS?

Yes and no. Television both shares responsibility for the riots after the King verdict, and yet was absolutely not to blame. It was both a bystander and a vital communication system. Without the George Holiday tape of King being beaten, there would have been no riots, no case, no story. If Los Angeles station KTLA had not paid $500 to Holiday and broadcast it, ex-Police Chief Daryl Gates would have reviewed the police reports on King's beating and told King's family that the officers were acting in self-defense—assuming they even bothered to ask. End of case and end of story.

How many times has that been precisely what happened? With the Holiday tape on KTLA and rebroadcast first by CNN and then on the broadcast networks there was a case, a story and finally, a cause. And from the cause, came the violence.

So our first basic question can be answered partially affirmatively: television was responsible for the post-King verdict violence in at least three ways:

• *Broadcasting the King beating tape over and over again kept the story and the emotion alive.* The continual rebroadcasting of the 81-seconds of beating eliminated any cooling-off period, any way the issue could have died. And the national and international spread of the tape made protesting the Rodney King beating a virtual mini-industry, with people investing reputations and honor in keeping the issue alive.

• *Not broadcasting the segment of tape taken before the beating exacerbated the shock that led to violence.* Station managers and news directors have said that the early portions of the tape showing King charging an officer and taking three stun gun shocks with no effect was too fuzzy for broadcast. But the jury saw them and, with help from an attorney and slow motion techniques, understood what they showed. If television was going to try the case on the screen, which it did, it needed to show all the evidence to the jury of public opinion. Ed Turner, Vice President and Executive Producer of CNN, admitted to the *Los Angeles Times* that in retrospect he wished he had brought in an attorney to translate the tape for CNN's audience.

Translating the fuzzy images for the viewers would have set up some doubt about the outcome, even in the black community, and made the response less explosive. Instead of the 53 blows in 81 seconds, audiences could have seen 10 seconds of slow motion of King charging the policemen and then 70 seconds of beatings. It would not have changed the morality of the beating, but it would have prepared the audience for the unthinkable. And it would have diluted the icon that the beating has become.

• *Live riot coverage incited more rioting.* Looters and rioters interviewed after the violence said that they saw broadcasts of the outbreak of the riots, their locations, scenes of looting and arson and the fact that there was no police protection was an invitation to more rioting and arson and looting.

But the answers cannot stop there; television's role was not absolute. There were other reasons for the violence that have nothing to do with television:

• *The court system failed, not the media.* It is inconceivable that the court system would allow a case of this nature to go to a location like Simi Valley. Television (and all the media) reported on the venue change in detail. It profiled Simi Valley and the jury and pointed out the danger of this kind of case being tried in that location. Television warned us of the coming violence, if we cared to look.

• *The Rodney King beating tape was news and failing to report it and show the tape would have constituted a cover-up of racism and brutality in the LAPD.* For years, Los Angeles' minority communities have complained of police brutality, only to be ignored by the police, the courts and the media. The Rodney King tape was the vindication of those complaints. Broadcasting the tape was a highly responsible act, a blow for justice in an otherwise unjust city.

• *The riots were caused by inequities and racism in our society; television is only a brave messenger.* The blame lies with the government for not correcting the problems, and specifically with the Reagan-Bush administrations for abandoning the cities and shifting resources to Republican vote-rich suburbs. The Rodney King beating tape was a mirror television held up to our society to show it what it had become. If we don't like what we see, we need to change ourselves, not blame the mirror.

DID TELEVISION EXACERBATE THE RIOTS?

Again, the answer is an ambiguous yes and no. Local television went to extraordinary lengths to cover the post-verdict riots. Many local stations canceled their regular programming and covered the riots continually. While the networks did not drop their prime time shows, they did rearrange their schedules and put their news and news magazine shows on longer than normal schedules to give audiences as complete a picture as possible of a developing, historic national tragedy.

Arguably, television exacerbated the rioting in four ways:

• *It told looters and arsonists where the pickings were best.* The scenes of looting and arson accompanied by reports of police abandonment of areas to looters was a road map to criminals.

• *It undercut civic authority.* The broadcast of live or taped images of looting and burning with inset boxes of public officials calling for calm only underscored the helplessness of society and law enforcement.

• *It continued to fuel the anger during the violence.* Continued broadcasting of the beating segment of the King tape during the riots stoked the emotional fire sweeping the city and the nation. Channel 2 in Los Angeles (and probably others around the country) ran the tape as the verdict was being announced to be sure that viewers would be angry enough. Seeing the taped beating and hearing the verdict simultaneously would and did anger just about anybody; broadcasting it over and over throughout the riots was clearly a provocation to those who were not in the streets rioting.

• *Television exploited the riots.* There were numerous examples of exploitative programming—TNT network running *Heat Wave*, a movie about the 1965 Watts Riots, Opra Winfrey with an out-of-control studio full of mixed races shouting at each other, Geraldo Rivera taking over the afternoon news on Los Angeles Channel 2 and being irritated at a Korean guest because he wasn't angry enough, or Channel 2 news reporter Pat Lalama interviewing two Korean women who had just been attacked and who obviously did not wish to be interviewed.

But there is another side to the argument, another set of answers about television's role during the riots:

• *It is television's job to cover stories like the riots, live and in depth.* This is what television does that no other medium can do. Viewers expect it, depend on it. Any other response would have been a breach of trust with the audience and a breach of professionalism. The pictures were not pretty, and may have aggravated some people, but showing them is television's responsibility. There may have been occasions when some stations did it clumsily or even irresponsibly, but on the whole, the hundreds of hours of live local coverage was one of television's finest hours—an accomplishment many reporters risked life and injury for.

• *The viewers needed the coverage for their own safety.* The looters and arsonists were not watching television; they were already in the streets. Law abiding people, like my innocent friend from Japan, needed to know what was happening in their city. The riot was the major news story of the city and to downplay it in any way would have deprived the decent people of the city information they needed to survive. Viewers needed full and complete information on the

riots, including damage, location, areas of police protection, to make decisions.

• *Television was a vital emergency communications system for the city and the nation.* The coverage of hot spots during the riots, particularly where unlawful activity was going on in the face of police failures, saved lives by warning people away from danger areas. The LA Fire Department reported that their own communication system was so overwhelmed that the only way they could locate and triage fires was through media reports. For them, television was the vital communication link when their own system failed.

• *Television served as a badly-needed instrument of democracy.* Los Angeles citizens needed to know when the police and other public servants failed in their duty. Reporting on police watching while looting went on was the kind of journalism a democracy needs to function. The final resignation of Daryl Gates was a product of television—first the beating tape and then the images of officers pulling back from crowds, or watching while people looted, or just not there. Those video tapes will be valuable evidence later in revamping the public services of the city.

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DOES TELEVISION HAVE NOW IN OUR SOCIETY?

Like all technologies, television is ambiguous; it is how we use it that determines whether its role is positive or negative in our society. But the television coverage of the post Rodney King riots has called into question how we define positive and negative influences on society. The answer to the first bedrock question, did television cause the violence, while ambiguous in the immediate, must be positive in the long run because television has taken two of our most cherished positive values and turned them into very dangerous, society-wide myths. In doing so, television has called into question three values that, arguably, were the driving force behind the riots—individualism, consumerism and the legitimacy of violence.

America was founded by people who left Europe to escape stifling religious and political conformity. The colonists wanted freedom, opportunity, the ability to "do their own thing" in a new world, free of the unnecessary restraints of society. This principle of the supremacy of the individual over the group and over nature itself is embedded in our ethos, our laws, our myths and our Constitution. From the lonesome cowboy home on the range, to court decisions allowing children to sue parents, Americans believe that the rights of the individual are paramount. This attitude is totally foreign to other cultures that emphasize the supremacy of the family, the village and the society.

American television reflects this national ethos of rugged individualism. Sitcom plots, movie heroes (and occasionally heroines), even news anchors lionize the individual and the constant battle against society's creeping attempts to take away freedoms. Whether it is John Wayne taming the wilderness and Indian tribes (without an environmental impact statement), or Dan Rather walking off the set because a tennis match went overtime, or the brave Lone Ranger surrogates on *Star Trek, The Next Generation*, or buzz words like "socialized medicine" on news programs, the individual is king on television. Society's needs and demands are secondary or even a nuisance to be avoided or quashed. The ads tell us to get out by ourselves on the open road and leave all our responsibilities behind.

Along with individualism, television, by its very nature and structure, reflects consumerism. It defines personal worth in terms of possessions. And it sells those possessions. Because American television is almost totally commercial-supported, little if any programming rejects the notion that by buying and owning things people are fulfilled. Characters, plots, sets, ads, even newscasts assume that selling is the purpose of life, that ownership is the highest state of the individual, that products are the rewards of life. This television worldview, and the worldview of individualism, is so powerful and so accepted, that we hardly notice it. We hardly notice that the lifestyles shown us on the screen are defined by what individuals own. Other values, like family, community, charity, cooperation, simplicity, are overridden. Television's purpose is to deliver audiences to advertisers; messages and models that would negate the impact of advertising do not prosper in that environment.

Finally, hundreds of times a day, every day, television tells us that violence is a routine part of life and that individuals use it to get the things they want to consume. The impact of this message over and over again, regardless of specific plotlines, is that violence is a legitimate part of American life. The tools of violence, guns, wars, explosives, machines are glorified and presented as badges of individualism and therefore things to be consumed or possessed.

This routinization of violence, when combined with the values of consumerism and individualism at the expense of society set the scene for the riots and looting. The Rodney King tape showed the everyday violence minorities in Los Angeles know and are told by the media is part of their lives. For years and even decades, television had been telling them that they owe society little or nothing, that winning in life means getting what you want—or what television tells you to want. With a weak commitment to community and a strong push to acquire, it was predictable that angry individuals would attack and loot their society. Television had for years told them to take what they wanted, to use violence to get it, and to ignore the impact on their community. Despite the protestations from local news directors that they bear no responsibility for people who act based on what they see on television, the arson and looting that followed the King verdict was merely an 'acting out of the values delivered daily on American television. In that sense, television is unambiguously to blame for the violence, and would be even if all the cameras had been turned off and the screens went black during the riots.

CAN TELEVISION HELP WITH THE HEALING?

Regardless of television's responsibility for the conditions that let to violence following the verdict, the most fundamental question that can be asked is what can television do now to help heal the wounds. The *Los Angeles Times* television critic Howard Rosenberg suggested that it is time for television to give something back to the community from which it gets its FCC license and draws its ad revenues. Rosenberg suggests that one day a week each local station devote an hour of prime time to informing viewers of a different neighborhood about the good things that are going on it it. His suggestion is that by doing simple, positive (but creative and entertaining) programming to introduce various factions in cities to each other, that knock down the myths and make the people real, television can begin to heal the wounds in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta and other

cities that erupted in violence.

Rosenberg's suggestion came originally from a television station employee in Los Angeles, Huell Howser, who launched *Videolog* and *Californiua Gold* on KCET-TV. Both shows featured the best of a neighborhood, often through Howser spending an hour on air strolling through a neighborhood and chatting with its residents. This kind of programming showed the richness of neighborhoods, and more importantly creates an alternative world view to individualism, consumerism and violence.

Rosenberg's thrust—that television should give something back—is the key. Many stations will complain that they do in the form of sponsorships, scholarships, and events. These are fine, especially when they are not part of a promotional campaign whose real agenda is ratings—but they do not give television back to the community. Rosenberg's point is that it is airtime, prime airtime that is needed to bring television's magic and power to bear on the problems and the negative worldview it has contributed to.

KTLA's news director Warren Cereghino, argues that television did not cause King verdict violence because "you could turn off the cameras, go into a news blackout, and you still would have had looting and burning and rioting. These people were not responding to the presence of television cameras. They were responding to the conditions of their lives." He is right, but he should have added that it will take television cameras to change the conditions of their lives in order to change their responses. ■

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VIEWPOINT

A Plethora of Pundits

The Democratic National Convention hemorrhaged media talkers the way politicians bleed false promises.

Like predators, they waited in their glass-windowed booths over-looking the convention floor Thursday night, ready with thumbs up or thumbs down as to whether Democratic nominee Bill Clinton's acceptance speech satisfied their own criteria for being presidential.

All week they oozed, they schmoozed. They analyzed, they autopsied. They proliferated, they pontificated and, above all, they polluted.

When it comes to metaphors, this was a convention where the pundit ticket of Gergen/Shields on PBS got more television time than the Democratic ticket of Clinton/Gore. A convention where TV Sam Donaldsoned, John Chancellored, Bill Moyered, Jack Germonded, Robert Novacked, "Crossfired" and "Capital Ganged" the daylights out of you.

Vice presidential nominee Al Gore easily might have been referring to some media as well as the Bush Administration when he repeated again and again in his acceptance speech Thursday night: "They must go!"

In fact, the most striking message emerging from the convention's TV coverage was this: The less you know, the more air time you get to blab about it. And if repeated frequently, the blabbing assumes a life of its own and gains acceptance as reality.

Thereafter, it bears the stamp of Conventional Wisdom (CW).

–Howard Rosenberg
The Los Angeles Times

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WILL THE REAL LIVE BRADY BUNCH STAND UP?

The old 'white bread' well-bred bubble-head sitcom is a hit for the '90's and even plays on stage to SRO audiences. Is it nostalgia, parody or cult-worship by the twentysomethings?

BY BERT BRILLER

It's a warm Sunday afternoon in New York's Greenwich Village, but it's just after the riots in Los Angeles and there's some apprehension in the air. I'm headed for the Village Gate Downstairs to see *The Real Live Brady Bunch*. The off-Broadway stage show spoofs the sitcom whose reruns seem immortal and whose fans see them again and again.

The parody's producers discouraged New York reviewers from seeing their show, fearing critics wouldn't understand their iconoclastic "guerrilla theater" approach. And they discouraged me, despite my calls and letters. But even if I had to buy my own ticket, I won't let their lack of cooperation bias me.

The producers are riding on the coattails of two television formats—audience participation and situation comedy. Curtain-raiser to the Brady play is *The Real Live Game Show*. Before the Brady addicts get their fix, they take part in a send-up of the game show genre as foreplay. The second banana warms us up. He thanks us

for coming to this dark basement cabaret (upstairs there's jazz) on this beautiful Sunday matinee when we could be sipping cappuccinos at Greenwich Village's sidewalk cafes.

"How was church this morning?" he asks archly. "Well, this will be more fun." Whipping up audience enthusiasm, he tells us to clap when the APPLAUSE sign flashes, to shout "Oooooooh" and "Aaaaaaah" every time a prize is mentioned. The cues are the flashing of a card (and a frozen smile) by a sexy short-skirted model mimicking Vanna White.

Actually the model is a male actor in drag. The program doesn't say whether today's performance is by Kevin Dorff or Ilan Kwittken, "an anatomically correct man who although he yearns to play Hamlet, Ophelia would be acceptable." Whoever it is, the guy has great gams.

The warmer-upper has us practice yelling "a Braaaand Neeeew Caaar" every time that prize is mentioned, giving the audience plenty of opportunity for high-decibel vocal participation. (It turnes out that the Braaaand Neeeeew Caaar is only rental limo for a day: "We never said you could keep it.")

Four audience members were selected to compete: a handsome black student from Seton Hall University—egged on by classmates at a front row table; a clothing salesman ; a blond hair stylist from Boston; and a perky grandmother whose claque included her husband, children and four grandchildren aged 7 to 13.

The stylist came from my table. She and two friends said they had flown from Boston just to take in the Bradys. The trip set each back $100 for airfare, plus taxis and $25 theater tickets, "So this better be worth it."

They know the Brady shows backwards and forwards. Some days they had spent two hours watching the reruns back to back. The stylist was disappointed that there weren't T shirts or other souvenirs for sale in the lobby. Obviously, there's an additional market for Brady merchandise to add to Paramount's coffers.

The first round of the game show required each contestant to recite "Quick, Chris, methinks there's a coyote in the credenza," demonstrating three separate emotions—giddiness, horror and horniness. The players threw themselves into the game, with even the grandmother delivering the line with a heavy helping of lust. The audience vote eliminated the stylist.

Next round required contestants to sing popular songs, and the salesman was out. The final round called for the student and grandmother to enact a soap opera scene, with lines like "you should talk about fidelity after having had two sex-change operations." To rib patterns of television, the game show was interrupted frequently by tongue-in-cheek commercials for shops in the area.

The student won the chance to get the Brand New Car, while the grandmother's consolation prizes included colored condoms. Seven young women were picked for the student's final task—to guess which of each's statement about herself was true. One coed's statement was that she could sing the first four lines of the Periodic Table of Elements. Challenged, she did so to loud applause. The emcee kiddingly chided her, "You left out one of the inert gases."

The hip student guessed a few statements right, but the clock ran out before he could finish. Loud cheering and applause ended the game show. During the intermission, members of the cast struck the game set and installed the minimalist "Brady" set. Unlike the lavish suburban home on TV, it is bare, a neutral wall with a single door suitable for angry slamming.

Checking the audience, I noted only three blacks. That's not surprising,

since blacks weren't too visible in the Brady series and other sitcoms of twenty years ago. Someday perhaps there'll be a Real Live Cosby Show, I mused, recalling that Cosby's final episode had racked up phenomenal ratings.

Half-way through intermission, the p.a. system announced "Last call for drinks! Nothing will be served during the Real Live Brady Bunch."

Lights down and up on this week's episode, "A Fistful of Reasons," written by Tam Spiva. The dialogue follows her TV script exactly, but the children are played by adults wearing the outlandish clothes of the 70's sitcom. The nine members of the Brady household—Mike, Carol, Alice the housekeeper, the three girls and three boys—are arranged in a tic-tac-toe format like the program's opening and closing logo, mugging at each other.

Although there was mild libidinous innuendo between Mike and Carol, the word 'sex' was mentioned only once, in the final episode.

The lyrics, to Frank De Vol's familiar music, open: "This is the story of a lovely lady/Who was bringing up three lovely girls" and tell how Carol (with her three blond girls) married widower Mike (with the three blackhaired boys). Bradyphiles in the audience join in delightedly. Blackout.

Lights up on Cindy, the youngest girl, played by a woman three times the child's age. She is boo-hooing loudly, then passes by Alice, whose greeting she ignores. Alice alerts Mom Carol to Cindy's fretting, saying, "Maybe she has something on her mind." Blackout. Canned laugh track up.

Older Brady girl tells Carol that Cindy won't talk and won't come down to dinner. Blackout. Lights up on Cindy, near the door that suggests her room, as the Brady parents enter. Mike says, "Cindy, we can't help you unless you tell us what's wrong." She confesses that she's being teased by the bully Buddy because she "speaks funny." Parents say they'll help her practice with speech exercises until her lisp is cured. Blackout.

Lights up on Cindy with a giant book labeled TONGUE TWISTERS. Alice tries to help, but both end up mixing the esses and ess-aitches. Blackout and laugh track.

The plot moves on, getting the middle Brady boy, Peter, to accompany his step sister so that Bully Buddy doesn't tease her. Their encounter ends with Buddy calling Peter "chicken coward" because he won't fight.

Dad tells Peter it's O.K. not to fight, it's right to try reasoning with the bully. When that doesn't work, Dad himself calls on Buddy's father. Buddy's father, arguing that boys will be boys, orders Brady off his property.

Now Mom Brady says she'll take over and try reasoning with Buddy's mother, woman to woman. However, the other mom wimpishly says she can't challenge her husband on how boys should be raised. Mrs. Brady stalks out, slamming the door.

Dad gives Peter permission to fight if reason fails again. Since the title is "A Fistful of Reasons," reason fails. Lights up on Peter with a black eye. Alice comes in with a prop lamb chop, "It's Dad's dinner but it will do Peter's eye more good." Blackout. Canned plus audience laughter.

Now Peter is being trained with boxing gloves by his brothers and Alice, who counsels "keep moving" and dances around comically stiff. One of Peter's haymakers inadvertently catches Dad's chin.

The climactic scene is Peter's accompanying Cindy, followed by a bevy of classmates who bet Buddy will win the fight. Cindy confesses she has let it slip that a donnybrook is about to take place. Peter's roundhouse punch floors the bully, who moans that his tooth is loose. Cindy chides him, saying "Now you talk funny." Peter tells her and the other kids not to tease Buddy, "for the same reason you don't want to be teased." The other kids hang their heads sheepishly and exit as the moral sinks in.

In true sitcom tradition, the problems (Cindy's being teased and Peter's fear) have been solved within the 22-minute time frame. But the producers present an iconoclastic capper, spotlighting Carol Brady on stage "with a last word." This is delivered as an altered version of the Jefferson Airplane song "Go Ask Alice." Carol belts it out, the lyrics including the admonition that she is telling the kids "the difference between the real and the show."

Abandoning the matronly demeanor of Florence Henderson as the Brady mom, but still in her costume, she bumps and grinds. The rest of the Brady brood joins her on stage in a zany orgiastic pantomime of unBrady-like actions—Cindy swigging from a gin bottle, Peter shooting up, the older siblings cavorting sexually, and even Alice letting herself go. To underline the sinful scene, it is presented with flashing red lights.

It's a quickie coda, but it does say the real world of the '70's wasn't in the apple pie order the Brady household portrayed. Although the TV show had mild libidinous innuendo between Mike and Carol (and they may have been the first sitcom couple to share a double bed), the word "sex" was mentioned only once, in the very last episode.

Why is the old television series, which aired on ABC-TV Friday nights from 1969 to 1974, so much a favorite? It also spawned six episodes of *The Brady Bunch Hour* in 1977, nine episodes of *The Brady Girls Get Married* and *The Brady Brides* in 1981, *A Very Brady Christmas* (1988), five shows of *The Bradys* in 1990 and a Saturday morning animated cartoon (1972-74), as well as record albums and concerts. As Ann B. Davis (Alice) says, "We've gotten so much blood out of this turnip, it may not be a turnip."

A variety of factors contribute to its continuing success. First, the Bradys offered predictability and safety. Viewers knew that if a child had a problem, Mom Carol and Dad Mike would come and get it on the road to solution. Theirs was comfortable family, in a suburban house with a well-stocked fridge, an indefatigable maid and siblings who got along well, at least one of whom viewers could identify with. The series reflected the fads of the times, like bell bottom trousers and loud polyester shirts. And it promised calm following the tumult of the rebellious late 1960's.

The Brady Bunch made it to the stage largely through the efforts of two sisters, Faith and Jill Soloway, who are 27 and 26 and involved in the underground Annoyance Theater in Chicago. They were associated with such "guerrilla" productions as *The Miss Vagina Pageant* and *Coed Prisons Sluts*. (The titles help define "guerrilla.") One day a colleague did a takeoff on Jan Brady which broke them up, and the light bulb went on—why not do a whole Brady episode?

The Soloways copied dialogue and directions from the tube and started performing Brady episodes verbatim on a small stage in Chicago. Meanwhile, word of the unauthorized lifting drifted back to *Brady Bunch* original creator Sherwood Schwartz and Paramount Pictures, which owns the copyright. Paramount was on the point of writing a legal letter charging infringement. But Schwartz recom-

mended holding off until he had a chance to check out how distorting or derogatory, if not just annoying, the Annoyance Theater's version might be.

Seeing the stage version on a trip to Chicago, Schwartz found, to his surprise, the butt of the joke seemed to be the 70's—its fads and foibles—rather than his show. The dialogue was straight from the original scripts. Sherwood decided "It was a gentle spoof of the life and times of the Bradys. I didn't quite understand the show's popularity until that day." So the Annoyance troupe was allowed to continue and filled the small theater for 14 months. It moved to New York in September 1991 for a "limited run" that has been extended several times.

The cast of TV's Brady Bunch.

In April 1992 the real live onstage Bradys went bi-coastal, opening in Los Angeles. For the first time the stage production is in a real theater, the Westwood, not far from UCLA in the city where the TV series was filmed. Sofas have been installed next to the stage so some lucky patrons can bring cushions and munchies.

The usual flow of dramatic fare is from stage to tube, and the reverse flow has been negligible. Why, then, has *The Brady Bunch* started something? One critic saw the frightening prospect that "next they'll do the *Real Live Gilligan's Island*. Surprisingly, a Canadian does want to stage *Gilligan's Island*. And Schwartz, who also created *Gilligan*, has worked for several years on a musical of *Gilligan's Island*. He hopes to get it on Broadway.

One reason for recycling reruns as stage productions may be that there is a pre-sold audience willing to pay to see their favorites—and repeatedly. Another is that the stage version can be "read" at several levels. There are those who will see the show and envisage the old characters they loved. Others will see them through glasses that now may have lost their rosy color. Some may just wish a nostalgic remembrance of lost times.

Some will enjoy the dissonance of grownups playing innocent kids while performers in their twenties play parents. The exaggerations and caricatures are amusing in themselves. While the sets are minimalist, the performances are over-acted, parody-cartoony.

Jill Soloway says the audience experiences *The Real Live Brady Bunch* as "performance art" rather than Theater; they don't see it as a play. She says the process is like "an Andy Warhol blown-up soup-can thing, taking something that you know in one context and putting it in another context and changing the meaning of it." I'd add that it's like a Roy Lichtenstein oversize painting of

a comic strip, with the balloons exclaiming "Wow!" and "Kabooom!"

Jill feels that taking the show off the small tube and putting it on a large stage enlarges it and "makes everything that's bad or unreal about it stand out. Giving it the life and breadth of theater is really absurdist."

Skeptics ask Why would anyone pay $25 to see something you can see for free? And know by heart? The answer is communion, participation, being there, sharing with a crowd and its idols your experience of having watched religiously.

Students watch the Bradys to relax after school and to feel superior to its simplistic and unreal presentation.

The mystery of why the Bradys have become the pop icon of the twentysomethings has spawned some scholarly discussions. Professor Robert Thompson, of Syracuse University, says that people under 35 know *The Brady Bunch* extremely intimately. "If you had that intimate a knowledge of Shakespeare," he believes, "you'd be considered a genius."

I'd note that the Brady trivia becomes a frame of reference the young can share, like Greg's all-purpose date-breaking line, "Something suddenly came up."

Thompson adds that the program "was painted in broad strokes. It was like Zen television." It completely avoided ambiguity. By contrast, he observes, "The American family now is so filled with ambiguity. It's kind of satisfying to see, in one's escapist drama,... that ambiguity isn't present."

He finds another element appealing to younger Bradyphiles, who couldn't be nostalgic for the 70's. This is the opportunity it offers to feel superior. He says that people watch *The Brady Bunch* with a sense of irony, "that elbow in the ribs."

Another important factor in the development of the Brady cult is that television has become an integral part of college life—no longer confined to the lounges, but as necessary in students' own rooms as their stereo. *The New York Times* said TV is now "Basic Furniture in College Students' Ivory Towers." University of California sociology professor Todd Gitlin said, "TV is their collective dream machine, their temple, their sense of being members of a nation."

A special Roper study reports that college students watch TV a weekly average of 18 hours—a lot, but less than the average adult. Michael Moffatt, who teaches anthropology at Rutgers and who studied undergraduate life, found a lot of "the ritualistic social viewing of something incredibly stupid." At his Rutgers dorm the butt was *Gilligan's Island*.

While Jill Soloway sees the Bradys as unreal—her parents didn't come in to solve the children's problems—Sherwood Schwartz answers those who said the series "was too namby-pamby, too sweet." He says, "But many of the stories ... came right out of our home life, though the bringing together of two separate families was an invention of mine. There are so many damn dysfunctional families in America that I think it's a longing for a more innocent , pleasant life, for that family that was very functional."

Ian Spelling, an entertainment writer for *The New York Times* syndicate, told me about the opening in Greenwich Village: "The crowd went bonkers. They were surprised that the script was followed word for word—of

course, with changes of inflection and direction. They loved it."

Spelling explains the television series rerun magnetism in part by its now being broadcast in the late afternoon, when students are finished with classes and relax with something "stupid or sappy." (Currently the show is on Turner's TBS cable at 4:35 PM ET, following *The Flintstones*, and on some 100 other stations via syndication.)

"I've a lousy memory," Spelling told me, "but I can reel off a dozen favorite Brady shows. Number 1 is when Imogene Coca plays crazy Aunt Jenny and Jan is worried she'll be like her, but then finds Imogene's a glamorous jet-setter. And then the one when Peter's voice is changing, which may ruin an album they're recording. And the Great Drive-off, where Greg and Marcia compete to see who's the better driver. And the episode where Marcia falls in love with the dentist, and the one where Jan hears radio signals in her braces, and the itching powder show. There's the episode with Bobby and Cindy trying to get into the Guiness Book of Records by nonstop teeter-totting. And the one when Alice threatens to quit. And when Greg doesn't make the football team but saves the big game by taking a photo of the opponent stepping out of bounds on a touchdown run."

"The Bradys may have been a mile from reality, but they were more familiar and likable than the Partridge family, who were two states away." Spelling adds, "The Bradys were fun."

The Soloways have said that the *Bunch* was rife with "sexism, classism, the worst stereotypes." That's partly true. But the first episode I caught after seeing the live show concerned childless neighbors of the Brady's who adopted a white boy, and then two of his friends from the orphanage, a Black and an Asian. That brought a complaint from an Archie Bunker neighbor, which was firmly rejected. The episode's message was clearly on the side of racial understanding. (The episode served as the pilot for a spinoff, but it wasn't picked up.)

The next day's rerun I watched was the Drive-Off, where Greg voiced chauvinist barbs against female drivers, but loses a driving contest to Marcia. Even the youngest Brady boy learns that he may not be a better bicyclist than his sister.

Besides the stage versions, Brady fans are getting some literary fanlore. Warner Books published *The Brady Bunch Book*, 268 pages of Brady anecdota by TV columnists Andrew J. Edelstein and Frank Lovece. It includes synopses of the 116 original episodes, and lots of other trivia.

Harper/Perennial published *Growing Up Brady* by Barry Williams, who played Greg, with Chris Kreski. It also gives an episode-by-episode rundown, with other insider notes. (A supermarket gossip tabloid picked up some tidbits of hanky panky among cast members.) More significant is its account of the struggles between the star Robert Reed (who died of AIDS and cancer this year) and Sherwood and Lloyd Schwartz over the series' direction.

Williams says he stopped watching the reruns because he became self-conscious, but did view them again researching the book. "Sometimes I laughed, sometimes cringed." he says. As for the stage version, he comments, "Pretty silly. Pretty silly."

One of the year's most cited books about television is William McKibben's *The Age of Missing Information*. Asked why he wrote extensively about the Bradys, McKibben says, "It's the things that have been on for so long, over and over again, that really shape our minds. *The Brady Bunch* is maybe the best example. It's so pervasive in our idea of what normal is and what the world

should look like."

To learn how the theatergoers feel, I gave postcards to a sampling at the matinee I attended. Typical comments were these from a 20-year-old college student: "The episodes are considered an American institution among myself and my peers ... The stage version was great. It was hysterically funny as we, the audience, were able to say the lines of the characters right along with the actors... I hope I can go back and see more shows."

When the *Bunch* premiered in 1969, Cleveland Amory pilloried it in *TV Guide*, calling it a pointless "mish mash." It survived his scorn. It also withstood putdowns by star Robert Reed who called the writing "stupid" and "Gilligan's Island-level crap." Reed, who studied at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and taught acting and Shakespeare courses at UCLA, wrote blistering memos to Schwartz, some reprinted in Williams' book. He was allowed to direct three episodes.

Reed found episode 116, about Bobby's selling hair tonic that turned his brother's hair orange and then planning to sell orange bunnies, so idiotic he refused to play in it on the day shooting started.

The result: a tragicomedy behind the sitcom—Schwartz frantically rewriting to give Reed's lines to the kids, Reed's agent arguing for Reed to be paid, Schwartz saying Reed shouldn't get residuals for an episode he's nearly ruining, Reed coming to the set, Schwartz asking him to leave, Reed coming every day to scowl, Schwartz rejecting the studio's offer to have Reed removed by guards because Schwartz didn't want the kids to see their "father" yanked away. Maalox moments! With Brady ratings sliding, episode 116 became the series finale.

But on the show we see family togetherness. No unemployed, no crime, no racial tension, no sexually transmitted disease. With all its inanities—a promo calls it "squeaky clean"—and despite the stage parodies magnifying its "whipped cream on white bread" blandness, *The Brady Bunch* somehow captures the attention of another young generation. The Bradys live happily ever after, idealized icons like fossils in amber—frozen on tape forever, with Reruns, Reunions, Reminiscences, Reincarnations, Merchandising Rights, Residuals. ■

Bert Briller was a vice-president of ABC-TV, executive editor of the Television Information Office and a reporter/critic for Variety. He has taught mass communication at Hunter College and is currently completing a book on television.

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TAKING BACK THE SYSTEM

A distinguished journalist calls for television professionals to help restore credibility to our democratic political process.

BY ROBERT MACNEIL

This is a wonderful time to be in communications. We have a world more open to our message that freedom and democracy work; we command technology that grows more astonishing by the month; and we have the tremendous advantage of being native speakers of English, which is rapidly becoming the world language.

Of course we are vastly outnumbered by people using English as a 2nd, or 3rd or link language for dozens of important uses. But that mass migration of English into other mouths produces some wonderful results.

There are the helpful English signs foreigners put out in hotels and places. Like the sign in a Tokyo hotel: "You are invited to take advantage of the chambermaid."

Or the one in a Tokyo bar: "Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts."

Or the tailor's shop in Hongkong which advertises: "Ladies may have a fit upstairs."

Or the hotel in Yugoslavia which has a sign in each room: "The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid."

In Rome a laundry sign says: "Ladies, leave your clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time."

But my absolute favorite is the hotel in Zurich which offers this advice: "Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedrooms, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose."

Those examples come from the magazine *English Today*, published in Cambridge, England, and read all over the world.

I sometimes think of that because of one commercial run often during the Olympic Games. It made me tear up a little, as it was calculated to do. It showed a young Lithuanian arriving to compete in the Games, thinking that just to be free was a victory. Curiously it did not make me remember the sponsor. That identity was lost each time I saw it because the evocative imagery stirred up associations which carried me away. It reminded me that my time in journal-

ism has spanned much of the cold war.

I was in Berlin the day they started building the wall. The commercial made me think of the rush of events that have gladdened our hearts these last few years—from the destruction of the wall to the crushing of the coup last summer in Moscow—the evaporation of communism.

We see in almost daily revelations the appalling cost to them of decades of gross deceit and perverted ambitions.

Yet each time I am reminded by a sentimental commercial or by a speech claiming victory in the cold war, I feel contradictory emotions. There is something unseemly about using it; a suspicion of gloating, of patronizing these poor children of the damned, who have finally seen the light and may now aspire to the nirvana of the free market. Yet another suspicion too: that we are not just patting ourselves on the back but expressing our insecurity. OK, communism lost, democracy won, but how's democracy doing? As all the ugly knitting of communism unravels, do we now see the dropped stitches and the skipped rows in our own system?

Even under the staggering weight of all the atrocities still coming to light, it took decades for Marxist totalitarianism to collapse.

It makes me think that we do not need big atrocities to weaken democracy. The fabric of trust that holds us together is not an iron curtain or concrete wall. It is more like gossamer, like a spider's web, whose strength is in its whole integrity. Small atrocities can damage the web and I think we have gradually allowed such an atrocity to overtake our election campaigns.

In 1968, in a book *The People Machine*, I worried that the new marriage of TV ads, political consultants and opinion polling, was an ominous development. I also worried that television news was on its way to reducing politics to triviality.

In the 24 years since the 1968 election, everything has gotten infinitely more sophisticated—and a lot of it worse. We know from the study at the Kennedy School that the average TV news election soundbite shrank from 43 seconds in 1968 to 9 seconds in 1988. Extrapolating from that, gives you an average decline of 7 seconds per presidential election, so this year's average bites should be two seconds. Political hiccups!

On the other side, the paid TV side, the decline of political parties, the changes in delegate selection, the proliferation of caucuses, the consolidation of primaries into mini and super Tuesdays, often make the TV commercial the principal vehicle of political communication. And we have seen the growing resort to negative commercials.

Greater reliance on paid TV advertising has driven the cost of campaigning ever higher, requiring tens of millions for the Presidency, millions for Senate and even some House seats, making fund-raising as important as governing or legislating; with effects no one feels really comfortable defending. These imperatives have raised the advantages of incumbency, and they have encouraged single issue campaigns by interest groups outside the political parties but capable of using the same techniques to target and frighten lawmakers.

The huge sums needed to run for office not only scare away some talent, they lead inexorably to more opinion sampling, or market research, so that candidates will not invest political capital in unprofitable issues. Except for a bold few, political leadership becomes increasingly: tell me what you want to hear and I'll say it. Parallel with this evolution, the public trusts politicians less and, in

the best poll of all, bothers less to vote for them.

In 1960, the Kenndy-Nixon election, the turnout of all citizens legally eligible to vote was 62.8%

In 64 it was 61.9%

In 68—60.9%

In 72—55.2%

In 76—53.4%

In 80—52.6%

In 84—53.1% (the only time the downward trend was interrupted)

And in 1988—50.2%

And if that downward spiral continues this year, fewer than half of the Americans entitled to vote, will bother. In 1988 George Bush was elected by 26.8% of the electorate, the lowest percentage in any two-candidate race this century. Nearly half the eligible electorate did not care to vote for Bush or Dukakis.

It boils down to this: confidence in the fundamental process of a democracy, the choosing of leaders, has declined to a point where huge chunks of electorate feel the franchise is irrelevant and see politics as a professional game played by us—an elite that includes the politicians, media, the pollsters, the media consultants, the speech writers—a whole well-paid, recession-proof aristocracy of power, that appears to manipulate a system for the benefit of a class who feel it worthwhile to vote.

An elite that includes politicians, media, pollsters, media consultants, speech-writers appears to manipulate the system.

What could be more damaging to a democracy than to run things so that a big chunk of your electorate feels impotent or indifferent—and to increase that feeling each election? There are two things the U.S. shares with no other significant democracy: high voter apathy and dependence on paid TV advertising for political communication.

Nobody disputes these facts and it is not a matter of partisan disagreement. I am not blaming Republicans or Democrats. I am not saying we got the wrong presidents. It is an American phenomenon, not a party matter.

Meg Greenfield of *The Washington Post*, a level headed woman, wrote the other day: "What is at work here is a lethal lack of seriousness ... given the assault on our sensibilities and the seductiveness of the campaign-as-soap- opera presentation, we are increasingly at a loss ourselves to know how to judge these handler-and-media-created caricatures. How do you judge them? It's not so simple as merely picking the one closest to your own political values, since there will be a number of them claiming to think and want what you do and since there is so much accommodation to continuous polling results."

I think the lethal lack of seriousness Ms. Greenfield observes stems from the fundamentally trivial premise that slipped into national politics decades ago, but arrived with a vengeance once the possibilities of marrying mass consumer television and merchandise advertising techniques were perceived in the 60s and gradually came to occupy the center of the process.

It is the premise that candidates for the highest office in the world's emblematic democracy—and naturally lesser offices—are as marketable as any trivial commodity. It is a commonplace to make to observation but I think it is as profound as it is obvious.

It is a philosophical premise about the machinery of democracy that sits quite comfortably in a culture that turns on the assumption that what

sells is good, what does not sell is bad, and anything that will *make* something sell is success. Selling is an end that justifies its means.

Because it is the premise on which so much of the economic health and wealth of this country (and its high standard of living) depend, it sidled into politics with amazingly little objection. How can one say that it is demeaning to the people who offer themselves for office, and to the voters who are asked to choose among them, without denigrating a process that is benign and applauded everywhere else in the culture? How can it be questioned without questioning the fundamentals of what advertising does for a living? Well it can be questioned as it has been, occasionally, by your own profession.

In 1971, Ed Ney, then President and CEO of Young and Rubicam, announced that Y & R would not accept any political candidates in the US in 1972. In *The New York Times* he wrote:

"What we really should do is eliminate the question of paying for television time in any political election and stop using commercial techniques that are not appropriate to political campaigns."

It was a voice in the wilderness but his reasons are worth quoting at greater length.

Ney went on: "The propriety of using our skills to influence people in this critically important area is increasingly suspect, as, indeed, is the whole practice of selling a candidate for any political office with the same rules that one might use when promoting a product. To illustrate, take the example of a product, chewing gum, though it might just as truly be any other type of product that has a clearly perceivable dimension and characteristics that can be isolated and that are not subject to change after the consumer has made the purchase ...

"These are widely different propositions, and it is a perversion of our skills to attempt to use the techniques of a 30- or 60-second commercial to discuss an issue or the character of a candidate for high political office."

"A perversion of our skills." Strong words. I saw Ed Ney a few months ago—he is now US Ambassador to Canada—and he believes them just as firmly 21 years later.

As I recall, a few other agencies also refused political accounts but that became irrelevant when campaigns chose to set up their own ad hoc agencies, sometimes to avoid the supposed taint of Madison Avenue, even while borrowing talent from it.

Four years later, Ney returned to the attack: "One cannot deny that the techniques utilized in 'cheap shot' commercials have an exasperating effectiveness, any more than I can deny that the fastest way to motor from Washington to San Francisco may be to drive 110 miles per hour all the way. The point is that this kind of television for political messages is—like speeding—reckless, irresponsible and very quickly dangerous to the public welfare."

Ney, who had worked in Britain, advocated sweeping reform in which paid commercials would be banned, and replaced with free television time, given to the politicians by right as in Britain.

No one took that seriously and he resigned himself to calling for an independent panel, similar to the National Advertising Review Board, to police offensive political advertising.

And, after four more elections and mounting disgust, that is where we have arrived in this election. The 4A's with the League of Women Voters and the Markle Foundation have been running Project RUN-FAIR, urging the public to call a 900 number to report deceptive or unfair political advertising. RUN-FAIR has been attacked for

being years too late, for harboring the secret motive of cleaning up the overall image of advertising, for not using a toll-free number. Joe Napolitan, for the American Association of Political Consultants, said the industry "should apply this to all advertising."

The news media, which began the practice in 1988, have greatly increased their own scrutiny of political advertising, with some newspapers, like *The Boston Globe*, running regular ad-watch columns, trying to assess the truth or falsehood of claims made.

And in response to a petition from People for the American Way the FCC has ruled that political ads must carry both audio and video identification of who paid for them.

That is probably all a healthy reaction to what many perceived as the excesses of negative campaigning in 1988. Even Lee Atwater, dying of a brain tumor, wrote that he regretted having said of Dukakis that he would "strip the bark off the little bastard" and "make Willie Horton his running mate."

Anything—voter anger, news media responsibility, campaign reform group pressure—that deters candidates from stripping the bark off their opponents is welcome. But concentrating only on negative and deceptive commercials answers only part of the problem, as Ed Ney pointed out long ago.

The problem remains that at the core of our campaigns, politicians allow themselves to be researched, scripted, shaped, revised, remade, remolded, marketed like any other commodity. And it does not stop with campaigns.

This way of making the president is now such an industry, so institutionalized, the tools so well honed, the mechanics so well understood and perceived as so necessary to political life, that once in office candidates cannot give it all up. It becomes reelection insurance.

Starting with John Kennedy, and through each of the Presidents since, governing has become an extension of campaigning and running the democracy becomes a form of permanent campaign. Acts of government are handled with as much pre-polling and scripting, rescripting and stage-managing, image-dressing and after-polling as if they were critical moments in a campaign for office. The selling of the president never stops.

White House PR people seem constantly to be saying: Your president is making the earth move, feel it.

The White House PR people seem constantly to be saying, in effect: Your president will make the earth move. He's making the earth move, feel it ... the earth is moving. There, he made the earth move and he'll make it move again tomorrow.

And if you say, "Hey, the earth isn't moving," they say, "You're not paying attention ... feel harder. It's moving. Or the Congress is stopping him from making the earth move. This is the earth-movingest president we've ever had."

Now voters know that presidents—like husbands—don't make the earth move every time. But the marketing mentality makes them tell us he does: he's Mohammed Ali, the greatest. It becomes impossible politically to admit any mistakes. He's not allowed any fallibilities.

The press sees through the constant flackery but has to report it because it has to report the substance of what the president is saying and doing. So the press develops its own defensive-

ness and puts a corrective spin on the White House spin. Surfacing in newspaper columns and the standuppers of network correspondents, that alienates voters who like the president and feel the journalists are constantly knocking him.

The more reverse spin they know the press will put on any politically sensitive thing they say, the more ingenious the pre-spin sessions, the stage-management of pseudo events and photo ops, and the leaking of favorable material.

In all this spin and counter spin, who knows where anything resembling the truth lies? In the Reagan White House it really surfaced only when all the insiders obligingly wrote instant memoirs, each to put his spin on the other, including the master spin controller, Larry Speakes.

So whatever engaged public remains, trying to stay attentive, trying to be part of the system, listens to the news, reads between the lines in the newspapers, and wonders how much of this stuff they're supposed to believe. It sounds like a game. It is a game of political marketing, which tolerates a kind of low-grade infection of untruth, or semi-truth, or playing with the truth; a mononucleosis of the national political spirit, very wearing to the immune system of the body politic.

It is a game and everybody in the elites I mentioned has an interest in it: candidates obviously, since this is what appears to work; but also those with the skills the campaign industry employs, including advertising and TV journalism.

No one has been evil. We have all just lived through the evolution, eager to play our part as it seemed necessary and satisfying professionally to do. Somewhere, someone must be saying for example: "Boy, remember 'It's Morning in America?' Those spots really worked. Didn't mean a damn thing, but they really worked!"

Despite Lee Atwater, someone must be saying to himself: "That Willie Horton commercial—wow! That rang their bells," And you could duplicate that professional satisfaction right through all the polling, writing, consulting, issue formation, image enhancing skills that make a campaign work. And you would find them in all the parts of the TV journalist's trade: pride in the carefully crafted piece on the nightly news, the pithy line at the end of the standupper. No one in particular is a villain. Everyone has been doing his job with reason for pride in his expertise.

But each one of us also has a stake in the health of this democracy. As we have just been reminded in Eastern Europe, we are not just bystanders, witnesses to democracy.

So, my question is: when does one's duty to the democracy take over from one's duty to a candidate, to an agency, a network, to one's own professional ambition?

I quoted Ed Ney, one of the advertising industry's great men, saying it was a perversion of advertising skills, to use the TV commercial for political purposes. So, is it a perversion of the television journalist's skills to reduce a politician to a sound bite of 9 seconds?

None of us would knowingly do violence to the democratic system, which guarantees the freedoms that are this country's greatest glory. But shouldn't we consider whether we are all lending our skills, perverting them in a process which is demonstrably eroding confidence in the democracy?

I think Susan Lederman, President of the League of Women Voters, said it well in announcing the RUN-FAIR campaign: "we all share responsibility to protect and enhance that democracy. Campaigns are the fulcrum on which the whole system turns."

It I had my way I would remove political commercials, and the money

they command, from the political system: just ban them, as cigarette ads were banned from television. But whenever I raise this in one of the earnest seminars on political reform, the others look at me with pity for my naivete.

But I think this year it is dawning on all of us that, if we don't use our professional skills to restore some credibility to the system, to bring in some of the millions who are turned off, this country may face a situation far graver than half of its electorate staying home. They will find other ways to vent their frustration.

Democracy is held together by a delicate web of trust, and all of us in public communications hold edges of the web.

We can't stop the game but we can play it more seriously and referee it more responsibly. ■

Robert MacNeil is the award-winning anchor of the *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour*. This article was adapted from a speech to the Advertising Women of New York, February 26, 1992.

PLAY BACK

Television's Purpose

I would like to urge upon you with all the vigor and resolution of which I am capable that there is no categorical antithesis between quality and entertainment for millions. For it is in its efforts to entertain that television's balance has been destroyed...

It seems to me that drama of the kind I have dwelt upon here today is one of the immediate and practical ways to restore to television some of its glitter, to transform the starers into lookers, listeners, and reactors, and to give television entertainment balance.

It is now clear that our system of communication must admit both "art-for-art's-sake" and "cost-per-thousand" philosophies; and while it is fashionable in some circles to maintain that sponsors' demands for large audiences must inevitably corrupt the quality and value of television output, some patient and reflective people continue to think in terms of peaceful coexistence.

It seems to me that a conspicuous opportunity exists, not just for the creative elements of the industry, but also for the advertiser with the vision and understanding to seize it. Good programming can be good business. It seems to me that creating exciting new drama should be at least a part of television's immediate purpose.

–Hubbell Robinson
from an article in the very first
issue of *Television Quarterly*, (1961).

"THE ARTS CANNOT THRIVE EXCEPT WHERE MEN ARE FREE TO BE THEMSELVES AND TO BE IN CHARGE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THEIR OWN ENERGIES AND ARDORS."

–Franklin D. Roosevelt
Address dedication of
the Museum of Modern Art
May 10th, 1939

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LET'S OVERHAUL TV'S POLITICAL ADVERTISING

A journalist and educator prescribes ways to remedy and reform a system that is undermining how we elect our leaders.

BY JERRY M. LANDAY

Politics in America began to crash and burn in 1952. Rosser Reeves, president of the Ted Bates Agency, convinced Dwight Eisenhower, assertive in war but reluctant as a campaigner, that his presidential virtues could be hawked to voters in television commercials, like toothpaste or beer. Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborne made the spots for the Ike "account". He won overwhelmingly.

Republican national chairman Leonard Hall declared: "You sell your candidates and your programs the way a business sells its products." Politicians became addicted to what Adlai Stevenson called "soapflakes campaigns".

Candidates now clutter the airwaves with abandon. They are routinely pitched *like* soap – test-marketed, wrapped and packaged in 30- and 60-second doses. Voters are seen not as thinking members of a democratic society, but as shoppers, mindless consumers of political product, passive before a barrage of audio and visual gimmicks designed to engineer consent.

We desperately need dialogue, discourse, debate. Instead, our political passions are smothered by TV blitzes, issueless campaigns, images without content, slogans without meaning: "I like Ike", "JFK: A Time For Greatness", "All the Way with LBJ", "Nixon's the One"' "It's Morning Again in America" (Reagan), "I'm not running to be Santa Claus" (Tsongas), "Let's Put People First" (Clinton).

Illusion overwhelms substance. Issues are displaced by dumbed-down decoys: "family values", flag-burning, "law and order". Candidates play to the viscera, abandoning genuine policymaking for propaganda.

Spots jostle spots for costly air time. Intuitive political judgment gives way to tracking polls, which measure the "inside leg" of a befuddled body politic on an hourly basis. Spot copy is altered overnight to conform, amplifying and playing back the confusion to the confused.

The voter wants leadership. He gets artifice. A visit to the voting booth

leaves him with the wretched feeling that what he has done has no more grandeur in it than choosing between a Bud Lite and a Bavarian on draft. It's time to fix the system.

Nearly a quarter-century ago, the Congress managed to legislate cigarette advertising off the air because smoking is harmful to health. It's now time to get political advertising *in its present form* off the air. Because politics in America has been taken prisoner by the product huckster, and by big campaign contributors who buy political influence by underwriting the whole dreadful business. It is ruining our national health.

We are losing control of the way we elect our president. When Richard Nixon won the presidency in 1968, no less than four media campaign aides were given major administration policy positions*. Now, media consultants and pollsters, the new praetorian guard, essentially run the show, from the pitch to what now passes for policy. The advertising mind has become the governing mind.

It was an ad man-turned-pol, a Democrat, Senator William Benton of Connecticut, who got the idea of marrying Madison Avenue to politics. He made his fortune as co-founder of the Benton and Bowles advertising agency. At 35, he cashed in his grey flannel suit for a life of public service and was elected.

In 1950, Benton showed off a new advertising idea to President Harry Truman – a street corner film projection unit that played a drab 60-second film pitch for Benton's Senate re-election campaign. Truman advised him to go shake 25,000 hands instead.

Some forty years later, hardsell has overwhelmed the handshake. Political resort to television spot campaigns grows exponentially, stifling informed choice, driving the politician deeply into debt and dependence on the process.

Media campaign managers are drawn like lemmings to television spots because they permit tight control of the message, and allow swift changes in copy themes. Spots can sway "undecideds" in the final hours of a tight race. They can be targeted to specific voting blocks.

But this year there are increasing signs of voter resistance. In Illinois, for example, Carol Moseley Braun, a virtual unknown, stayed out of a costly TV spot barrage between her two competitors for the Democratic senate nomination. She won. Voter outrage at irresponsible attack ads helped to hand primary victories to a host of others, including California's Dianne Feinstein in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate.

Descriptive of the ruination of American politics is what the late Robert Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, said about advertising in general: "[Its point is to] make us buy things... that we do not want, at prices we cannot pay, on terms we cannot meet, because of advertising we do not believe." This disbelief now extends to the way we elect leaders in whom we *want* to believe.

Political advertising has converted us from subject to object. The campaign is all make-believe, all smoke. Study the TV spots of the 1992 primaries. Image ads have come to overwhelm issue ads. It makes no difference whether it was rugged Pat Buchanan as the Marlboro Man, Paul Tsongas as Johnny Weismueller, Bill Clinton as Jack Armstrong the All-American Boy, Bob Kerrey as war hero, George Bush playing "The Presi-

* An advertising man, Bob Haldemann, became the President's chief of staff. A broadcast executive, Frank Shakespeare, was appointed head of the U.S.I.A. A public relations specialist, William Safire, became a senior presidential speechwriter. A journalist, Patrick Buchanan, served as special assistant to the President.

dent." They are echoes, not choices. Because one industry mentality serves all.

Behind a swelling score, Clinton tells us breathlessly: "This election is about change." "Courage for a change," declares Bob Kerrey. " Honesty for a change," chimes Jerry Brown. President Bush brings imperial overstatement to the theme: "If we can change the world, we can change America."

Change? Great! What kind? *Quien sabe?*

Clinton and Bush and Buchanan all want to "take back America." For whom? For "the people." To whom shall we give it? Why, the "forgotten middle class," declaims Democrat Clinton. All the other campaigns stake out the same ground. Their advisors have convinced them it must sell in Suburbia. Inner cities, with their poor and jobless, are consigned to oblivion.

Standing at his desk before a sea of flags, Bush is projected as "presidential." But a sea-of-flags backdrop makes Clinton "presidential" too, raising the question in healthy minds as to whether flag wavers do more damage to the moral fiber of the nation than flag burners.

MadAve image machine busily grinds out scenarios:

"Man of Action": Tsongas furiously breast-stroking to camera, Clinton on the production line, Bush touring Yeltsin around the White House.

"Common Man": Harkin in an abandoned factory surrounded by rapt workers, Clinton, chin in hand, in a countrified parlor with adoring neighbors.

"Family Values": Poking into the Kerrey and Clinton family albums to share those heartwarming candid kid photos and snapshots from the war.

Folksy Testimonials: Father-in-law telling us what a great American Paul Tsongas is. Tom Harkin's deaf-mute brother doing the same for him, in sign language.

Ad-ttack-tics: Kerrey telling us he will force Japan to trade fair. Force her? Lots of nasty quotes from newspaper editorials about the opponent-intoned by a sneering off-camera voice. Bush getting a former commandant of the Marine Corps to tar Buchanan as an isolationist.

Media managers urge the use of proxies in attack-ads to keep one's hands clean. A faceless narrator is customarily the assassin. A Marine is even better.

Big "issues" in short takes: "snapped," in analyst Ken Bode's phrase, "through a 30-second slingshot." In a marvel of compression, Clinton solves corporate irresponsibility, export of jobs, investment policy, welfare cheating, education, and childcare. In the same breathless 30 seconds, Bush strengthens our economy, makes America competitive, shifts the able-bodied from welfare to work, rebuilds our educational system.

In trendy California, ad-visors were cramming pitches into 10-second spots during the primary. "It's amazing," a media consultant told The *New York Times* disingenuously, "how much information you can pack into 10 seconds." The *Times* likened station-break ad clutter on Los Angeles television during the primary to "passengers trying to jam onto Japanese subway cars."

The politicians have made a Faustian deal with the ad trade, deficit campaigning with designer-ads of contentless content. Replay the vacuous lyrics of the jingle that pitched Ike to television audiences back in 1952: "You like Ike/I like Ike/Everybody likes Ike for President/Bring out the banners/Beat the drum/We'll take Ike to

Washington." In 1992, the art of non-content evolved into Clinton's "Opportunity, responsibility, new ideas, old-fashioned values". Tsongas' "He's not afraid of the truth. He'll declare an economic emergency on the first day and shake things up." Buchanan's chain-yanking "We will say goodbye to yesterday and build a new tomorrow."

Having allowed ourselves to be made into walking billboards, we Americans have gotten what we deserve – ad jingles on our lips, ad logos on our caps, ad slogans and brand names on our sports shirts, our jeans, running shoes, underwear, buttons on our chests and bumper stickers on our cars with "action" slogans, the display of which has become the *surrogate* for action.

Like oil and water, politics and illusion do not mix:

•Democracy is self-perfecting. It rests on openness and light. Political advertising deals in the inflated claim, the unjust comparison, the trivialization of the banal.

•The concerns of healthy government are framed by the public interest and the needs of the governed. The values of political advertising are hitched solely to the profit of those who advertise.

•At the heart of democratic discourse is the free expression of the collective will by informed citizens who are fully conscious of – and involved in – governing themselves. But political advertising plays to passivity, and to what the client and his media consultant want to make us do. It's tyranny with a velvet touch.

•Democracy is driven by *conscious* choice made on *rational* grounds. But the objective of propagandizing by advertising is to by-pass the rational and visceralize the process. Okay, perhaps, in pitching cars, beers, razor blades. Not aspiring leaders.

•Access to the game of political advertising is limited to those with vast amounts of money. With or without an "800" telephone number, only candidates who can afford advertising time can buy it. So, we confront a self-limiting process, the main result of which is that uncommon common men and women are denied the right to run for state and national office. A system with TV rate cards as the dues stifles political diversity. It degrades us from democracy into plutocracy.

In the past twenty years, the cost of the average campaign for the House of representatives has risen from $80,000 to $400,000. In the same period, the cost of a race for the U.S. Senate has grown from $600,000 to more than $4,000,000. Most of that money is earmarked for television packaging and spot time.

In 1992, nothing seemed different, only costlier. In California, Rep. Mel Levine spent more than $3.5 million on TV advertising in the Democratic senate primary, only to be beaten by Rep. Barbara Boxer. Jan Crawford, a Washington political consultant and time buyer, estimates the five senatorial candidates in that primary spent a total of $20 million, most on TV ads. She estimates that the three Democratic presidential candidates in the New York primary spent nearly that much.

President Bush and Pat Buchanan spent $1.5 million each to underwrite their TV campaigns in the once-humble New Hampshire primary.

In the general election four years earlier, Bush qualified for more than $64 million in public campaign funds. He spent nearly $40 million of it to package his campaign on television – the most expensive, as well as the most memorable, on the air. It brought us the infamous factory flag-wrap, Willie Horton, and a simple-minded whodunit on dirtying Boston Harbor. The presence of Ross Perot will drive presidential campaign tabs even higher.

Meeting these costs has become the single most demanding task of

national officeholders. In 1992, many primary candidates were forced to reduce drastically their person-to-person campaigning, spending the time instead to make pitches on the phone to donors to meet staggering TV bills – known in political parlance as "dialing for dollars." Then they started filling the coffers all over again, preparing for general election campaigns or writing off debts. Once elected, they must begin at once to raise cash for the next campaign.

Much of that political poke supports the media machine of modern politics, a veritable industry. The candidate turns over his brain, common sense and soul to a golden horde of consultants, spin doctors, copywriters, speechwriters, ghostwriters, producers, demographers, computer modelers, test marketers, media buyers, product testers, graphic designers, make-up mavens, lighting experts, photographers, and button-makers.

Shamans of opinion surveying and statistical juju constitute a major branch of the trade: pollsters, demographic analysts, census massagers, behaviorists, focus-group facilitators, pop psychologists and pop sociologists. They satisfy the advertising culture's self-justifying need to quantify everything, converting politics into a numbers racket. In the end, there is no risk taking. No daring. No feeling. No ideas. No vision.

The traditional political establishment shows neither the will nor the character to reform itself. Change must come from without. There will always be television. But the political advertising machine can be separated from TV politics through the regulation of produced political ads.

At first glance, this idea seems to defile a constitutional sacred cow – that it violates the First Amendment, put there by the authors, after all, to protect political speech. It is self-evident, however, that produced political ads are largely not political speech at all, but a form of *product* advertising – "commercial" speech. Such advertising is misleading and deceptive, intrusive, invasive, undemocratic, and a downright nuisance.

We cannot and should not regulate pure content. But there is persuasive legal precedent for the regulation of advertising techniques and practices which tend to distort, deceive and mislead. The courts have found that "commercial" speech enjoys less protection under the First Amendment than pure political speech, and that "reasonable regulation" of commercial product advertising is not subject to intense first-amendment scrutiny.

The Securities Act of 1933 gives the Securities and Exchange Commission the power to protect investors from deceptive practices by regulating the form and content of "tombstone ads" in newspapers and magazines.

These ads make public offerings of securities. They are unadorned, black-and-white blocks of print. The regulations are very precise on what these securities ads can and cannot say. They may factually describe the stock offering, but they may make no claims for it. They must acknowledge risk. They must offer a prospectus, whose form is itself strictly controlled.

The sole purpose of the regulation is to protect the public from "speech" intended to lure buyers to purchase fraudulent, highly risky or worthless securities. In much the same way, the Federal Trade Commission regulates advertising it deems unfair and deceptive. The Food and Drug Administration has come to regulate misleading information and misrepresentations in pharmaceutical ads and product labeling.

In 1971 a federal appeals court upheld the power of Congress to remove cigarette ads from radio and television to protect the public health. In a 2-1 decision, the court found that

in balancing free speech against the public good, Congress had a rational basis for its ban, that public ownership of the airwaves gives government a unique right to regulate electronic messages, and that radio and television advertising possesses a unique set of characteristics which gives it undue influence over the public as opposed to counterpart ads in print, especially over an impressionable younger audience.

I argue for no-frills, issue-oriented spots shorn of all production and pretense, dramatic devices, images, jingles, narrations, visuals demeaning the opponent, graphics glitter and splash which result in what one colleague calls "the degradation of democratic discourse," produced ads that misrepresent the candidate, confuse and disillusion the voter, tarnish the system – in short, that contribute nothing to the healthy conversation of a campaign. The production devices and conventions I cite are *not* "pure speech." Nor, I argue, can they be said to have legitimate political "content."

The criteria I propose for no-frills political spots are simple: Only the candidate may appear in them. He—or she—may, in keeping with the First Amendment, *say* anything he chooses—directly to camera—so long as he observes the established standards of acceptable speech. The candidate may exhort, argue, explain, urge, extol, deplore—out in front.

He is free, of course, to try to deceive. But he does so in full view of the public, and must personally accept the political responsibility for his having done so. If his message is worth saying, then it is appropriate that the candidate say it himself.

The setting for these no-frills ads must be neutral—an office, a lawn, a street. If there must, let there be a desk in the foreground and an American flag in the background, or even on the lapel. Let there be simple graphics limited to naming the candidate, party affiliation, the source of the political underwriting for the ad, the date of the forthcoming election. And nothing else.

To illustrate and celebrate his qualities, the candidate may draw upon archival news recordings or film of his own public record and activities, i.e., campaign speeches, legislative activities, community service—footage about him already "in the can".

But let there be no artificial anything—no celebrity endorsements, no man-on-the-street testimonials, no paid actors, no staged dramatizations, no disembodied voices, no Hollywood musical scores, no special effects. Only he and his ideas are on display. What else is needed to sell honest leadership?

I propose that the same standards apply to the purchase of program blocks, be they five or 60 minutes in length. Speeches, informal chats, unrigged interviews, factually based documentary presentations, yes! Produced humbug, no.

No-frills politics on television allows the candidate to regain control of his own campaign, his own career, to sever ties with costly political media factories and the awful TV ads they make. He recaptures his political independence, and cuts his Faustian ties to "soft" money, and the corrupting interests which deliver it.

How each candidate makes use of his air-time, what he chooses to say, how he says it, the size of his ideas, will speak for him.

Prof. Ronald Rotunda of the University of Illinois, a prominent legal scholar, declares such a reform to be "constitutionally suspect." His colleague, Prof. James Pfander, points out the substantial concern of the Supreme Court to ensure "that ... regulations do not limit campaign speech."

Pfander concludes that this "will make it difficult to sustain a restriction

on the content of the message that the candidate can communicate." I argue that restrictions would in no way limit the content of what the candidate wants to say, only regulate the form in which he says it. The scholars concede that the body of pro-consumer case law I cited earlier provides reformers with respectable legal starting points for a theory which can be taken to Congress and the courts. These reforms ought to be pursued.

Another appropriate reform which I advocate would place the burden of the on-air campaign process on public broadcasting. Each election time *public* radio and television stations should be expected and required to provide, free of any cost, the "electronic hustings" on which major candidates mount campaign "ads" or programs. Stations would clear free air time throughout the program day for campaign presentations, ranging from spot ads to debates.

The time would be divided equally among the candidates for national and statewide office. The stations would be granted relief from the "equal time" provisions of the Federal Communications Act. Only candidates with serious support would benefit.

The Markle Commission on the Media and the Electorate made a somewhat similar proposal in its 1991 report on the political role of public broadcasting. The report unhappily drew little support from the leadership of public broadcasting. At the time of this writing, some public stations are known to be considering self-starting the idea on their own.

In this way, public broadcasting can justify the diminishing pool of government funds on which it depends, and strengthen its case for more generous public support.

Moreover, its leadership can dramatically demonstrate the centrality of PBS and National Public Radio—"the electronic parkland," in the phrase of William McCarter of WTTW Chicago—to their uneasy and reluctant funders in Congress: those on the right who want to impose suffocating controls on public broadcasting, and the rest who only halfheartedly defend it.

Ken Bode, the director of the Contemporary Media Center at DePauw University and CNN political analyst, decries any effort to limit political advertising. In Bode's words, "As painful as some of the ads may be, any kind of regulation of campaign speech is a bad idea. Communicators in particular have to be mindful of the dangers of restricting free speech."

But we also have to be aware of the dangers of rampant propaganda within a political context, especially given the vulnerabilities of a culture conditioned to seduction by Hollywood and Madison Avenue and sight-and-sound media. Our democracy has, so far, successfully balanced the exercise of free expression with the carefully defined discipline of regulation in critical sectors in which special interests place themselves ahead of the public interest.

I urge us to debate and discuss my suggestions. We need to do more than simply continue to decry the unrestricted ad-madness that is now in process of destroying healthy politics. We live in the real world, not a world invented by words and images. Freedom rings. It doesn't have to advertise. ■

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A century ago, the field of electronics was in the Dark Ages. Then Philips was born, and Philips companies have been lighting new ground ever since.

Now, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences has honored Philips with a special Emmy award for the development of digital audio technology leading to the compact disc.

We at Philips would like to thank the Academy for allowing our community of scientists and engineers this moment in the spotlight. And we thank those scientists and engineers for advancing Philips' tradition of innnovation.

Begun as a lamp factory and expanding into consumer and industrial electronics, medical technology, communications systems, electronic components and semi-conductors, Philips has been lighting new ground for over 100 years.

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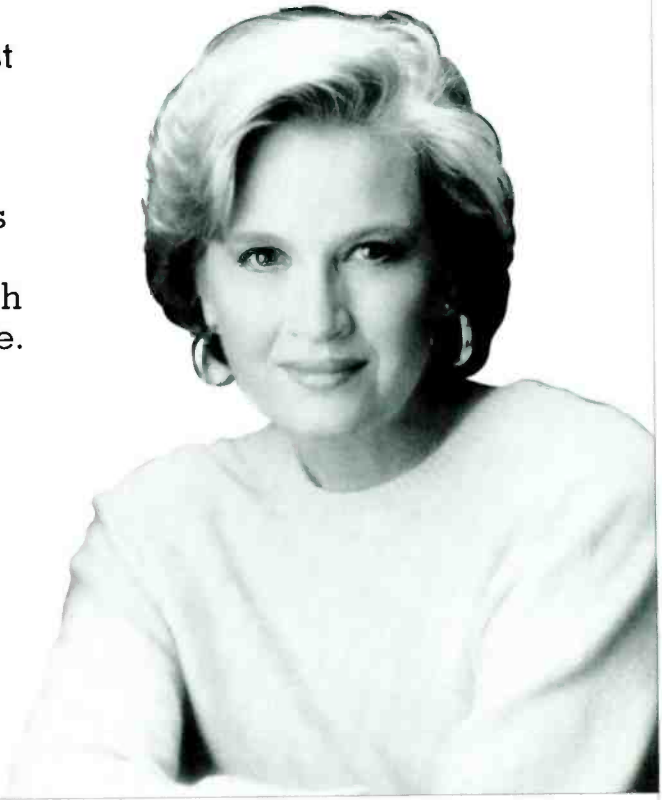
PHILIPS

DIANE SAWYER: 'THE WARM ICE MAIDEN'

PrimeTime Live co-host Diane Sawyer chats with TVQ's special correspondent, Arthur Unger, about her years in TV news as well as her amazing years with Nixon at San Clemente.



BY ARTHUR UNGER

Newsperson Diane Sawyer is a refreshingly complex study in contradictions. At our first contact in her still-being-redecorated office at ABC News's Columbus Avenue offices, she seems to be a totally cool beauty, intelligent, sophisticated, composed ... albeit a bit feisty ... a strong mother-figure character out of an Ingmar Bergmann pastoral film. She asks for my opinion of fabric for the sofa—I opt for the paisley, but it is clear that she is going to select her own choice; asking me is a mere courteous deference, slightly sexist ploy.

In my chat with her she goes on to reveal real insecurity, tentativeness, shyness. She wants to rephrase almost everything she says, especially her opinions of other women in television news. "I hate this," she insists and I finally opt to allow her to correct impressions at a later date through a phone conversation in

which I read back what she had originally said as she added just a few words here and there.

"Beauty and the Beast" is what insiders nicknamed *PrimeTime Live* before it premiered in August 1989, pairing the beauteous blonde Diane Sawyer with nasty wooden-haired Sam Donaldson. The show was criticized for its awkward audience participation and the uneasiness that existed between the co-hosts. Over the years since then, Sam has moved to Washington, DC and Diane has gone on to do prizewinning interviews and hidden-camera segments which helped make *PrimeTime* the top-rated hour-long program at ABC, consistently ranking in the Nielsen Top Ten. Like *60 Minutes* at CBS, this news magazine show has become a major profit-center for ABC.

Recently Ms. Sawyer has made headlines with startling hidden-camera investigations of racial discrimination and televangelists. She conducted investigations of mammography, Veterans Hospital patient neglect and deadbeat fathers as well as sexual molestation by priests. She has interviewed such wide-ranging personalities as Pres. Mubarak, King Hussein of Jordan, Eduard Shevardnadze, Patricia Bowman, Barney Frank, Saddam Hussein and Syria's Assad.

She occasionally serves as substitute anchor for Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel. Prior to joining ABC News, Ms. Sawyer spent nine years at CBS News where she appeared on *60 Minutes*, and co-anchored the morning news with Charles Kuralt (how could that have failed!). Prior to CBS, there was the most unbelievable portion of her career: she held several positions in the Nixon administration, joining the transition team when he resigned and moving with him to San Clemente where she assisted him in the writing of his memoirs. In the following interview she refuses to attack her ex-employer Nixon and speaks honestly about what she learned during her San Clemente years.

"His is one of the most endlessly intriguing minds I've ever been around," she says.

A native of Glasgow, KY, Ms. Sawyer received her B.A. at Wellesley College and completed a semester in law school before she moved into broadcasting as a reporter and weather girl.

Now the wife of screen director Mike Nichols (he directed *The Day of the Dolphin*), Diane Sawyer is a kind of a dolphin .. a killer dolphin. She is intelligent, caring, warm, gentle, retiring ... but with claws at the end of her flippers. I came away liking her enormously, but not absolutely certain I'd feel safe swimming in the tank with her.

Following is a record of my conversation with Diane Sawyer. There has been a bit of tightening and the chronology has been changed in some cases. As previously explained there were a few words added to her original analyses of women in TV news. But all answers are verbatim.

UNGER: *It has been said that your move from CBS's* 60 Minutes *to ABC's* PrimeTime Live *was somehow symbolic of the lead in network news going from CBS to ABC.*

SAWYER: Would that all of network news rose and fell with my—please note that I'm laughing here—with my departures and arrivals. To the extent that the ratings reflected anything, I know, is a coincidence because it was all about executive producer Rick Kaplan driving forward with the newscast. He was coming into his own even as I arrived here. None of that was consideration or calculation in my mind. It was really not about who's up, who's down, who's middle.

UNGER: *You were quoted once as saying that you are an old-fashioned adventuress: "I live for the roll of the dice," you said.*

SAWYER: It's absolutely true. I said someplace else once—this is true—that Mike (husband Mike Nichols) always says that when he worked with Elaine [May] doing improvisations that the only safe thing was to take a chance. And I also think that's true. I've done it my whole life and it keeps me awake.

UNGER: *What do you mean? Are you nervous about it or does it keep you alive?*
SAWYER: No, no, no. It keeps you alive. It keeps you growing. Again there were so many things that led to my departure from CBS and so many things that led to my decision to come to ABC, so it certainly wasn't just that. I guess if you're talking about the psychological wellspring, it is in part that I love the idea of being forced to grow, of never settling into a formula or even a port. Always forcing yourself into growing. You can do that within jobs, too. I mean you can certainly do it with any magazine show; you can keep at it. I read in one of those magazine advertisements—not in some profound book—that the most creative work is done at the edge of your competence. And I suspect that in a way that's true. It's always when you're rocking a little and reaching and stretching and daring.

UNGER: *That's one step before the Peter Principle.*
SAWYER: (laughter) The best work is done at the edge of your competence as you're sort of waving goodbye and floating down to the bottom of the canyon.

UNGER: *For several years, you were considered about the hottest woman in television. In the last year or so, maybe Katie Couric has moved into that spot. Are you glad to be out of that position?*
SAWYER: You think there's only one hot woman in television? A bouncing ball? That's comical. I don't really think it works that way. I think she's terrific. And heaven knows I think Paula Zahn and Joan Lunden are equally terrific. I love switching around in the morning—you know, variety of morning television. Having been there, it's always wonderful to read between the lines and say to yourself: "Now, is this the morning that she could barely get up? Is this the morning when she said to herself, Why am I keeping these hours?" Then there's Barbara Walters who is always the number one hottest woman in television. There's Leslie Stahl and Lynne Sherr out doing the most amazing reporting. Women on magazine shows are doing interchangeably, exactly the same kind of reporting, of investigative stories, of hard-hitting, hard-slogging stories in the jungles, in the mountains of exotic countries that any man would do. It's done. It is done. And there is no story that Sam Donaldson will do that I wouldn't do. And there would be no consideration one way or the other with him or me. And it really is a benchmark.

UNGER: *Along those lines, I notice that* PrimeTime *has just hired Nancy Collins to do entertainment. Does that mean that you're going to stay away from entertainment?*
SAWYER: Well, I have really pretty much done that anyway. I do a few of them every now or then. There are always a couple of people I really want to talk with. But I'm doing so many investigative pieces which take so much time ... and have to incubate. And you have to be there and you have to climb on the plane and sail off to do them. So, I really like to keep myself concentrated.

UNGER: *Do you prefer to do the investigative stories?*
SAWYER: I think you have to be able to shift your weight. That's the pleasure of a magazine show. I like knowing that this week I have this fairly complicated piece in which 22 of

the men and women in Massachusetts who were sexually molested by a priest when they were children have come forward, sat down with us and we went out to try to find the priest and talk with him. I love knowing I have that story this week. I love the fact that next week we're not just going to rerun the old televangelist piece but we have done some more reporting on it. And then I like the idea that I've just done a new Patti LaBelle, who is, believe me, like a combination of every holiday you've ever been through. She is like Mardi Gras and Christmas. I love the fact that I have that variety at all times. I have two huge investigative pieces under way right now.

UNGER: *Most of the investigative ones use hidden cameras.*
SAWYER: Yeah.

UNGER: *Almost in the way that* 60 Minutes *used to use ambush attack. You think that that can continue or do you think you're going to move away from that?*
SAWYER: I think that it can continue as long as we're responsible in our use of it. As long as it isn't wanton and capricious. It really has to be a situation where you say to yourself: "There's no other way to see this." We would cheat ourselves out of the truth if we didn't take a hidden camera in to see what really goes on. And as long as you are sure that that is true and that it is a story of sufficient consequence, you can justify what is certainly an intrusion into people's lives. I think it can go on and the pieces that we have done—the ones coming up—I think are big enough and important enough that I don't have any concern about using it or the way we use it.

UNGER: *Are you already working on things that will be on during the fall and winter?*
SAWYER: Oh, yeah. I've got two I'm working on for that period. I've got one that will be on already—the welfare piece. I've done a piece on welfare fraud. It's become a kind of huge averting of the eyes, I think, by the bureaucracy, of the extent to which there really is welfare fraud. And one of the reasons we've all been so trepidacious about going near it is that no one wants to hurt the people who really deserve the money. And so, I think even in this industry we're a little loath to go in—for fear that it will splash up in this volatile political climate and injure people who really deserve welfare money. But we decided to go out and just see for ourselves how much fraud there is out there.

UNGER: *Have you found that the pieces that you've done—the investigative pieces—have had some effect on the events?*
SAWYER: I think they really have. I think that our day care piece, which will be rerunning, has helped drive the issue. The televangelist's piece had direct immediate consequences. There are, I think, five investigations now under way: among them an FBI, postal service and V.A. Hospital piece I did that a few years ago. They're using—I sound like "My Greatest Hits" here!—a piece we did with a black man and a white man in schools now. A lot of them are used in schools, so the great pleasure is it is not dropping a sigh into the Grand Canyon—but actually being able to score a hit.

UNGER: *How do you feel about the enormous impact that the talk shows and magazine shows seem to be having on events—on reality. Right now, the talk shows have become the most important part of political campaigns.*
SAWYER: I think it's great. I think to see everybody arguing again is a great celebration of democracy. And we forget that that's the way it was always intended to be: that we were to come to our conclusions by talking

over the backyard fence, and reading, and sharing information, and arguing. And, in a way, the talk shows are a backyard fence.

UNGER: *I know during several of the major court cases on C-SPAN, I listened to the call-ins and I was amazed at how interesting and valid the questions were. I wonder if it was just the C-SPAN audience or is there a real intelligent American public out there that wants to have its questions answered and wants to ask intelligent questions.*

SAWYER: Someone decided to study the questions that were asked on call-ins recently and compare them with the questions that were asked in press conferences and the conclusion was that the press was interested in process; and the people were interested in the substance. I think that in our statistic-saturated world, we are never able to—for most of us—distill it and really analyze it and come to opinions, conclusions ourselves. We have a lot of information out there but the intrinsic instinct of the viewer is so good and they're so smart ... their instincts about people on television are almost unerring. I remember John Chancellor saying when I first got into this business, "Beware! The camera is a lie detector. And it will find you out."

UNGER: *Despite what you were saying about the people and intelligent questions, when* PrimeTime Live *started, the questions didn't make it somehow. What went wrong there?*

SAWYER: Oh, everything! I said to executive producer Rick Kaplan the other day, it was as if we decided to jump out of an airplane and I turned to him and said, "Did you bring the parachutes?" "I thought you brought them the parachutes." Turned to Judd and said, "Do you have any parachutes?" We're all trying to forget what happened. With the audience, we learned a lesson which is that the audience has to be engaged or the audience shouldn't be there. And, in order to do that, you really have to have one topic which you churn for an hour at least, so that the audience can grapple with it. We were doing two and three topics and you can't say to an audience, "Okay, have four profound thoughts in 30 seconds or less, please. That's all we've got." It just can't be done. It's a Freudian thing and you have to let it kind of find itself. And so, we got the worst of both worlds. We got an audience without the participation and we had taped pieces with an audience giving that strange report card in a room. I'd still love to see us, by the way, bring an audience back, which we talked about doing if we did this welfare piece—possibly bring an audience back and deal with one subject. But you have to choose them very carefully.

UNGER: *Speaking of things that didn't quite work, how about the relationship between you and Sam together?*

SAWYER: Kind of strained. You don't think we were Rogers and Astaire? Our chemistry ... who knows? Who knows what happened on the air? I don't even know if it was as bad as everyone said. Because you'll never know because once it's said, it becomes self-fulfilling. Once there are enough people who said that "you're awkward together on the air," it's impossible not to be.

UNGER: *But Sam is awkward with everybody. There's no one at ease with Sam.*

SAWYER: Oh no, not really. I mean he and George Will have really worked out a Sunday morning boxing match which works quite nicely. I think they sort of know how that goes. And in fact, he and I would go in front of the audiences and we'd give speeches, or we would argue about things, and we had a *great time*. And it was as aggressive and spontaneous

and "unrehearsed" as they say in the television business, as free-for-all as you could find. And then, when we would get in there with our audience surrounding us—and the sharp intake of breath because of the people sitting around you—and Sam would start to zero in on a question or zero in on me, and the audience would start to take sides in the room. I think it threw me and it probably threw him, too. And then again, we would have a minute or two at the end of a piece to talk. It wasn't as if we had 15 minutes as they do on Brinkley's show. We would have one minute in which to engage on some issue. And it just can't be done because you end up sounding rehearsed or you can never complete a thought.

We should have done what marriage counselors do, right? In the beginning, don't they always separate you. I don't know, I've never been to one—but they always separate you and say, "You're not to talk to each other about any of these points." If they had said to Sam, "You must not talk to each other ever, ever, ever (pounds desk) on this show. We won't let you," we would have been fine. (giggle) And we would have talked up a storm.

UNGER: *How about now?*
SAWYER: He's in Washington. He loves it. He's exactly where he should be. He's where his instincts are the best. He is absolutely on his game. He's like a nuclear weapon—it's enough to know he exists, you don't ever have to use him. (laughter) And having him in Washington to puncture the pomp and phoniness is a great resource for all of us to have at ABC News. He is still the person who can go in and ask that question that makes you sort of start for a minute, but it's the question that makes you say, "Well, yeah, yeah."

UNGER: *But you're pretty good at that yourself. In looking over your interviews, especially that Saddam piece you don't hesitate to zing them.*
SAWYER: I'll ask 'em. I'll ask 'em. But, again, Sam has made it an art form—the impertinent question.

UNGER: *Did you part friends?*
SAWYER: Always. But that was what was so strange, too—*National Inquirer* notwithstanding— insisting that we were slugging it out. We have always been the best of friends. We talk on the phone all the time. I would throw my body at anybody coming at him and he'd do the same for me. And Rick Kaplan has said that he knows now, when each of us comes into his office, it's to make sure that something good happens for the other one and never to complain.

UNGER: *You think that there might be an on-air kind of reconciliation at some point?*
SAWYER: (hoots of laughter) Can these two people be reunited!

UNGER: *Diane and Sam together again.*
SAWYER: With Dr. Joyce Brothers trying to bring us back together? We may, on some occasions—we've talked about this a lot. He might come to New York and we might do something jointly. But I doubt that we'll ever go back to sort of—chat. We don't have enough time on our broadcast to do that now because we do four pieces a night and we really do like to keep all of the time for information as much as we can. Maybe we'll do a little bit of it at some point down the road. We probably would sneak it back in.

You know, when he's covering things live—like during the Gulf War—we did a lot. When I'm not in the field, we'll talk back and forth a lot.

UNGER: *When you were in Iraq, he was in Saudi Arabia.*
SAWYER: That's right.

UNGER: *Maybe it was just the right*

distance.

SAWYER: (laughter) If you can keep two or three small countries between us, we're all right.

UNGER: *To get back to what we were talking about earlier about going from CBS to ABC, how about the role of Roone Arledge? Was he a major factor in your moving over? Was he the one to convince you to come over?*

SAWYER: Well, there were so many things at work. Who can resist the power of a dreamer like Roone? The power of someone who says, "Yes, yes, of course, yes" instead of "No, maybe, I'll see, I'll get back to you" ... and who really believes in the seriousness of the news. And it's always been counter-intuitive for people that someone who came from ABC Sports should be the standard bearer for the seriousness and weight and importance of television news, but he is. Roone did things simultaneously: he said, "go for quality" and "try to do it as imaginatively as you can. Try things you haven't tried. Go ahead and do those things that you never thought you'd get a chance to do." That is almost irresistible.

UNGER: *Is he still as actively involved as he once was?*

SAWYER: He's in every day. I've talked to him on the phone two or three times each week. And he was a major part of Sam's negotiation.

UNGER: *Are there more things that you talked about with Roone still to come?*

SAWYER: I talked about doing some hour specials, but look at me. Look at my life. I don't know. It's very hard with a new show until you can get a rhythm down where you can take a break which I haven't the time to do at all. None of us have.

UNGER: *I notice that Peter Jennings did Ross Perot. That would have seemed to be a perfect one for you.*

SAWYER: I would have *loved* to have done it. But you can't take time off to do another hour as well. Eventually, I will be able to. I think by next summer I should be able to.

UNGER: *Barbara Walters takes a very aggressive role in getting her own interviews, finding people and going after them over and over again. Do you operate like that too?*

SAWYER: I do. Because I also do these long pieces and because I travel a lot and I'm out in the field a lot, and overseas a lot, I probably aim at fewer of them than she does. I just can't because of time. I can't be as I was last week: In Providence, Provo, flew back to Washington, then up to Minnesota. That was just one week to do three different stories. You almost can't do that and spend a lot of time on the phone. With Patty Bowman, for instance, I called her repeatedly...

UNGER: *I watched that again. I thought you did a very good job on that one. Sympathetic, but also there were questions asked that needed to be asked. You were not handing the interview over to her at all.*

SAWYER: It's interesting. She chose me after the Willie Smith trial because she'd seen the work I'd done on television and she wanted a news interview. And I thought that spoke well of her, that she wanted a fair—but strong—interview which spoke to her confidence in herself. But no, I do make a lot of calls myself, too, when I can.

UNGER: *Who would you like to do that you haven't done yet?*

SAWYER: Noriega. We haven't heard from him since the invasion. Everyone would like to talk with Mrs. Nixon. But I don't think she'll ever do it again. I knew her in the Nixon days...

UNGER: *Wouldn't that make it*

easier to get?
SAWYER: Not necessarily. I think sometimes it's easier to do it with people who don't know everything.

UNGER: *Did you know her well when you were working for Nixon in San Clemente?*
SAWYER: Fairly well; Yes, we saw her quite a bit out there. And I was in the awkward position—I read his diaries. And I read their letters to each other when they were courting. So, it probably would not be a good idea for me to do it anyway. It's an unfair advantage to go in there knowing so many intimate details.

UNGER: *As long as we've come to that, you once said you asked Nixon whether he was happy. And his answer was that happiness doesn't matter.*
SAWYER: It was more intricate than that, but yes, that was essentially his answer—that there's a point in your life at which all this talk about happiness becomes irrelevant and you have to keep your eye concentrated on the goal.

UNGER: *Does happiness matter to you?*
SAWYER: (pause) Yeah, it does because I think the best work is done through love and passion and joy. I read once a long time ago that at its root, the English word "to wonder" is the same as the word "to smile" in its very beginning. And in some languages, apparently, it still has a very direct derivation. And it doesn't surprise me, because our job is all about curiosity. And I can't imagine waking up in the morning and being filled with the questions I am filled with every morning, if I couldn't take joy in the world and finding out the answers.

UNGER: *Does all of this traveling affect you personal happiness?*
SAWYER: Oh, sometimes. When I've been traveling as I did last week and I do the show and we're here until 11:30 and then I get up the next morning at six and head out on another plane to two cities to do very difficult interviews and I don't get back until midnight on a Friday night and I'm sitting on the plane feeling sorry for myself and I thought, "Yup, that's part of my happiness, too." Because I know in the end that I wouldn't trade it with anybody.

In fact, I asked my husband, Mike Nichols, just yesterday: "Do you have enough time alone? Am I gone too much?" And he said, "Both."

That's sort of the way I feel. Each of us loves being alone and each of us loves being together, so that we prize being together but we cherish times on our own, too.

UNGER: *You have done a number of things in television. You've been a weather girl...*
SAWYER: Yes, a lamentable one.

UNGER: *... and you've been co-anchor. Which of the things that you've done have you enjoyed the most?*
SAWYER: It would certainly not be weather girl. I was practically run out of town for not using hair spray in those days. I could barely peel the hair out of my eyes to see the board. You know, there's nothing in the world like setting out on a dark night toward a story that may teach you something brand new. And knowing when you get back that you're going to have the length and the flexibility in which to tell it. With that as my standard, this show would have to be it. I know every time going out that something could happen that had never happened before.

UNGER: *Is this more true of* Prime-Time *than it was of* 60 Minutes?
SAWYER: Only in the sense that we tend to do longer pieces a little more frequently.

UNGER: On 60 Minutes *Don Hewitt is the guy in charge. He's ...*
SAWYER: Benevolent despot!

UNGER: *Is there one here?*
SAWYER: Well, in the end, executive producer Richard Kaplan will make the determination. In the end, he's the one who will arbitrate. Rick has been here since the very beginning. Each of us will come in and make our case one way or the other, but he has to decide in the end. Very rarely, I only know of maybe one or two instances in which there has been any disagreement. We pretty much all have a consensus about how much time the material really dictates.

UNGER: *I said you've done many jobs. You anchored the morning news, but you've never anchored an evening news.*
SAWYER: I substitute here a lot and I substituted at CBS.

UNGER: *For a long time, there was talk at CBS that you would co-anchor with Dan Rather. And in the midst of that, I asked Dan that question. And he said he didn't want a co-anchor but if he had to have one, you would be it.*
SAWYER: Oh, what a wonderful thing to say. Given what has happened with the evening news broadcasts and the extent to which they're doing longer pieces now—*American Agenda, Person of the Week* and really letting some interviews run on at great length, now, I think it's very hard to argue that you need two people for that broadcast. And I think most of them would say the same thing. In the end, it's seven minutes of copy. And I'm not sure you would need two people to anchor that broadcast.

UNGER: *Would you like eventually to anchor a newscast? If Peter Jennings left, for instance?*
SAWYER: I'm not being coy. I absolutely love the work I'm doing here. I can wake up in the morning and say, "Here's someone I want to meet and here's the question I want to ask" and I can be on a plane in the afternoon. If you were the captain of the ship as Peter is, you'd really have to be there at 6:30 virtually every night of the week. I have the freedom to improvise all week long.

UNGER: *Do you think there's a need for three evening news shows?*
SAWYER: I like watching all three and that's what I try to do as much as I can. I used to like it when they were staggered. I always thought that was perfect. And then you could have a comparative hour's newscast which seemed to me a very good discipline for democracy to be able to do that. But you can't do so much anymore. I think all three of the newscasts are evolving into something different. The old is fading and the new is not quite yet been perfected. I think ABC has been leading the way with *The American Agenda*. Peter has done some things which I loved. Occasionally, he will take an interview out of the day and just let it run. Just let the conversation run.

UNGER: *In a way though, isn't that turning the evening newscast into* PrimeTime *or into* 20/20?
SAWYER: Yes, it's making them a little more of a magazine show in the sense that you're choosing a few things to let run at some depth rather than giving so many headlines. At the same time, it puts a greater burden on the magazine shows to be more analytical, which is very hard to do on the day's news. It's one thing to do a great *American Agenda* piece, which they do, and another to let an interview run about the day's news, but turn it around and analyze the material in it is almost impossible.

That was one of the problems we had at the beginning of the show. We had this great thesis that we were going to be an Op-Ed page of the

paper on Thursday. We would be able to come in on Wednesday at the earliest, really, and take a look around the room and say to ourselves, "What do we want to think about for tomorrow night?" And that we would turn it around quickly and put it on the air.

Well, we discovered that it cannot be done. You don't have enough time when you have to marry pictures to words and thoughts to do it in 24 hours. To do an hour's broadcast that way thoughtfully. Ted Koppel can do it because you get to see the wealth of inner springs of his broadcast—you get to see the interviews in progress. It's all happening on the air, but we couldn't do it, because we wanted to try to do an hour.

I think what will happen is the magazine shows will go even more toward analysis and the nightly newscast will do a lot more of what we think of as traditional magazine reporting which is interviews that run at some length on the day's news and then some prepared pieces of the kind we'll continue to do as well.

I have this theory that one of the aggravants of the democratic process right now is the contrapuntal sound bite on television. One of the things that is dispiriting us—it does me as a viewer and as a potentially voting citizen—is that we see on the evening newscasts and we see in the morning newscast for that matter, the person who says, "This is what should be done," and then a person comes up and says, "No, that shouldn't be done because it won't work." And then we're left as viewers with no resolution of the issue.

I would love to see a magazine show that does what they do in *The New York Times* after the debates each four years ... Remember? They come out and they say, "Here's what one candidate said was the case. And here's what another candidate said that was the case. And here's what's actually the case as best as we can figure out." I'd love to see a magazine try to resolve these unresolved issues of fact in a lot of cases. Any number of nights you can watch an evening newscast where someone says, "Personal income has declined since 1953." And someone else will come up and say, "No, it really hasn't because of this and this." Well, what's the truth? What's the fact? What do we base our judgment on? I'd like to see us digging and saying, "Well, this is the fact."

UNGER: *What would you like to see happen on coverage of campaigns?*
SAWYER: I'd like to see us hold everybody's factual feet to the fire which I don't think we do. We really do let figures get tossed around in the most confusing way and we don't try to reconcile it. We see it somewhat in the long pieces. But those are long pieces. They take a lot of reading time. I'd love to see television try to come to grips with that.

I think candidates should be held to the facts they use.
UNGER: *How do you do that immediately, conveniently on television?*
SAWYER: I think you research them and come back the following night.

UNGER: *Didn't Perot talk about electronic town meetings? Might that have been the answer?*
SAWYER: Well, yes, but we all know how hard it is. Ask Ted Koppel who does a lot of town meetings how hard it is to corral people's questions and keep everything on target in a town meeting. I don't know how you're going to get a poll that way.

UNGER: *You've often said that you don't have any career master plan. Is that still true?*
SAWYER: Always been true. I make my decisions with less calculation and less time.

UNGER: *Yet you've been called "a superb politician, a careerist who*

makes connections as the needs of upper professional mobility demands."
SAWYER: (chuckles) Ask people who really know me. That's all I can say. Ask anyone who really knows me. You know, Ted Koppel has been called "political." Dan Rather has been called "political." Tom Brokaw has been called "political." What does this mean? They do their job. They're good at their job.

UNGER: *Speaking of political, I once asked Walter Cronkite about running for office and he said if people really knew what his politics were, they wouldn't be so eager.*
SAWYER: I always thought that he was right—that he would shock a lot of people with his un-avuncular politics.

UNGER: *How do you feel about news persons on TV using the power that being on a news show gives them to run for office? Donahue or Moyers, for instance?*
SAWYER: Well, remember, I'm someone who came from politics to news.

UNGER: *Actually I was going to say that you came the other way...*
SAWYER: I'm not exactly untainted on this issue. It seems to me that we need good people in Congress. It doesn't matter where they come from. I don't think there should be any prohibition just because through television—even television news—you became a national name or a statewide name. I don't think there should be a prohibition on your serving if you want to serve. Going back and forth and forth and back again is a problem. I don't know how many of those traverses of the bridge—particularly the profession—should tolerate.

UNGER: *I think Nixon asked Mike Wallace to be his press secretary at one time. And John Chancellor was at the Voice of America at one time. And Edward R. Murrow served in government of course. So there has been some exchange. But do you feel that your experience with Nixon helped you in the job you do now?*
SAWYER: I thing it helped a lot.

UNGER: *In what way?*
SAWYER: You learn not just the process of a government but you learn about human nature that drives government. And you learn where conspiracy theories are plausible and where they're not. And you learn how much of government is—and the mistakes of government are—made through inattention through overwork, through fallibility and not through calculated maliciousness. You also learn how tough it is to get things done in government. It is really tough to accomplish *anything* when you're there. And I think all of that serves both to make you more skeptical and more philosophical.

UNGER: *Do you think that the experience with Nixon tainted your advance as TV newsperson or did it help? Were there people in the business who wouldn't consider you because of it?*
SAWYER: Well, it was a great shock when I first went to CBS. Dan Rather and Bob Pierpoint who was my cubicle mate at the State Department (we were in a 4-inch square space)—came to me and said, "Before you hear from anybody else, we want you to know how violently opposed we were to your coming here. We don't think you should be here. And we feel that we can't support this decision."

I would walk into rooms and hear people stop talking instantly and know that I had been the topic of the conversation. There were a few people who reached out to say to me: "It's okay. You'll survive it and live it down." In the beginning it was really rough.

UNGER: *You don't feel that's true*

anymore? Is it because people have forgotten or because they've forgiven?
SAWYER: I think they haven't forgotten and probably not forgiven. But I have nine, ten years of work now to be judged for its fairness. That has to count for something. And people can judge because it's television and they can see your questions and hear the answers, make their own minds up about whether you're fair.

UNGER: *Now that all this time has gone by, do you have any changed perspective about Nixon?*
SAWYER: No, I really feel very much now as I did then. I'll always be grateful for the time I spent out there in San Clemente. He is one of a kind and to be with him as he rather uncongenially—because he didn't like writing his memoirs—reviewed his life, reviewed what had happened to him was like leafing through American history.

UNGER: *How do you feel about his current rehabilitation or seeming rehabilitation?*
SAWYER: It was inevitable because he is so interesting. And you cannot keep someone interesting out of public view. And you cannot keep someone whose opinions arrest and provoke you out of the airwaves or out of the news. Nor would you want to. It doesn't say anything one way or the other about Watergate. He is a rivetingly interesting man.

UNGER: *Didn't you do an interview with him at CBS?*
SAWYER: Oh, you know, after that interview I did with him, I swore I'd never do another one. And I don't think—as with Mrs. Nixon—I don't think you should interview someone you know, even though I warned everyone on the morning news.

I said: "I worked for him. Listen to this with the knowledge that I worked for him." I don't think it's a good idea.

UNGER: *Has he ever tried to somehow insert himself into your news coverage?*
SAWYER: Not at all. Never. And never would.

UNGER: *So you still consider him a friend?*
SAWYER: Well, we haven't talked in a long time. We exchanged notes a while back. And I'm not sure that he was happy about the interview that I did on the morning news. That was in 1982-83. Because it was tough having him there. But we've exchanged notes since then and I get messages through people that he's asked about me, so I think I'm still in his thoughts.

UNGER: *Do you think history will be kinder to him in another 20 years?*
SAWYER: I think history will be very respectful of his intelligence and achievements. But the lead paragraph of every article is always going to be "The first President to resign his post..."

UNGER: *I keep feeling that if Woodward were to write about it now, he might have a different take on Nixon than he did 20 years ago. Woodward has changed*
SAWYER: I'm sure he would because, again, you realize that Nixon had an uncommon experience for a President when he arrived there. He had a great seriousness about the world and a real resource of memory and understanding to draw on, in foreign policy in particular.

UNGER: *Do you think he'd make a good presidential advisor?*
SAWYER: Look what he did to Soviet policy. There were a lot of people saying the same thing, but when he wrote that series of articles about aid to the Soviet Union, it was the catalyst that forced action. He did it. He got the Soviet Union the American assistance that it needed in the time period that it happened.

UNGER: *It would be interesting to put him in* CNN Crossfire *in place of Sununu.*
SAWYER: Yeah, it would be. He still can do the most inexhaustible interviews with anybody. I've seen him go hours. As he would in San Clemente, you know. He'd call us in and I used to say six hours later, you didn't dare take a drink of water before you went because you wouldn't necessarily be let out if there was something on his mind and he really wanted to wrestle with you about it.

UNGER: *When you look back now on the San Clemente period, was that a valuable experience for you?*
SAWYER: I think it's valuable. I could wish for a little bit less —that it had only been two years instead of four years—and I could wish just a tiny bit for those two years back. But I wouldn't trade the experience for anything in the world.

UNGER: *Have you written about that experience? Will you?*
SAWYER: I doubt it. I don't know how you'd do it. We all know this business and unless there were something sensational...

Why betray someone's confidence? What do you owe to people who take you into their confidence?

UNGER: *Let me read some of the comments about you that I found in clippings. You just react quickly to them.*

"She has the intelligence, talent and stamina to be a first-class journalist."
SAWYER: (chuckle) I've a lot of stamina.

UNGER: *"The only reason she's written about so much is because she has a pretty face."*
SAWYER: (laughter) Has anyone seen me like now?

UNGER: *You look pretty good to me.*
SAWYER: You can disabuse that.

UNGER: *"She's as erratic as Dan Rather."*
SAWYER: Mmmmmm. "Erratic", I don't know what that means.

UNGER: *"Blond beauty matched by intelligence." That comes up an awful lot.*
SAWYER: Why? (laughter) My hair. What is this obsession with hair?

UNGER: *I noticed that sign in the office: "We love your hair" signed by the whole crew. What is that?*
SAWYER: Oh, when I cut my hair, there were so many stories in the press. So all of the guys in the studio lowered the sign from the ceiling as I was getting ready to go on the air, "We love your hair."

UNGER: *Did they feel that the hair thing was an important issue for you?*
SAWYER: Oh, they were really joking because it was the subject of such (giggle) controversy. I mean I could have walked naked down Park Avenue and not created the stir I think I did by cutting my hair. Which may not say much about me naked...

UNGER: *Sam Donaldson said: "There's a seemingly unassailable ozone layer of composure and elegance about Diane Sawyer. A Dianeness."*
SAWYER: That's very nice. He's very courtly.

UNGER: *"She's impulsive, spontaneous, but always in control."*
SAWYER: Boy, I'd like to think that. I think she's impulsive, spontaneous and always a little bit out of control.

UNGER: *Your interview technique is "strategic and unrelenting."*
SAWYER: That's nice. That's nice. I hope that's true.

UNGER: *This is something that you*

said which I find fascinating. "It never occurred to me that I couldn't be a serious journalist and wear an evening gown." That was after the Vanity Fair *sexy picture story.*

SAWYER: I think most people in the country know that you don't always wear a suit in your life and they're not alarmed to discover that you don't. I think it was a stir mainly inside the profession.

UNGER: *Two interesting things side by side here. Your salary: "Seven million dollars guaranteed over the next five years..."*

SAWYER: I'm really not being cute. I don't know.

UNGER: *Then, "I've never made a decision in my life for money."*

SAWYER: That's true. It's absolutely true.

UNGER: *And you also said, "I'm the one who's always been a little above my head. Playing tennis with pros, cantering bareback without even riding on a saddle very well, I like taking a chance."*

SAWYER: It's true. There's a famous incident with my husband who was going to teach me to ride. And I got on the horse that was supposed to be the gentlest, nicest horse. A huge horse. And he goes galloping off and I come back to the barn with my legs wrapped around the horse's neck, holding onto his ears because we had been jumping over fences and posts, and everything else out on the field. I'm a little reckless.

UNGER: *In you career as well as in private life?*

SAWYER: I think so. I think most people felt that to leave *60 Minutes* which, for 20 years has been the premiere broadcast that it has been, was madness.

UNGER: *Have you had any regrets?*

SAWYER: I have loved every minute of creating this show. Well maybe a few of the reviews—maybe a few minutes of the early days I could do without.

UNGER: *During those early days, somebody called you a "Twinkie." How do you react to it?*

SAWYER: Yes, wasn't it Linda Ellerbe? Wasn't that Linda's phrase—the Twinkie?

UNGER: *She called you a Twinkie or wondered whether you were one.*

SAWYER: She may have called me Twinkie. You know, coming from Linda, I'll take anything. I think she's so great. If she say's I'm a Twinkie, I'll wear it proudly.

UNGER: *"One of the most ambitious women in America."*

SAWYER: Mmm. Competitive, but not so ambitious.

UNGER: *In answer to that, you once responded: "Would a woman with clawing ambition give up four years of her career to work in San Clemente with a man with no future?"*

SAWYER: I remember saying that. It's true. Ambition, to me, is about the angle of your elbows and the extent to which you use them against other people. I don't think I do.

UNGER: *Here's another one: "An uneasy mix of journalism and show business, reporting and acting, substance and style."*

SAWYER: Sounds like most people's referendum on television news periods, doesn't it?

UNGER: *Nixon, I gather, called you "the smart girl."*

SAWYER: Right. "The tall girl" or "the smart girl." He didn't know me by name and he would pick up the phone and call the operator. I'd written one thing for him which he liked and I was "the smart girl" for a while

and then, on other occasions, I was just "the tall girl."

UNGER: *Now, here's a nice comment: "Warm, self-assured, engaged and engaging."*
SAWYER: Ahhh.

UNGER: *That's nice, isn't it?*
SAWYER: Very nice.

UNGER: *Ice maiden.*
SAWYER: I prefer warm, etc.

UNGER: *"One of the ordinary folk with common cares and common distractions." Do you think that really describes you? Do you think you're ordinary folk? Don't you have rather unique cares and distractions?*
SAWYER: (laughing) Yes, ordinary folk with unending cares and distractions. You know, most people who know me—but don't take my word for this—will tell you I'm a little bit of a dingbat if the truth was told. I made my reputation in my family by repeatedly walking into glass doors because I wasn't paying enough attention and I'd try to walk out through them. I still do it. I get very absorbed in the story and think nothing of going off and getting in the wrong cab and heading off to the wrong airport and climbing aboard the wrong plane, which I did just again this past week-end.

UNGER: *You're wearing glasses now. Do you wear contacts on camera?*
SAWYER: I do. I wear glasses most of the rest of the time though because I'm too lazy to wear contacts.

UNGER: *So, walking into doors...*
SAWYER: ... is also a function of intense myopia.

UNGER: *"A careerist who makes connections as the needs of upward professional mobility demand." That's pretty negative in its own way.*
SAWYER: In the end you have to say: "I stand by what I do on the air." If it's no good, I'm no good. I don't think anybody in this business was ever made by connection. Ever. It can't be done. The camera is too ruthless and you either do the work and get the story and tell them in a way people can understand, or you'll get found out. And all the connections in the world are not going to save you.

UNGER: *Let's now go to some of the names of women in television news. How about a quick one- or two-word reaction?*
SAWYER: I'm not very good at this but I'll try.

UNGER: Barbara Walters.
SAWYER: Powerhouse ... smart as they come. Kind of a fusion reactor of energy.

UNGER: *Connie Chung.*
SAWYER: As engaging and gracious a television broadcaster as there is. I think she's wonderful.

UNGER: *Leslie Stahl.*
SAWYER: A great human being ... a great reporter.

UNGER: *Joan Lunden.*
SAWYER: A generous and warm and true woman who really does care about the things she seems to care about. She inspires so much confidence on the air the way she handles people and goes after information.

UNGER: *Sylvia Chase.*
SAWYER: Resonant compassion and a real gift for moving you one moment and then going tenaciously after her target.

UNGER: *Katie Couric.*
SAWYER: A wonderful conjunction of experienced reporting, good preparation and charm. She deserves all the applause she is getting.

UNGER: *Jane Pauley.*

SAWYER: A delightful, smart and unpredictible newsperson ... so rare and wonderful on TV.

UNGER: *Mary Alice Williams.*
SAWYER: So smart, authoritative and impressive.

UNGER: *Paula Zahn.*
SAWYER: Smart and strong and great.

UNGER: *Lynn Sherr. You obviously have a soft spot for her.*
SAWYER: For all of these women. But Lynn is a deeply admired friend as well as colleague. We play tennis together and she ran me into the ground last week. She has a terrific mind and heart.

Don't you think this list is fabulous? The fact that there are so many talented women doing superb, unequaled work.

A list like this makes you say to yourself that this is really the age of formidable women in television. And we all have formidable women like Nancy Dickerson, Marlene Sanders and Barbara to thank for it. But look at Katie Couric with Ross Perot, and Paula and Joan with Bill Clinton, and Barbara interviewing the Bushes. And Lynn, Leslie and Sylvia doing investigative reporting. Look at what we're doing these days. The brilliant Susan Spencer and wonderful Carol Simpson and the many beat reporters who do such brilliant work too and on a daily basis. And let's not forget Catherine Crier who has such authority on CNN.

UNGER: *You're proud to be one of the group?*

SAWYER: I think this is as competitive and competent and as full of camaraderie a group as exists. We really like each other. And all of those various and malicious notions of women in industries where there were going to be a few of them and therefore it had to be a battle to the death have been detonated, completely destroyed by the experience of all these women in this industry together. I think we would do anything for each other.

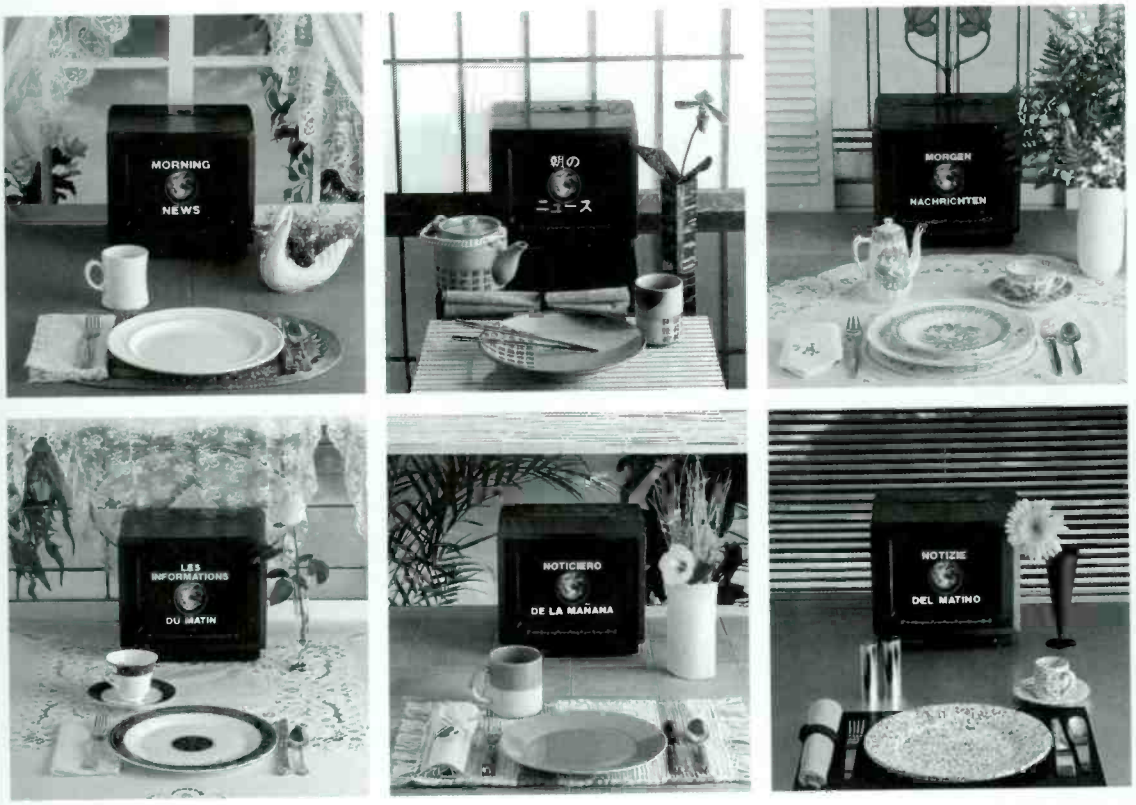
UNGER: *You answered the happiness question. Are you content?*
SAWYER: Oh, yeah. Work and love, that's what the old guy said and he was right. Work and love.

UNGER: *How long have you been married?*
SAWYER: Four years.

UNGER: *And seeing your husband not as often as you'd like.*
SAWYER: But, I manage a lot. I'll do anything to get back. Believe me, that streak going by in the airport is me racing for the plane to make sure that I get back at night. When he's doing a picture in California, we meet on weekends in St. Louis—exotic weekends in St. Louis: Diane and Mike.

UNGER: *Exotic weekends in St. Louis! Sounds like a* National Enquirer *headline.*
SAWYER: I'll take "caught." Caught in a hotel room in St. Louis... with her husband! ■

In seventeen years of writing about television for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Arthur Unger has 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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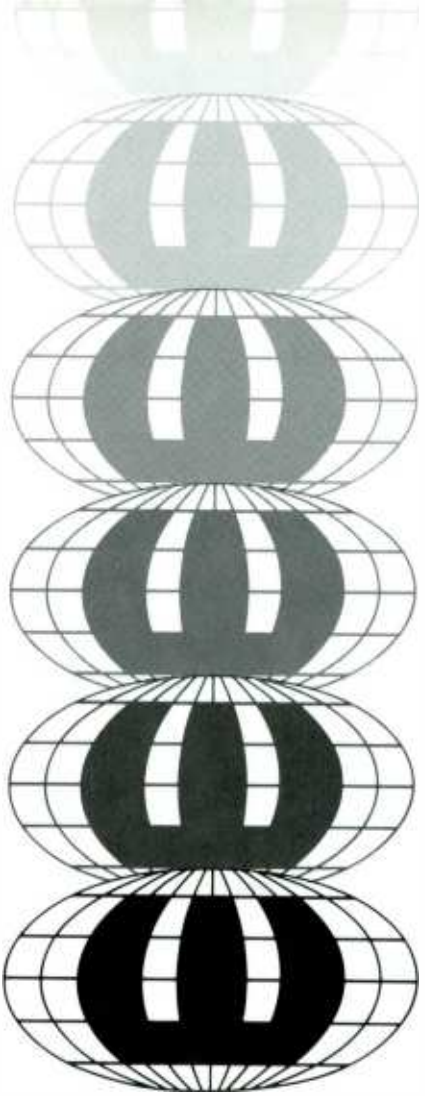

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THE FACE OF THE NEWS IS MALE

If networks and station newscasts do not better reflect the diversity of the audience, they may lose viewers to the competition.

BY MARLENE SANDERS

It was 1964 when I became ABC News' second woman correspondent. The other two networks also had one or two women in their correspondents corps of about 50. It wasn't much, but it was a start. By now, nearly 30 years later, one might have expected something resembling parity. Anyone who does lives in a fantasy world.

"The Face of the News is Male" is the headline of the newest figures, provided by Women, Men and Media, its fourth such survey. Women, Men & Media was founded in 1989 by feminist leader and author, Betty Friedan, a visiting professor at The University of Southern California, along with Nancy Woodhull, then President of the Gannett News Service. The objective was, and still is, to monitor gender issues in the media. This stemmed from a growing awareness of the imbalance and distortion in the coverage and representation of women in film, print, and television.

The news in the latest survey is not reassuring, in fact, it's terrible. And it's not just the television numbers that are poor, but also the report on newspapers.

First, let's look at how the study was conducted and what the monitors looked for. The study's duration was for one month, February, 1992, a random choice. In the front page newspaper study, 20 papers were examined from major and smaller markets. The front page and the first page of the local section were measured by bylines (how many women writers) and photos, as well as the op-ed or equivalent page (bylines only). Also counted were the number of women interviewed.

The three network evening newscasts were judged on the basis of the number of female correspondents reporting and how many people interviewed were women.

In the network survey, men reported 86% of the broadcast news stories, and were sources 79% of the time. The number of women correspondents reporting the news overall dropped from 16% to 14% this year. The one slight plus is that during the survey period, the number of females interviewed increased from 1 in 10 in 1989

to about 2 in 10 this year.

Before discussing the breakdown network by network, a word about newspaper results. Female bylines in the 20 newspapers averaged 34% and women were in photos 32% of the time. Men were interviewed 87% of the time, even being featured in stories about silicone gel breast implants.

The small and medium size newspapers did better than the big dailies like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, both of which came in near the bottom; *The Post* second worst, *The Times*, last. What seems to be happening is that in smaller communities, where newspapers face stiff competition from community papers and local television, editors are recognizing they need female readership to survive.

In the 1960's, the few of us who were female news writers, producers or reporters could do very little to change the system. We had to work hard to prove ourselves, as things were, in those almost all male newsrooms. But by the 1970's, the women's movement came along, and women were organizing at the newspapers, news magazines and at the networks. The network groups were mostly made up of women from other departments, of non newswomen, since there were so few of us.

Government policy, however, was on our side, and affirmative action was in place. The National Organization of Women challenged the broadcast license of WABC-TV, the ABC owned-and-operated station in New York City. Because all of the networks had their headquarters in New York, the dismal statistics revealed in that challenge made an impression. ABC and CBS began negotiations with their women's groups.

A great deal of progress took place in the ensuing years. NBC though, took an adversarial position, and the women there took to the courts. Years later, the women won, but at a high cost. Most of the leaders of the effort felt they had to leave the network because of their activism. The agreements they reached were monitored for several years, and slippage began immediately afterwards.

It was during Lyndon Johnson's presidency that most of the progress for women in the networks took place. In the 1970's, anxious to keep their licenses, local stations reached out to hire women, in some cases, unqualified women, as reporters and anchors. "The class of '72" they were called, and many of them are now stars at the networks. The unqualified drifted away.

Efforts to bring women into the fold slowed as Democratic administrations in Washington gave way to Republican rule. "Quotas" and "affirmative action" became dirty words; deregulation under conservative FCC rules made it possible to remove scrutiny of fair employment practices. Later requirements to monitor public service and news programming were nearly totally eliminated. Instead of being custodians of the public airwaves and serving the public interest, broadcasters were free to program as they chose, and provide their version of the public interest– "what the public is interested in."

And so after the great leap forward of the 1970's, and the marching in step of the 1980's, what we have in the 1990's is a gradual move backwards.

Here is what the Women, Men & Media organization found in its 1992 survey.

Females in the News

Television Averages February 1992

CBS averaged the highest number of females interviewed, 24%. ABC was again at the low end of the scale with 18%. The major topics for which women were interviewed included:

Health (25%), legal stories involving mistreatment of or discrimination against women (23%), and economics (19%).

Although U.S. women "brought home the gold" from the Olympics, only 1 female correspondent reported a sports story during the study period, and only 7 females were interviewed about sports. Of these, 4 were included in a story about eating disorders among women athletes, reported by a male (ABC, 2/10/92).

Out of the 60 news shows aired in February 1992, 1 had no female correspondents or female interviewees (ABC, 2/3); 7 had no female correspondents (ABC, 2/3, 2/7, 2/14, 2/17, 2/26; NBC, 2/6, 2/7); and 4 had no female interviewees (ABC, 2/3; CBS, 2/25, 2/28; and NBC, 2/12). More females than males were interviewed on only two days during the reporting period (CBS, 2/12, 2/13). On only one day were there more females than males reporting the news (NBC, 2/28).

On one day (2/3/92) that ABC had no female correspondents or female interviewees, there were 14 stories reported by men, and nine men interviewed. The stories were about politics, environmental pollution, health care costs, education–in short, topics of equal concern to and involving both men and women.

On the two days that CBS included no female interviewees, there were 20 stories reported and 45 men interviewed by 16 male and 4 female correspondents. One of the stories, reported by a male, was about a pregnant drug abuser and her dilemma about having an abortion (2/25/92).

Other stories filed that were glaringly low or lacking in female input included one on NBC (2/5/92) about the U.S. Senate lifting the ban on fetal tissue transplants. A male reported the story, and 3 males were interviewed. On the same day and network, a story was carried about shoppers flocking to discount outlets. A male correspondent reported the story; four males and one female were interviewed. Who does most of the shopping in this country?

Also on NBC (2/26/92), a male correspondent reported on the controversy surrounding local health policies for premature babies; only one of the five people interviewed was female. On ABC (2/27/92), a male correspondent reported on the nuclear waste disposal controversy at Nevada's Yucca Mountain. There are many women actively involved in this issue, yet five men were interviewed for the story, not one female. These examples are not the exception; they are, rather, typical of the lack of importance relegated to female commentary and activities.

As in the newspapers, female television correspondents, in general, do not appear to seek out females for commentary any more than their male counterparts. Also, as in the newspapers, there were no days during the study period in which there was a lack of male correspondents or male interviewees.

Before we released the results –still a reporter at heart– I called all three networks to tell them of our findings and to get their views. There was genuine disbelief at their poor showing, after all, a few women anchors are now making the megabucks of their male counterparts, and have reached video stardom. Questions were raised: There were women anchoring (weekends of course), and women co-anchoring in the early morning, and major A.M. broadcasts. Why didn't we count them?

Because only the prime time newscasts were our focus, that's why. Further, the networks replied, what you are not considering is, for example, the "American Agenda" pieces done by Carole Simpson and several other top women correspondents on

ABC. Those pieces take longer to do, so those women cannot be as visible as the breaking news reporters. Yes, but men do some of those long form reports too, and that argument just doesn't sell.

The problem is that women make up only a quarter to a third of the TV correspondent corps. A few women cover the White House and a handful of other visible government departments. Others just don't get on the air often, and their stories are relegated to non-prime time programming or to syndication.

We found that there has been some progress in the number of women who are executive producers and broadcast producers. The number of bureau chiefs is still small, and at the vice presidential level, if anything there has been slippage. At the height of the progress of the 1970's, CBS News had four; now there is one. ABC has had two news veeps fairly consistently since then, and NBC has two.

There is another problem we don't like to talk about. Not all women in power are our friends. The need to be "one of the boys" does exist. Some women are simply afraid to appear to tilt toward other women, afraid to be labeled feminists. As a result, they therefore fail to make their presence count.

The problem is we women journalists lack power. We are too few in number. We do not hire and fire. We do not make the story assignments unfettered. We do not have the proportion of top jobs that our numbers in the population or the audience justify.

Just as we were so obviously absent from the Senate Judiciary Committee, just as we are barely visible in the president's cabinet, just as we are tokens on the boards of corporate America, so we are largely unseen and unheard in the newsrooms of this nation.

Those of us who have fought the good fight, many of us, are no longer there. Outsiders can provide the numbers and make known the problem. And, undeniably, it is tough to agitate for change in a time of recession.

It was never easy. But only the women within news organizations can work for change. Otherwise, the networks and local stations around the country may have to learn the hard lesson that the newspapers in many cities are beginning to understand: that is, if they do not reflect the diverse faces of their audience, black and white, male and female, young and old, they may lose those viewers to cable and to the increasing presence of the competition. They will have only themselves to blame. ■

Marlene Sanders is a former ABC and CBS News correspondent, producer and executive. She is co-author of *Waiting for Prime Time: The Women of Television News*, teaches journalism at New York University, and is program director of Women, Men & Media.

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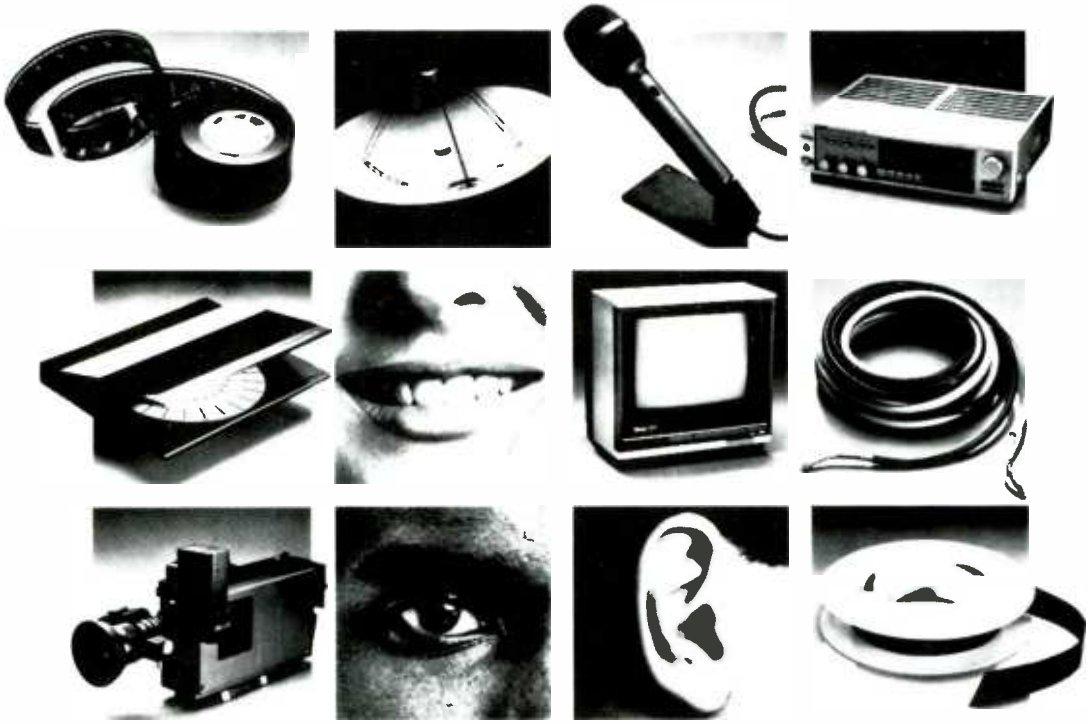

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HERE'S TO THE MUSICAL VARIETY SHOW!

And to its premier producers, Gary Smith and Dwight Hemion, who earned 36 Emmy nominations. And here's how they're adapting to the genre's passing.

BY RICHARD KROLIK

Television nostalgia buffs love to talk about The Golden Age. Arguments develop: were *Studio One* and the Fred Coe dramas better than today's made-for-TV movies, like *Roots* and *Lonesome Dove*? Did Sergeant Bilko and the Dick Van Dyke show generate more living-room chuckles than Cosby and Roseanne?

At least, drama and situation comedy comparisons are arguable. What's not arguable is musical variety, from Ed Sullivan to Barbra Streisand. That category is virtually dead, gone, out of here.

Probably its most celebrated practitioners, who've survived by turning their tasteful talents to other pastures, is the team of Gary Smith and Dwight Hemion.

Their *bona fides*? How about 36 Emmy nominations for one or both, and 16 statuettes for Hemion alone, plus a bunch for the duo, plus Directors Guild awards? How about blurbs from fellow workers like "master craftsmen ... innovative, intelligent and so generous with their talents ... creative genius" (Ann-Margret) and "... constitutionally unable to do a show that looks ordinary or undistinguished" (Steve Allen) and reviewers like John O'Connor in *The New York Times*: "Mr. Smith and Mr. Hemion, skilled veterans of television specials, know how to get their magic moments" and the dean of TV critics, the *Washington Post's* Tom Shales: "... together and individually they have worked on the most lustrous and fondly remembered musical specials ... Smith and Hemion are the class act of variety show packagers." New York's Museum of TV & Radio recently devoted an entire summer to screenings of a selection of their hit shows.

Where do talents like these come from, and how do they mature and mesh? Where do they get their breaks that open the doors, and what do they do when they get inside? In short: who are these guys?

Dwight Hemion, born in New Jersey in 1926. Family business, funeral services. Education, public high

school. Self-admitted no scholar. Hobbies, sports and girls, dancing at the near-home Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook and New Rochelle's Glen Island Casino, homes to the Big Bands, memorizing musicians and arrangements like batting averages. And what you must know about Hemion: he is what all the females he encounters call, immediately, adorable. Blond, blue-eyed, big smile, soft-spoken almost to the point of inarticulateness. Politically arch conservative, but never presses his views on a listener. Always immaculately dressed. Plays golf.

Gary Smith, ten years younger, proof that opposites attract. Dark-haired with a bushy mustache, serious tennis player (Grant Tinker calls him "scrappy, but with a terrible serve"). Born and raised in Queens, N.Y. Artistic. Youthful ambition: scenic designer. Graduate of the arts program at Carnegie-Mellon, hired straightaway at CBS. Articulate, aggressive though mild-mannered, thoughtful, imaginative, conceptual. Puts the shows together, knows the numbers, makes the pitch. Solidly liberal.

By coincidence, both partners have ended up with happy second marriages and five children. Both live well, Smith with a home base in L.A. and a home in Mexico, Hemion with a spread in the horse country of Virginia and a pad in Los Angeles.

Because Gary Smith didn't come on the television scene until Dwight Hemion had become a full-fledged TV director, let's look at how the older fellow got to that point.

Hemion came out of the Army Air Force in 1946 with a high school education and nary a clue of a vocation. A family friend intervened and became his first mentor: Paul Mowry, then National Director of ABC Television, brought him in as a gofer. ABC Television, a nice-sounding entity, consisted of two stations, WFIL-TV in Philadelphia and WMAL-TV in Washington.

Whatever programming the so-called network did originated in one of those two stations and occasionally from the DuMont studio in New York. ABC had only recently come into being, when NBC's Red and Blue radio networks were broken up and the Blue, bought by Ed Noble of Lifesavers, became the first three letters of the alphabet.

There were only a handful of TV sets in those days. On the production side, everyone was learning on the job. "I went from gofer to assistant," says Hemion, "an assistant of what, I don't know. I still got sandwiches.

"One day we went down to Philadelphia, where I was to assist the director, Bob Doyle, do a boxing bout. Doyle got sick, and I did the fight. That was my initiation, the first time I ever called camera shots. I still remember the two black and white cameras, one and two, one and two."

Bob Doyle, who had a solid career at NBC and ABC as a director of news shows and conventions and who later produced the National Geographic series, had Dwight with him on football, basketball and baseball, and the young assistant soaked it all up.

"I became a sports director," Hemion recalls, "it was terrific experience, as far as being able to relate to cameras and be comfortable with cameras."

By 1949, as Hemion was beginning to feel he'd mastered the trade of sports coverage, ABC decided sports was not its cup of tea and bowed out of the business. Young Hemion was let go. Luckily, another mentor showed up: Don Kellett, who had managed the New York Knicks and then become general manager of WFIL-TV in Philadelphia, hired him. "I was lucky to get a job," Hemion says, "even though it only lasted a couple of months.

"One day I got a phone call from New York, a man named Hal Friedman, who more people remember as the husband of Marie Torre than as the producer of the original late-night show, *Broadway Open House* with Jerry Lester, Dagmar and the Milton DeLugg orchestra.

"He told me NBC was looking for guys for their local television station. 'They've brought a fellow named Ted Cott over from WNEW to run it.'

""So I went to see Ted Cott and I was hired."

The job was a staff director, expected to put cameras on anything and everything the program schedule called for.

"I did cooking shows and documentaries and couple shows like Johnny Stearns and Mary Kay, occasionally Tex and Jinx, Skitch Henderson and Faye Emerson, the *Morey Amsterdam Show*."

All that jumping from show to show must have earned Hemion good marks at WNBT, because when Dick Pack, who ran programming for Ted Cott, wanted to do a nightly 90-minute local variety show around Steve Allen, he offered the director's job to Dwight Hemion. That was, as Steve's hit song put it, the start of something big.

The Steve Allen Show on WNBT brought together a quartet of young talent that was destined to make an impressive entry in showbiz history: Jules Green, Steve Allen's manager who brought him east, discovered Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, both 17-year-olds with nightclub and radio already on their credit list. Then they signed Andy Williams, 18, veteran of the cabaret act, Kay Thompson and the Williams Brothers, and Pat Marshall, now Mrs. Larry Gelbart. After a year, Hemion's old companion in the jack-of-all-producing-cum-directing trades at WNBT, Bill Harbach, became the producer; soon thereafter, a young man who had been holding cue cards for Perry Como, name of Nick Vanoff, joined the production staff.

That was the beginning of what would become thirty years of intertwined careers of Harbach, Hemion and Vanoff, as they worked on shows and series in various combinations of Bill and Dwight, Nick and Dwight, Nick and Bill. Vanoff and Harbach produced ABC's *Hollywood Palace* for seven years; among the three of them, they probably received more Emmy nominations and awards for outstanding achievement in musical variety entertainment than any similar trio of pals.

The three probably received more Emmy nominations and awards for achievement in musical variety than any other trio of pals.

The Steve Allen Show, which began as a local show on WNBT, NBC's New York o-and-o, went network in the early fifties and became *TONIGHT*, one of Pat Weaver's many achievements, carving a late-night niche for NBC that has defeated the competition for a couple of generations.

And Dwight Hemion moved on. Nick Vanoff was offered the job of producing a new Perry Como show and brought Dwight along. It was there he met for the first time the young scenic designer, Gary Smith. They got to know each others' work, and rely on it, during the Como run.

And it was during a hiatus from that run that Hemion broke out of the pack of young talented television directors. He was invited to direct a special for a newly-discovered actress-singer who

had just shaken up Broadway in a show called *Funny Girl*.

My Name Is Barbra was shown on April 5, 1965. In addition to the glorious voice and the dramatic looks, Streisand got a chance to show off her talent for comedy ("Secondhand Rose"), pathos ("People") and pure glee, in a sequence where she ran through Bergdorf's grabbing everything in sight while singing "I Got Plenty of Nothin'". She belted "When The Sun Comes Out" and "Lover Come Back To Me" and finished with her incomparable "Happy Days Are Here Again."

The show got an Emmy for "Outstanding Program Achievement in Entertainment", as they lumped shows of all kinds in the sixties; Joe Layton got his Emmy as producer, but Dwight's nomination for best direction was beaten out by a dramatic show. For Barbra, fan clubs formed.

"So I did Barbra's first show," Hemion recalls, "and shortly after that I got a call from Sinatra's people." Out of that phone call came the opportunity – and formidable challenge – to direct and produce *Frank Sinatra: A Man and His Music*. The challenge came not so much in conceiving settings and camera shots, but rather in the overwhelming presence of the world's favorite singer.

To say that Sinatra gave people around him a hard time would be understating the case. On the set of the show was a young writer named Gay Talese, working on a piece for *Esquire* that became somewhat famous. He observed the exchanges between the star and the producer-director: "Sinatra continued to tear into Hemion, condemning . . . the lack of modern techniques in putting such shows together . . . and Dwight Hemion, very patient, so patient and calm that one would assume he had not heard anything that Sinatra had just said, outlined the opening part of the show."

Hemion got his first directing Emmy for the Sinatra show, which was followed by another for a sequel, and a nomination for a second Streisand, *Color Me Barbra*, where he achieved spectacular effects with her numbers in the Egyptian collection of the Philadelphia Museum.

Meanwhile, back at the Perry Como ranch, they were breaking up that old gang. The Saturday night hour was cancelled. Nick Vanoff and Bill Harbach headed west, where they founded the eminently successful *Hollywood Palace*. Gary Smith made the big step from scenic designer to producer the hard way, accepting an invitation to take over *The Judy Garland Show*. He did his best, but as he said thirty years later, "A weekly series kills you, exhausts you. Judy shouldn't have been on every week. No musical artist is big enough."

Smith stayed on the coast to produce a rock'n'roll musical series called *Hullabaloo*, showcasing young people along with stars like Sammy Davis and Paul Anka. It lasted a season, but by 1967, another opportunity appeared: Kraft Foods wanted to do a weekly musical variety series, *Kraft Music Hall*, with a different host and a different concept each week. And they wanted Gary to produce it and Dwight to co-produce and direct.

With a three-year commitment in hand, the road looked pretty well charted for the odd couple. At a New Year's Eve party, they found themselves in a corner, away from the noise, talking about their television shows ahead, and it hit them simultaneously: "Maybe we ought to go in business together!"

Dwight exclaimed:"We can blow this town apart!" Gary must have agreed. To accommodate the packaging aspect, they formed Yorkshire Productions, because they both had Yorkshire terriers at the time.

"Doing Kraft was like doing a spe-

cial every week with people as different as Alan King, Bobby Darin, Eddie Arnold," says Gary. "It was the busiest and happiest time of our lives."

During one of the summers in this period, Smith and Hemion went to London to do a Kraft show with Dudley Moore and Peter Cook. When they went back a second summer, Sir Lew Grade, the eminent British producer, offered them a deal to use his studios, bring over American stars, and produce shows for the U.S., the U.K. and the world market.

So began a highly productive four-year period of specials starring the likes of Julie Andrews, Burt Bachrach, Barbra Streisand, Glen Campbell, Ann-Margaret . . . a *Peter Pan* with Mia Farrow and Danny Kaye . . . the debut of Jim Henson's Muppets . . . command performances for the Queen.

Weep for the days of musical variety specials with sets that knock your socks off and shots that make you sit up and take notice.

After they returned to the States, Sir Lew asked them back for one more command performance, reporting that Her Majesty herself had inquired of him, "Are the boys available?"

Back home, "the boys" continued their merry way with musical variety specials that won Emmys and Directors Guild awards – *America Salutes Richard Rodgers* won both in 1976.

Typically, it had a quote star-studded unquote lineup: Gene Kelly, Henry Winkler, Diahann Carroll, Vic Damone, Sammy Davis, Jr., Sandy Duncan, Lena Horne, Cloris Leachman, Peggy Lee, John Wayne. One show followed another, with names like those showcased with taste and imagination.

But a cloud began to form on the horizon. In addition to the specials that required a concept and creative production from a blank slate, Smith-Hemion were called on to do "events". Happenings like Friars Roasts and Television Critics Circle Awards and Academy Awards shows began to appear on their schedules. These were a far cry from starting with an empty studio or an appropriate location and building a show with stars; here the event was locked in, and the creative contribution of Smith-Hemion was limited to putting cameras on it with as much skill and good taste as possible.

There would come a time when Smith-Hemion did virtually nothing but events. Meanwhile, just reading from the 32-page catalogue of their productions will make you weep for the days of musical variety specials with sets that knock your socks off, camera shots that make you sit up and take notice, and a wide range of popular music rendered by the greats from Steve and Eydie saluting Irving Berlin to Minnie Pearl and Roy Acuff from the Grand Ole Opry House to Elvis' final TV appearance.

Two of many that Gary Smith takes pride remembering are what he calls "concept" shows. One was a holiday tribute to the Radio City Music Hall, called *Rockette* with not only performers like Ben Vereen, Ann-Margret, Alan King and Jack Jones, but running commentary by Gregory Peck, not just for his star presence, but because he once worked as an usher there.

Another memorable "concept" show was *Uptown-A Musical Comedy History of Harlem's Apollo Theatre* as remembered by Frank Shifman, the Apollo's manager for decades. The show brought together virtually every great entertainer who played the

Apollo: Cab Calloway, Bill Eckstine, Sarah Vaughan, Lou Rawls, Nipsey Russell, Gladys Knight and the Pips... on and on.

Three years ago, the Museum of Broadcasting in New York presented a Mark Goodson Seminar and Screening Series called "Produced and Directed by Smith-Hemion." The screenings, which ran five days a week from June through September, used 28 specials, and had a hard time limiting the summer to those. We've touched on some of them; others that may evoke memories include *Baryshnikov on Broadway; Shirley MacLaine at the Lido; Bette Midler: Ol' Red Hair Is Back; Linda in Wonderland; Julie on Sesame Street; Alan King's Wonderful World of Aggravation* . . . the gamut.

'The variety show, the showcase, is dead, let's face it. There will never be any more Ed Sullivans that the family gathered to watch'

In connection with the summer-long screenings, there was a two-day seminar featuring Smith and Hemion in front of an audience of television-aware New Yorkers. Gary did the talking; Dwight sat there looking benign. When asked why he didn't chime in more, he gave a typical Hemion understatement: "His stuff seemed so much more exciting to me than the stuff I had to tell."

How can these two polar opposite partners get along for all these years? Steve Allen gives a clue: "I cannot even imagine the two disagreeing or arguing about a point. One man's judgment automatically complements the other's. A quality they share is ease of execution. There are no control-room hysterics, there is no temperamental invective. If one did not know of the painstaking planning and natural creativity involved, one might be forgiven for thinking that the unfailing quality of their productions was largely a matter of tossing it off."

Smith and Hemion also have the good judgment not to mix their private lives with their professional duties. Gary and his wife Maxine have one circle of friends, Dwight and Kitty have another. When the men are together, they work on the matter at hand; they don't ever talk politics, or gossip, or any of the chitchat that passes for civilized discourse, especially in show business. Obviously, the arrangement works.

But what of the art-form they developed and devoted so much of their careers to? What of the entertainment giants they so ably and professionally showcased?

"The variety show, the showcase, is dead, let's face it," Gary Smith admits. "There will never be any more Ed Sullivans that the family gathered to watch on Sunday nights; the home is too splintered, there are TV sets in every room in the house, and there are dozens of cable channels to choose from. Variety shows just don't get ratings."

As Tom Shales wrote in the *Washington Post*, "What good is being the best at what you do if no one wants to do it? Gary Smith and Dwight Hemion have produced the classiest musical specials and variety programs on network television, but now both species have virtually vanished."

What happens to this talented team whose work has been so closely identified with another age? Well, like any other corporation whose product has gone out of public favor, they survey the market and tailor their product to what the market wants.

"Television specials have become events," Gary Smith says, "so Smith-Hemion is in the events business."

They demonstrated their ability to handle the biggest, the New York City celebration of the Statue of Liberty's hundredth birthday. Said David Wolper, executive producer and chairman of Liberty Weekend, "Smith-Hemion were absolutely perfect for a job like that. When they're working on it, you can be sure it's going to get done, and in a classy way."

Smith-Hemion were again asked to "produce" the Democratic National Convention, this past July, as they did in 1988. (In this case "produce" means make it acceptable to the networks and cable systems.) Their contribution to the 1988 Convention caused some controversy at first – constructing a three-tier platform brought anguished cries from displaced pols, softening the "blatant red, white and blue" with shades of salmon, eggshell and azure coloring worried traditionalists – but they were invited back. And as veteran network political reporter Sander Vanocur puts it, "If the Democratic party had allowed Smith-Hemion to run the campaign the way they ran that Atlanta convention, Michael Dukakis would be President today."

Also on their 1992 agenda are the events they do each year: the gathering of young performers from around the world, taped in Holland for UNICEF; the competition of young musicians and the annual teachers' awards, for the Disney Channel; the National Literacy Awards, for the White House; *Christmas In Washington*, for NBC and the President, and thankfully one return to their musical variety format, a Neil Diamond Christmas show, for HBO.

In a special Smith-Hemion 20th Anniversary issue of *The Hollywood Reporter*, chock full of congratulatory ads from the artists and the technical people they'd worked with, their "company writer" Buz Kohan shows why he has that status: "Metaphorically speaking, Smith-Hemion is a team that never loses. It is a team that faces the oppostion – sameness, triteness, expedience – and fearlessly pulls from their bag of tricks plays that are inventive, surprising and elaborate . . . fresh ideas, innovative ideas, theatrical ideas, concepts that were elegant in their simplicity, concepts that were fragile in their complexity. A Smith-Hemion production has a look, a feel, a smartness about it that belies the intense effort that went into its execution.

"They delight the eye, the ear, the senses, the intellect, the funny bone, the soul, the elite and the masses."

When Dwight Hemion made his 26-year handshake deal with Gary Smith and predicted "We're gonna blow this town apart!", he couldn't have foreseen that the musical variety format would self-destruct.

Ah well. It was great fun while it lasted. Golden Ages don't last forever, anyhow. ■

Richard Krolik was on the production staff of trail blazing programs such as *Today* and later was in charge of programming for the Time-Life broadcast division. He writes for various Washington publications and for *TVQ*.

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PUTTING THE ARTS ON TELEVISION

Directors Merrill Brockway, Kirk Browning and Roger Englander look back on four decades of American cultural programming

BY BRIAN ROSE

The arts on television are more than just the story of great performances. They are also about how masterpieces created for the stage and the concert hall have been translated to a new and different type of medium. The most memorable TV programs featuring dance, theater, opera, and concert music—programs like the *Young People's Concerts*, *Dance in America*, the Toscanini telecasts—gain part of their power because of the ways they have been transformed and reshaped for the small screen, through the artistry of the TV director. They must see each composition afresh, deciding the best way to make dance move within TV's limited spatial frame or how to dramatize an orchestral work or what elements to intensify on a crowded opera stage. In a very real sense, directors of the arts on television are vital creative collaborators with the composers, choreographers, and dramatists whose work they are bringing to life for millions of home viewers.

The three directors interviewed for this article have played an important role in shaping the ways American TV has looked at the performing arts. Their pioneering efforts helped set an unusually high standard for arts coverage in this country. Each brought a sensitive and sophisticated approach to his directing, distinguished by a sense of musical timing and a responsiveness to each work's dramatic possibilities.

Merrill Brockway, who started out as a professional musician, became a TV director in the late 1950s in Philadelphia. After doing every type of program, he moved to New York a few years later, where he eventually became a producer and director of the distinguished CBS culture series, *Camera Three*. In 1976, he went to PBS's *Dance in America* as a producer/director, creating some of the most imaginative dance programs in TV history. In the early 1980s, he served as chief producer for CBS Cable.

Kirk Browning began his TV career in the late 1940s at NBC, where he directed a number of trailblazing

programs, including many of the Toscanini telecasts, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and dozens of operas for *NBC Opera Theatre*. Moving to PBS in the 1970s, he directed *NET Opera Theater*, as well as many programs for *Theater in America* and *American Playhouse*. He has also directed virtually every telecast of *Live from Lincoln Center*, and many for *Live from the Metropolitan Opera*.

Roger Englander started directing theater and opera on TV soon after World War II, eventually moving to CBS in the early 1950s. After working on *Omnibus* and other arts series, he became producer and director of one of television's most honored series, the Leonard Bernstein *Young People's Concerts*. In the mid-1970s, he served as a producer/director of *Camera Three*, and later worked as head of Music Programming at CBS Cable.

In this interview, these three directors, who have been friends for decades and whose careers have intersected at numerous points throughout the years, talk about what has happened to cultural television since the 1940s. They also discuss the craft of TV directing, the challenges of translating works from one medium to another, and their ideas about what lies ahead for the arts on TV.

BRIAN ROSE: *You all got started in television fairly early. Kirk and Roger were there in the late 1940s, and Merrill began in the early 1950s. What kinds of restrictions did you face, particularly in terms of technology?*

ROGER ENGLANDER: I began working in TV starting in 1945 at WBKB in Chicago. We were trying to put on Tennessee Williams's *This Property is Condemned*, which I had staged at the University of Chicago. All we had were two big, clunky cameras. We alternated wide shot, close-up, wide shot, close-up, with virtually no camera movement. The program, unfortunately, never made it on the air.

When I moved to Philadelphia in the late 1940s, I produced Menotti's *The Telephone*, with Paul Nickell as the director. We now had three cameras, but they were still big and clunky. We used all sorts of gimmicks to make motion, like pan cards.

KIRK BROWNING: When I got into TV, I didn't think of technology as a limitation. I had the opportunity to work up from stage manager, to assistant director, to director. So I got gradually familiar with the functions of the studio and the control room. These were the tools that we were given, and it appeared to me we had limitless opportunities. Obviously, from today's perspective, those were primitive tools, particularly with the difficulties we faced in doing all of our transitions live and always changing lenses. Working with scripted shows, as I did, meant we had to write out in advance when and where we wanted to switch from a 135 mm. lens to a 75mm. lens, which called for a lot of planning.

One of the things I wish someone had confided to me when I was first starting out in television is that it would be helpful to regard the TV camera at worst as an adversarial instrument and at best as a reluctant ally. The struggle to make the viewer care as much about the television product as you do about the source material is unremitting, mighty and seldom successful. The television camera, in the area of arts programming, is inherently a primitive, unresponding, indifferent eye. The longer I'm in the business I'm aware that the craft is difficult because the camera poses such problems.

ENGLANDER: Would you say the same thing about film?

BROWNING: No. I have discovered that the television camera itself doesn't resonate with any sub-textual implications at all. It is totally literal. It sits there and photographs what you

see. All the subtext has to be spelled out for the viewers. This is obviously simplistic to an enormous degree, but the television camera doesn't have any sense of metaphor at all.

Bobby Kaufman called me up once and wanted to do a TV version of Tolstoy's short story about horses called *Strider*, which was then playing Off-Broadway. I went to see the play at a tiny arena theater, and this group of actors came out dressed in nothing but leotards, and snorted and stamped their feet, and for the next hour-and-a-quarter, they were horses. It was utterly charming, but I said to Bobby, "You don't understand. The moment you put a camera on them they're going to look like a bunch of foolish actors, trying to act like horses."

ENGLANDER: TV doesn't permit a suspension of belief, then?

BROWNING: No, it doesn't, and I don't think this is true of film. I remember how excited I was when I saw the movie version of Romeo and Juliet, with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev. This was filmed in London by a German director who used nine cameras. You could watch this on a big screen and enter into the detail of almost every image. You could see and read the details of every image. You can't do that with television. Every single thing, every moment of psychic activity the viewer is supposed to feel, has to be spelled out. I totally despair in this area of the TV aesthetic, and I've tried everything.

The psychology of television is that the camera comes to represent the psyche of the viewer. The way you look at television gives the camera a tremendous power. You're expecting the camera to see for you, and then feel for you. It's a very subjective role.

ENGLANDER: But this is also a matter of screen size?

BROWNING: Absolutely. If the dimensions of the TV screen were to change tomorrow, everything I'm saying would be different.

MERRILL BROCKWAY: I don't know if this is a full response to your statement, but what I'm always delighted and surprised about is the unpredictability of what the camera does. Once I was doing a student TV workshop at NYU and we were putting together a version of Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. There was one actor in the group that the camera adored. It was like the camera became alive and got brighter every time that actor was on the screen, and then dimmed when he wasn't there. I called the actor over, and pointed to the camera and said, "This box is going to change your life." It's true of many other things. You can't explain why they work for the camera, they just do.

ROSE: *How did your awareness of TV as a domestic, household medium change your response to it?*

BROCKWAY: Program directors kept telling me that TV was for the guy with the beer can and the woman with the ironing board. I told them they were full of crap. There were other people besides the beer drinkers and the ironing boarders watching TV too.

BROWNING: When we started, it was the perception of the public that a new art form was being created. The viewer came with a certain appreciation that they don't have today of what was presented on the tube. In the first place, it was a fairly elitist medium. People spent quite a lot of money on those first sets, and broadcasting was only on for a few hours a day. It had an integrity. It had an authority, and people cared. Nowadays, you can't get through to the viewing public anymore. They just don't seem to care.

ENGLANDER: As every new

medium comes up, it turns its predecessors into a more exclusive technology. When TV came in and assumed its tremendous popularity, it led to a corresponding rise in art films. People now rent and collect films as valuable art commodities. Now the same thing is happening in television. People rent and buy tapes from the "Golden Age" of television programming.

ROSE: *During the 1950s, did you feel a freedom about what you could do with the medium?*
ENGLANDER: Yes, even on commercial shows I worked on, like *Omnibus*, there was never any contact between the programming people and the advertising agency. Hands off was the rule.

BROWNING: It was a very good time. I was so spoiled working in my exclusive niche at NBC. The *NBC Opera Theatre* was under the aegis of David Sarnoff, and nobody ever touched us. I could do anything I wanted and nobody ever said no.

BROCKWAY: When I started in Philadelphia at WCAU-TV, I started with nothing. But I knew that if I filled my staff responsibilities for them as an all-around director, I could do anything that I wanted to do. They started to say, "Let him alone. He's out doing his art stuff." But the art stuff began to make a name for itself. I found important supporters in Philadelphia and later at WCBS-TV in New York, which leads to my belief that it all has to do with single individuals who are willing to back you and your efforts.

ROSE: *When did you first come up against the limitations TV posed when dealing with the arts?*
BROWNING: In the early 1950s, the Metropolitan Opera approached me to do live telecasts for a pay-per-view system for theaters they were interconnected with. It turned out to be a total disaster, and I realized that television simply couldn't handle the task of translating live performances from the stage. Twenty years later when John Goberman came to me with the idea of doing telecasts from the various theaters of Lincoln Center, I said, "forget it. I've done it, it doesn't work." It was only because John had the sense to get a special fund to do in-house experiments as a way to see what could and couldn't be done that we were able to figure out how we could now tackle this problem and find a solution. Yet, even now, I still don't think television produces anything more than a pale, second-hand experience, generally.

ENGLANDER: Actually, I loved doing arts programs on remote locations, away from the studio and the concert hall, more than anything else. That to me was the most creative challenge of all. I felt stymied by being in the studio, and wanted to break out, if for no other reason than to give a different perspective.

BROCKWAY: My first experience about the limitations of TV occurred with one of my most experimental programs on *Camera Three*. It was a show devoted to George Crumb's *Ancient Voices for Children*. The problem was that the work was so sophisticated in terms of its audio that we knew that television would be lucky to capture 50%. Nevertheless, we talked to George about this, and we decided that since we all loved the piece so much anyway, that it was worth doing, despite these obstacles.

Twyla Tharp, on the other hand, is continually frustrated by television. Every time she works with it, she gets angry and throws things, because of what it can't do.

It's sort of a mindset. You have to approach it with the idea, this is what it can do and what it can't. Balanchine certainly approached TV with that philosophy. He'd say to me,

"Show me what it can do and then I will make it work."

ENGLANDER: Limitations are wonderful. I don't know how you can work without them.

ROSE: *When was the first time that you realized the power of television and the potential impact of what it could do?*
BROACKWAY: I never did.

ENGLANDER: I did when we received the hundreds of letters from viewers about the Bernstein Young People's concerts. People from the sticks, who had never seen an orchestra, would write in. I remember one from a mother who said her son never knew an orchestra had real people making music. He just thought it was sounds from a LP record.

BROWNING: The thing that changed my whole perception of television was a thirty-second commercial I saw in the early 1950s. I was flipping the dial at home, and a live Hathaway shirt commercial came on the air. What happened in that thirty seconds changed the way I felt about television from that point forward. The commercial was for a button-down, pinstriped shirt—I still remember it vividly. It was shot with one camera, with a close-up adapter, live. It opened with close-up of a corner of a guy's neck, with a shirt tab visible. As it faded in, the guy and an off-screen girl were having some kind of intimate, affectionate conversation, which had nothing to do with shirts. Then, into the frame came the finger of this girl, and the finger goes down to his breast, across his chest, and then continues down and down and down. The camera holds its position at his belt, and the finger disappears downward out of the frame.

I knew from that moment what television was. That is the art form of television! It is such a subjective medium. It is a selection which is so personal that it might be repellent on the movie screen. It is using the camera as the most personal viewing possible. The genius of it was that there were three psyches represented at once. There was the boy's psyche, the girl's psyche, and viewer's psyche. That kind of confluence of three psychic energies in one image was tremendously powerful. I've never forgotten that, and I've never done a show that I wasn't thinking how can I create this kind of personal resonance.

ENGLANDER: Which of your shows do you feel came closest to that kind of impression?

BROWNING: It was probably a version I did of Lee Hoiby's opera *Summer and Smoke*. Lee had written it very similar to the Tennessee Williams version. It was a linear plot that went directly from point to point. But he had written it in such a way that I found I could transform it into a memory piece. Without changing a note of music, I could start with the penultimate scene, with a close-up of the lead character's, Alma's, face, in a park. I then had her reconstruct in her mind what had happened to her, and kept cutting back to her during the musical interludes between each scene.

I believe that if you're able to do this kind of personalization, it penetrates the viewer's consciousness in a tremendously powerful way. It's terribly difficult to do, and sometimes it's totally inappropriate. I don't know, for example, how you would do it in ballet, where this kind of metaphor doesn't seem appropriate.

BROCKWAY: I think we were able to do this on *Dance In America* with Martha Graham's *Clytemnestra*, which we originate from one character's mind in much the same way. I certainly try to search for this

personal, human quality in every piece I've ever done for television. It's essential, especially when you're converting pieces created for the proscenium stage.

ROSE: *What steps does one take to add these personal qualities when you're dealing with previously prepared pieces, which you need to translate for TV?*

BROWNING: My formula, which is so crass and which I'm so shameless about, is to keep the camera very active. To force the camera to be exploratory and restless, to keep it from being anything but a passive observer.

ENGLANDER: I've taken a different approach, sometimes letting the camera just stay on a subject. When I did a telecast of Joseph Szigetti playing a Bach Chaconne, I used just three shots for a twenty-minute piece, and it was mesmerizing. The lack of movement can often be an asset.

BROWNING: You're absolutely right. For example, Greg Mosher just did a telecast of *Uncle Vanya*, which used very little camera movement, and it was absolutely appropriate for this particular production. When Greg and I began working together on transferring his stage production of *Our Town* to television, he asked me "Do you know the secret of television?"

"Of course I do," I told him.

"I knew you'd say that. What is it?" he wanted to know.

I responded, "Television is photographing subtext." That's all I ever need to say to him.

So we proceeded to do *Our Town*, which I thought worked very well in our version. We certainly employed a subjective approach, but Greg hated camera zooms and lots of camera movement. He liked to be able to frame everything tight, and hold it, which was OK, so I needed to adapt to this style.

ENGLANDER: Both of you have worked extensively with co-directors, something I've never done. Merrill, you were closely associated with Balanchine, and Kirk you've done numerous theater productions with the original directors. How did you find this type of experience?

BROWNING: I think it's the hairiest part of the business, and one that probably poses the most difficulty to a young, relatively inexperienced TV director. I know that if I had had to do these types of collaborations in my youth it would have been terribly hard, because you're so determined to see things your way, without a lot of input. But I have totally relished the experiences I have had with Jerry Zaks, Greg Mosher, and Frank Galati recently.

BROCKWAY: I thing Kirk is totally right. If you have a big, protean talent, TV will be too small for you. Still, I think something which has linked all three of us, and made us the directors we are, is our training in music. It's pretty damn difficult to be a TV arts director without a strong sense of musicality.

BROWNING: That is the strongest single attribute one can have. To a large extent, the word director is very misleading. We are translators, we are interpreters, we a responders. In the area of art programming, there is an existing work of art and we are there to share the response of the average viewer to that work. Your success depends on the extent to which you represent the public psyche.

ENGLANDER: The origin, the fountain of our inspiration, is always the music. Those little notes written on the score. The music dictates everything.

BROCKWAY: This works perfectly

with somebody like Balanchine, **who** was extraordinarily musical. But unfortunately, not all choreographers have this gift, and I often had to make the decision whether I go with the music or go with the choreographer.

I was trained as a pianist, but at nineteen I knew I wasn't going to be Horowitz. Consequently, I did a lot of accompanying work, which provided me with a useful mindset. If they commented on your work, you knew you were playing too loud. I brought that kind of collaborative philosophy with me to television.

BROWNING: I never worked with a director that I wasn't sympatico with. During our first meeting, if I could detect that they weren't going to be sensitive to what the camera could and couldn't do, I simply didn't take the job.

ROSE: *Was this also true for you Roger in your collaborations with Leonard Bernstein?*
ENGLANDER: After the first couple of shows, we never discussed camera. By then, we understood each other. The few problems he might have were never about camerawork.

BROCKWAY: This was also true for me with Balanchine. He was such an inspiration because he was serving the dancers; he wasn't serving Balanchine. He was an impeccable musician, and all you needed to do was to look at the piece and you could see what he was telling you to do. He had a very unpleasant experience when he took the City Ballet to Germany to have several of his works taped over there. There were three directors and each had a separate theory of how to approach the dance—one believed in zooms, one pans, and so forth. Balanchine was unhappy with the results because, as he later told me, "What came out was not my piece. If they want to do that, why don't they make up a piece and do it." I remembered that and always tried to make the programs HIS ballets.

BROWNING: I worked with Balanchine several times in the 1950s on the *Bell Telephone Hour*, and it was a total joy. He would see where the cameras were, and what it was possible to do, and then he would make the necessary adjustments. I never got the feeling, however, that he ever felt rewarded by working on television.

BROCKWAY: No, he used to refer to those days as " We needed the money, so we leased out pieces," But when he got to *Dance in America*, he said "We no longer need the money, and I don't lease out my pieces."

ROSE: *I wonder if each of you could talk about breakthrough programs you worked on, programs which you feel deepened your understanding about TV's possibilities.*
ENGLANDER: I can mention two. One was a studio show I did on CBS for Revlon's *Spring Festival of Music*, featuring the CBS Symphony Orchestra and pianist John Browning. They were performing the finale of the Rachmoninoff Second Piano Concerto. The concert had been specifically conceived for television. We had two monster Houston cameras and three or four regular cameras. The orchestra was seated not in the usual pie shape around the conductor but in a box shape. There were tons of microphones, mostly for decor. Everything was designed to emphasize the television nature of the event.

Cameras were choreographed to see other cameras at certain times, so that we could view the monster cameras as they craned up or down at key moments. In one sequence, near the coda, there was a close-up of the conductor hitting a downbeat, quickly followed by a full shot of the orchestra, then closing in with a high-angle view of the studio which ended with a close-up of the pianist's hands. That

one sequence, which I think lasted only twenty-seven seconds, was worth just about everything I'd ever done.

The other program was one I did for *Camera Three*. Anna Sokolow's *Dreams* was a ballet about the Holocaust, and I had the idea to stage it in a dismal, bombed-out loft about a block away from where I lived. It worked, because it took dance out of the studio and allowed it to react with an environment.

BROWNING: I think the most fun I ever had was within the constrained discipline of *Live From Lincoln Center*. Everything on the series has to be totally organic; you can't go out of the concert hall, and you have to see only what the audience sees. You can't embellish with any extraneous visuals. However, when we scheduled a performance with the New York Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta of Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky Suite*, I thought there might be a possibility to go to the piece's origin's, which was the film directed by Sergei Eisenstein. I went to my producer John Goberman and said, "I know we've got to be true to the format, but is it conceivable that since it's a bit of film music, and the context is so intimate between the Eisenstein film and the Prokofiev score, that we could help our audience see this as a concerto between film for orchestra." I wanted to use excerpts from the movie just like a solo instrument.

John said he'd talk to Zubin and told me to go experiment. I studied the film closely and found thirty-two places where we could go to the movie during the course of the music, and then cut back to the orchestra. Even though the film wouldn't be seen by the audience in the hall, Zubin said fine.

We did it, and it was tremendous fun, though a bit hairy, since we had to blend in thirty-two roll-ins, some no more than five or ten seconds apart. The challenge was to make the Philharmonic not look like a pit orchestra playing to a film, and not make the film gratuitous by making viewers wonder why they were suddenly seeing movie clips. We had to find a way to make it logical. My formula was to find the weakest part of the music—that is, the section with the least amount of energy—to cut to the film, and then the strongest part of the music to come back to the orchestra.

BROCKWAY: One of the most important shows for me involved working with Martha Graham on *Dance in America*. Prior to that, I had always used instant editing on dance specials, where you would edit the event live as it happened. Beginning with Martha, however, I started to use isolated cameras, which permit you the chance to record every moment from each camera, and then put it all together afterwards. That was a crucial moment for me, because from that point onwards, the craft of editing became a tremendously significant factor. Isolated cameras allowed a lot more of the choreographer's intentions and a lot more of the quality of the dance to be realized.

ROSE: *All of you have been at the forefront of arts television almost since it began. What period to you think was the most exciting?*

BROWNING: I guess for me the most interesting time was in the late 1960s, after I had left NBC. NBC was actually a fairly predictable kind of experience. I was terribly spoiled there, and I certainly had a lot of fun. And of course there was the challenge of *NBC Opera Theatre*, of trying to make opera accessible to a mass audience. But basically, for me, the most exciting period was when the Ford Foundation gave us the opportunity to do opera under much more experimental conditions with *NET Opera*. The work I did on that series with Peter Herman Adler was the time that we really tried new things with

opera formats.

ENGLANDER: I don't know if it's reverse snobbism or what, but even though I had the opportunity to work at PBS from time to time, I didn't want to align myself or the programs I did in a ghetto atmosphere. I loved the idea that what I did at CBS would be seen by a wider variety of people, who might have been watching a big, popular show right before and would then stay tuned and possibly be intrigued by our arts programs. If you were a viewer of PBS, you were already pre-disposed, and I didn't want to have pre-disposed audiences. I wanted to shock them and get them interested.

BROCKWAY: Though I've done both, I'm strictly a "ghetto audience" person. I never longed for public favor.

ENGLANDER: It's not that I wanted public favor. I was just intrigued by the possibility of a large audience and spreading the "good word." Still, it's very difficult to reach a large public. Arts programming will always be for the few, and will always stay for the few. That is what makes it great.

ROSE: *Still, it's interesting that while Kirk felt he got freedom once he left the commercial networks and went to PBS, Roger and Merrill had a great deal of freedom at CBS as producers of* Camera Three.
BROCKWAY: I always felt that *Camera Three* was a gesture of penance by CBS. All of those applications CBS filed with the FCC extolling their programming were always filled with statements about *Camera Three*.

ENGLANDER: CBS followed the same strategy for the *Young People's Concerts*. Once Newton Minow denounced television as a vast wasteland in the early 1960s, the network promptly moved the series, which had been on Sunday afternoons, to prime-time.

ROSE: *After decades of translating the performing arts for television, do you feel a sense of frustration about the form and what can be done with it?*
BROCKWAY: There are two pieces of advice that I've kept falling back on. One was given to me by Edward Steichen, after I had done a documentary about him. He said, "every twenty years a guy should kick himself in the pants and do something, you should give it away. Then you can do something you don't know how to do."

BROWNING: I'm the first person to recognize that the end of the parabola has come for me in terms of the types of format I've been working with over the past decade. I can do it with both hands tied behind my back. I'd like to do something else using some other aspect of television, the part that I care about. But I don't know where, because there's no appetite in the system for anything like that at the moment.

ENGLANDER: I always liked what I was doing, because I had the determination to pick and choose only projects which interested me.

ROSE: *Kirk, it's interesting that after working on the Toscanini telecasts, you became director on one of the most experimental series that's ever been on, the* NBC Opera Theatre. *Now, forty years later, you're doing the types of traditional, live concert television with which your career began. I remember that at a seminar you participated in several years ago at Fordham University, you said that the format of shows like* Live from Lincoln Center *was creatively stagnant. Do you still feel that way?*
BROWNING: Well, it's true that the format hasn't gone anywhere. But what *Live from Lincoln Center* has

done, and continues to do, is to get refunded every year, due to its consistent high ratings. There's a formula to what we do, and it seems to make everybody happy. I'm not going to change the system, because I can't afford to.

ROSE: *What possibilities do you see for the future of cultural programming?*
BROCKWAY: I'm a great believer in the teeter-totter theory, that the amount of arts programming is basically cyclical. I've seen it go up, and then go down. I've seen it then start up again, only to collapse, as it did with CBS Cable. Still, I choose to be optimistic, and hope that the teeter-totter will once again rise. It's certainly not up there now.

BROWNING: I don't share any of that sanguine philosophy. I think that the only possibility for an arts director starting out now is to work in the area of home video. I just don't believe that the networks will ever feel that the mass audience will ever be served by the arts again.

ENGLANDER: The position of the three networks is in jeopardy. I can't help feeling that someday they'll be nothing. Still, if all of us were in our early twenties today, we would all find our niche in something else that's just getting started. I probably would have gone to film school.

BROWNING: When young directors come to me for advice, I tell them not to go into the system as it exists, but to go to a small regional station attached to a university. There you may still have the chance to use television in an interesting way. Maybe the television of the future will not be television as we conceive of it, in terms of networks and large-scale productions, but as a personal artist's medium.

ROSE: *Do you then think the days of TV directors who spend most of their time translating other people's material to television are over?*
BROWNING: I think it's beginning to wane. The opportunities will be for the people who do it themselves. Keven Kline will no longer need me to help him put *Hamlet* in front of the cameras. He'll do it himself. That's certainly what Peter Sellars has done with his series of Mozart operas. Even though he made a few mistakes with their initial outings, I believe he'll be very, very good in television.

BROCKWAY: One of the things that will remain is a thirst for material. There'll always be a need for translation, whether it's for network television or home cassettes or whatever. My feeling is that the quality of translation will now vary a great deal. We all helped establish a certain standard of how to bring dance, music, and theater to TV, and we tend to like each other's work and agree with it. Still, I agree with Kirk that more and more artists will do their own translating, without using an intermediary, in the way that there are now more writer/directors in filmmaking.

ROSE: *Why didn't the move to eliminate the TV director emerge earlier? Why weren't artists from other media given greater control?*
BROWNING: TV in the old days had a certain authority. But now I feel it's turned into a secondary craft, with less room for directors whose work is solely in television. The only reason I still get work is that the production cost for these shows is so high they can't trust someone without a wide-range of experience. They still need somebody who knows the rules. But I feel the time is coming when the TV director will be obsolete. There's no mystique about what we do.

ROSE: *The three of you have had a tremendous influence over how the arts have been, and continue to be,*

covered on American television. Looking back, did you sense the importance of what it was you were doing and feel a kind of mission in your work?

BROCKWAY: Not really. For me it was always just doing a job. This was made perfectly clear to me early in my career when I was doing a rock and roll program in Philadelphia. One of the managers came in and started talking about his "artist." and I wonder, "what's this 'artist' bit?" Bach went on for a number of years and he never once called himself an artist.

BROWNING: I never for one moment forgot that I am a craftsman, not an artistic director. I have a craft that I use in the service of the arts.

ENGLANDER: I did feel a sense of mission in that I was exposing people to the arts who might never have gotten a chance to see them. I always hope that my programs would arouse their interest in the performing arts and make them want to find out more about them. ■

Brian Rose teaches in the Media Studies Program at Fordham University. He is the author of *Television and the Performing Arts* and the editor of *TV Genres* (Both published by Greenwood Press). His newest book is *Televising the Performing Arts: Interviews with Merrill Brockway, Kirk Browning, and Roger Englander,* from which this article is adapted.

VIEWPOINT

"The other night, while I was watching Siskel and Ebert discussing the improvements in home-video technology, I found myself shouting at the television set.

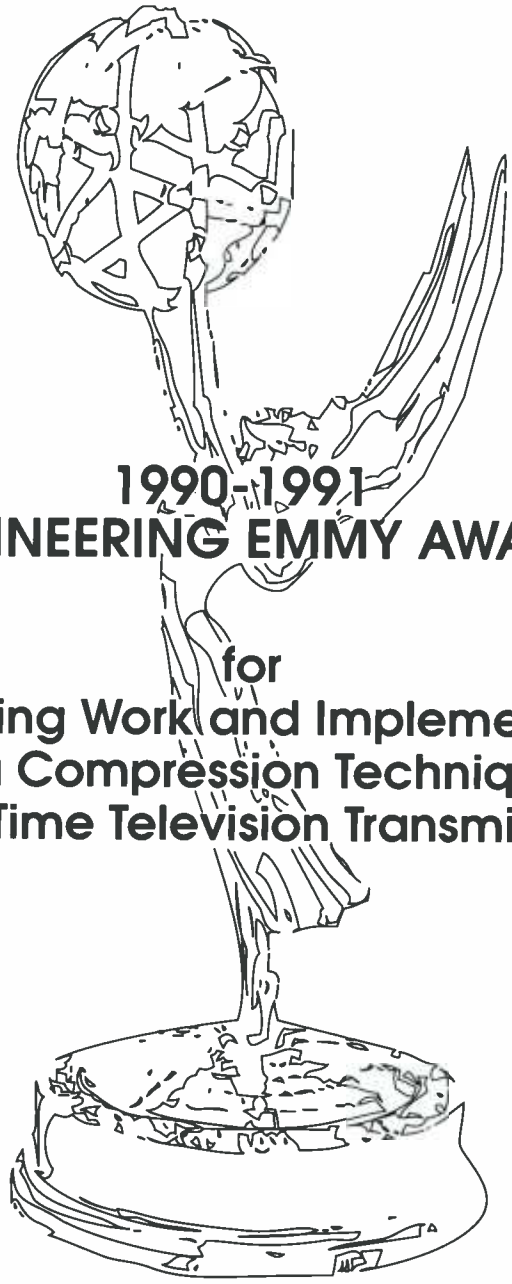
"For a mere $1,400(U.S.) you can buy a two-pound rig that will focus and adjust light and color automatically, or (a different brand) take the amateurish jiggle out of closeups.

"For another thousand, you can buy a system so small and portable that you can strap the camera to your wrist and film your mugger–or, if you're on the other side of the fitness industry, your muggee.

"What I was shouting at the formerly interesting Siskel and Ebert was hardly original. I was demanding to know why we should use these devices at all. I must confess to having and unreasonable hatred for home videos that is older than the technology itself. About the only thing in the world that's as dreary as sitting through someone's video experience of ClubMed, Southern France or cousin Sally's 37th birthday bash, is the home-slide shows that home video has rapidly replaced as the interpreter of individual experience.

"It isn't that the people who shoot home videos are themselves necessarily dull, vulgar and stupid. Often, they're virtuous, pleasant and intelligent folks. But a hand-held video camera (or a photo camera with slide film in it) seems to send out a miasma, chemical and cultural, that lowers the intelligence and judgment of the user by at least 50 percent."

–Brian Fawcett
Globe and Mail
Toronto



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ALCATEL

TELETTRA

A YANK TEACHES INDEPENDENCE TO ROMANIAN TV

But the lessons come hard in a country where programs were cancelled for being too popular.

BY JIM SNYDER

So it's late November, 1991. I have just retired from the Washington Post Company after 40 years in broadcast news and I find myself in gloomy, cold Bucharest trying to explain to a Romanian air traffic controller how to cover an election on television. The air traffic controller and I have been thrown together by the International Media Fund, a private, non-profit organization based in Washington which exists to help those who want to establish independent radio and TV stations in the formerly communist nations of East Europe.

The International Media Fund, headed by Marvin Stone, formerly editor in chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, was formed in September 1990 in reaction to a suggestion by Secretary of State James Baker. In a speech in Czechoslovakia on building democracies in the wake of the communist failure, Baker stressed the need for establishing a free press; he spoke of the need for "a diversity of voices" in all those countries, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. The IMF has identified and assisted a long list of individuals and organizations in Eastern and Central Europe which want to establish independent stations. The assistance has included technical equipment and many training programs.

That's how I got to know that air traffic controller in Romania. Jim Lynagh, who had recently retired as president of Multimedia Broadcasting, and I agreed to go to Bucharest as unpaid volunteers to conduct a week of IMF seminars on television broadcasting for a group of Romanian journalists and would-be independent station operators.

Our audience included people of all ages and experience. Some, like the air traffic controller, were interested in setting up independent TV stations in their towns. Others were journalists who wanted to work in whatever independent TV station business developed. Some were employees of the state controlled TV system, curious about American broadcasting. The state system people seemed to fall into one of two categories – they were

worried about competition from the independents or they were frustrated by the bureaucracy and the political manipulation of the news on state TV.

Our seminar participants were curious about our capitalist backgrounds, including the fact that Lynagh had been my boss in Washington and Detroit, he as general manager and I as news director of the *Post-Newsweek* stations. It took Jim and me long hours to break down the reticence of these people who had spent most if not all their lives under the oppressive rule of the hated dictator Nikolai Ceausescu. In Bucharest people still talk of Ceausescu's secret police and the possibility that they are still around, lurking in the shadows. We heard the expression "black money", money acquired through Ceausescu era tyranny and now secretly owned and used to build influence in Romanian businesses.

Ceausescu was succeeded as president by Ion Iliescue, a middle level bureaucrat who rose to lead the dissident group which overthrew and murdered the Ceausescues. Iliescue was elected president in May 1990, but his regime hardly qualifies as a reform movement. The question hanging over our seminar was, "how much broadcasting freedom would Iliescue tolerate?"

We had been warned to not get too exotic in our presentations. We used charts and video tapes and worked together and separately before the group or parts of it. It was only when we turned to what Lynagh called "the Phil Donahue format" that we started to get some real dialogue going. Lynagh, who got his start forty years ago as a country music disc jockey, roamed through the assemblage microphone in hand inviting and forcing comment. Slowly the reserve, based on that long established fear of saying the wrong thing before strangers, Romanian and otherwise, began to melt and they started to enjoy themselves. Their fierce pride in their dream to become pioneers in independent broadcasting came to the surface. They also vented their anger and frustration with a national legislature still overpopulated with former communists – and a state TV system still too sensitive to those in government who felt there was a lot the citizenry did not need to know.

In order to transmit radio or TV programming under the present system in Romania, you must rent facilities from the state which then tells you when you can broadcast your program on the state controlled system. The government had proposed an Audio Visual law, the equivalent of our Communications Act of 1934, which would assign frequencies and grant licenses to independent broadcasters. But in December 1991, no one could predict the fate of that law. One of the men who drafted it told me the debate in parliament would be tedious. He said it would be slowed by some of the ex-communist members who wanted to first discuss specific punishments to be inflicted on any offending journalists!

At one point in our seminar, I was trying to illustrate that an independent station news staff, in order to compete, did not need the same bloated, over-equipped staff as the state TV system had. I played a videotape of how one reporter and one news photographer had done a complete job of covering the destruction by fire of a church in a small Connecticut town. The reporter's story included shots of the building in flames, of neighbors hosing down their homes to prevent the fire from spreading and interviews with firemen, neighbors and the pastor of the church.

The heart of the story was that the small community had lost one of its prized assets. One of the seminar participants reacted by saying, "How complete that story was. On the state TV they only show you the flames,

they never tell you the whole story." One participant was an engineer in his fifties, a member of a group called SOTI (Romanian Society for Creating an Independent Television) based in Bucharest. SOTI members, mostly engineers, and academics are dedicated to having their countrymen win access to television programming which does not echo the state system. SOTI has received technical aid from the International Media Fund so there was always at least one SOTI member at our seminar. The fiftyish engineer was the most outspoken participant as he reported with considerable fervor, of the lies the state TV system had told –and was telling– to the people.

I was impressed with the strength such people showed us. All those years of oppression had not dulled their hunger for freedom. And they had not lost the kind of courage it takes to step up and be identified as someone willing to take on the political and economic risks involved in setting up an independent station. It was the SOTI members who had an underground distribution system for distributing video cassettes of anti-communist documentaries from the western world during the darkest days of the Ceausescu regime.

Whenever I could, I watched the nightly half-hour news on the state TV and always came away depressed. Every newscast I saw was drab, unimaginative and at times shocking in its inadequacy. Toward the end of our stay, Bucharest was hit with a 13 inch snowfall which caused massive transportation problems. The situation was made worse because a low supply of fuel and a budget crunch prevented the government from operating snow plows full time. None of this was reported on the state TV prime time newscast.

The nightly news show gave me the idea that somewhere back in the early 1960's someone decided to copy U.S. news show style of that period. So there is the anchor desk with male and female anchors against an old looking backdrop. There is no pace, no compelling storytelling. The news camera shooting and editing is to be polite, undistinguished. The overall impression is one of wall-to-wall blandness as if the goal to be achieved is to not have rocked the boat for one more day.

During the seminar, I had talked of how TV news producers in the United States keep expanding the kinds of news they feel can be effectively included in their newscasts. I showed video tape examples of local station coverage of medical stories, business news, weather and traffic, education and consumer issues.

There are always times during any seminar when you wonder if you are getting through at all. What with the burden of simultaneous translation, I went away worried if my broad-news-budget thesis was really understood. After all, we were talking to people who would consider it a major breakthrough to get a newscast, no matter how primitive, on the air with regularity without government supervision.

There were a few times when I felt the translator was not serving me well. At one point after the air traffic controller had made a comment, I remarked that air traffic controllers are held in high regard in the U.S. since the work they do is so vital. Having heard the translator's version, the air traffic controller returned to the microphone to say with some indignation "I am not a king. I stand in line for food and other things just like everyone else." After the session ended, I pulled the air traffic controller aside with a different translator to make certain he knew exactly what I had said.

As Lynagh and I talked ourselves hoarse explaining the joys of competition in American broadcasting and the rewards of performing a valuable

public service through effective news broadcasts, we kept bumping into reminders of Romania's freedom-less past. We visited Cezar Tabarcea who was running a brand new journalism school. He was helping to meet a need. All the country's former journalism schools were useless since all they could do was to teach people how to be propagandists for the government.

Tabarcea had spent years teaching linguistics at Bucharest University. In the eighties, he developed his own TV program in which he talked about languages with various guests. Ceausescu and his wife did not mind if Romanian TV broadcast reruns of various American entertainment programs. What they didn't want was unvarnished coverage of what was going on in the country. They also didn't want any Romanian TV performers to get too popular.

Cezar never dreamed his linguistics program would disturb the government but then one day some audience ratings came out and they showed while the most watched program on Romanian TV was *Kojak*, the second most watched program was Cezar's show. Shortly after the ratings appeared, Mrs. Ceausescu called the director of Romanian TV and ordered the linguistics show canceled. And it was. Cezar hasn't been on TV since. He is philosophical about the end of his television career and fervent about the need to train journalists who will report in the western style.

In March, I returned to Romania on another assignment for IMF and found fresh reminders that solutions come painfully and slowly. SOTI members and others who had received technical equipment from IMF were using it but were still far from independence. The Audio Visual Law still had not been passed. Meanwhile SOTI and other independent producers in cities around the country had distinguished themselves covering local elections, completely free of government supervision or interference.

Finally, on May 20 the Audio Visual Law was passed and signed; it provides for an 11 member commission which will hold hearings and then grant licenses and frequencies to the applicants it approves. President Iliescue refused to sign the original law the parliament passed. He insisted on tougher penalties in the sections dealing with violations of the law by journalists. The law does set up machinery for granting broadcast licenses and frequencies, but it also gives Iliescue tight control of the commission and toughens up the penalties.

A journalist can get from 2 to 7 years in prison for "defamation of the country and of the nation, incitement to war, to national, racial, class or religious hatred, incitement to discrimination and territorial separatism or public violence." Six months to nine years in prison is decreed for those journalists who "prejudice a person's dignity, honor and public life as well as the person's right to his/her own image."

Obviously the campaign for a "diversity of voices" in Eastern Europe cannot count the Iliescue regime among its members. Prospective independent station operators are left to speculate fearfully on how the Romanian courts will define "incitement to national or religious hatred, territorial separatism or public violence."

With all the flaws of the new law, the optimists are saying independent commercial broadcasting could come to Romania by late Fall. I'm sure my friends at the seminars in Bucharest know that they will have to supplement their broadcasting skills with a talent for walking on eggshells if they are to survive in Iliescue's broadcasting universe. ■

Jim Snyder has worked in broadcast journalism for more than 40 years, as reporter, producer and manager for CBS News, Group W and Post-Newsweek Stations.

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In Touch with Tomorrow

TOSHIBA

AFTER THE KING OF THE NIGHT'S ABDICATION

A personal memoir of Johnny Carson's remarkable career and some thoughts of his future.

BY GARY STEVENS

The sound and the fury, the month- long hype, the deserved tributes have all passed now. Johnny Carson, as of this writing, is in a form of retirement. But is he? Personally, I believe he'll be in action long before 1993 has become a calendar event.

As his publicist during the 60's and one who has known him from his emergence days in the mid-50's, I'm not referring to research files or saved clips to say "Heeeere's Johnny!" in print.

What follows is total recall. Is he a simple creature, who never really believed he was *numero uno*? Or was he ever comfortable being the longest running, most successful personality of the television age? Can he be construed as a complex being deeply wound up in the labyrinth called life? Frankly, I don't know; I'm not qualified to pass on such opinion. Perhaps the apt conclusion would be that J.C., on one hand has glorified simplicity, and on the other side of things, has compounded the id phases of behavior.

I first met Johnny in 1955 when he was doing a night time show on CBS. A friend of mine, Paul Baron, was the program's musical director. At the time, I was heading the television department at Warner Bros. Out of nowhere a call came in one day from Baron.

After the exchange of pleasantries, he got right to the point: "There's a guy I want you to meet. His name is Johnny Carson. I think he's the brightest comedian I've heard in years. He's got to become a star. He's fresh and funny. How about coming down to the studio tomorrow at rehearsal? I'd really like you to see him and meet him."

Baron was a man of experience and taste. I respected his opinion. So I showed up at the CBS-TV complex the next day and watched Johnny perform. In thirty minutes I knew he had something different.

Later, I met him. He was surrounded by Ben Brady, his rep at the William Morris office, and Bill Brennan of CBS. We had the briefest of chats. When the amenities were over, he knew who

I was, and I came away impressed with his manner and his talent.

About a year later, after I'd left the movie studio, I received a call from Lester Gottlieb, an executive in the program department at CBS-TV in New York. He had flown out to California to find a producer for a new afternoon show hosted by Johnny Carson. An agent named Nick Sevano and Marlo Lewis, Ed Sullivan's producer had recommended me. The job was narrowed to five people; I was one of them. My work with Steve Allen on *Songs For Sale* and my assignment on the *Mike and Buff Show* held me in good stead.

I met with Johnny for about an hour. We kicked around all kinds of ideas. He talked about his plans and asked me about my various contributions to the many shows I had been connected with since 1949. *The Cracker Barrel* segment on the daily Kate Smith afternoon show at NBC, producing *Twenty Questions*, the popular panel program, and *The Stork Club* were some of them.

We hit it off very well. The chemistry was good, the vibes were there.

A week later, Gottlieb called and informed me that inside CBS politics were brought into play and Herb Allen from Bob Crosby's daily show, was selected to helm Carson's upcoming program. He assured me that I came in second. Frankly, there's no great reward occupying the place position. A few days later after that, I received a call at my home from Johnny who repeated the details of the decision and ended saying "One of these days we'll probably do something together."

The leaves fell, the winter came, the crocuses bloomed – all to denote the passage of time, the new year. Carson's show didn't last very long. He was now in New York doing *Who Do You Trust*?

I was back in New York. With no TV deals, I reverted back to my old standby, public relations. In short order, Alan King was a client. In addition, I also was hired to promote Music Makers, a rising jingle outfit and its creative head, Mitch Leigh. The combination of Dick Rubin, a top agent at MCA (then Carson's ten percenter) and Steve Strassberg, high up in the publicity echelon at ABC-TV, pitched Al Bruno, Johnny's manager, on my behalf. We had a session in his office, and he brought me down to see Johnny who was doing a guest shot on the Garry Moore variety show. It was a warm reunion. Carson said yes immediately and a deal was arranged. Three months for a trial period. I lasted all through the 60's.

The first interview I lined up for Johnny was with Dick Shepard of *The New York Times*. It took place in a small, cluttered office upstairs at the Little Theatre (now Helen Hayes), from whence *Who Do You Trust* originated. Shepard sat on a couch; Johnny was behind a set of drums. Dick asked the questions, the rising prince of afternoon TV paradiddled as he supplied the guarded answers.

Johnny was hardly a scribe's delight. He wasn't very responsive to personal questions. Quickly, I learned that he was a very private person. All during *The Tonight Show* era I turned down ten to fifteen requests for interviews for every one I okayed. I had convinced Johnny to sit still occasionally for a half hour or so during press interviews on a selected afternoon.

He preferred his office to a restaurant. Among the lucky question-askers were Gael Greene, then with *The Herald Tribune*, and Alex Haley (of *Roots* fame) a contribution for *Playboy*.

Years later, both of them made interesting statements to me. Gael said it was this piece that catapulted her into bigger things. This was long before she became a regular in *New York Magazine*. Haley confessed one day as we walked along 52nd Street

that it was the Carson profile that provided him the fee to help pay his rent and give him sustenance and hope.

The strangest one-on-one confrontation between journalists and Carson took place at Sardi's. Rex Polier, a columnist for the then functioning *Philadelphia Bulletin*, pen and pad in hand, started out with: "Johnny, what will we talk about?"

Carson looked at him with a startled expression. "What do you want to talk about?" asked Johnny.

Polier fumbled a little and queried: "How do you feel about the show you're doing?"

Carson lost his cool and spouted: "You're a TV columnist! You're supposed to know something about me. Didn't you do your homework? Is that all you can ask? What are you, a garden editor?"

Whereupon, Johnny got up and walked. It was my job to placate Polier. Somehow I did. Easy it wasn't.

To know Johnny well, to study him reveals that he is not a comedian per se. The one-line technique that works for Berle and Youngman is not his metier. In reality he is a wit, a humorist.

Maybe a better description of his gift would be to stamp him as a reactor – to people, answering questions, to the news of the day. When Merv Griffin was flourishing and Joey Bishop tried the ABC night time, Carson never considered any or all of the competition, Alan Thicke and Pat Sajek included.

For thirty years he was competing against himself. He had a personal logo: "Try never to be dull." Above all, for me, Johnny Carson came across as a performer, an entertainer.

An apt description of Carson's gift would be to stamp him as a reactor – to people, answering questions, to the news of the day.

Years ago I had him invited as the special guest at the United Nations during Staff Day, presided over by the then Secretary General, U Thant. Chevalier, Belafonte, Kaye, Sinatra had that honor before him. In front of a packed house of about 2,000, Johnny went out there and wowed them. He was charming, engaging and funny.

When it came to writing, Carson was capable of penning his own material. His writing staff was important as suppliers, but if Johnny had to, he could handle scripting the monologue or various bits and pieces. In his very early days in California he did very creative writing for Red Skelton, earning that comic's respect and admiration. I've read three books, all unauthorized biographies, that have dealt with Johnny, his life and times. Two, *Carson* by Paul Corkey and *Johnny Carson* penned by Ronald L. Smith, in my opinion, hardly suffice. They are surface volumes apparently based on minor research clips in the files and cursory conversations with some who knew him. Both were published in 1987.

On the other hand, *King of the Night*, which came out in 1989, is quite definitive and really helps to explain Carson. The author Laurence Leamer has a very revealing line at the top of page 405: "To Johnny, *The Tonight Show* was everything." In a crisp, concise way that line may explain the fall-outs, the comings and goings of three wives, estrangements from sons, the firing of managers, attorneys, producers, etcetera.

Not everything in Carson's life spelled success. When the World's Fair was on in New York in the 60's and Johnny was soaring nightly in

popularity, Columbia records had him record an LP with Carson as a jesting guide to the Fair.

From a critical point of view it was good, but saleswise, it was a dud. Viewers just didn't buy it. Another venture, via Doubleday, was a little book, *Happiness Is Just A Dry Martini* with cute drawings and Carson's captions. It had a modest sale, but never became the best seller that the publisher envisioned.

Acting – stage and screen – were within Johnny's scope. He played in *Tunnel of Love* on Broadway, more than adequately doing a role associated with Tom Ewell. There was also an insignificant part in a "B" movie, too minor to write about.

However, I do have a feeling about Carson as a screen or TV actor. It is my opinion that his best way out of "retirement" is to take on a challenge – a real acting assignment. Something dramatic and meaningful.

Remember how *Night Must Fall* changed Robert Montgomery's career and image? How *Days of Wine and Roses* showed the hidden dimensions of Jack Lemmon's talent? I firmly believe that Carson, with a good director and a powerful script could be a surprise on, for instance, a two-part mini-series.

Tonight Show audiences were probably never aware of Johnny's craving to sing. For a time he studied with one of the best voice coaches in New York, Sue Seton. She was encouraging. But he didn't follow through. He was content that he could carry a tune, was hardly tone deaf, but that was it.

The trust within him to accept a challenge, conquer it and then walk away from the *fait accompli* phase is illustrated by his mastering the bow and arrow; long hours invested peering into an expensive telescope; acquiring a wine rack; filling it with rare vintages, and then walking away from each hobby, acquisition and achievement.

Before Johnny developed a palate capable of sampling and enjoying the cuisine at New York's "21" or Beverly Hills "Spago", he was quite content to sip apple juice at breakfast and hamburgers at lunch or dinner. Those simplistic gastronomic approaches were in the days long before his sartorially elegant look before the cameras nightly. Ah, the 60's! And pressed sleeves. This leads me to comment on Johnny's transition to a place on somebody's best dressed list. For a time on the early *Tonight Show* he was turned out in Petrocelli garb, supplied by the manufacturer.

He kidded the biggest names, yet drew no real resentment. For some reason, he made middle age seem younger.

Then Sonny Werblin, the great agent and Johnny's short term partner in Raritan Enterprises, came into the picture and saw possibilities in getting a top menswear maker to manufacture a "Johnny Carson" line. Good advance, resounding royalties and a complete, endless wardrobe. Not bad. An arrangement along these lines was reached with the old established firm of Hart, Schaffner and Marx.

Hell, there are so many memories of Johnny. They're boiling over in my head. Say Nebraska to me, and I think of my persuading him to return to Lincoln and help the state celebrate its 100th birthday. A big bash was arranged, and before Johny left for his native state I put Governor Norbert Tiemann on the TV show. Johnny look-

ing to avoid publicity was reticent about okaying the Guv's appearance. But I insisted and prevailed. The state gave Johnny a five thousand dollar check, which he graciously and immediately turned over to the University of Nebraska for a scholarship fund.

On the subject of money: through me, Johnny became the cause celebre, who broke precedent at the conservative and staid *Chicago Tribune*.

In 1967, Johnny went out on strike against NBC, as an adjunct to an AFTRA walkout then in progress. Carson objected strenuously to the use of reruns without his permission. It became a page one story. *The Chicago Tribune* assigned a top freelance writer, Norma Lee Browning, to do a five part in-depth feature on Carson, his career and the trials and tribulations of his battle with the network.

The paper called me, asking for an exclusive. I was anxious to fend them off, knowing Johnny didn't want to sit still for interviews at that time. So aware that reputable daily papers don't pay for news stories, I ad-libbed a wild sentence, "Sir, it will cost you five-thousand dollars."

The editor assumed that I meant five thousand dollars for each of the five articles. To my amazement, he agreed to twenty-five thousand. I called Johnny, told him of the big bucks and he said: "Hell, yes." The story of the fee hit the front pages of *The Wall Street Journal*.

I sometimes did some pub crawling and nights out with Johnny. One of the most unusual was a late stop at the Royal Box of the Americana (now the New York Sheraton). Free of any inhibition, Johnny got up to the bandstand and insisted on playing drums with Count Basie's sensational band. I must say Carson pounded the skins like a professional. The sidemen were surprised. However, there were side effects. Johnny played and played until the Basie band exited.

By that time it was maybe 1:30 AM. On to another place we went for a drink or two and the morning wore on. At the last stop, the proprietor gave Johnny a cheesecake. He was ever thoughtful – knowing my then wife would be wondering whatever happened to me and where, Johnny took out his pen and wrote on the bag covering the cake: "He was with me. Johnny Carson." It got me off the hook.

Johnny was the loner who was never lonely, the talented man with a native intelligence and a ready wit.

For thirty years he was an antidote for the boring hours after prime time. He made a fortune for himself and NBC. He kidded the biggest names and drew no real resentment. For some reason he made middle age seem younger.

A majority of Americans felt good about him. He was a light hearted reward after sometimes sombre local news.

The average Joe and Jane found new personal meaning in the lyric from the "Oh, Johnny" song of Bonnie Baker time.

"You make my poor heart jump with joy." ■

Gary Stevens' long career in the medium goes back to heading the television department of Warner Bros. in the 1950's.

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