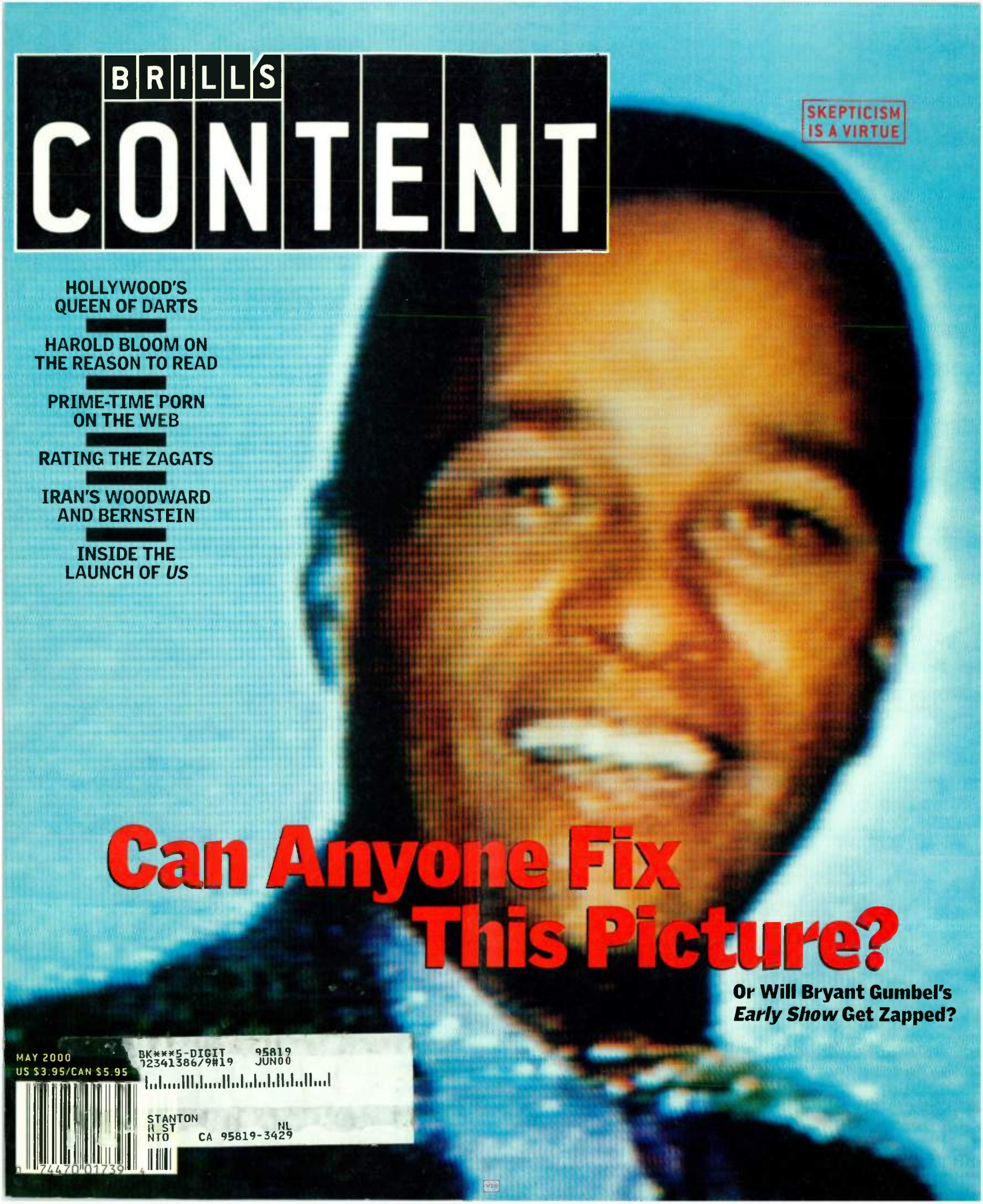
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CONTENT
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HAROLD BLOOM ON THE REASON TO READ
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INSIDE THE LAUNCH OF US
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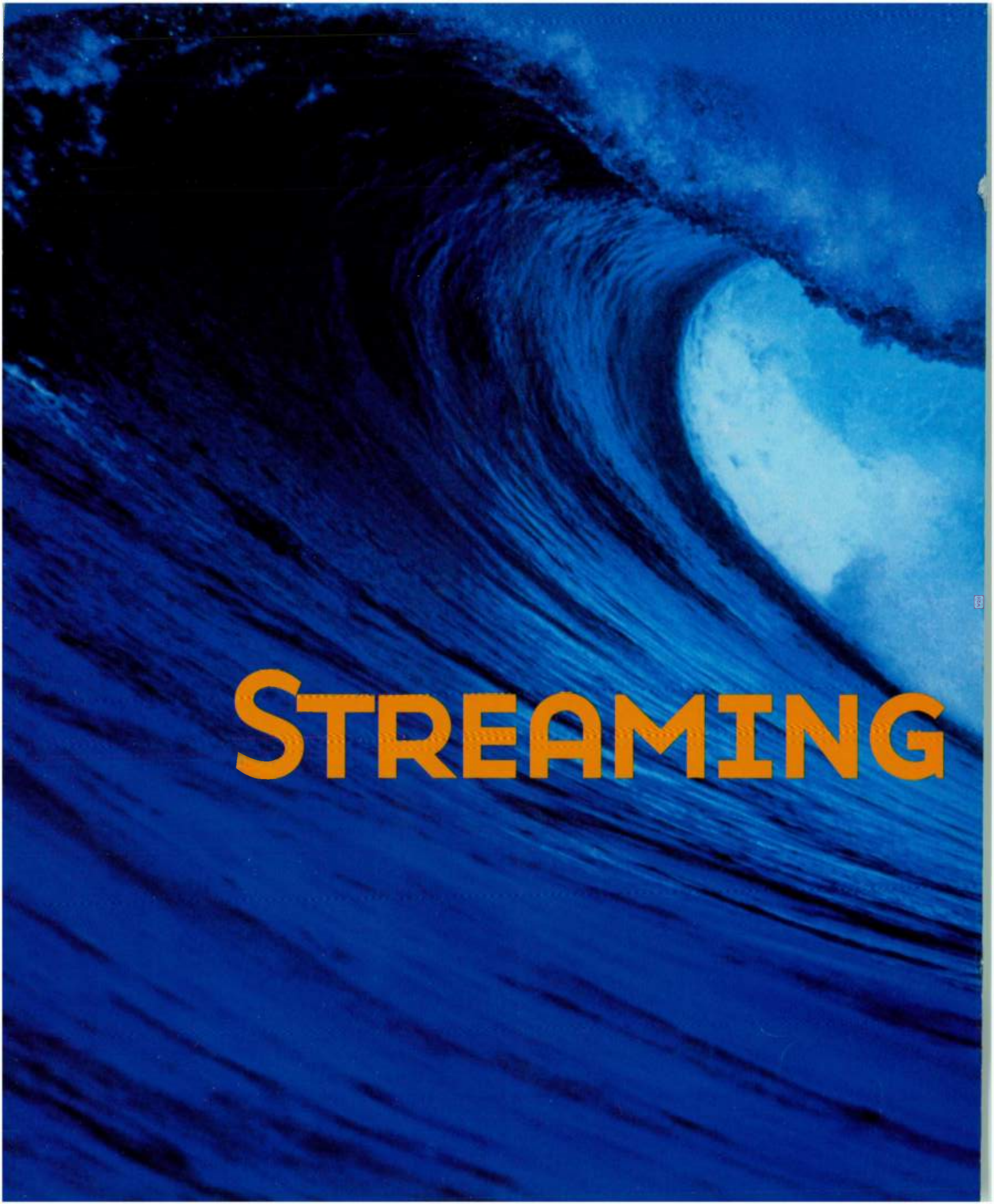
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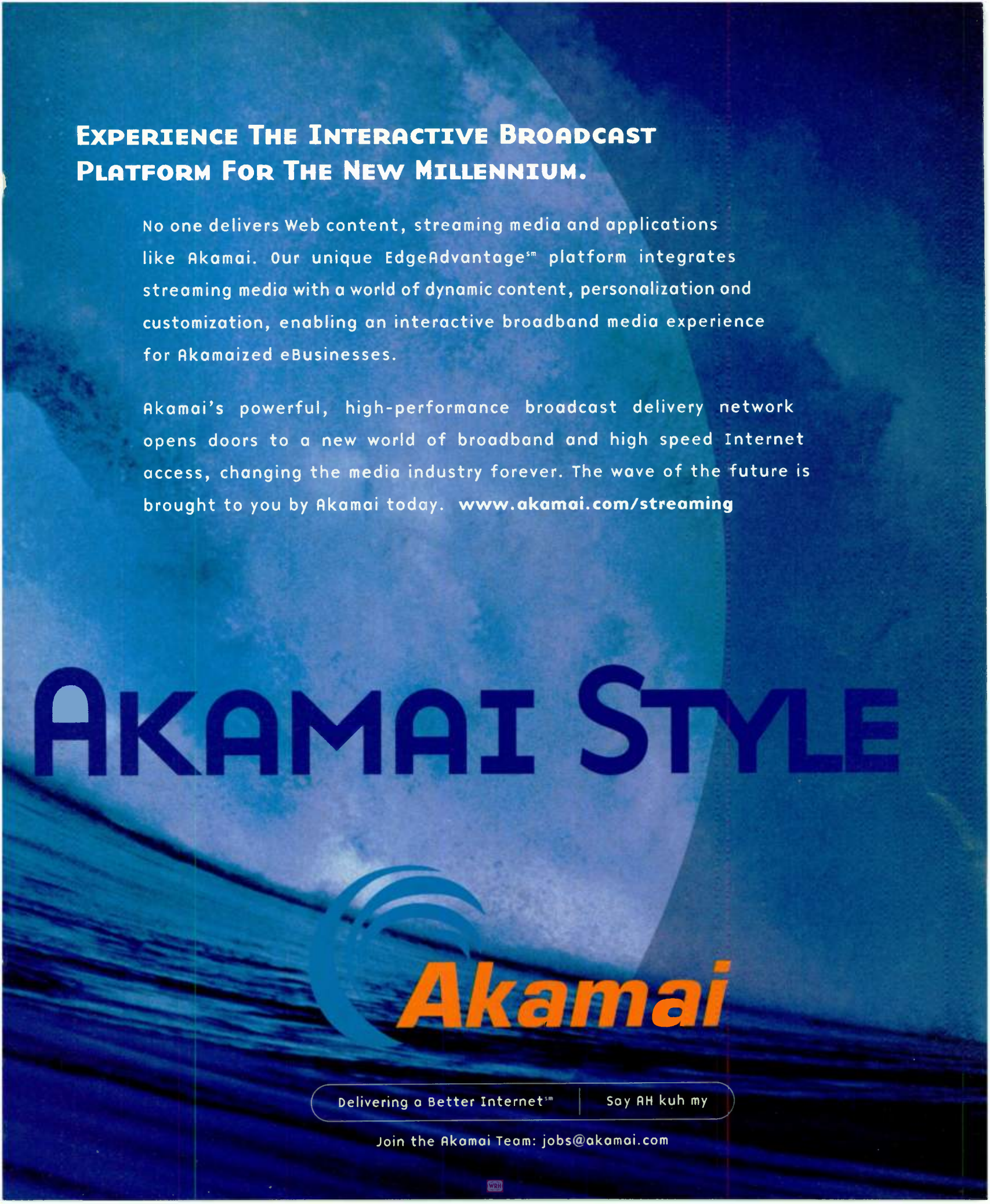
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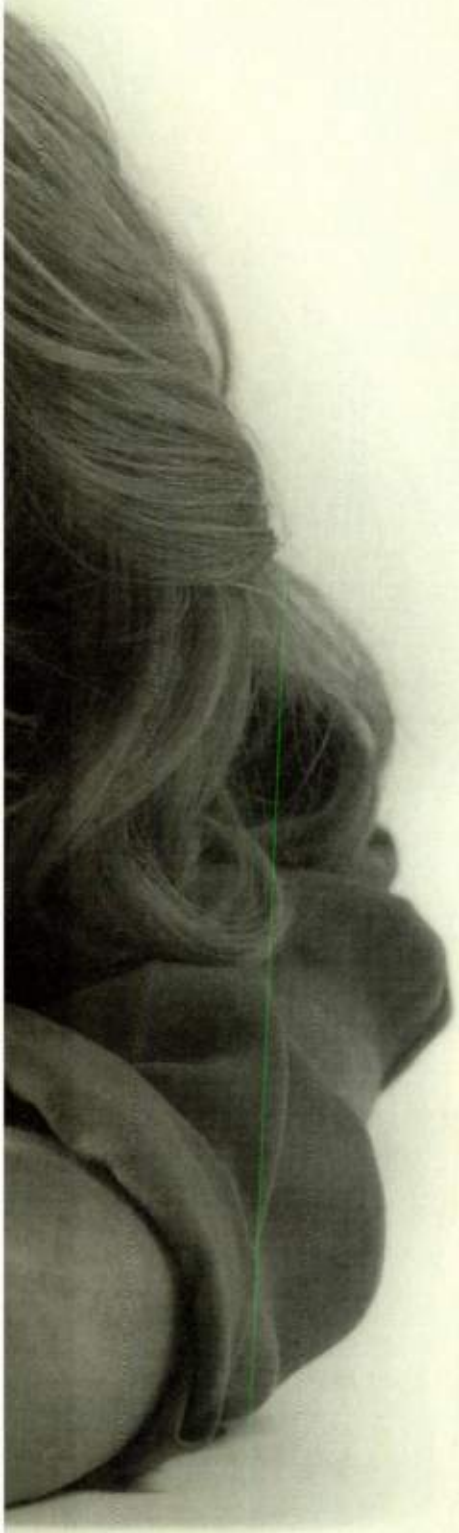

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LORI FENA and **CHARLES JENNINGS** are cofounders of TRUSTe, a leading privacy-assurance organization on the Net.

ABRAHAM FOXMAN is the national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

DAVID HIRSON made his Broadway debut with his first play, *La Bête*. His second and most recent Broadway play is *Wrong Mountain*.

GAY JERVEY, a senior correspondent for *Brill's Content*, recently profiled MSNBC talk-show host Chris Matthews.

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CYNTHIA OZICK's new collection of essays, *Quarrel & Quandary*, will be published this year. Her most recent novel is *The Puttermesser Papers*.

ABIGAIL POGREBIN, a senior correspondent for *Brill's Content*, most recently profiled Kate Betts, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*.

KATHERINE ROSMAN, a senior writer for *Brill's Content*, most recently wrote the February cover story, "JonBenét, Inc."

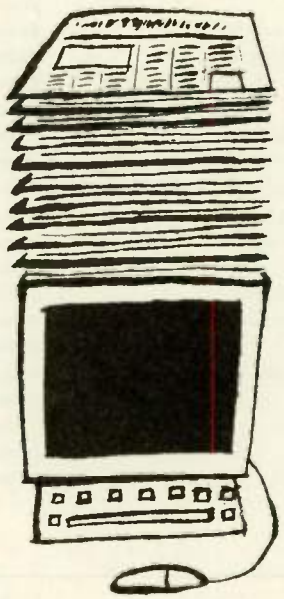
CALVIN TRILLIN, a contributing editor for *Brill's Content*, is the author of *Family Man*. He is also a columnist for *Time*, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, and a contributor to *The Nation*.

SCOTT MENCHIN

NOT SO FAST...

The view that daily newspapers are becoming moribund in the Internet Age is now as common as the view that the Internet will become the dominant news medium of the future.

Several articles in this issue argue otherwise. The Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter Alex Jones, a coauthor of *The Patriarch*, a book about the star-crossed Bingham newspaper dynasty, and *The Trust*, last year's acclaimed account of the still-thriving Ochs-Sulzberger family of *The New York Times*, writes about his own family's four-generation involvement with *The Greeneville Sun*, circulation 15,000 (page 86). Last week, as he has for the past 55 years, Jones's 85-year-old father went to work at the *Sun* (which is published in Greeneville, Tennessee), proving that in a culture of media conglomeration, a small-town newspaper can survive and even thrive if it maintains its core values, reflects its community, and retains that community's trust.



On page 60, the twice-lambasted playwright David Hirson recounts how, even in a wired culture, where anyone and everyone can post an opinion, a few newspaper theater critics still largely control the future of Broadway. He points out the irony that as the economic stakes of Broadway have risen, and fewer new American plays are produced each year, those who can bestow a critical blessing have more influence than ever in determining the life or death of a show.

Jacki Lyden's piece, on page 118, about the news revolution in Iran—which played a crucial role in defeating Iran's hard-line government—makes the case for print even more clear: We have yet to see a government fall as a result of the digital revolution. Lyden, a senior correspondent for National Public Radio and a host of *All Things Considered*, has visited Iran seven times since 1995. She reports that a handful of former revolutionaries turned journalists—an ex-cleric, an ex-spy, and two ex-soldiers—risk their lives daily in a country lurching toward democracy.

Indeed, the more the Internet grows as a medium for the exchange of information and ideas, the more we learn how far it still must go before it replaces the media so many are hastily writing off as obsolete. Steven Johnson, a cofounder of the online journal *FEED Magazine*, states in his piece on page 63 that, contrary to what Robert Wright argues in his new book, *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, the Internet is getting dumber as it gets bigger. Johnson makes the point that information doesn't replace knowledge, and that in order for the Web to get smarter, its underlying architecture must evolve.

On page 108, Charles Jennings and Lori Fena chart the frightening erosion of our privacy resulting from the free-for-all dissemination of our personal identity information—or PII, in their Internet argot. Rather than empowering us, they argue, the Internet can actually make us more vulnerable. Strangers can now know things about us without our getting anything—knowledge or information—in return (except, perhaps, a free toaster). It's an unsettling account of the dark side of the Information Age.

This magazine focuses on the media—how they operate and how they do their job. Collectively, the pieces mentioned here suggest that we shouldn't let the high-voltage excitement of today's business pages—which have pretty much replaced the politics and arts pages as must-reading—seduce us into believing that new information technologies have rendered print, even the local, small-town print of a family-owned newspaper, irrelevant.

DAVID KUHN

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Brill's Content is about all that purports to be nonfiction. So it should be no surprise that our first principle is that anything that purports to be nonfiction should be true. Which means it should be accurate in fact and in context.

2 Labeling and Sourcing
Similarly, if a publisher is not certain that something is accurate, the publisher should either not publish it, or should make that uncertainty plain by clearly stating the source of his information and its possible limits and pitfalls. To take another example of making the quality of information clear, we believe that if unnamed sources must be used, they should be labeled in a way that sheds light on the limits and biases of the information they offer.

3 Conflicts of Interest
We believe that the content of anything that sells itself as journalism should be free of any motive other than informing its consumers. In other words, it should not be motivated, for example, by the desire to curry favor with an advertiser or to advance a particular political interest.

4 Accountability
We believe that journalists should hold themselves as accountable as any of the subjects they write about. They should be eager to receive complaints about their work, to investigate complaints diligently, and to correct mistakes of fact, context, and fairness prominently and clearly.

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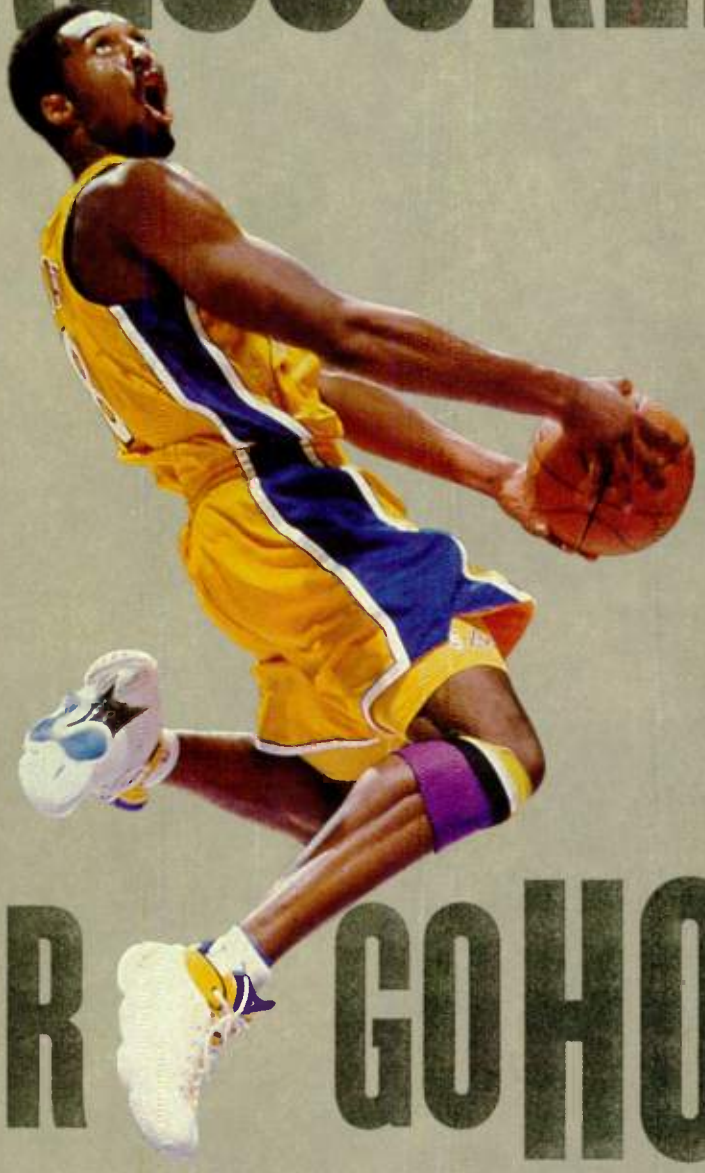

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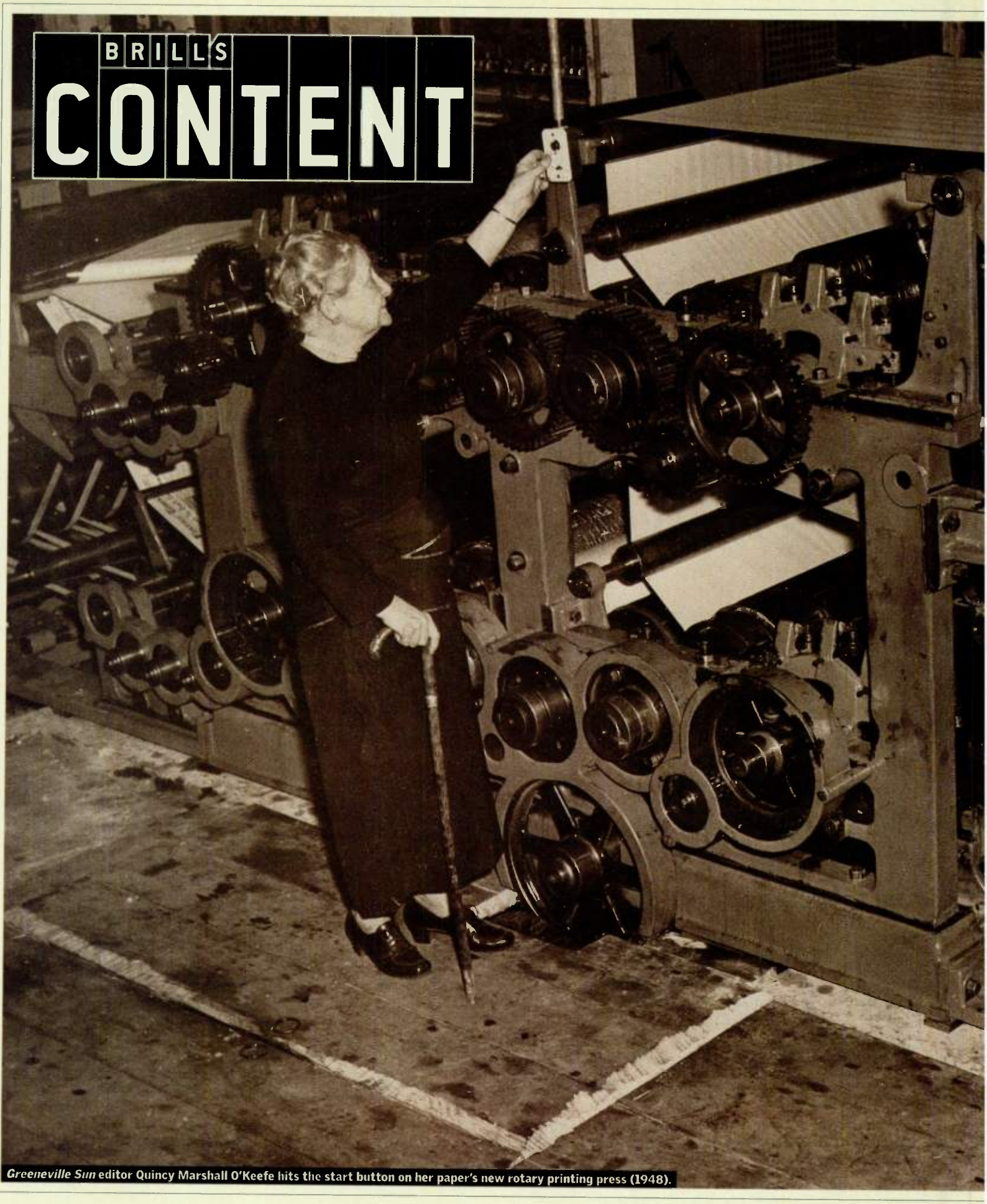

Greeneville Sun editor Quincy Marshall O'Keefe hits the start button on her paper's new rotary printing press (1948).

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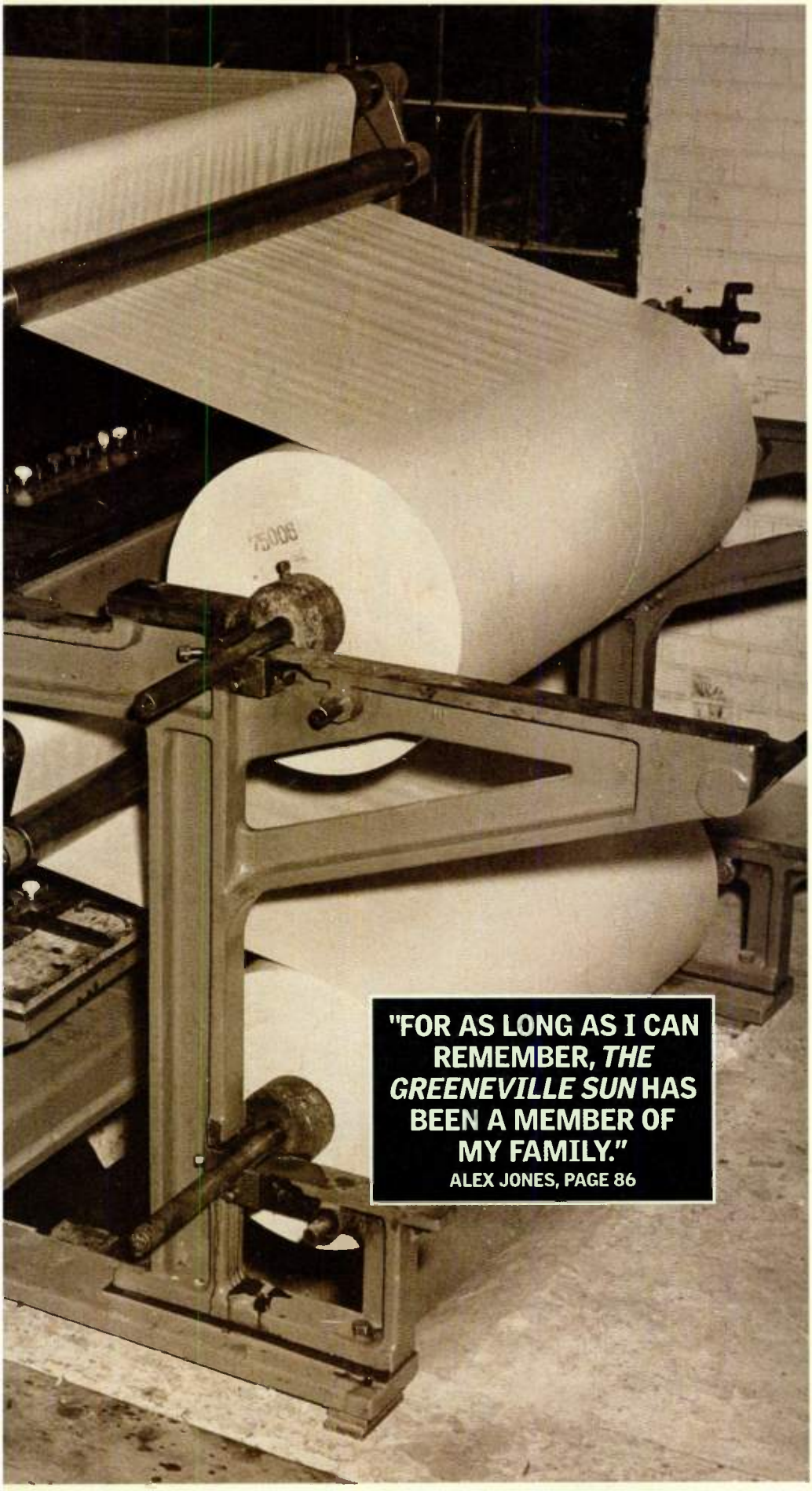

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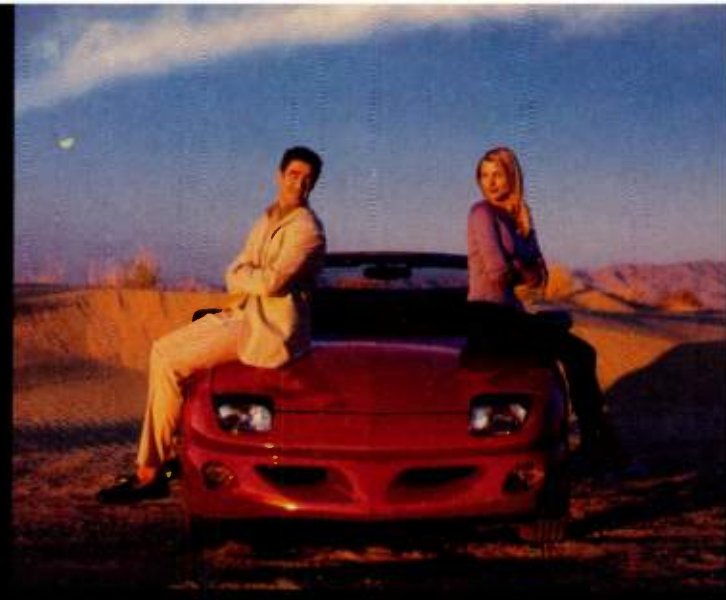

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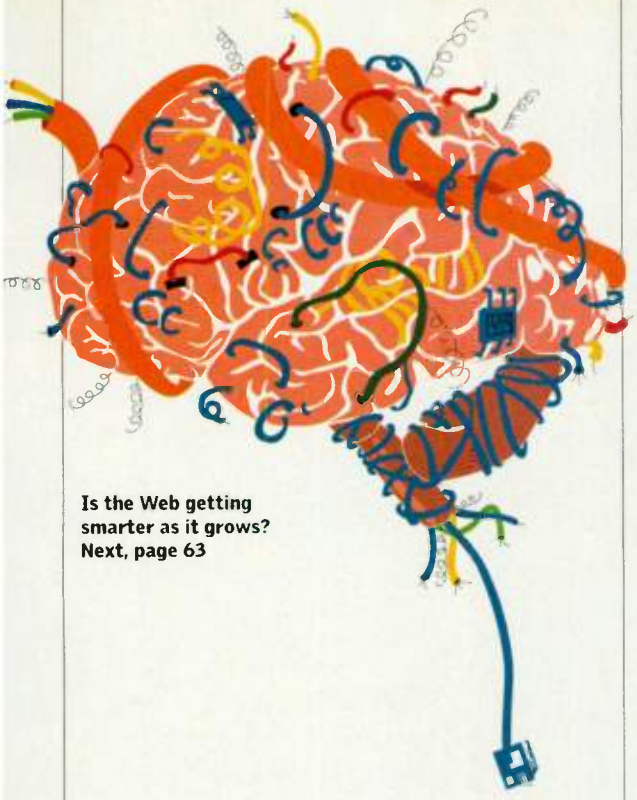

Is the Web getting smarter as it grows? Next, page 63

UP FRONT

COLUMNS

THE STORY OF THE FREE PRESS IN IRAN IS LESS THE STORY OF A WHOLESALE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY THAN OF PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT GIVE UP.

INVESTIGATORS, PAGE 118

ABBAS KOWSARI; ILLUSTRATION CHRISTINE STEPHENS

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1. We always publish corrections at least as prominently as the original mistake was published.

2. We are eager to make corrections quickly and candidly.

3. Although we welcome letters that are critical of our work, an aggrieved party need not have a letter published for us to correct a mistake. We will publish corrections on our own and in our own voice as soon as we are told about a mistake by anyone—our staff, an uninvolved reader, or an aggrieved reader—and can confirm the correct information.

4. Our corrections policy should not be mistaken for a policy of accommodating readers who are simply unhappy about a story.

5. Information about corrections or complaints should be directed to editor in chief David Kuhn. He may be reached by mail at 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; by fax at 212-332-6350; or by e-mail at comments@brillscontent.com.

6. Separately or in addition, readers are invited to contact our outside ombudsman, Bill Kovach, who will investigate and report on specific complaints about the work of the magazine. He may be reached by voice mail at 212-332-6381; by fax at 212-332-6350; by e-mail at bkovach@brillscontent.com; or by mail at 1 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138.

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WEST WING ANNOYS; HITCHENS DRAWS FIRE; AND A BIZARRE WAY TO MARKET A BOOK

TURN OFF THE FICTION

You have contributed to the blurring of news and entertainment with the article on *The West Wing* ["The Real White House," March]. If I want to read about fictionalized television dramas, I'll turn to *Entertainment Weekly*.

BOB VIVIAN, CHICO, CA

COULD HAVE DONE BETTER

"The latest issue, with its suck-up of praise to *The West Wing*, is the straw that canceled my subscription. I've hoped that someone would tackle the issues raised by this TV show, and when your mag arrived, I dived into it first thing. I'm tempted to write, "Imagine my horror when—," but I was kind of saddened.

Here's how I would have handled it. First, I would not have let a guy who wanted to work on the show write the piece. He loves the show and the people who do it. Second, I would have made the writer emphasize more of the problems and not go with the plea that *The West Wing* says it better than establishment journalists. The arguments cited from show scripts, are, like the rest of the show, the kind of things liberals dream up to say to the next conservative they meet.

DONALD HINKLE, GREEN VILLAGE, NJ

WAY TOO LONG

"You have eight pages of print on "The Real White House." You could have made your point in three paragraphs that were hard-hitting and interesting. I hate to say this, but your magazine is written like the literature you criticize.

JACKIE OBENSCHAIN, CHATTAHOOCHEE, FL

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

"The recent media survey ["Public to Press: Cool It," March], although perhaps "groundbreaking" and almost as fascinating and "eye-opening" as you describe it, missed opportunities for more incisive analysis.

According to the accompanying article, your rather small sampling of Americans [gave answers] concerning [mostly] national news outlets. Despite the presence of cable and the Internet, I believe that local news outlets, including TV, radio, and newspapers, feed more easily off the public's appetite for sex and violence, its fascination with the rich, and its powerful hopes for the weekend weather.

Simply because a large audience freely consumes close-ups of Kennedy funerals inserted between forensic details of regional murders and special reports on germs does not mean the press is valorously serving the truth to an ungrateful, hypocritical public.

CORNELIUS COLLINS, BROOKLYN, NY

RATHER IRONIC

"It's rather ironic that Frank Luntz's survey ["Public to Press: Cool It"] for *Brill's Content* found that 48 percent of Americans think that journalists covering politics should reveal their leanings, yet neither Luntz nor *Brill's Content* reveals the fact that Luntz is [a] leading Republican pollster and far from an unbiased source.

Luntz is described as "president of Luntz Research Companies" and a "veteran pollster and public-opinion expert." There is no mention of his key role in creating Newt Gingrich's Contract with America, which was an appalling example of biased polling. Luntz concealed his methodology and questions [and] hid the fact that he was [misrepresenting] what the American people believed on these issues.

Brill's Content made a mistake by choosing a political hack posing as a "public-opinion expert" for this poll. But you compounded the error by concealing Luntz's biases. You have an obligation to inform your readers of the potential biases of picking a conservative pollster.

JOHN WILSON, CHICAGO, IL

Letters to the editor should be addressed to: Letters to the Editor, *Brill's Content*, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 Fax: 212-332-6350 E-mail: letters @brillscontent.com. Only signed letters and messages that include a daytime telephone number will be considered for publication. Letters may be edited for clarity or length. Letters published with an asterisk have been edited for space. The full text appears at our website (www.brillscontent.com).

LETTERS

Frank Luntz responds: Although I appreciate being referred to as "[a] leading Republican pollster," I have actually had more national media clients than political campaigns over the past few years, including NBC News, *Newsweek*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, not to mention Fortune 500 companies. The fact is, an increasing number of outlets have turned to Republican and Democrat pollsters to conduct their survey research because of our accuracy and our unique understanding of the American mind-set. And to suggest that a conservative pollster is less qualified or more biased than someone else to ask questions about the press is in itself a brazenly biased assertion.

Editor Eric Effron responds: Mr. Wilson is right; we should have included information about the party affiliation of Frank Luntz's political clients. My mistake.

IT'S NOT NEWS

"I enjoyed reading the article ["Public to Press: Cool It"]. There seemed some surprise at the apparent disconnect at what people wished the media "wouldn't cover" and what they would watch: They didn't want the media to cover the [John] Kennedy Jr. [plane crash] too closely, yet they would be willing to watch. I believe this makes sense when looked at with the proper viewpoint.

Coverage of a hostage situation or of the search operation for Kennedy's plane is entertainment, not news. My guess is that the people polled wished the news programs would carry news. I know I do. It was extremely frustrating to watch the news and news programs and be unable to get any news.

GARY DAVIDOFF, WESTERN SPRINGS, IL

WRONG QUESTIONS

"About your survey on why the public has such a low opinion of the media, I think you asked the wrong questions.

What do people want from journalists that they're not getting? There are at least three things: (1) real news that matters to our lives; (2) access, when we have news to offer; and (3) help in keeping politicians accountable on issues that concern us.

We don't want circuses to keep us diverted. The lives of famous people, tragedies, sex scandals, and trials get much too much attention. Perhaps this is done to give people the illusion that they are being kept informed.

LILLY HIRSCH, POTTSVILLE, PA

SO LONG TO CREDIBILITY

"[Regarding] the recent "partnership" Brill Media Holdings, L.P., has agreed to form with CBS, NBC, Primedia, Ingram Book Group, and EBSCO, I suppose we should expect to see a cover with Brill Media Holdings representing part of the brain on your next "Big Media" exposé. Say good-bye to your credibility as a media watchdog and save your assurances of your independence.

LARRY GALIZIO, PORTLAND, OR

HOW BIZARRE

"Bob Blauner's bizarre account of Judith Regan's ["I Sold Out to Judith Regan," March] marketing his anthology as a "Diana book," the better to capitalize on the Princess of Wales's death, is a cautionary tale for any author. But, at least for this reader, Blauner's own credibility is cast into doubt when he admits that "until I saw the headlines about Diana Spencer's death...I didn't know which country she was princess of."

The mass, global reaction and outpouring of popular feeling in the wake of Diana's death was an epic event, of irresistible fascination to any social scientist, let alone one who claims his specialty is the grief of sons in the wake of a mother's death. That this 30-year Berkeley sociologist would seem to brag about ignorance of, and uninterest in, one of the signal news events of the century is more alarming than any of Judith Regan's ill-conceived book-marketing efforts.

MARK GAUTHIER, NEW YORK, NY

Bob Blauner, shocked by his own book.

TOO MUCH WHINING

"The extended whine from Bob Blauner is an extraordinarily naked bit of self-exposure. He thinks of himself as a Berkeley "radical," though he's been a tenured professor for years, a cog in the machine, part and parcel of the powers that be. He also claims to have "labored" for five years. Labored? To compile a collection of other people's writing while drawing his full-time salary as a Berkeley prof?

JAIME O'NEILL, SACRAMENTO, CA

THE POOR UNKNOWNS

"I am getting tired of the first-person stories of poor unknowns led like lambs to slaughter by vicious, calculating media people. This seems to be a special genre for *Brill's Content*. In February, we got George Ventura's sad tale ["I Trusted a Reporter"], and this month we have Bob Blauner's. Both men paint themselves as innocents who were ruthlessly taken advantage of by evil villains, but are we really supposed to believe that these two men were so completely naive? Their tales are so suffocatingly one-sided and self-serving that it is difficult to feel any sympathy for them at all.

VIVIAN WAGNER, NEW CONCORD, OH

NOT SO DUMB

"I am astounded by George Ventura's claims in "I Trusted a Reporter." In the article, he details his ill-fated dealings with reporters, during which he divulged to them confidential passwords with which they could access corporate voice-mail accounts of Chiquita Brands International, Inc., executives. The reporters allegedly used these passwords to do just that while investigating the company for a series of articles.

For Ventura to claim "It may be hard for some people to understand how I, an attorney, didn't know this was illegal" is rubbish. It's difficult to fathom how Ventura could have sat through three years of law school and passed a state bar examination that tested criminal law, criminal procedure, constitutional law, and privacy guarantees.

ANN THERESE PALMER, LAKE FOREST, IL

AMAZED AND CONFUSED

"What amazed me...in Christopher Hitchens's reply to Marion Meade's perfectly reasonable personal account ["The Secret Plagiarists," Talk Back, March] of biographical strip mining [even more] than his profanity was his delegation of research to fact-checking. If Meade can substantiate her claims, which I assume *Brill's Content* did double-check themselves, Hitchens might have chosen many of his words, obscene or otherwise, differently.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 134]

CORRECTIONS

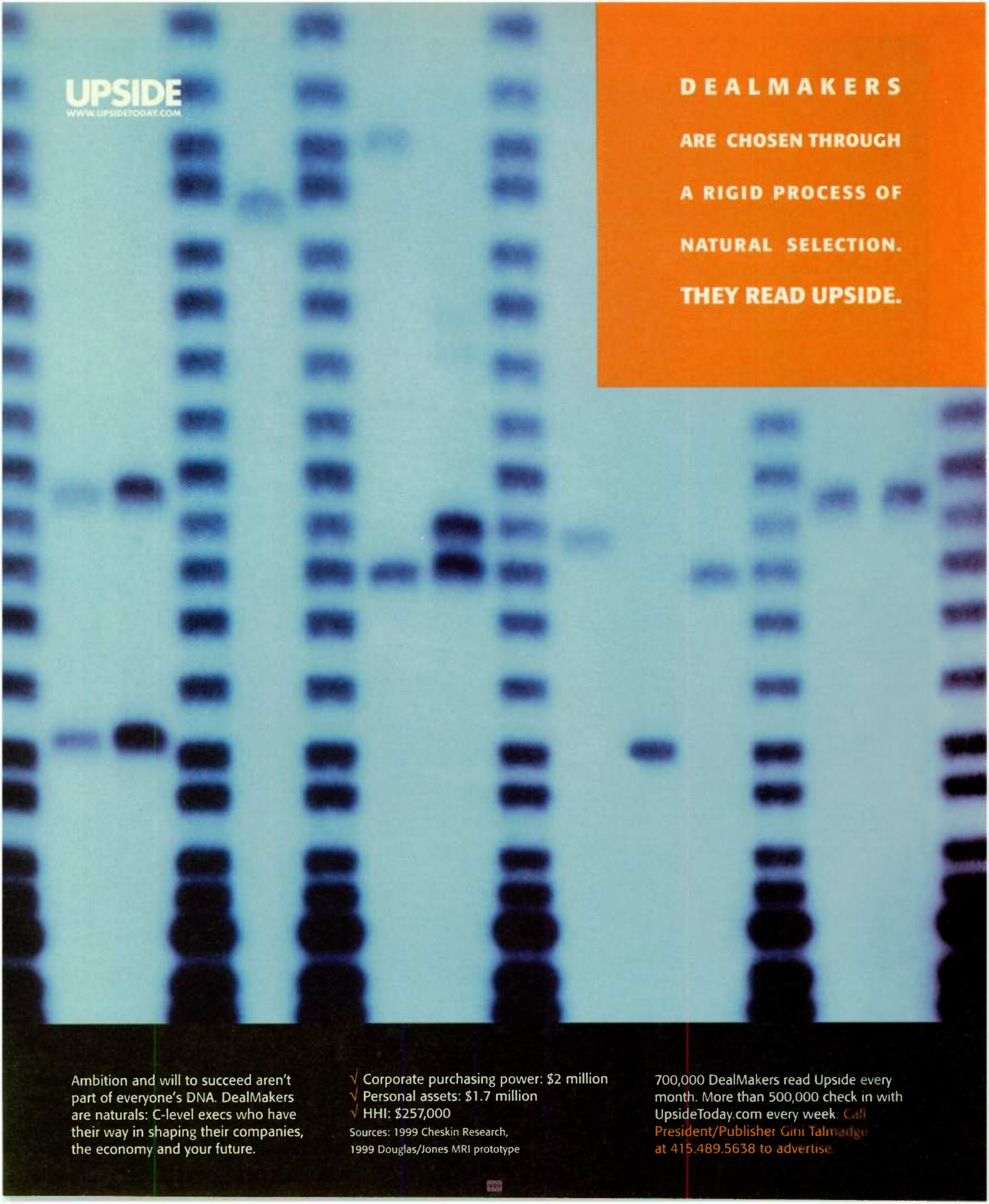
In April's Can't Keep A Good Man Down," staff writer Jane Manners incorrectly referred to a 1967 column by Mike Royko. The column was printed in the *Chicago Daily News*, not the *Chicago Tribune*.

In April's Sources, "Bringing Up Baby," due to an editing mistake by Senior Associate Editor Dimitra Kessenides, the name of David Houts was misspelled.

In "Beam Them Up Already," in April's Stuff We Like, senior editor Ed Shanahan misidentified the role played by Leonard Nimoy on the TV show *Star Trek*. Nimoy's character was Spock, not Dr. Spock.

We regret the errors.

DOUGLAS ADESKO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THE HUNGER ARTIST

This image, one of hundreds from James Nachtwey's new book, *Inferno*, brings human suffering into sharp focus.

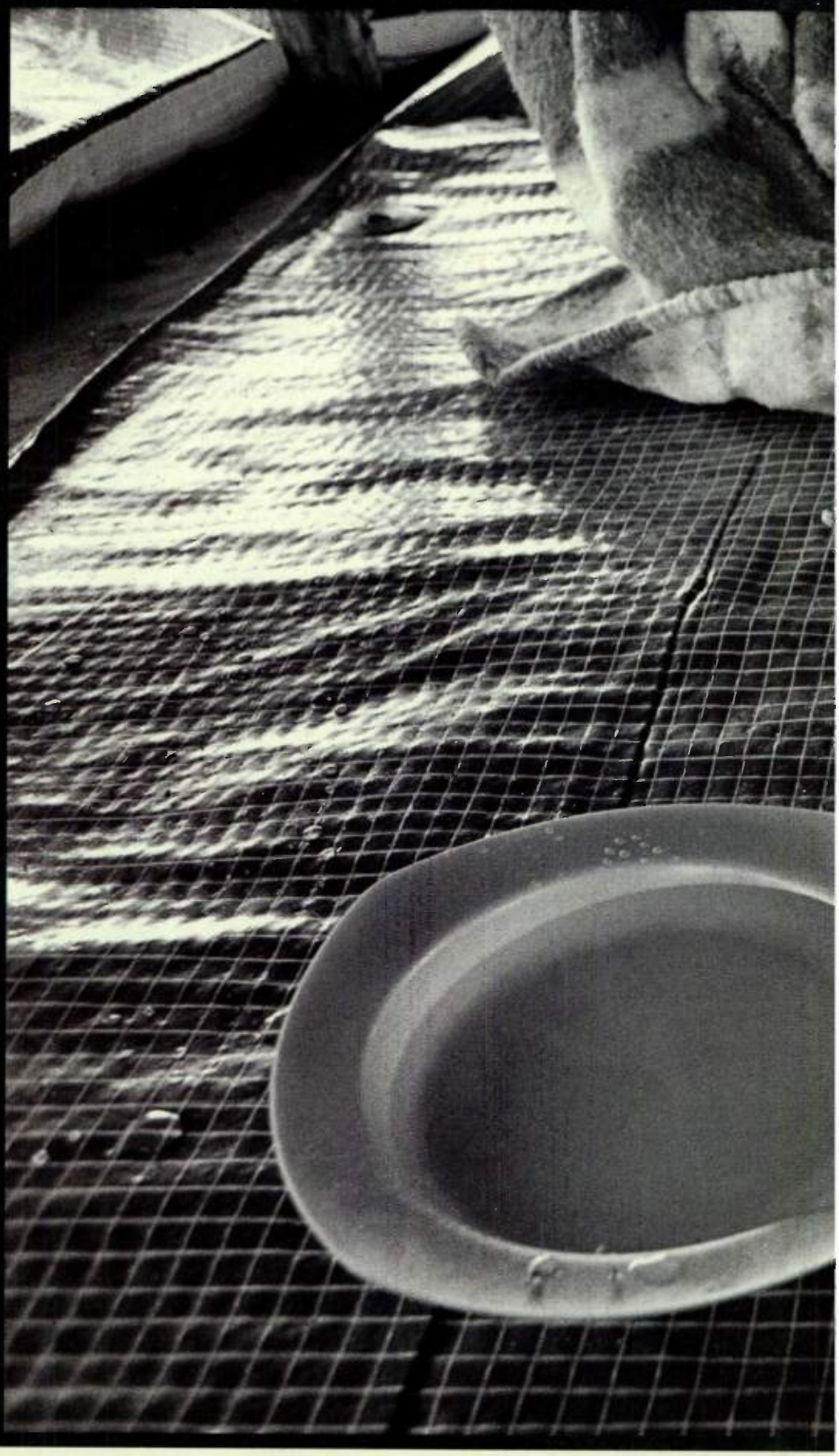
James Nachtwey aims his camera at emaciated men and women, starving children, and scorched villages. "It seems like the most worthwhile use of photography," he says. "If people are aware, there will be a reaction."

In the summer of 1993, during the height of the second famine to strike Sudan in five years, Nachtwey, who has worked for *Time* magazine for 16 years, insisted on going to the African country despite his editor's objection. "I thought this was a situation in which hundreds of thousands of people were in need of the world's attention," he says. Nachtwey, 53, was the only journalist in Ayod, a town in southern Sudan, where camps had been set up to care for the dying, many of whom were too weak to feed themselves. As Nachtwey walked through one of the tents, he noticed a man, pictured here, who, even on this warm day, was wrapped tightly in blankets to keep his emaciated body insulated.

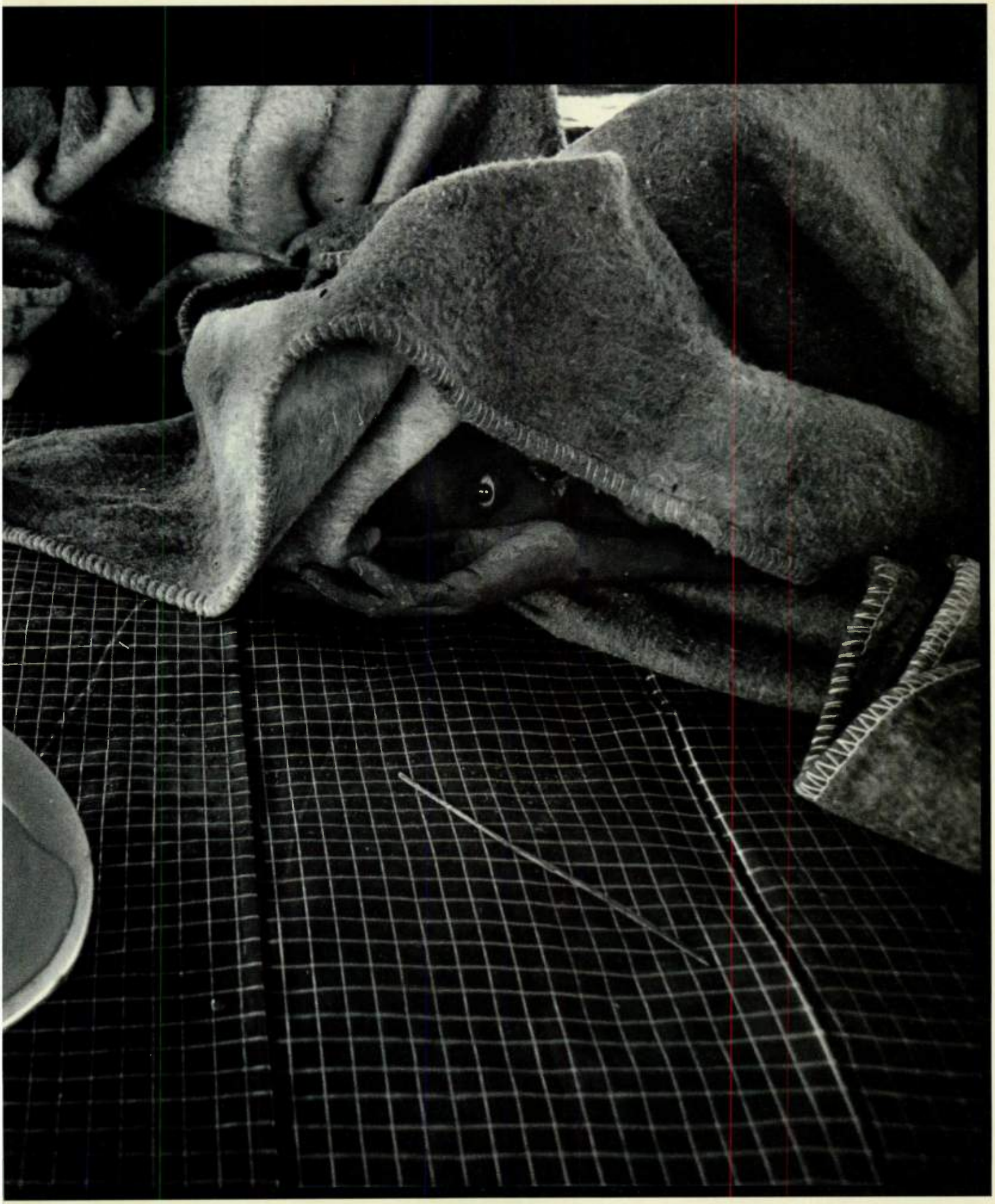
"The humanitarian workers began to set out bowls of rehydration fluid," recalls Nachtwey, "and this man was watching this from inside his blankets." The photo appeared in *Time* shortly after Nachtwey's visit, and seven years later, his face still fills with horror when he contemplates it. "There was something poignant about the man," he says. "It was his need for this food and his inability to reach for it himself. He had to wait for it." Nachtwey took this photo, he says, because "I was reacting to the anguish he must have been feeling; the anguish and the relief."

Nachtwey has been photographing harrowing situations since 1981, when he traveled to Northern Ireland during the IRA hunger strikes. His pictures appear primarily in *Time* but have also run in *National Geographic* and *Life Magazine*. *Inferno*, a compilation of 382 Nachtwey photos, was published in March with stunning black-and-white images of the plight of Romania's children, the impoverished "untouchables" of India, the genocide in Rwanda. "It's a record of the last decade of the 20th century," says Nachtwey, agreeing that the account is a grim one. "I hope it gives people some perspective," he adds. "The media is inundated with fashion, celebrity, and domestic politics—*Inferno* may be seen as a reaction to that."

BRIDGET SAMBURG



Photograph by James Nachtwey



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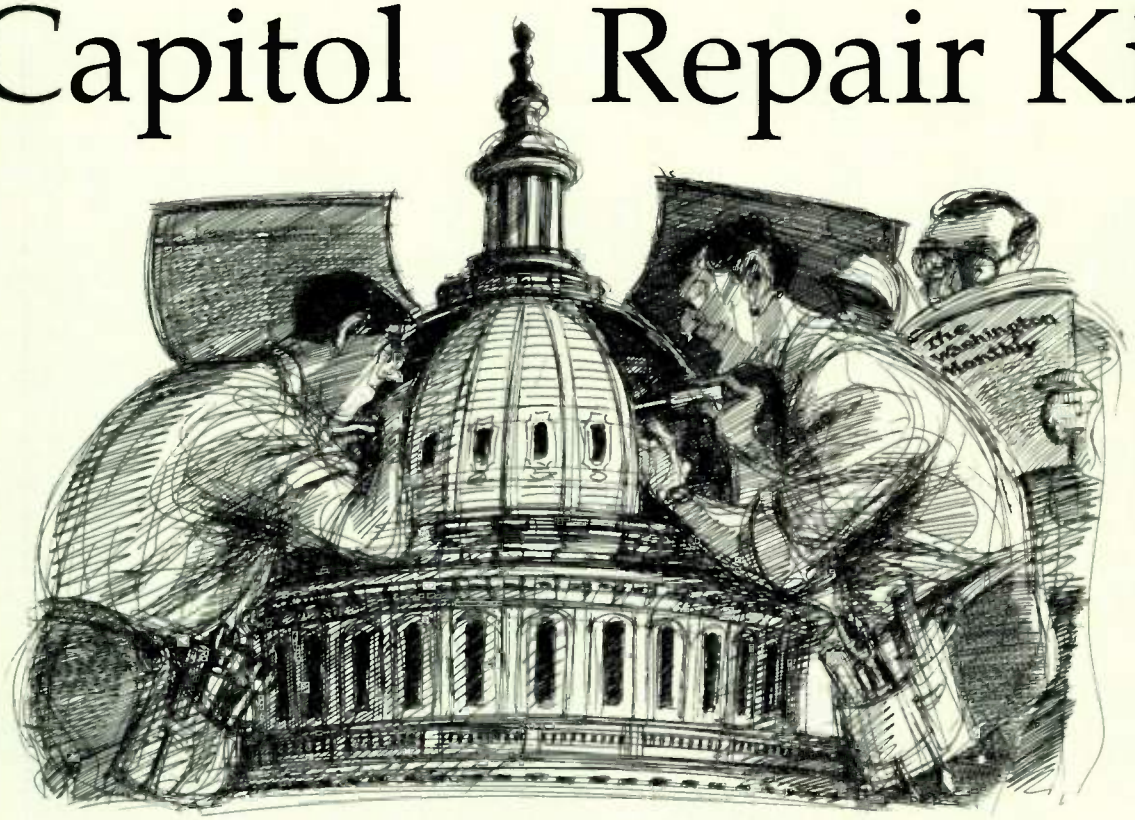

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"... holds up a deadly accurate mirror to the Washington political culture, exposing its hypocrisies, stupidities, and unexpected triumphs." — *Michael Beschloss*

'John' and 'Bush'

How the Law of the Rope Line and the Law of the Hunt took hold during the Republican presidential primaries. BY STEVEN BRILL

At the height of the John McCain swoon, I had lunch with two reporters who were covering his campaign for major national news organizations. Both repeatedly referred to the Arizona senator as "John" yet referred to Texas governor George W. Bush as "Bush." Both told delightful stories about their travels with McCain, illustrating not only what a great guy he is but their friendship with him, too. One even allowed that "John panders a lot, like with the Confederate flag and abortion, but with John you know his heart isn't in it. He's kind of let us know that."

Leaving aside the fact that having the big guy from the Straight Talk Express admit that he's pandering would seem to be a major story, what this reporter and his colleague were displaying—both to me and, more important, in their infatuated coverage of McCain—were the two most basic realities of how a lot of journalism happens. They're what I call the law of the rope line and the law of the hunt. These laws don't apply to the best reporters, the ones who keep a professional distance from their subjects and who have a strong enough, secure enough sense of themselves. But as we've seen from the McCain swoon, they do apply to many of the journalists responsible for much of what we read and watch.

THE LAW OF THE ROPE LINE

Reporters are human beings, and the practice of journalism turns many of them into insecure human beings. That's because they live their lives around movers and shakers but, in their minds, they're not players themselves. They stand with pad and pen in hand on the sidelines watching others who are in the arena, people who are more important than they are and who keep them roped off at a distance. Of course, this hierarchy isn't necessarily true, but it's a mind-set that often infects reporters. I know, because I've felt it myself.

The result is that all but the most professional of reporters compensate by pecking away at their subjects from behind that rope line, trying to tear them down. (Some also try to get on television as much as possible because that can make them as "famous" as the people they're covering.)

This instinct to try to nail the target from behind the rope line is not only a matter of an inferiority complex; it's also a combination of jealousy (as in reporters who were of Bill Clinton's generation not being able to deal with the prospect of someone their age becoming the leader of the free world), career boosting (as in being the first to prove that the guy getting all the cheers isn't any good), and, of course,

SCOTT MENCHIN

peer pressure (as in not wanting to look softer than the other stone-throwers on the rope line). What it all adds up to is that usually, any shortcoming, any evidence of human frailty, becomes the story and the transcendent image. How else to explain the hostility toward George W. Bush, a man who, whatever his tongue-tied public pronouncements, is, by most accounts from people who know him, not nearly the helpless boob he became in the press early this year.

Indeed, the law of the rope line explains not only why so many political reporters are so hostile to those they write about but also, for example, why business reporters tend to accentuate the negative when writing about high-flying CEOs and why, to take a specific and particularly obvious Manhattan media-elite example, most journalists who write about *Talk* magazine editor Tina Brown can't control the impulse to tear down someone who has succeeded far beyond what they can hope for in the same field.

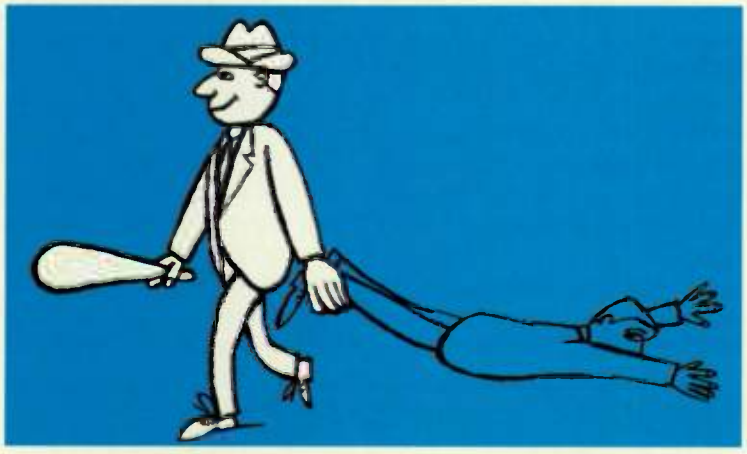
However, if, as in McCain's case, the subject gives them broad access or even befriends them, something else often happens. The reporter begins to treat him like a person and cuts him all kinds of slack. True, any process that makes someone a person with whom a reporter has a relationship rather than an object to whom he shouts a question at a press conference will temper that reporter's coverage; it's harder for any human being to write something tough or snide about someone whom he's going to sit next to and trade stories with on a bus for two hours the next morning. But it often becomes more than that if you're used to being on the rope line and are suddenly waved inside. The subject's strong points become the story and the frailties become explainable afterthoughts.

This dynamic is usually most obvious in Hollywood reporting or in the case of the "secretive business mogul" who "opens up" to a reporter. When that happens a fawning profile is almost guaranteed (unless the subject's alleged negatives have already been so widely conveyed that peer pressure, combined with jealousy, prevails).

But the McCain swoon was as deep and as reality-defying as any Wall Street or Hollywood puffball treatment, which makes it unusual for modern political coverage (and reminiscent of the old days when FDR or JFK palled around with the press). Here the law of the rope line, combined with the press's general impulse to create a horse race even when one candidate seems far ahead of the other, was in full bloom—working on the one hand so that most reporters were inclined to tear down front-runner Bush and, on the other hand, so that most reporters were inclined to give McCain all the breaks.

IF A REPORTER IS USED TO BEING ON THE ROPE LINE AND IS SUDDENLY WAVED INSIDE, HIS SUBJECT'S STRONG POINTS BECOME THE STORY AND THE FRAILTIES BECOME EXPLAINABLE AFTERTHOUGHTS.

The result was breathtaking. Here was a man with whom the press could have had a field day. McCain could have been the returning soldier who ditches the wife who had waited for him all those years in favor of the 25-year-old blond whose money propelled him into politics; the ambitious pol who has never been a particularly effective senator; the right-winger who stands stridently on the other side of most reporters on such issues as gun control, abortion, gay rights, civil rights, and the environment; the candidate for chief executive who, unlike his principal opponent, has no executive experience; and the reformer who talks the talk of campaign finance reform but has never stopped being a one-man fund-raising machine when it comes to soliciting donations from cable television executives and others whose business fortunes he presided over in his committee work in the Senate. That's not a fair picture of McCain, either, but it's the one we might have gotten from behind the rope line. Instead, in most media outlets he became Mr. Straight Talk, a man who, as my reporter friend allowed, panders but panders with a difference because he really doesn't have his heart in it.



SCOTT MENCHIN

THE LAW OF THE HUNT

Reporters are paid to be hunters. They love looking for prey, and they get rewarded the most when they snag the most difficult catch. But hand them the prey on a silver platter, especially when it's being handed to all of their competitors at the same time, and they lose interest.

Here's what I mean by that. Several years ago, when the company I ran owned a newspaper for lawyers in San Francisco, the managing partner of one of that city's largest law firms called me. He said he wanted some PR advice. Although he was a friend, I told him that I couldn't give it to him because, well, I ran a newspaper that wrote about him and his firm. He blurted out his problem anyway. At the time, I was frustrated that our paper there seemed not to be looking for important stories avidly enough yet seemed to be chasing small stuff too avidly because the chase and the resulting gotcha were so much fun. So I decided to try an experiment; I gave him some secret advice to see how our paper handled it.

His PR problem was that he was about to lay off four or five secretaries as part of an effort, he claimed, to streamline the firm so that it could keep its fees to clients as low as possible. (Obviously, he'd already worked out his spin.) He was afraid, he said, that the secretaries were going to try to make a big story out of it by leaking the news, and that the press would seize on these minor staff cuts as a sign that his firm was in economic trouble, which, he said, it wasn't.

The advice I gave him was simple but counterintuitive unless you understand the law of the hunt: I told him that rather than just hope the press didn't hear about the firings and prepare some good spin if they did, he should put out a press release enthusiastically announcing that the firm was undertaking a campaign to cut costs in order to serve clients more efficiently. Then mention the staff cuts, proudly, somewhere down in the press release, I added.

"A press release?" he asked. "Are you nuts?" My answer was that I'd bet him a dinner that my reporters and the rest of the press would ignore the whole story because (a) they hated press releases, since that was information that they didn't "discover" and (b) they'd know that everyone else had the information at the same time they had it. I won the dinner.

And so John McCain, by sitting in the back of the Straight Talk Express talking up all his mistakes and misstatements (suppose Bush had talked about "gooks"?) and reveling in all the wrong turns he'd taken in his personal life and in his career, neutralized those stories—just as Janet Reno inoculated herself a month into her tenure as attorney general by saying that Waco was all her fault. Meanwhile, George W. Bush—who took two weeks to concede that he should have said he disagreed with the Bob Jones University policy on interracial dating when he spoke there and, at least in the early stages of the campaign, generally presented himself as the aloof, always scripted candidate who was invincible—became the perfect prey. As my two reporter friends put it, he was "Bush," and the other guy was "John." ■

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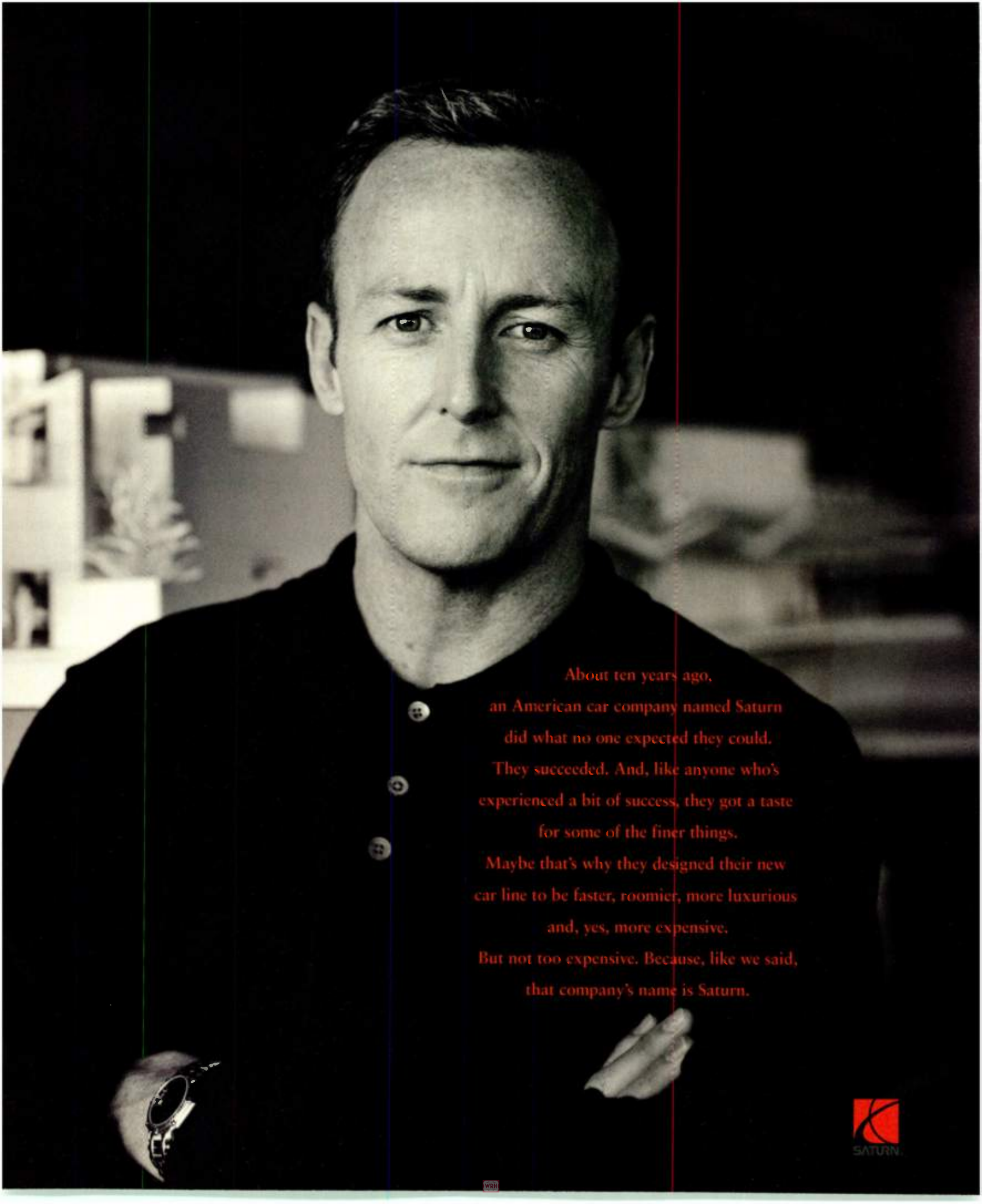
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STUFF WE LIKE

THE BARK

Magazines for dog lovers tend to confine their topics to breed-ranking and housebreaking, so it's surprising to see a canine-centric journal with literary aspirations. *The Bark* is a Berkeley-based quarterly featuring dog-oriented poems, cartoons, essays, and fiction. Despite its high-toned approach, *The Bark* has an independent, literary vibe, from the recycled matte stock paper on which it's printed to its motto, "Dog is my co-pilot," adapted from WWII memoirist Robert L. Scott. Writers and journalists such as Ian Shoales and Cynthia Heimel contribute stories, as do animal behaviorists and researchers. *The Bark*'s April issue features dog cartoons. According to founder and executive editor Claudia Kawczynska, all issues explore the relationship between dogs and humans, as in "Memoir of a Dog-Headed Man," a piece by cartoonist P.S. Mueller in which the narrator's species is, well, unclear: "Yes. I knew the Kennedys....It's true what they said about those competitive boys, though I'll admit I held my own and often outran the lot of them....The family had a wonderful cook who worked miracles with rabbit. Camelot."

KAJA PERINA

***The Bark* is a new breed of dog magazine that features poems, cartoons, and essays.**

SQUAWK BOX

Unbelievable but true: CNBC's *Squawk Box* is the best morning show ever. Why? Because it's not as purely business-focused as you'd think, and because its hosts are, to all outward appearances, real people. Sure, Matt and Katie are nice and friendly and attractive, but they're a little too nice and too friendly and too attractive. They're welcoming, but they're not quite real. None of that here. *Squawk Box* anchor Mark Haines, to his great credit, is fat. He frequently seems on the verge of slumping underneath his desk. He wears old-man reading glasses, and he spends a good part of the 7-to-10-in-the-morning broadcast taking them on and off. Reporter Joe Kernan rarely remembers to look at the camera, or even to sit still. His hair points in all directions, and on a recent morning, he kept scratching his face. But the two are smart, fun, dryly sarcastic, and clearly knowledgeable—not just about financial markets but also, apparently, about William Shatner's musical career and some of the lesser-known sixties TV shows. Watching NBC's *Today* is like looking in on the beautiful people; with the *Squawk Box*ers, you're hanging out with the guys.

JESSE OXFELD

***Squawk Box*'s Mark Haines**

JOURNAL OF MUNDANE BEHAVIOR

mundanebehavior.org

You might not expect something called the *Journal of Mundane Behavior* to be all that interesting. First published on the Web in February of this year and with a second issue slated for June, the online journal is devoted to exploring the "unmarked" aspects of a culture that usually has time, the editors claim, for only the unique and the exceptional. Thus, instead of studying the year 1776, they propose historians examine 1906, a year in which nothing happened; instead of looking at fundamentalists, they propose scholars examine the mildly religious. Sounds fascinating, no? In fact, it is. The first issue contains a meditation on shaving and observations on how Japanese people suddenly become friendlier when they get into elevators. Under consideration for the next issue is a report on Swedish cell-phone use and an essay on the importance of mundane conversation in doctor-patient relations. The journal is

NORMAN

STUFF WE LIKE

written in relatively plain English, says editor Scott Schaffer, in order to promote his goal of "publicizing the intellectual, and intellectualizing the public." The effect is exhilarating but also uncanny, like looking at a microscope picture of microbes on your skin and discovering a whole civilization right under your nose.

ADAM LEHNER

Director Stone (center) and friends

"WHASSUP?!" ADS

It's hard to like TV advertisements much, seeing as how—one way or another—they usually find their intrusive, demanding voices in shrill hysteria or stentorian pomposity, all of it perfectly insincere. But every so often the 30-second spot becomes a miniature showcase of cinematic genius and inspiration: the Budweiser "Whassup?!" campaign, for example. With no special effects, celebrity pitchmen or talking animals to speak of and an independent-film look that cuts against the glossy beer-ad standard, the "Whassup" series has struck a pleasing, goofy chord since its debut late last year. A new batch of the commercials featuring the same cast will be released this spring. The ads feature a group of friends who greet each other—on the phone, over intercoms, in person—with ever more exuberant renditions of the phrase "Whassup" until the giddiness peaks and wears off and someone answers the question ("Nothing. Watching the game. Having a Bud"). Director Charles Stone III originally developed the ads as a short film, in which he starred with a number of childhood friends. He says the campaign is about brotherhood, about friends "appearing to say nothing, but saying everything." Stone's short was picked up by Budweiser's agency, DDB Chicago, and as ad campaigns go has become remarkably popular. On adcritic.com, a site that tallies votes from online ad aficionados, the "Whassup" ads occupy three of ten spots in the rankings. Stone's hip-hop style and music-video touch—he recently directed a clip for The Roots—have lent Budweiser an aura of street credibility and warmth, and it's no wonder the beer company has commissioned more spots from the director. The new series will show the characters branching out, he says. "The concept is expanding."

LUKE BARR

STUFF WE MIGHT LIKE

MAXIMUM GOLF

Maximum Golf heralds the debut of yet another genre-bending publication: It wants to *Maxim*-ize the traditionally stodgy sport with humor, girls, and gadgets.

Editor Michael Caruso, formerly of *Details*, will launch *Maximum Golf* in May. "Many young men are just as passionate about golf as they are about sex. And in a survey of golfers, 80 percent would rather shoot on par than have sex with a movie star," insists Caruso. Not likely, especially since *Maximum Golf* wants to make sure the rest are well entertained: The magazine's website (maximumgolf.com) promises "the sexiest models, actresses and beverage-cart girls in America." Instead of endless photo spreads in which middle-aged paunches are poised above ugly golf shoes, the sport's young greats, such as Tiger Woods and Sergio Garcia, share pages (and presumably the green) with Matt Damon and Cindy Crawford.

Beyond the standard fare of major tournament coverage and tips on how to improve your game, *Maximum Golf*, published by News Corporation, will adhere to the high-octane men's magazine formula, highlighting the coveted and the illicit. Features include "The Perfect Drive," a column about cars, and a column covering such vices as liquor and gambling.

KAJA PERINA

NERVE MAGAZINE

The highbrow online erotica of Nerve.com is headed offline and into print with the launch of *Nerve*, the magazine, in April. The bimonthly will attempt to offer a sophisticated take on sex, a subject that often defies sophistication in magazines. Nerve.com cofounder Rufus Griscom says that he'd always planned for a print offshoot, and that working online has only heightened his appreciation of the hard copy: "A single flick of the wrist in effect downloads 50 megabytes of visual medium," he explains.

Nerve will include material from the website, including columns by Maggie Cutler and Jack Murnighan. Literary essays and reported pieces, such as an article about Budapest's porn industry scheduled for the premiere issue, will also be part of the mix, as will ample photography. Each issue will feature at least three photo essays as well as what sounds like a promising section called "Beholder's Eye," which will present three prominent photographers' shots of the same nude model.

LESLIE HEILBRUNN

A photo from *Nerve* magazine

THE PARIS REVIEW

George Plimpton

It's serious business when the country's best-known literary quarterly won't accept any new poetry. Two years ago, *The Paris Review* found its poetry "bin" full. Editor and cofounder George Plimpton estimates there was enough for two or three issues of poetry alone. "We had to try to lessen the piles so we could start accepting poetry again," he says.

The solution: the quarterly's spring issue, a "feast," in Plimpton's words, of only poetry and essays about verse. (Check out "Pomework," which contains poems written from a title suggested to the author by the magazine's editors.) Plimpton's explanation for the abundance of poems is that "good short fiction [can be] hard to come by; there's just more poetry." The issue's April appearance is just in time for National Poetry Month. "It's the first issue we've ever had come out in the proper season," boasts Plimpton with his inimitable patrician delivery. "Usually we're sort of lax....We've had to work like dogs on this."

ELIZABETH ANGELL

PLIMPTON: ROBIN PLATZER; NERVE: LESLIE LYONS

GREGORY CREWDSON

For his current *Twilight* series, photographer Gregory Crewdson takes a full film crew to the Lee, Massachusetts, neighborhood where he spends half the year and shoots its residents in staged, abnormal situations. In one photo, a sweating middle-aged man lays sod in his living room; in another, a pregnant woman sleepwalks in her underwear on a freshly cut lawn.

"I want to take what on the surface can appear to be ordinary or routine activity....and make it obsessive or irrational or inappropriate," says Crewdson, 37, who teaches photography at Yale. That description only hints at the complexity of the photographs, which have recently been exhibited simultaneously in galleries in New York, North Carolina, and Vancouver.

Although Crewdson considers *Twilight* a collaborative effort with the residents of Lee, he makes clear that his photos are not meant to represent the town. "I wasn't particularly interested in documenting the town of Lee in any traditional way," he says. "In a sense I'm trying to use the town itself and its inhabitants as a kind of...very large soundstage."

A typical photograph takes a week to set up, as Crewdson arranges the lighting and every piece of scenery. Then each photo can take an entire day to shoot, whether it's an extreme close-up of a possibly dead man or a street scene filmed from atop a crane.

The results are huge (48 by 60 inches) photographic canvases that suggest magical possibilities lurking in everyone's backyard. It may not be real on film, but it could be real *out there*. For more information on Crewdson, go to www.luhringaugustine.com.

MATTHEW REED BAKER

***Twilight* zone: Gregory Crewdson combines small-town citizens and staged surrealism in his ongoing photo series.**

SHIELDS UP!

grc.com

When it comes to the Internet, what you don't know can hurt you. Ignorance of your cyberspace vulnerabilities can lead to theft of personal information—such as credit card numbers—or even make you an unwitting participant in hacker attacks such as the ones that plagued several websites last February. So we appreciate the efforts at Shields UP!, a website that can expose your computer's vulnerabilities online.

Aimed at Windows computer users, Shields UP! was created by Steve Gibson. Part of his own company website, Gibson Research Corporation, the security check is free and Gibson is not pitching security software or consulting services—yet.

At Shields UP! visitors voluntarily submit their computers to a scan, similar to those that after-school hackers perform when they break into computer systems. Gibson's program then reports on which entry points, or ports, it was able to access on your computer. The ramifications can be startling, such as discovering that the contents of your financial records are exposed while you're online. Fortunately, Gibson offers free advice and tips on how to shut your digital doors.

JOHN R. QUAIN

(For more on Internet privacy, see "Privacy Under Siege," page 108.)

TIN HOUSE

The editors of *Tin House* have worked hard to distinguish themselves from the competition: The year-old journal just might be the only literary quarterly on the market with its own martini. The magazine's founder, Win McCormack, insisted that *Tin House* look different (bold headlines and pull quotes), feel different (more like a book, less like a magazine), and, if you follow the recipe for the cocktail in the current issue, get you drunk. "Win has been doing an awful lot of research," says co-editor Elissa Schappell of McCormack's hard labor at the bar of New York's Four Seasons restaurant.

McCormack launched *Tin House* in 1998. He hired Schappell, a former *Paris Review* senior editor who now writes about books for *Vanity Fair*, and her husband, Rob Spillman, a former *Details* columnist, to edit the literary journal. He also secured wide distribution in bookstore chains such as Barnes & Noble.

The journal's fourth issue is set to hit newsstands in May. And for now, martini in hand, everyone's having a good time. "It's a dream," says Schappell. "A wealthy gentleman comes up to you and says, 'Hey, little girl, want your own magazine?'" She said yes.

ELIZABETH ANGELL

In addition to poetry and fiction, the quarterly magazine *Tin House* will offer profiles and feature stories.

BOOKS: NORMAN. *TWILIGHT*: GREGORY CREWDSON

STUFF WE LIKE

AMERICAN RUINS

"I'm a photographer of change, of transformation," says Camilo José Vergara. Vergara is explaining his work of the past 29 years, during which he has documented the decay of neighborhoods in such cities as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Gary, Indiana.

The work—part sociology, part urban studies—has received its fair share of attention in recent years, with shows at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City. A second book of Vergara's photos, *American Ruins*, was recently published by The Monacelli Press.

"My interest is more in [the] buildings, and what happens to [them] over time," he says. "Once I started photographing over time, I realized that there were changes." This is evident in the images of Chicago's Tufts Fireproof Warehouse, at 4444 West Madison Street, shown here.

Vergara's shot of Chicago's Tufts Fireproof Warehouse in 1997 (left); within a year, the building was gone.

Vergara first photographed the building in 1987, when a bedding shop operated out of the first floor. By 1997 the shop had closed, the building had been abandoned, and scavengers had stolen architectural detailing. In late 1998, Vergara returned to find an empty lot.

What do the photos tell us about the value we place on buildings? Vergara wants the images to speak for themselves. But he has taken away some enduring impressions. "There is a lack of care. If there is no use for [a building], then it is just sometimes demolished.... Anything can be thrown out, a car, a skyscraper, a post office."

DIMITRA KESSENIDES

SAFE AREA GORAZDE

Most people associate comics with superheroes, not combat journalism. But cartoonist-reporter Joe Sacco has established a one-man genre, creating vivid cartoons about war zones across the world. His previous work includes comic books on the conflict in Palestine and the Gulf War. In May, Fantagraphics Books will release Sacco's latest, *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992–1995.*

"I'm interested in the human face behind these things," says Sacco, who spent four weeks in 1995 interviewing and photographing the people and places of Gorazde, a Serb-encircled Muslim enclave devastated by the Bosnian war. He has spent the last four years drawing the town for his 240-page book.

Gorazde's landscape is rendered in meticulous detail, but Sacco's most stirring views are of the town's resilient people, desperate for medicine, candy, electric power, and blue jeans—searching for any sign at all that the outside world knows they exist.

STEPHEN TOTILO

CHRISTOPHER GRAY

If Sherlock Holmes loved architecture, he'd probably be Christopher Gray. Gray, who can tell the history of a New York City building from a gate or a window, has spent the past 13 years sharing that knowledge with the readers of his *New York Times* "Streetscapes" column. Situated in the otherwise manic hustle of Sunday's "Real Estate" section, the weekly dispatch is an oasis of leisurely architectural esoterica. During a recent walk around the city, Gray offered a comment for nearly every building. "I remember that one being scalped—when the cornice was taken off," he says of 219 West 81st Street. At 465 West End Avenue, he relates the story of a former owner. "Her mother wrote her out of the will," he says, "but wrote her ex-husband in."


A Building's Fortunes Rise With the Neighborhood's

The column is full of similar stories—the nightclub operator who sought out theater people as tenants; the turn-of-the-century banker who built an apartment house with a ballroom and billiard room and occasionally lived in a hotel; the architect who was made to tear out Ionic columns against his will. The characters are amazingly vivid considering Gray's insistence that he's "not a people person, but a building person." At the foundation of his work is meticulous research of photographs, census records, renovation plans, and anything else that will provide a clue to the life of a seemingly ordinary building. How does he keep track of it all? "There aren't that many dates," Gray says without a trace of irony. "Only 100 or 150 years or so."

ALISON ROGERS

STUFF YOU LIKE

CAROLINE ZIEMKIEWICZ, A MOVIE-OBSESSED TEENAGER FROM MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA, WRITES:

Darkhorizons.com is a collection of information on current and upcoming films as well as movie news and gossip. Web master Garth Franklin, based in Australia, is less prone to running rumors as facts, as many of his Internet movie-buzz colleagues do. Instead, Franklin treats them as what they are, and he publishes corrections promptly. The site, which is updated about five times a week, includes a news page, advance reviews, movie trailers, and an index, organized by year, that lists information about nearly every project that has even been hinted at.

Is there stuff you like? If so, write to us and share your favorite media sources. Send ideas to: Stuff You Like, *Brill's Content*, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. Or e-mail us at: stuffyoulike@brillscontent.com. Please include your address and contact numbers.

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REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

A magazine whose motto is "Skepticism is a virtue" should also think long and hard about the ads it accepts. BY BILL KOVACH

TASTE IN ADVERTISING. An e-mailed message from Eileen S. Gelon of Beverly Hills, California, is typical of several complaints from readers who questioned the magazine's taste in running an advertisement in a recent issue:

"I am deeply disappointed that your magazine accepted the ad for The History Channel (page 29 of your February issue). To show a close up picture of someone who is dying (it really doesn't matter that it was Robert Kennedy) to promote a television show is in the lowest and worst taste. The History Channel should not have created the ad but, once they did, *Brill's Content* should not have accepted it. I have spent 28 years in publishing, and I know you could have refused the ad and would not have had to give a reason why. How am I supposed to feel comfortable accepting your magazine as the media's conscience when you appear to have succumbed to the Almighty Dollar?"

I sent Ms. Gelon's message to chairman and CEO Steven Brill, asking, "Do you have 'taste' standards for ads? If so, where do they apply, porn? violence? etc.?"

I run here his reply in full, for it tells you a lot about how Brill thinks about these issues and how his standards are applied:

"We do have taste standards, and I have no compunction about invoking them. They're not written standards; they're based rather on whether I or anyone else in a senior position objects to an ad because, well...we just think it's beyond the bounds of taste.

"As for this ad, I'm the culprit if there is one. I saw it. I thought about it. And I decided that it was okay because it was using a real and, indeed, often used photo to draw people to a serious program on a serious channel about a serious subject. To be sure, were I still running Court TV I would not have used such an ad, and, in fact, I vetoed all kinds of ideas like that when I was there. But that creating/editing process is different from the act of refusing to take an ad that someone else has created, especially when the someone is a reputable channel that does good work.

"Having said all of that, I showed the ad to my 11-year-old son after it was published in our magazine, and he argued with me that I should not have accepted it because it's exploitive and, he said, 'sleazy.' On reflection, I now think he's right."

Brill's son is right—the ad is "sleazy." The job of deciding when and how to use illustrations of the violent world around us as a matter of news is one of the toughest jobs an editor has to do. Closing our eyes to the results of individual acts of violence or calculated policies of violence can be more dangerous to the health of a society than the momentary unease that seeing them in news reports may cause. But attempting to commandeer an audience by using the shock of a violent image is exploitation. Capitalizing on the final agony of another human being for commercial gain might be the ultimate proof that although the market may know the price of everything, it seems to know the value of nothing.

HOW TO REACH BILL KOVACH
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e-mail: bkovach@brillscontent.com
Mail: 1 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

LETTERS VIRTUAL AND OTHERWISE. Stephen Engelberg, special projects editor at *The New York Times*, has raised a question about the handling of a letter he wrote to this magazine that criticized its work. The letter took issue with a November 1999 article about the *Times*'s coverage of the Wen Ho Lee affair ["Crash Landing"]. The *Times* letter, 4,100 words long, was posted in full on the *Brill's Content* website when it was received, along with a 950-word response by the author, Robert Schmidt. Mr. Engelberg complained that his letter had been cut to 1,600 words before it was published in the magazine the following month.

"For the record," he wrote, "I think the cutting of my piece was done professionally, though I disagree strongly with some of the choices made on what to keep and what to take out. And that's the point. If *Brill's* had given me a length, I would have cut my piece to fit or asked them not to publish the piece. If they had given me a deadline, I would have met it. That's what our business is all about.

"The problem here is pretty basic. I wrote an institutional response to what we viewed as a very unfair, one-sided piece of reporting. I weighed every word, trying to strike the right balance and tone. My first chance to review what was going to appear under my name came after the magazine closed. If that's the policy at *Brill's*, I respectfully suggest that it should be changed."

First let me clarify one point. Mr. Engelberg must have misunderstood the intent of this magazine's letters editor at the time, Ed Shanahan, when Shanahan sent a copy of the edited letter as a courtesy.

Sending a copy of the edited letter, Shanahan said, "seemed to me to be more courteous than publishing it without giving a heads-up to the *Times* and having them first find out that we had cut the letter when the issue hit the streets."

Editor Eric Effron adds that it is not the policy of the magazine to give letter writers "the chance to review our edited versions of their letters. In the average month, we run between 20 and 40 letters to the editor, with virtually all of them cut in some manner, very late in the process. It is impractical for us to consider being in constant contact with each letter writer about the cuts we're making in their letters. We could not justify giving *The New York Times* a crack at editing our edit while not offering the same opportunity to Joe Smith from Idaho Falls....One final point: Can you imagine *The New York Times* printing any letter nearly as long as the version of their letter we published?"

The answer to this last question is no because *The New York Times* prefers to print letters of 200 words or fewer and reserves the right to edit and cut them.

Given the volume of mail, both e- and snail, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 134]

Bill Kovach, curator of Harvard's Nieman Foundation for Journalism, was formerly editor of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution *and a* New York Times *editor.*

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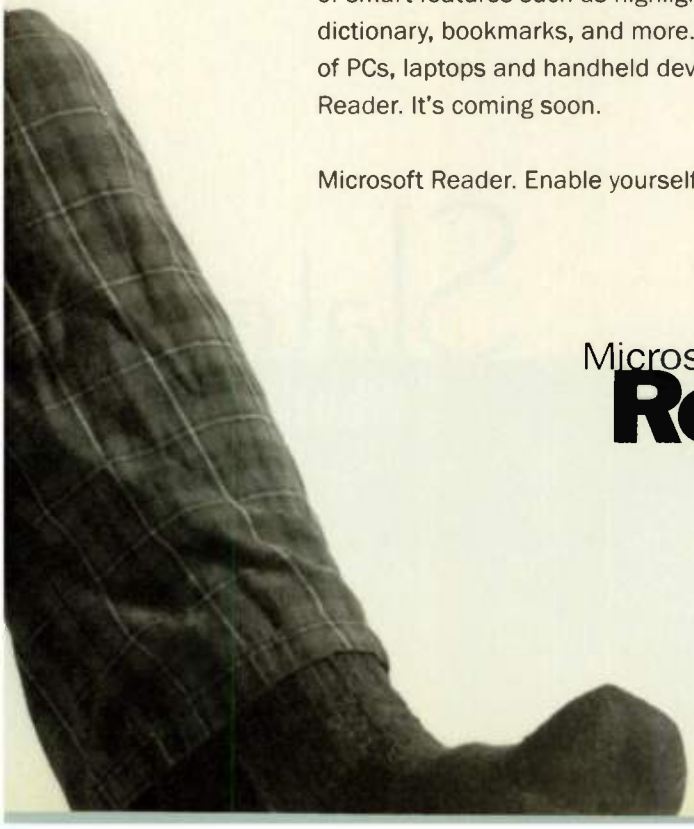

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NOTEBOOK

Next stop, *Wonderland*: Bellevue's Dr. Robert Berger

VOICE OF AUTHORITY

A NEW TV DRAMA'S RESIDENT SCRIPT DOCTOR

A couple of years ago, the actor and director Peter Berg came up with the idea of producing a TV show that would set *ER*-style drama in a mental hospital. Looking for advice, Berg eventually found his way to the office of Dr. Robert Berger, director of forensic psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York City. Berger oversees the care and evaluation of the 27 most dangerously insane inmates in the New York City prison system. Berg knew right away the man was a gold mine.

"I was amazed," says the actor best known as Dr. Billy Kronk on CBS's *Chicago Hope*. "I asked him about this psychotic and that psychotic and I realized that every hot psychiatric criminal goes through Bellevue and that Berger was the man in charge of them." The result of this insight, and of the collaboration that ensued, is not only ABC's *Wonderland*—a strangely compelling new hourlong drama about life in a place a lot like Bellevue—but also an unlikely friendship between two dissimilar men.

At a tastefully austere bar deep in Manhattan's SoHo one unseasonably warm March evening, Berg and Berger meet with a reporter to discuss the show. The doctor is long and tall, with [CONTINUED ON PAGE 40]

ON THE RECORD:

"I'm a vertical segregationist, absolutely."

KIM MASTERS, QUOTED IN THE MARCH 16 *WASHINGTON POST*, ON HER BELIEF THAT THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY'S "VERTICAL INTEGRATION" WAS PREVENTING DISNEY MEDIA OUTLETS FROM COVERING HER BOOK, *THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM: HOW MICHAEL EISNER LOST HIS GRIP*, ABOUT THE COMPANY'S CEO.

BERGER: REGGIE CASAGRANDE

COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN

REBELS WITHOUT A PHONE

Last August, satellite-telephone maker Iridium filed for bankruptcy. By March 17, the company had not found a buyer and got ready to shut down the 66 low-orbit satellites that allow its phones to operate.

Among the unlikely victims of the satellite deorbiting program are Chechen rebels at war with the Russian army. According to writer Robert Young Pelton, many rebels (he can't provide an exact number) depend on Iridiums in a region without many other forms of communication.

Pelton, author of *The World's Most Dangerous Places* (the fourth edition of which will appear in May), says the phones had become battlefield status symbols when he visited war-ravaged Chechnya in November. Iridiums, which sell for as much as $1,500 in the United States, fetch up to $4,000 in Chechnya, says Pelton. "My host in Grozny wanted me to leave my phone," he noted, "and I tried to explain that you can't just talk on them without somebody paying the bill."

What will life in Chechnya be like without Iridiums? An e-mail message sent in early March to azzam.com, a website that posts interviews, photos, and video clips of the war in Chechnya, yielded the following response: "We cannot comment on what systems [the rebels] do and do not have. They are aware, however, of the latest technological developments and the fact that Iridium may go bust very soon. They have alternative means of communication."

ELIZABETH ANGELL

NOTEBOOK

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39] dark, mischievous, confiding eyes and an exuberant flattop. He wears a sharp pinstriped suit and a red tie and often tries to laugh and talk at the same time, like a giddy child. Berg, who is blond and muscular—almost exoskeletal—wears sneakers, khakis, and a T-shirt. Berger hugs Berg and then fondles his tiny silver cell phone as they explain Berger's *Wonderland* role. He is a professional source, the man behind the scenes who gives the show both the patina and the substance of authenticity. Berger provides the show's writers with insight into what his job is like, and he acts as a factual policeman, resisting the blandishments and the wild ideas of *Wonderland* writers to make sure their stories come out accurate.

This is not Berger's first turn as a Hollywood consultant. He came up with the idea for *Final Analysis*, the 1992 film starring Richard Gere, and consulted on Martin Scorsese's 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*. "It's easy for people to get silly when Hollywood comes to town, to get overwhelmed with the fact that we're telling their story," says Berg, hulking over the table, looking slightly dazed, "but he's a doctor; he knows it's just an ego trip."

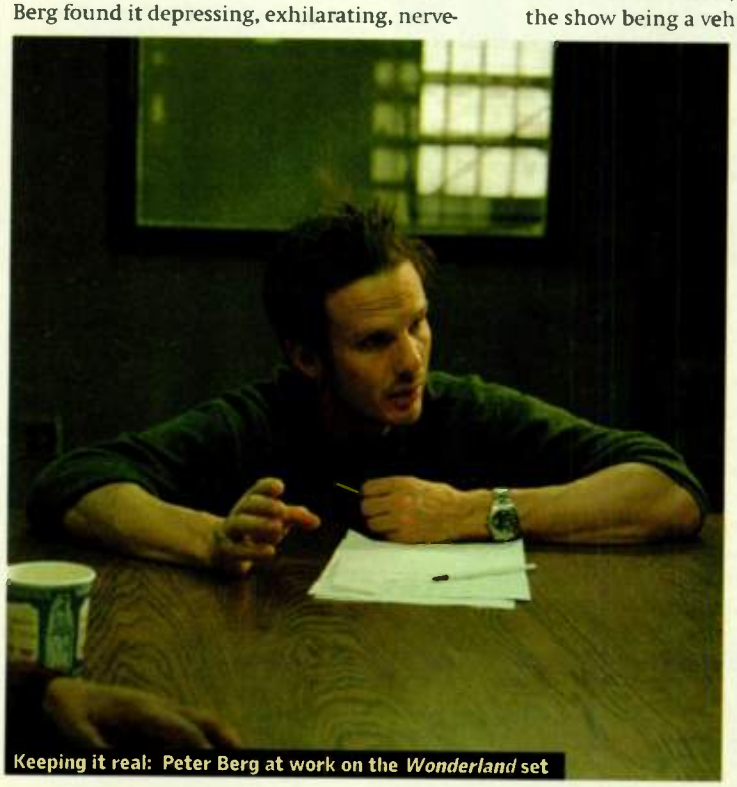
At the beginning of the two men's partnership, about a year and a half ago, Berger was surprised to discover that though Berg had played a TV doctor for years, he apparently didn't know what a "resident" was. The actor clearly needed an intense remedial education. Over the course of the following nine months, Berg and a staff of writers followed Berger and several other doctors around as they met with patients, held meetings, attended conferences, and ate lunch. Berg found it depressing, exhilarating, nerve-racking, and enlightening to spend time with the criminally insane, but in Berger he found a colleague. "I wanted to do an episode about someone who was running for senator," Berg says by way of example, as he fiddles with his microscopic electronic organizer. "A character wants to run as a war hero and needs a wound like [Bob] Dole and [John] McCain have. He convinces his wife to cut his foot off and the psychiatrists have to decide what to do. I asked Berger what he thought and he proceeded to give a two-hour, completely brilliant lecture on the subject, complete with diagrams."

In addition to such lectures, Berger suggests changes to throwaway lines about dosaging ("increase that from 25 mgs to 50 mgs"), the symptomology of the insane, and beyond. "We have to tone down lots of stuff," Berger says. "Writers, for example, often depict patients as talking in a rambling, bizarre way. They get it from TV and I know that if I don't take it out, I'll just be perpetuating the stereotype. But people don't jump in the corner and go 'Gooks! I see Gooks!' It just doesn't happen."

At the bar, semi-celebrities drift in and out, and one begins to realize how perfectly suited for the job of professional source Berger really is. Given that much of his day job consists of hanging out with mental patients, his natty dress testifies to a certain theatrical sense of self. He says he sometimes imagines himself in a movie when dealing with particularly disturbed patients (to achieve distance) and confesses to having long thought that someone should make a TV show about his life.

At the same time, Berger is passionate about the show being a vehicle for the accurate depiction of the life of the troubled mind. But as Berg gets up to talk with an acquaintance, Berger, drinking a double espresso, reveals that even the perfect doctor can be affected by the heat of Hollywood star power. He and other doctors consulting on *Wonderland* would become irritated if their work was not appreciated, and there was competition for recognition and credit. "Certain people would go to some doctors and not to others and you would say: *Doesn't that writer like me? Was I too technical? Was I not sensitive enough? Was I boring?* But of course I wasn't. That's just how Hollywood works."

ADAM LEHNER



Keeping it real: Peter Berg at work on the *Wonderland* set

MICHAEL GINSBERG

TICKER

5 Average number of times per hour of sports commentary that announcers use such war terms as *battle, kill, ammunition, weapons, professional sniper, taking aim, fighting, detonate, squeezes the trigger, exploded,* and *blitz* to describe the action 1

$2.50 Cost of Stephen King's newest novel, *Riding the Bullet*, available exclusively in electronic book form from Scribner Press and Philtrum Press (the author's own imprint)

$28 List price of Stephen King's *Hearts in Atlantis*, published in hardcover last September by Scribner Press 2

$22.4 Amount spent, in millions, by dotcoms on magazine advertising in November 1998

$155.4 Amount spent, in millions, by dotcoms on magazine advertising in November 1999 3

16 Percentage of Americans over the age of 30 who say they regularly get information about the presidential candidates from comedy programs such as *Saturday Night Live* and nontraditional outlets like MTV

24 Percentage of Americans under the age of 30 who say the same thing 4

1,080 Number of ad pages in the February/March 2000 issue of *Bride's* (a Guinness World Record for the most pages of advertisements to appear in a single issue of a periodical)

1,270 Total number of pages in that issue 5

10 Estimated number of Americans, in millions, who watched Tiny Tim marry Miss Vicki on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, December 17, 1969

16 Estimated number of Americans, in millions, who watched Darva Conger marry Rick Rockwell on *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?*, February 15, 2000

58 Estimated number of Americans, in millions, who watched Prince Charles marry Lady Diana Spencer on the three networks, July 29, 1981 6

1) "Messages About Masculinity," Children Now national poll, September 1999 2) Scribner Press; CNN.com; Amazon.com 3) Competitive Media Reporting 4) The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press 5) *Bride's*; Guinness World Records 6) Nielsen Media Research; CBS Research & Planning

The critics rejoiced: The Philadelphia Orchestra (above) paid for some raves.

SECOND STRINGERS

QUESTIONABLE OVERTURE

The Philadelphia Orchestra, one of the world's most respected symphonies, has marked its centenary with a lavish coffee-table book, *The Philadelphia Orchestra: A Century of Music*. The tome, published last fall by Temple University Press, weighs 3.7 pounds and sells for $75; few will dispute the probity and scholarship of its 256 pages.

Yet the volume has struck a sour note with arts editors and journalists across the country. At issue: the orchestra's decision to pay distinguished music critics to write some of the book's 12 reverential chapters—critics who review or write features about the ensemble for, among others, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *New York* magazine.

"This makes me uncomfortable," says Raymond Sokolov, who edits the *Journal*'s arts page, for which two of the orchestra book's contributors regularly freelance. "There's no question that if the gentlemen who contributed to the book were full-time writers here, they'd be fired immediately."

Other cultural institutions have produced commemorative volumes, but the orchestra—wanting, as project coordinator Marie-Hélène Bernard says, "the best, smartest writers we could get"—may well be the first to pay critics to honor it. Bernard says contributors were told to write "whatever they like" on their assigned topics; she wouldn't reveal how much each was paid.

"I'll come right out and say it—the orchestra paid me $3,000 for my chapter," says Herbert Kupferberg, a senior editor at *Parade* magazine who helps oversee that publication's arts coverage. No one would mistake Kupferberg's contribution on legendary conductor Eugene Ormandy for a puff piece, but he does acknowledge that the material is unavoidably fawning.

"The more important issue, I think, is what impact taking this money will have on the writers who cover the orchestra," Kupferberg says. "I do not review or profile them in my job. And I was never told by the orchestra what to write."

Contributor Peter G. Davis, *New York* magazine's longtime music critic, *does* review the orchestra. Says Davis: "I never really thought about this affecting my ability to review the orchestra fairly, because the topic I was given, the orchestra on tour, was so innocuous that I could barely keep awake while writing it."

The book's editor, John Ardoin, a music critic for the *Dallas Morning News* for 32 years, says, "Classical music is a very small world; you're always brushing up against the performers, especially in smaller cities. Also, I actually believe that it's unrealistic to expect critics to live in a vacuum. I'm not saying you would want to do anything to compromise yourself. But knowing the community makes your writing better. I can remember that I had applied for a job at *The New York Times*, to be a music critic under Harold Schonberg. But Schonberg told me, 'I can't hire you, John, because you're too friendly with too many of the musicians, and you're known for being friendly with them.'"

Indeed, the *Times*—like the *Journal*—forbids any staff writer from contributing to a project such as Ardoin's. This policy and those like it at other publications narrowed the field of possible contributors. "As for regular freelancers," Sokolov says, "I have to trust their judgment. I can't know their every move. But I can tell you that we won't be sending those two to Philadelphia soon."

BOB ICKES

ORCHESTRA: DON TRACY; TOOBIN: DAVID HUME KENNERLY; ISIKOFF: ALLAN TANNENBAUM/CORBIS SYGMA

FIGHT CLUB

A TALE OF TWO TITLES

When the paperback edition of Michael Isikoff's *Uncovering Clinton: A Reporter's Story* comes out on May 23, it will include what the author calls a "rather nasty essay on the problematic ethics of ABC's legal analyst" Jeffrey Toobin.

Isikoff, the *Newsweek* reporter who was the first journalist to learn of President Bill Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, isn't happy being named as one of the "key players" in Toobin's analysis of the impeachment saga. In his book *A Vast Conspiracy: The Real Story of the Sex Scandal That Nearly Brought Down a President*, Toobin, also a *New Yorker* staff writer, calls Isikoff greedy and obsessed with the president's sex life.

At the heart of Toobin's argument about Isikoff is the idea that the reporter had been working on a Clinton sex-scandal book with *Wall Street Journal* reporter Glenn Simpson since early 1997. The tentative title, according to Toobin: *All the President's Women*. Toobin cites as proof a taped 1997 phone conversation between Linda Tripp and Lucianne Goldberg in which the phrase is mentioned.

Jeffrey Toobin | Michael Isikoff

Isikoff and Simpson deny they ever discussed it. "Toobin's a very reckless reporter, and he probably just sloppily attributed it to us, misapplying it for his own convenience," says Simpson, adding that the name for the book was *Secrets and Lies* and that its focus was a range of Clinton-administration scandals.

Toobin stands by his account. But he, too, is making a change to his book's paperback edition (due out in October). He'll cut a reference to Isikoff's "protecting the independent counsel's investigation." Says Toobin: "I wrote a 400-page book and I made one mistake."

ELIZABETH ANGELL

NOTEBOOK

BRANDED

NAKED DESIRE

Early this year, *Smithsonian* magazine put out 120,000 copies of this postcard advertisement, which shows beefcake more reminiscent of an Abercrombie & Fitch catalog than the fare associated with the august Smithsonian Institution. "Uncover something unexpected in the pages of *Smithsonian* magazine," the flip side exclaims. The image of a limestone baluster cradled just below a stonecarver's buff torso fits that maxim. The card is part of a push to reposition the Smithsonian "brand" and raise cash. Sexing up *Smithsonian* as a way of goosing profits may jar quaint folk who think the magazine is about the national repository of culture and scientific discovery. That's fine with publisher Ronald Walker, who says, "We're a general-interest magazine. We're not about a museum." JOHN K. KEARNEY

MATCHING WITS

GAME THEORY

When Dr. Laura Schlessinger ignited a public uproar over her views on homosexuality, Joan Garry, executive director of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, took her on in the press. But how would Garry fare on four gay-themed questions from the new Dr. Laura board game, which uses actual questions from the radio shrink's show? The board game's object: to match the answers Schlessinger actually gave. Garry got three right. "It scares me," she says, "that I've studied her enough that I can think like her." STEPH WATTS

AGAINST THE GRAIN

NOTHING BUT NEWS

On February 7, Carol Marin's first day as a solo evening news anchor at WBBM-TV, Chicago's CBS station, a water main broke downtown. The other networks were on the scene. They went underground to examine the break. They interviewed disgruntled commuters and backpedaling city officials. The coverage was entirely predictable.

Those tuning in to *The 10:00 PM News Reported by Carol Marin* got something else: a two-and-a-half-minute report, without commercials, pegged to a press conference held by former city treasurer Miriam Santos, recently released from prison after her conviction on extortion charges was overturned. Then came a three-minute, live, in-studio interview with Santos. The water-main break got 30 seconds later in the cast.

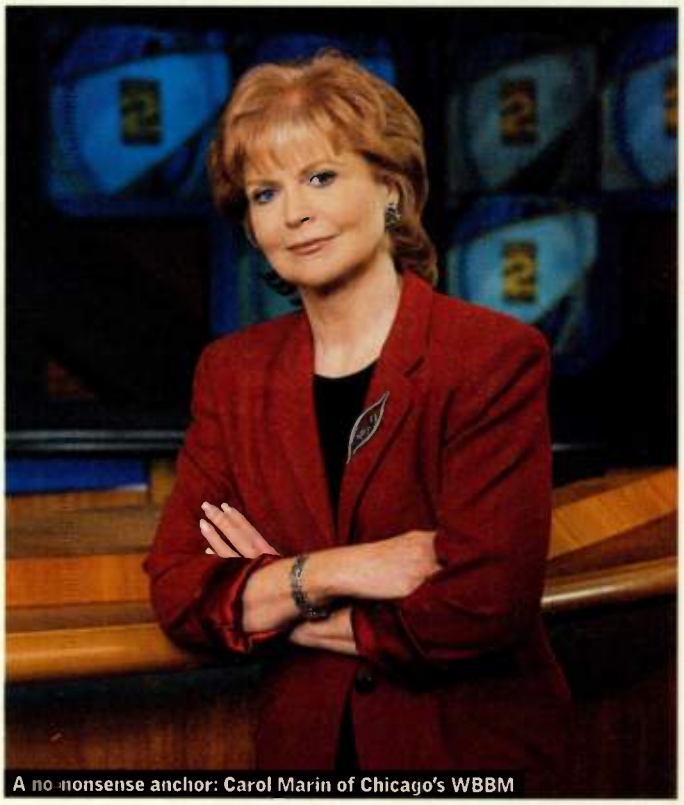
It was just that kind of hard-news approach WBBM executives had in mind when they courted Marin to anchor the evening news in the hope of rescuing the station from the bottom of the ratings well. "In Chicago the news had become so homogenized, we had to do something," says Hank Price, WBBM's vice-president and general manager.

At the time, Marin, 51, was doing investigative features for WBBM and working as a correspondent for *60 Minutes II*. In 1997, she and coanchor Ron Magers resigned from WMAQ-TV, Chicago's NBC station, after Jerry Springer was hired to do commentaries. Marin had been suspended twice by WMAQ previously for refusing to do subtle on-air product tie-ins, including one about a thyroid medicine that was about to lose its patent. "I thought I was pretty well finished anchoring the news," she says. Price convinced her that he wanted a newscast that was serious, substantive, and no-frills. She agreed, as long as there would be no phony happy talk between stories, no target demographics, no features about the CBS movie of the week, and no cute animal footage. It would be news, not entertainment.

"I've said that my idea of news hell is telling you about the real guy behind tonight's movie," says Marin, also the newscast's senior editor. "In my view, the best kind of newscast is where the news of the day drives the format; the format doesn't drive the news."

Marin's experiment has thus far distinguished itself, even if her ratings still find her in last place. At the end of the first month, her reporters hadn't broken any major stories, but every night's show contained significant enterprise reporting that added to the day's mix of news. Marin scored important live interviews with a local federal prosecutor and the superintendent of police, among others, and had so many unscripted, informative interchanges with reporters that the format became a point of parody for one local newspaper columnist.

At times, the newscast has tried almost too hard to be part of the civic culture. On Marin's second night, local radio personality Bob Collins died in a plane crash, and Marin devoted nearly the entire newscast to an examination of his life. The tribute ended with a piece by sportscaster Tim Weigel in which he mourned the recent losses of Chicago's "magnificent seven," such unrelated figures as Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Mike Royko, and Walter Payton.


A no-nonsense anchor: Carol Marin of Chicago's WBBM

But a recent news evening revealed the increasing difference between Marin's newscast and those of her competitors. WBBM's March 6 broadcast began predictably, with four minutes devoted to a scandal involving Illinois governor George Ryan, followed by a brief preview of Super Tuesday's presidential primaries. The competition led with approximately the same stories at about the same length, but as the half-hour continued, the contrast became clear. Marin featured three enterprise stories: an investigation into phone-company rate hikes; a report on economic revitalization in Gary, Indiana; and an entertaining piece about an aging downstate environmental crusader. Meanwhile, the other stations aired stories about "what you can do to increase your baby's IQ" and a bald-faced plug for a children's asthma pill.

The most important difference may have been the most subtle. All day, construction on I-55 had been a lead local story. Coming out of one commercial break, Marin offered her version: a 20-second clip of a highway construction sign. "Nothing like road construction," Marin said. Then it was on to sports. NEAL POLLACK

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ART OF THE COVER

TRUMPED

The cover of the March issue of *George* magazine shows real-estate mogul Donald Trump smirking at the camera while an unidentified woman's lips plant a kiss on the cheek of the would-be presidential candidate. The accompanying cover line promises readers "The Secret Behind Trump's Political Fling: He's Running—All the Way to the Bank."

The secret behind the photo was that it had originally included the entire face of model Melania Knauss, Trump's girlfriend at the time of the shoot. But shortly before the magazine was to be shipped to the printer, *George*'s editors learned that Trump and Knauss had split up. Not wanting to appear out of date, they cropped the shot to show just Knauss's lips. Frank Lalli, who succeeded the late John Kennedy Jr. as *George*'s editor in chief with that issue, says he actually ordered a second Trump shoot, this time with the mogul alone. But, Lalli says, the new photos were "not nearly as good as the one with him and Melania," so Lalli opted to cut Knauss out of the original cover shot, running an uncut version inside the magazine.

"[*George*] wanted to protect the flank," Trump says. "I guess they protected the flank by showing the nose and chin." But the magazine couldn't protect both flanks. Days after the issue hit newsstands, Trump announced he wouldn't seek the Reform Party's presidential nomination, making the cover story yesterday's news.

JANE MANNERS

Bijou Phillips (left) and Power in a scene excised from the movie *Black and White* but available on the Internet.

SCREENINGS

CALL IT THE RATING GAME

Late last year, the 12 Los Angeles–area parents who make up the film industry's Classification and Rating Administration watched an eye-opening sylvan tableau: two white girls—actresses Kim Matulova, who removes her underwear during the scene, and Bijou Phillips, whose elbow moves rhythmically in the direction of Matulova's thighs—intertwined in a standing embrace in New York's Central Park with a black man, the rapper Power. Aside from several flashes of pale butt and breast, there was no nudity in the sequence, although plenty of outdoor eroticism was in the air, abetted by the hip-hop grind of LV's "You're a Big Girl Now."

The rating board came blinking out into the California sunlight and sent word to director James Toback that his film *Black and White*, in which the scene appeared, would be rated NC-17: no children under 17 admitted.

"It's a de facto censorship rating. You cannot get a movie released wide or even moderately with an NC-17," says Toback, who after an unsuccessful appeal submitted a series of edits in which Phillips's elbow movements were progressively less energetic. In the end, the board gave the film an R rating.

But the story didn't end there. Executive producer Hooman Majd says he was convinced the initial decision was wrong, and took a novel approach to airing his grievance: He posted before-and-after versions of the sequence at www.sputnik7.com/blackandwhite so visitors could judge for themselves. The board immediately sent him a letter telling him to take it off the Internet, Majd says. He ignored the request.

Black and White features Brooke Shields as a documentary filmmaker studying the troubled relationships among a group of New York rich kids and the black criminals, rappers, and athletes they fetishize. The unorthodox cast includes model Claudia Schiffer, New York Knicks star Allan Houston, and Method Man, Raekwon, and Power of Wu-Tang Clan. In March, Toback held a screening at Harvard University's Afro-American Studies Department that was hosted by department chair Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Majd says he suspects that the board's resistance to the scene had as much to do with race as it did with sex: "So how do I know that they didn't want to censor the movie because it had a black man with two 17-year-old white girls?" asks Majd. "I don't. The arbitrariness of the rating bothers me." Toback agrees that "race definitely played a role."

In the past, Toback had to cut two other films, *Fingers* and *Two Girls and a Guy*, to secure R ratings. "The website was the first time I'd been able to get under the board's skin," he adds with a laugh.

"Jim Toback is a wonderful artist," says Motion Picture Association of America president Jack Valenti, who, soon after taking the job in 1966, created the rating board to replace the existing jumble of censorship panels. Valenti has been defending that board against charges like Toback's ever since. The board functions as an independent body (Valenti appoints its chairman); Valenti insists the MPAA simply provides the unbiased consensus of a group of average parents while protecting filmmakers from government intervention. "What bothers me is when directors and producers make an economic decision to bring in an R-rated picture, and then complain bitterly that their artistic rights are being violated," Valenti says. "I count myself the best friend a free screen ever had."

SEAN GULLETTE

MAGAZINE NORMAN

AGENTS OF INFLUENCE

WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

The question of whether a book review editor's first obligation is to his newspaper or to his friends came up in December when a letter offering exclusive excerpts of the unauthorized biography *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, by Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, was delivered to *Los Angeles Times* book editor Steve Wasserman. Wasserman says he mentioned the matter to Sontag, who asked to see the solicitation. Wasserman agreed and sent her the letter, with its promise of scintillating details about her private life. The results were predictable: angry exchanges of phone calls, lawyers, and much posturing among literati.

Wasserman, a friend of Sontag's for more than 30 years, says, "It seemed to me to represent no breach of ethical practice whatsoever."

But his counterpart at a top newspaper disagrees. *Washington Post Book World* editor Marie Arana says that although she's never encountered an analogous situation, she wouldn't comply with a request such as Sontag's: "[Passing on a letter] would just be counter to our policy." Says Charles McGrath, editor of *The New York Times Book Review*: "A book review and their staff need to strive for objectivity and stay out of the fray."

Sontag has been notoriously well defended in publishing circles. She impugned the seriousness of the biography (due out in June) in two profiles hyping her new novel—one in *Vanity Fair*, the other in *The New Yorker*—both written by longtime friends. Other friends contacted the biography's publisher, W.W. Norton, about the book, including attorney and free-speech advocate Martin Garbus, and Sontag's longtime publisher Roger Straus, who has handled the work of such dissidents as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Rollyson and Paddock quickly cried foul. Sontag has "a history of attempting to control events," says Rollyson. The authors defend their book as a balanced account of Sontag's attempts to shape her public image, from vetting journalists to suing publications that reprint her statements without her sanction. One chapter is devoted to her relationships—with women as well as with men—a subject about which Sontag has shown herself to be particularly sensitive.

Wasserman says ultimately there should be nothing to complain about: "It gives what in all quarters is considered desirable, which is publicity about an unpublished book." KAJA PERINA

Susan Sontag got help shredding an unwanted bio.

CONTRARIAN

WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

Courting the press: Veteran newsman Bob Greene

New York's Long Island *Newsday* has a remarkable history in investigative journalism, much of it thanks to Robert Greene, 70, who, as a reporter and editor at the paper from 1955 to 1993, led investigative units that produced two series of Pulitzer-winning articles. But Greene, now a Hofstra University journalism professor, shouldn't be expecting anybody at *Newsday* to send him thank-you cards. "There are a few of us," one reporter who chooses not to be identified says, only half jokingly, "who'd very much like to run across him in a dark alley. Preferably while sitting in a car. With the motor running."

The source of friction: whether reporters should testify to the veracity of published information, as the rules of evidence sometimes require. On January 26, *Newsday*'s Elizabeth Moore and Scott Feldman, a local television anchor/reporter, were subpoenaed by the Suffolk County district attorney to appear before a grand jury and confirm quotes they had attributed to the county sheriff. *Newsday*'s policy, explains editor Anthony Marro, "is to contest subpoenas. We don't want our reporters to be viewed as tools for the prosecution." So the paper (and the TV station) challenged the subpoena in court.

On February 10, with the subpoena under appeal, *Newsday* ran an op-ed by Greene that called the paper's position "elitist and illogical." Explains Greene: "Protecting a confidential source, to me, that's sacred, but if called to testify about on-the-record information, a reporter should demand a subpoena—to show it's under compulsion—and then cooperate."

More galling to *Newsday* staffers, Greene's name appeared in a January 30 affidavit filed by the DA's office, which read, in part, "According to Professor Greene, in the past *Newsday* reporters have testified to published news, without objection....Neither the Society of Professional Journalists nor the Investigative Reporters and Editors Organization support policies which prohibit news reporters from cooperating with law enforcement entities or testifying in criminal matters regarding published information." On February 18, the appeals court upheld the subpoena's validity.

SPJ ethics chairman Fred Brown says, "It's an issue on which both the I.R.E.'s code and ours are silent, but...we certainly don't tell reporters to cooperate—they should be very wary of that sort of thing."

Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, says, "The fear is that in grand jury situations, witnesses have very few protections should the prosecutor decide to ask about unpublished information the reporter may have." And, Dalglish says, "if you're viewed as siding with one side or the other, your credibility with sources gets damaged."

Greene and Suffolk County district attorney James Catterson Jr. have known each other since the late 1950s, when Greene covered a series of corruption scandals on Long Island and Catterson was an assistant DA working on racketeering investigations. Their relationship deepened after Catterson's successful 1989 prosecution of two men who murdered Greene's daughter Lea. But Greene says none of that figured in his contrarian position: "Testifying to published material has been my policy always. Times change, but I don't." BILL VOURVOULIAS

ILLUSTRATION: STEVE BRODNER; GREENE: JESSICA WYNNE

CAPITALISM SERV


Seattle coach Paul Westphal

SPORTS TALK

THE PRICE OF SILENCE

When the NBA issues fines, you envision on-court brawls and obscene language. But in March it was reticence that claimed the punitive spotlight. The NBA—as part of its new policy presumably meant to boost TV ratings—required that some coaches wear microphones during games so fans could hear what they were saying. Two who refused to wear the mikes were hit with huge fines (later rescinded), which led us to look at the penalties doled out by the NBA this year to those who have proved media unfriendly.

Seattle SuperSonics: fined $100,000 when coach Paul Westphal refused to wear a microphone during a March 12 game televised nationally by NBC.

Toronto Raptors: fined $100,000 after coach Butch Carter refused to be miked at the same game.

New York Knicks: fined $25,000 on March 10 for its failure to make its players available at a post-practice media session.

Karl Malone of the Utah Jazz: fined $10,000 for failing to appear at a media session during All-Star weekend in February—in order, Malone said, to spend time with his children. Chris Webber of the Sacramento Kings: fined $10,000 for missing the same session.

Patrick Ewing of the New York Knicks: fined $10,000 on December 8, 1999, for his failure to be accessible to the media. The team was fined an additional $25,000 for failing to make Ewing accessible.

MATTHEW REED BAKER

ACTING OUT

THE OTHER WOMAN

Any movie "based on a true story" takes liberties with the truth—usually to achieve a linear, melodramatic narrative and what filmmakers call "dramatic effect." But when a movie makes one of its subjects so angry she files a suit against its director, writers, producers, and distributor, it produces a different kind of dramatic effect—one involving lawyers and the possibility of monetary damages.

Lana Tisdel filed such a suit last fall against the makers of *Boys Don't Cry*, claiming the film misrepresents her. Tisdel was the girl seduced by another girl, Teena Brandon—in the guise of a new boy in town named Brandon Teena—shortly after Brandon arrived in Falls City, Nebraska. Brandon was later raped and then murdered (along with two others) by two of Tisdel's thuggish friends, one of whom was sentenced to death and the other to life in prison. Now 26, Tisdel still lives in Falls City. The actress who played her, meanwhile—Chloë Sevigny—was up for an Oscar in the best supporting actress category last month and riding high on critical acclaim. To get to the bottom of Tisdel's claim of "false light invasion of privacy," we asked Aphrodite Jones, author of *All She Wanted*, the definitive account of the 1993 events captured in *Boys Don't Cry*, to make the call. As of March 17, the two sides were close to settling the suit, according to Tisdel's lawyer, who refused to discuss details.

LUKE BARR

BOYS DON'T CRY shows:	LANA TISDEL's suit claims:	APHRODITE JONES, the expert, says:
Boys Don't Cry is set in Falls City, Nebraska, a tough, rural town. Tisdel is shown in the film working a factory job and living at home in modest circumstances. She's shown drinking at a bar, along with all the other characters in the film. In general, she is sympathetically portrayed.	Numerous inaccurate and highly offensive derogatory references to Ms. Tisdel as 'lazy,' 'white trash,' and a 'skanky snake' are replete throughout the film, which also depicts Ms. Tisdel as constantly under the influence of drugs and alcohol (and implying the hallucinogenic drug use)."	 Brandon with Tisdel (r) Lana was not a cheerleader; she was from an on-the-dole kind of family. Her mother was on welfare; her father was on welfare. She was lower class, the underdog." White trash, skanky snake? "I won't comment on that."
In the movie, Tisdel and Brandon undress each other—after it's been made clear to Tisdel that Brandon is in fact female—in a way that implies gender isn't all that important to either. The film explores the fluidity of gender identity.	"Further, falsely depicts Ms. Tisdel as being unfazed by the discovery that the object of her sexual desire whom she believes was a male, was in actuality a female transvestite and/or transsexual who is later murdered."	"The reality is, Lana did not stay in a physical relationship with Brandon after she found out the truth. She wanted to believe Brandon was a guy. [When she did discover Brandon was female] she felt betrayed. "
The film shows a tender and loving relationship between two people, both of whom seem confused and careless about gender. Brandon gives Tisdel a ring, and proposes they run away together and get married.	"Goes to great lengths to portray a modern day gender bending *Romeo and Juliet* relationship that simply did not exist as depicted. There was never any proposal of marriage made to Ms. Tisdel."	"In reality, [their relationship] only lasted six weeks. Lana told me there was only one sexual encounter. She said it happened when she was drunk, and she couldn't remember much of it."
In the movie, Tisdel pleads with Teena's killers, Tom Nissen and John Lotter; screams at them to stop; throws herself at their feet; and generally does everything she can to prevent the murders from happening, to no avail. She wakes up at the crime scene in a daze the following day.	 Sevigny as Tisdel "Places Ms. Tisdel at the murder scene depicted therein, depicts her falling asleep at the murder scene, and shows her doing nothing about it after it has occurred, all of which is simply false."	"After his arrest, [one of the suspects claimed Tisdel] was in the car at the time of the murders, which created a witch-hunt for a while—the police, the prosecutors, they were all asking her questions, but they never came up with anything. To put her at the scene is questionable."
The film does not directly address Falls City's intolerant character, but a friend warns Brandon that they "hang" gays there.	"Offensive and objectionable to plaintiff and to a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities in that the plaintiff has and will be scorned and/or abandoned by her friends and family.... [Tisdel] has been and will be exposed to contempt and ridicule."	"Falls City is a very conservative, racist, and homophobic place. [In addition to class bias,] for the town to be reminded that she was in a lesbian relationship—that makes her a target."

ON THE RECORD:

"I'm kind of a touchy-feely guy."

RICK ROCKWELL, ON ABC'S *GOOD MORNING AMERICA*, EXPLAINING HIS AGGRESSIVE EMBRACE OF HIS BRIDE DURING FOX'S *WHO WANTS TO MARRY A MULTIMILLIONAIRE?* THE MARRIAGE QUICKLY DISSOLVED AFTER IT WAS REVEALED THAT A FORMER GIRLFRIEND HAD OBTAINED A RESTRAINING ORDER AGAINST ROCKWELL.

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GREETINGS FROM HOLLYWOOD: Satan's L.A.-based whirling knife gauntlet of artistic castration.

By Cintra Wilson I entered the theater with my teeth clenched, expecting to see another thing I love infuriatingly drained into flavorless pulp by insecure Hollywood execu-thugs who need to stick their worthless, soul-killing two cents into everything and don't know when to shut up and let the artists do their work. But incredibly, it seems that for once they accidentally chopped together the right combination of

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politics after dark

When presidential candidates venture into the unpredictable worlds of Letterman and Leno, they risk discovering that the joke is on them. BY ERIC EFFRON

Political commentators have long bemoaned the blurring of the lines between politics (serious, consequential) and entertainment (fun, frivolous). According to this critique, when our national leaders or would-be national leaders cater to the whims and demands of the entertainment culture—with its celebrity obsession, its detached irony—our politics are debased and the citizens are ill served.

But in politics, as in entertainment, if it works, it spreads, and ever since candidate Bill Clinton got a bounce in 1992 when he showed up on the *Arsenio Hall Show* and whipped out his sax, candidates have seen late-night talk shows as appealing venues to reveal their alleged lighter, cooler sides, especially to younger voters who generally don't set their alarms Sunday mornings to catch *Meet the Press*.

The producers like these appearances, too, of course, since they usually generate pre-show buzz and post-show headlines, plus it can't hurt to have your guy seen shooting the breeze with the folks who run the country or may be doing so someday soon.

"This is one of those happy examples where we use them and they use us," David Letterman's executive producer, Rob Burnett, told *The New York Times* just prior to presidential hopeful George W. Bush's March 1 appearance, via satellite, on the Letterman show. "This is really no different from show business," Burnett added. "We're media, and these guys need media."

It may be tempting, in fact, to dismiss these appearances as mere show business and therefore devoid of substance; after all, what could the clownish David Letterman glean from the candidates that serious journalists who follow their every move and utterance for a living could not? A lot, it turns out. There were some moments during Letterman's Bush interview that demonstrated that the conventions of entertainment, as opposed to those of journalism, may be more effective in flushing out some truths.

Letterman, though good-natured, was pretty tough on Bush at times. He asked him about his ill-fated visit to Bob Jones University, wondering whether Bush had taken any action against his staffers who were responsible for the event. He reminded Bush about his trouble naming world leaders (Bush seemed to shift uncomfortably when it appeared Letterman was about to quiz him, too), but Letterman jokingly asked Bush to name the president of the Hair Club for Men. (Bush got that one right.) But for me, the most telling moment in the interview came early when Letterman asked Bush to explain what he means when he describes himself as "a uniter, not a divider."

"It means when it comes time to sew up your chest cavity, we use stitches as opposed to opening it up, is what it means," Bush answered.

Aside from the fact that the remark is an attempted joke about Letterman's recent heart surgery, it is incomprehensible. If such an exchange were to happen in most straight news settings, the interviewer perhaps would follow up and ask the speaker to clarify what he meant, or just move on to the next question. Larry King might say "Good point" and go to the phones.

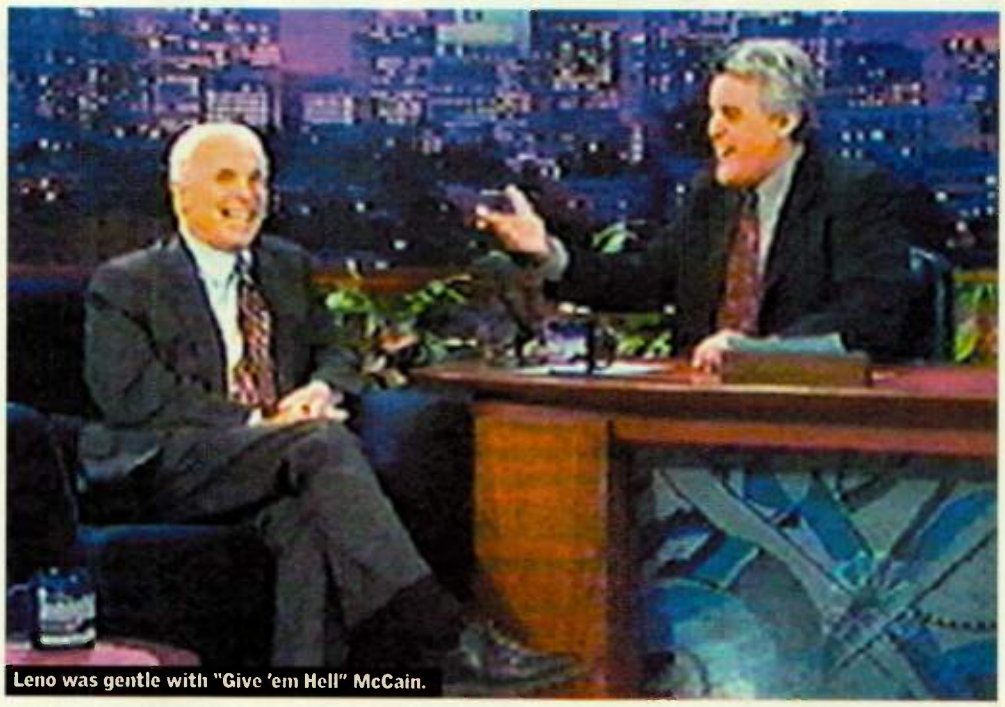
But David Letterman is no Larry King, nor is he Tim Russert, and

Bush gave Letterman new material in real time.

when Bush gave his chest-cavity comment, Letterman and his producer pointedly exchanged puzzled glances, neatly captured by the camera, that unambiguously indicated that they had no idea what the hell Bush was talking about.

Yes, their reaction was sort of mocking. And yes, it was sort of embarrassing to think that the governor of Texas, quite possibly the next president of the United States, was being dissed by the guy who brought us Stupid Pet Tricks. But Letterman's response struck me as authentic and appropriate, and viewers were probably better served than they would have been had the interviewer been constrained by the seriousness and respectfulness demanded by the customs of journalism.

Bush has been derided plenty for his tendency to mangle his sentences, but that generally happens after the fact, in op-ed pieces or by shouting heads on television. On the Letterman show, we were forced to face this Bush trait far more squarely—not only did we witness it ourselves, but we also could participate in and relate to Letterman's head-scratching reaction. It's bad news for a politician when his actions become a punch line for Letterman or Jay Leno, but this was worse because Bush was right there, providing fresh material in real time, participating in the put-down.


Leno was gentle with "Give 'em Hell" McCain.

At another point in the interview, Letterman remarked that Bush looked like a "million damn dollars" and asked him, "How do you look so youthful and rested?" Bush's response: "Fake it." As television critic Tim Goodman of the *San Francisco Examiner* observed, "That's like putting a ball on a tee for Dave," who immediately took his whack: "And that's pretty much how you're going to run the country?"

Pretty much all Bush could do was laugh along with the rest of us, but as a viewer, you couldn't help thinking that he had put himself in a position that impelled us to laugh at him, not with him. Not a presidential act. And you're wondering, If he can't handle Letterman, how's he going to do with Congress or NATO?

YOU'RE WONDERING, IF HE CAN'T HANDLE DAVID LETTERMAN, HOW'S HE GOING TO DO WITH CONGRESS OR NATO?

As it happened, on that same night in early March, Letterman rival Jay Leno was playing host to Bush rival Senator John McCain. Leno was much easier on McCain, essentially letting him talk about whatever he wanted to. McCain did his so-so Leno imitation, joked about how he was voted "Miss Congeniality" in the Senate he often lambastes, and plugged his website. Having introduced him as "Give 'em Hell" McCain, Leno seemed to have been caught up in the McCain surge, which would soon peter out. As a result, the interview was far less informative or compelling than Letterman's, although McCain did pass up an opportunity to make nice to his party's Christian wing by accusing Pat Robertson of practicing the "politics of division." "That certainly didn't sound like an apology," Leno correctly observed.

Still, McCain, left to his own devices, certainly didn't help himself by bantering about bunions, boasting unconvincingly about all the "hippies" and "vegetarians" who supported his candidacy, and making a joke (which Leno did not seem to get, although you can't really blame him) about how his campaign plane was made in Russia.

It's understandable why candidates are willing to venture onto the strange terrain of late-night talk shows. The ratings are higher than the serious Sunday programs; a recent Pew Research Center poll indicates that a fairly significant number of people, particularly young adults, get some of their political information from the late-night shows; and there's nothing wrong with showing you can take a joke. But, as the Letterman-Bush interview revealed, it's a much harder environment to control. Rehearsed gimmicks can fall flat, as when Bush unveiled a "Dweebs for Bush" T-shirt (Letterman often calls Bush a dweeb). Stump-speech-tested soundbites sound even tinnier, as when Bush alluded to his "record in the great state of Texas."

Columnist Gail Collins noted recently in *The New York Times* that skill as a guest on late-night television "has become a critical requirement for the presidential candidate of the 21st century...." True, but maintaining dignity while sparring with sharp-tongued masters of comedy is tricky business. It might even qualify as a Stupid Human Trick. ◘

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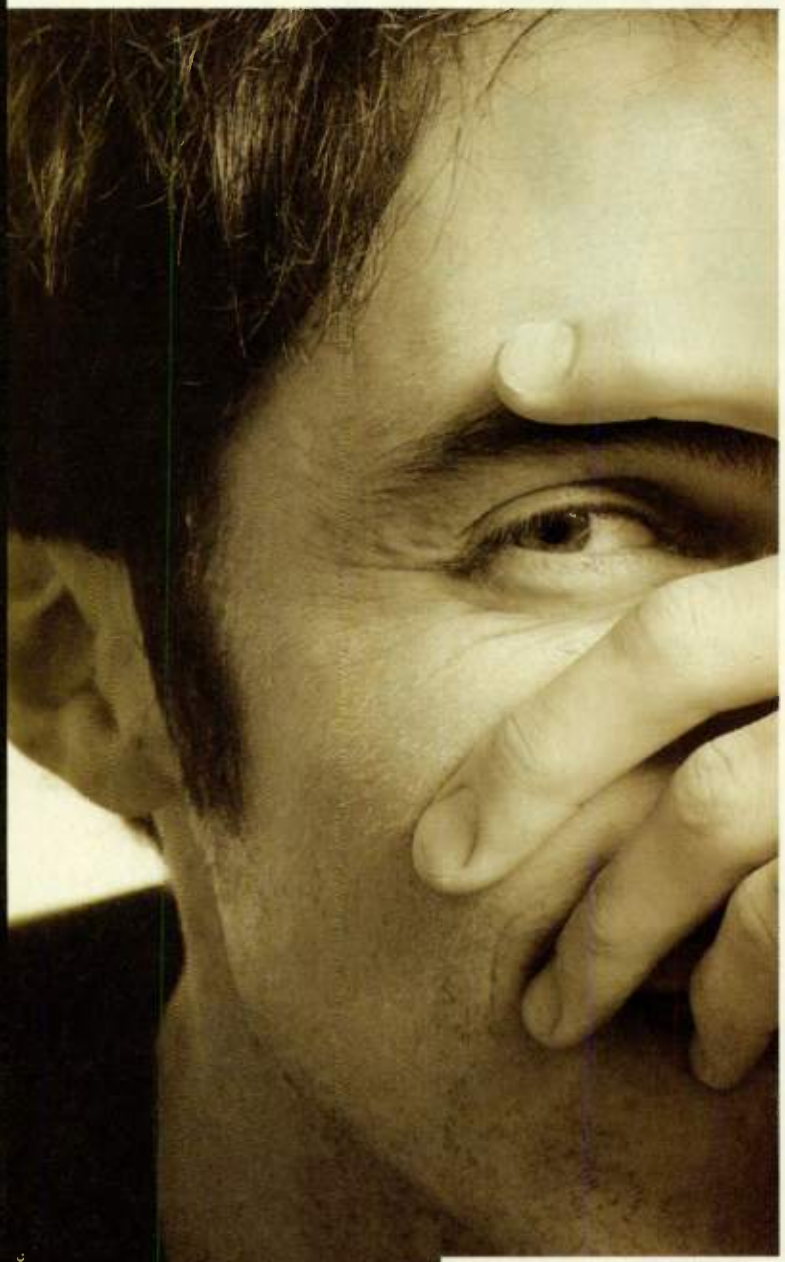

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eating with the enemy

Having insulted public figures for more than 20 years, our columnist never feared running into any of them. But guess who's coming to dinner. BY CALVIN TRILLIN

Around the time Steve Forbes dropped out of the presidential race, I imagined myself walking into a New York dinner party a bit early and finding him to be the only other guest on hand. That pasted-on grin of his, I notice right away, seems even more maniacal in person than on TV; I half expect him to break out any moment in a crazed cackle, like the Mozart character in *Amadeus*. "I've got just a few things to check in the kitchen," the hostess says after introducing us. "I'm sure you two have a lot to talk about." As she leaves the room, Forbes suddenly quits smiling. (*So he doesn't actually have to smile if he doesn't want to*, I think to myself. *Isn't that interesting!*) He starts glaring at me. His glare is easily as maniacal as his smile, and much more malevolent. "Well," I say as cheerfully as I can manage, "I suppose you might be wondering why I referred to you in *Time* as a dork robot."

Forbes, still glaring, doesn't say anything. "And I should say that I might have used the same phrase later in *Brill's Content*, just as a reference," I go on. "And, yes, it was quoted in *The New Yorker* by a completely different writer—someone I don't really know all that well, by the way. Well, I'd just like to say that, for what it's worth, that particular phrase...." But Forbes has turned around and is fumbling around amid the dishes and silver on the sideboard behind us. It occurs to me that he is looking for a weapon.

In my role as a jester among the jackals of the press—as opposed to my role as a serious (well, all right, moderately serious) reporter who usually writes about people nobody has ever heard of—I've been making rude comments about public figures for more than 20 years, and it used to be that I never thought much about running into any of them. After all, most of them live in Washington, and I live in New York—only a few blocks from the Forbes building, now that I think of it, although I go over there only to look at the toy soldier collection in that dandy little Forbes gallery I was intending to compliment Steve Forbes on as soon as he put that steak knife back where he'd found it.

Beat reporters—the beat could be a police precinct or the United States Senate—mix with the people they write about all the time, of course, and that can have the effect of maintaining a sort of governor on how nasty their reporting gets. On the day the paper comes out with their piece on what happened that fateful night at the station house, they may run into the desk sergeant in question

Steve Forbes suddenly quits smiling.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANNY SHANAHAN

and may even be in a position of having to ask him for a favor. A similar constraint is one reason people in small towns are less likely than people in New York to say something terminally vicious to someone who, say, cuts in front of them in a line: They're aware that they're going to see that person again the next day or the day after that. Those of us jackals who hurl our gobs from afar, on the other hand, like to feel that we're free of the unfortunate limitations placed on irresponsible invective by the niceties of civilized human interaction.

The possibility that our insulation is actually a bit frayed was brought home to me last fall when I took part in a panel in New York on political humor. During the discussion, I'd mentioned that the Bush administration was a grim period for people in the political-humor game—no indictments to speak of, a cabinetful of overpoweringly respectable Protestant gentlemen of the sort the president might have met at Andover. For that reason, I said, we tended to concentrate our attention on John Sununu, who had a characteristic that attracts us faster than free drinks: He was, to use the Irish phrase, full of his wee self. I told the audience that Sununu's manner had led Ed Rollins, the Republican political consultant, to describe him as a lesson in the perils of telling your child that he has a high IQ and that his manner and his splendidly euphonious name had inspired me to begin writing deadline poetry for *The Nation* with a piece of verse entitled "If You Knew What Sununu." During the question period, the moderator called on a woman in the back of the auditorium, and she began by saying, "I'm John Sununu's sister...." That got by far the biggest laugh of the night.

Sununu's sister, who teaches Spanish and French and Italian, turned out to be so good-humored that I didn't have to follow my first instinct, which was to jump up, shout "I just realized I left something on the stove," and bolt from the stage. I assume from the discussion that night that she is a broad-minded person who can take a joke about her own family—although I suppose there is also the possibility that she, too, sees her brother as a lesson in the perils of telling your child that he has a high IQ. Still, the encounter got me thinking. If Sununu's sister and I have crossed paths, can Sununu himself be far behind?

'D'Amato' rhymes with what?

In fact, I now find myself wondering at odd moments if he's the portly man who has just bustled past Forbes and me at that dinner party, making a beeline for the hors d'oeuvres. He's not the only new arrival. Although I've managed to detach myself from Forbes, I've been backed into the corner by Billy Graham, who is literally thumping on his pocket Bible as he presses me on where I could have gotten the idea that his own vision of hell is a world in which he doesn't get to play golf with the president.

Billy Graham's teed off.

"I'd just like to say...." I begin.

"You call that poetry!" Alfonse D'Amato interrupts, as he suddenly appears in our conversation. "You putzhead!"

"I think I can explain, Senator," I say. "It just happens that 'D'Amato,' which doesn't rhyme with much, does rhyme with 'sleazeball obbligato.'"

"It doesn't rhyme with the sleazeball part!" D'Amato shouts, pushing up against me like a manager expressing his outrage to an umpire.

That strikes me as a pretty good point, but before I can say so Al Gore is upon me, delivering in that wooden manner of his an excruciatingly boring lecture on why it was irresponsible of me to refer to him as a "man-like object." As I try to get a word in—making sure that the fevered D'Amato doesn't make me spill my drink on the vice-president, because I know how those earth tones hold a stain—I see, to my horror, that Donald Trump and Dan Quayle and Ron Perelman and Henry Kissinger have entered the room and are bearing down on me. Henry Kissinger! Could that one little war-criminal joke in 1981 still be troubling him? Talk about hypersensitive! Desperately, I look around for an escape route. There is only the window.

PEOPLE IN SMALL TOWNS ARE LESS LIKELY THAN PEOPLE IN NEW YORK TO BE TERMINALLY VICIOUS TO SOMEONE WHO, SAY, CUTS IN FRONT OF THEM IN A LINE.

Suddenly, a commanding voice says, "Settle down everyone." The voice, it turns out, belongs to John Sununu's sister. People stop moving toward me. D'Amato and Graham and Gore back off. It occurs to me that anyone with extensive teaching experience really knows how to handle unruly behavior. "He was just joking, so take it easy," Sununu's sister says. "Don't be so full of your wee selves." After a beat or two of complete silence, everybody begins chattering as if nothing had happened, and then we all go in to dinner. Before we can sit down, Sununu's sister, like a no-nonsense nanny confiscating a pack of bubblegum, walks over to Forbes's place setting and removes the knife. ■

Have the media overlooked a historic libel suit brought by a Holocaust denier? Or has the case gotten exactly the attention it deserves?

Eichmann erased

CYNTHIA OZICK ARGUES

One winter night 90 years ago, a painter named Vanessa Bell took off her blouse at a party and danced topless; on another occasion she fornicated with John Maynard Keynes while a roomful of people looked on. This led her sister, Virginia Woolf, to announce that human nature had changed "on or about December, 1910." What she meant was not that sexuality had been unheard of before that date, but that it had at last been admitted to public scrutiny.

In or about December 1961, when the trial of SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann was concluded in Jerusalem, human nature was again changed. Not that the atrocities, brutalities, enslavements, and mass murders perpetrated by the German nation under the Nazi regime had gone unnoticed before that date. But it was the Eichmann trial that decisively penetrated public consciousness with a resonant force so baleful, so far-reaching and acute, that it altered the very ground of human understanding. The effect of the Eichmann trial was to split the century in two: the blinkered half before, the knowing half after. The Eichmann trial was the apple of which, willy-nilly, the 20th century ate.

Yet the trial by itself might not have succeeded in jarring American awareness. It was conducted, after all, in a remote part of the world, in an unfamiliar language, 16 years after the end of the war. What secured its significance was the attention of journalists. The trial, lasting from April to December, was covered daily and minutely in the press. It was broadcast on television. It stimulated a series of famous (some thought heinous) articles, published in *The New Yorker* and steeped in controversy, by Hannah Arendt—whose indelible phrase, "the banality of evil," can, even now, stir up old unsleeping quarrels. And when the judgment was arrived at and the overseer of the murders of millions hanged, when the exhausted witnesses and the weeping spectators (many of them survivors of the death camps) had vanished, no one could say that the trial was done with. Memory and the knowledge of darkness were strengthened in its wake—through films and novels, museums and monuments; and most clearly in the designation "Holocaust," which had hardly existed before. The Eichmann trial was a turning point in the mind-set of a generation. What made it so were the reporters who sent back their dispatches and the editors who published them. Since memory without newspaper records grows pale, one can imagine that if the hugely influential *New York Times* had not fulfilled its public obligations then, the archive of a crucial period of historical evaluation would now be the poorer.

Nor is this a mere imagining. Twice before, notoriously, the *Times* had failed—once in the 1930s, when its Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, conveyed deliberate falsehoods about the Soviet reality, and again a decade later, when editorial policy relegated the news of German persecutions of Jews, including killings, to inconsequential snippets in its back pages.

In January 2000, a trial began in London designed to erase almost everything that had unassailably emerged from the Eichmann verdict 40 years before. Deborah Lipstadt, a professor at Emory University in Atlanta and the author of *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, published in the U.K. in 1995 by Penguin Books, found herself the defendant in a libel suit brought by David Irving, a leading Holocaust denier, whom she had characterized as "a Hitler partisan wearing blinders." According to the court papers, she was prepared to argue that Irving has repeatedly denied "the deliberate, planned extermination of Europe's Jewish population by the Nazis" and denied also that "gas chambers were used by the Nazis as a means of carrying out that extermination." In her book, she charges Irving with misrepresenting data "in order to reach historically untenable conclusions, particularly those that exonerate Hitler." She cites his claims that the Holocaust is a British propaganda hoax and that the gas chambers at Dachau and Auschwitz were built after the war, the former by the Americans, the latter by the Poles. In 1992 a [CONTINUED ON PAGE 58]

WESLEY BEDROSIAN

history is not on trial

ABRAHAM FOXMAN ARGUES

More than 50 years after the Holocaust, the worst fears that interest in the tragedy would wane have not been realized. On the contrary, the last few years have witnessed a proliferation of interest in and the institutionalization of Holocaust-related matters: More than 33 million people watched *Schindler's List* on television; magazine articles, books, and news coverage have abounded regarding the Holocaust assets cases; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Washington, D.C., is one of the most popular spots in our nation's capital; a conference in Stockholm this year on Holocaust education attracted world leaders; Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* generated much discussion in Germany and elsewhere.

This commitment to educating people about and remembering the Holocaust, led by America and Israel but manifest elsewhere, is by far the most significant and surprising development regarding the Holocaust, so many years after the fact.

A far less significant development, but one that should not be overlooked, is the emergence of the Holocaust denial movement. Who would have believed 50 years ago that individuals would engage in "scientific" work to prove that the Holocaust never happened, that there was no particular Nazi plan to exterminate all Jews, that Hitler himself didn't know or that the numbers who died were far smaller than Jews claim?

The fact that few people accept the views of the deniers and that the number of individuals involved in the denial movement is quite small is important. Still, we must not be complacent about the Holocaust denial movement because our concern is for the future, far more than the present.

It is in this dual context—one in which public attention to the Holocaust has never been more apparent while Holocaust denial is nonetheless finding a life of its own—that one must look at the London trial in which Holocaust denier David Irving sued historian Deborah Lipstadt for libel, claiming that in her writings she has damaged his reputation as a "historian."

The question for those of us whose primary concern is how the Holocaust will be viewed in the 21st century is what approach to the trial is best. I believe the Irving-Lipstadt trial is important and the notion that we should not take it seriously is an approach that could have handed a victory to Irving in advance. Instead, Lipstadt and her attorneys prepared a strong case, to present the reality of the Holocaust and expose the assault on it by David Irving. Had there not been a realization that indeed the stakes were high in this case, there would not have been the level of effectiveness in countering Irving that transpired almost daily in the London courtroom, which will serve history and truth well, no matter what the outcome.

Some argue that the trial deserved far more attention than it has received; that by not covering this story as a major event, the media are allowing the deniers to move forward largely unchallenged. But to turn this case into nothing less than a trial of the truth of the Holocaust would have been a big mistake. Should Irving win on certain legal technicalities, it could generate doubt among those not well informed about the facts of the Holocaust. And if the American press had covered it as it would a landmark case, it might inadvertently bestow on Irving a stamp of legitimacy and provide him with a platform from which his views could be aired daily to an international audience.

WESLEY BEDROSIAN

When it comes to media coverage of the trial, I think the media got it just about right. The analogy I would draw is to the amount of coverage generally devoted to the atrocities of the Holocaust as compared to coverage about those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Clearly, the overwhelming picture must be about the vast evil of the Nazis and the indifference of the world to the plight of their victims. Yet it is important to have a measured number of stories describing those courageous individuals who saved Jews.

Similarly, concerning coverage of Holocaust denial, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 58]

CYNTHIA OZICK [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56] Munich court convicted Irving of "defaming and denigrating the dead," and fined him $6,000. He has been barred from entering Germany, Canada, and Australia. But in London it was Irving who brought the charges; it was his contention that she had damaged his reputation as a historian. He has written more than 30 books, many on the subject of wartime Germany.

By the middle of February the trial was well advanced, attracting full accounts in the British press. Irving, meanwhile, had put up a David Irving website, which includes a lengthy and not particularly friendly article from *The Atlantic Monthly* as well as the voluminous daily transcripts of the proceedings. In New York, however, the *Times* remained unaccountably barren of any ongoing news of the London courtroom. The silence was briefly broken at the end of February, when dispatches from Jerusalem noted that Eichmann's memoirs would be released to the defense. But the trial itself was incidental to the story, which focused on the archival history of Eichmann's manuscript in Israel. Before then, week after week, the events in London had gone wholly uncovered, though another trial—the police shooting of Amadou Diallo—was meticulously followed day by day, in conscientious detail. The local case, to be sure, raised imperative social issues far broader than the simple facts of the crime. But even the most philosophical framing of it could hardly maintain that a wallet in the hands of an innocent man, a wallet mistaken for a gun, had the power to corrupt a century's historical truth.

The Eichmann trial was a watershed in its time because it reversed the erosion of memory and became, for the larger public, an enduring source of enlightenment at an hour when the data were already beginning to slip into obscurity. The Irving-Lipstadt trial is a watershed in our time because the data are under systematic and malignant assault, led by David Irving in Britain, Robert Faurisson in France, Ernst Zündel in Canada, Arthur Butz in the U.S., and Jörg Haider in Austria. Holocaust denial is active in parts of Eastern Europe, and ubiquitous in many Arab countries, Syria most conspicuously. To ignore it—to fail to report it, to continue to omit it—is to permit the 21st century to bury the 20th.

Some compare the London courtroom to that 1925 American courtroom where a teacher named Scopes was tried for espousing the reality of science against its deniers. But newspapers reported that trial. In an hour when television anchors and radio talk shows are omnipresent, and the newspaper of record grows fatter and fatter, news of the London trial has been lean. On occasion, references to it could be found in publications like *The New York Jewish Week* and the *Forward*, or, for some handfuls of Southern readers, in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The Palm Beach Post*. A column by Judith Shulevitz in *Slate* generated online discussion. But even taken together, these mostly marginal efforts added up to meager media attention.

Of course, if all your days were leisurely, you might laboriously attempt to navigate the David Irving website to uncover the transcripts. It is true that reading the hundreds of pages of the daily proceedings would be remarkably informative. But no one required us to search out the transcripts of the Diallo trial to learn what was happening there; all we had to do was turn on the radio or open the morning paper. Criminal trials seduce attention (recall O.J. Simpson and the Menendez brothers); they mimic television drama. It is only the lie of the millennium, the lie that overturns human history, that appears to be worthy of the media's neglect. ■

ABRAHAM FOXMAN [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 57] the big story in the world today is that—incredibly—the Holocaust remains a big story. The smaller, but not inconsequential, story is that efforts are being made to undermine the truth of the Holocaust, as represented by David Irving and his suit against Professor Lipstadt. This story deserved measured coverage, which it received. *The New York Times* had two substantive pieces during the course of the trial, which I believe is reasonable, considering that during this same period there were innumerable pieces on other aspects of the reality of the Holocaust. This is a proper balance.

The best way to counter Holocaust denial is to continue to educate the public about what the Holocaust was—through books, films, art, and politics. The Irving trial should serve as an alert that the Holocaust denial movement is trying to gain respectability, and that this effort will continue. As survivors pass away, as generations grow up and view the 20th century as ancient history, one can be sure that the deniers will be at it again and again.

Why? First, because we have come to realize that anti-Semitism has a life and dynamic of its own, manifesting itself in different ways in different periods of history. It has been described as the "longest hatred," and the reason it has survived is due to the fact that it serves the needs of groups in societies around the world who need a scapegoat for social, political, and economic ills. Holocaust denial is the latest version of anti-Semitism, and one can be sure there will be takers for the notion that claims about the Holocaust are nothing more than a vast Jewish conspiracy to win sympathy or support for the State of Israel.

Second, Holocaust denial will live on because in the minds of neo-Nazis and neo-Fascists, the main obstacle to winning legitimacy for their movements is the association with the Holocaust. Let us not forget that in the 1920s and 1930s, before World War II, Fascism and Nazism were accepted as respectable political movements by millions and millions of people in Europe. The taint of the Holocaust has changed all that, and any sign of a Fascist movement is today correctly put down by recalling the Holocaust. Would-be Fascist political movements of the future will undoubtedly focus on finding a way to minimize, revise, or deny the Holocaust in order to reinstate their ideology.

The media, especially in democratic countries, must always be vigilant to ensure that they not be used as a platform by Holocaust deniers. As we watch the Arab press continue to mouth Holocaust denial claims, as we see unrest in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, we know there will be opportunities for those looking to use Holocaust denial for political gain. In this country, media "pundit" and presidential hopeful Pat Buchanan has espoused Holocaust revisionism. We must approach the challenge from a many-faceted perspective. Most of all, we have to keep the facts of the Holocaust high on the public agenda. At the same time we have to expose the deniers for what they are, and what they hope to achieve. I'd say we have the balance in media coverage today just about right. ■

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barbs on broadway

In January, reviewers launched a devastating attack against David Hirson and his latest play. Though championed by audiences and some other critics, it closed in three weeks. A similar fate befell his first work, in 1991. Here, a meditation on the press as cultural arbiter. BY DAVID HIRSON

When asked, in a 1996 interview, to comment on the impact that professional theater criticism has had on his work, Edward Albee dryly replied, "From most critics I learn how long my play will run. That's about it." Any dramatist who has been privileged enough to receive the attention of the press would undoubtedly concede the truth of Albee's remark. It bespeaks the perennially uneasy relationship between artist and critic that exists regardless of the discipline—whether one writes or paints or composes. Albee's career, from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* through *Three Tall Women*, is a virtual object lesson in the vicissitudes of critical assessment. He declares uncompromisingly (and without bitterness) that the reaction to his work is a matter of interest, but not necessarily import, since it inevitably reflects the fashion of the times: "So you're in and out of fashion. I'm back in fashion again for a while now. But I imagine that three or four years from now I'll be out again. And in another fifteen years I'll be back. If you try to write to stay in fashion, if you try to write to be the critics' darling, you become an employee."

David Hirson, hardly the critics' darling

In the past decade, I have written two plays, both produced on Broadway, neither of which puts me in any danger of being considered the critics' darling. Both have become the subject of stormy, sometimes rancorous critical debate. Both have been, by any standard (but especially Broadway's), viewed as wildly unconventional, even eccentric pieces of writing, and both have found passionate exponents and rabid detractors. This is as it should be. It is part of what makes art exciting; it is, as Albee says, the measure of how effective a dramatist has been in getting the audience to think as they leave the theater, instead of immediately focusing on "where we parked the car."

Rancorous debate, however, hardly bodes well for the fate of a commercial play, at least not in an age when soaring ticket prices cause potential theatergoers to pause in the face of a negative review, particularly one from a major newspaper. But to what extent should the commercial fate of a play be of concern to the artist? One might argue that it's blessing enough simply to get a hearing for one's work, let alone the launch afforded by a first-rate Broadway production (which I have had the good fortune to experience with both of my plays, *La Bête*, 1991, and *Wrong Mountain*, which opened in January). Gratitude is what's called for, regardless of whether the work is well or poorly received, or whether it runs for one night or one year. The length of its survival, especially in the status quo environment of commercial theater, is obviously irrelevant, at least from an artistic point of view.

From the point of view of one's colleagues, on the other hand, as well as that of the audience, it is, I have come to learn, quite another matter. *La Bête*, which is set in 1654 and written entirely in rhyming couplets, was greeted with a hailstorm of critical abuse when it opened in February 1991. Several prominent critics immediately rushed to the play's defense, an extraordinary gesture in the normally complacent world of New York theater. Even more extraordinary, a group of 28 luminaries including Jerome Robbins, Katharine Hepburn, Joanne Woodward, Harold Prince, Liv Ullmann, Kevin Kline, and Jules Feiffer banded together to write a letter of protest to *The New York Times* (whose critics had dismissed the play) that urged readers to judge this "amazing evening in the theatre" for themselves. (The *Times* chose not to publish the letter; it eventually appeared in *TheaterWeek*.)

Members of the audience were equally bewildered by the denunciations leveled at the play. One letter to *The New York Times* said, "Reading the reviews of David Hirson's new play *La Bête* was like watching someone shoot down an exotic bird that has magically appeared among a flock of sparrows." *La Bête* closed after only three weeks, its final performance in New York attended by a virtual Who's Who of American Theater. That it went on to receive a shelfload of prizes at the end of the season and won, for the London production in 1992, Britain's Laurence Olivier Award, was cold comfort for those concerned about the future of the American theater, and the role that Broadway seems gradually to have abandoned in preserving it as a vital cultural force.

JESSICA WYNNE

***Wrong Mountain, La Bête*: diatribes and couplets**

Nine years later, the alarm expressed by audiences and colleagues at the negative reaction to, and quick demise of, *La Bête* has evolved into something more like despair. When *La Bête* opened, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, in 1991, it was one of only a handful of new American plays then running on Broadway. When *Wrong Mountain* opened at the same theater, in January of this year, it was the *only* new American play running on Broadway. In less than a decade, Times Square has been transformed by corporate interests into a vast entertainment complex that has effectively wiped out the ideal of a mainstream theater that can also claim to be artistically ambitious.

But is such an ideal worth maintaining? Writing about *La Bête* in 1991, one critic said, "If such a work cannot impress Broadway, then what hope is there for Broadway? There is of course an American theater without Broadway, but there is no apparatus for proclaiming the arrival of important new work at a regional theater; no medium through which such energy can radiate. And that is why the continued existence of commercial Broadway is essential to an artistic American theater."

With these sentiments in mind, I initiated, eight days after *Wrong Mountain* opened on Broadway to reviews that were virtually identical to *La Bête*'s, a series of talk-backs with the audience that I pledged to continue after each performance for the run of the play. Having been besieged, as I was nine years earlier, by colleagues and audience members who were confounded by the violence of the critical response, I felt that an open discussion of the play and the sharply divided reaction to it might prove illuminating. Never before, to my knowledge, has a playwright in the commercial theater invited this sort of exchange on a nightly basis, and no one, least of all I, was sure of what to expect.

Astonishingly, not dozens but hundreds of people, forgoing dinner reservations and train schedules, remained in their seats at 10:15 each evening—close to 700 on the first Saturday. Many lively, penetrating questions were asked about the nature of the play itself, which concerns Henry Dennett, a bitter, unappreciated poet in late middle age who, on a bet, writes the kind of titillating, "issue for our time" drama that, in his view, commands the respect of middle-class theater audiences and guarantees worldly success. For Dennett, so-called "serious" art in America has become a form of pornography, "a cornball pageant of feel-good politics and pop-sociology that allows audiences to experience collective guilt as a form of collective absolution—a slambam catharsis on the order of 'I feel your pain, now where we gonna eat?'"

Since the cultural critique at the center of *Wrong Mountain* engages audiences—and critics—not merely as spectators but as subjects, and even, at various points, as objects of satire many who stayed for the talk-backs wondered if I weren't living too dangerously in my writing. If Henry Dennett's opinions could be taken for my own, mightn't my thesis be considered too provocative or incendiary? Wasn't I biting the hand that feeds me?

I suppose it's inevitable, given the turbulent history of *La Bête*, that Henry Dennett's diatribes against the theater should invite a degree of autobiographical speculation. But Dennett, a long-suffering, unrecognized poet, clearly has an ax to grind. My experience is more complicated. And, in any event, if I were a writer who had a "thesis" to advance, I would not choose to write for the theater. Good dramatists live in perpetual doubt. They create characters who express a variety of opinions, sometimes provocative ones, out of which, on occasion, something like truth is arrived at, if only obliquely. No one character speaks for the author; no opinion goes unchallenged. *Wrong Mountain*, I hope, raises, rather than answers, questions. And the questions it raises are, I hope, existential, not merely aesthetic, ones.

Aesthetic questions, however, may have proved to be an impediment to critics, at least in the view of talk-back audiences. Many believed that theatergoers were far less thin-skinned than professional commentators when confronted by Dennett's broadsides. Some suggested that an even more important issue may have obtained. Neither *La Bête* nor *Wrong Mountain*, it was pointed out, conforms to any recognizable genre. They are, in stylistic terms, "exotic birds," uncategorizable species that tend to be met, traditionally, with either euphoria or intolerance ("the kind of show you'd expect to dazzle some critics, infuriate others," wrote *The New Yorker* of *La Bête* this past January. "'Wrong Mountain'...has all the markings of an equally, if not more, confounding work...").

SHOULD WE ABDICATE TO THE PRESS THE DECISION ABOUT WHICH PLAYS A BROADWAY AUDIENCE WILL ULTIMATELY BE ALLOWED TO SEE?

Unfortunately, a few infuriated critics can be enough to sink a new Broadway play, especially one without a box office name. With the exception of big-budget musicals, British imports, and star-driven revivals, anything less than unqualified approbation from the mainstream press tends to be regarded as off-putting by theatergoers paying $65 a ticket. In other words, a new play in the commercial theater can no longer afford to evoke genuine controversy (when genuine controversy is exactly what's needed to breathe life into the commercial theater). It requires a sort of Good Housekeeping Seal of approval to survive.

NORMAN

Over time, this alienates audiences who are interested in complex, challenging pieces of work. Eventually—as many people in the talk-backs informed me—they stop going to the theater altogether.

As costs continue to escalate, matters are bound to grow worse. Theater (both on and off-Broadway) is likely to become increasingly conservative, more and more dependent on the imprimatur of professional commentators. Few, if any, new American plays are produced directly on Broadway these days. They are developed through what has become a farm system of regional theaters or are first produced off-Broadway in the hope of gaining the sort of critical support that can make a move to Broadway possible. This is safer, but is it good for the theater? Doesn't it discourage innovation and risk-taking, and abdicate, to the press, the decision about which plays a Broadway audience will ultimately be allowed to see?

Neither of my plays, it should be noted, was subject to this trend. Both were lucky enough to find commercial producers who boldly mounted them in the old-fashioned way—out of town for four weeks and then straight in. They are anomalies, therefore, as much for the audacity with which they were presented as for what they do or say. Could this have affected, the talk-back audiences wondered, the nature of their reception?

Wrong Mountain closed, like *La Bête*, in less than a month. From a playwright's perspective, this is not necessarily a bad thing. If *La Bête* is any example, a short run on Broadway, rather than damaging a play's reputation, can, if the work goes on to enjoy a rich afterlife, actually add to its luster—become part of its legend. As *The New York Times* wrote in January, "'La Bete' closed after 24 performances and 15 previews, marking it in Broadway lore as a cause célèbre casualty of critical perception and theater economics."

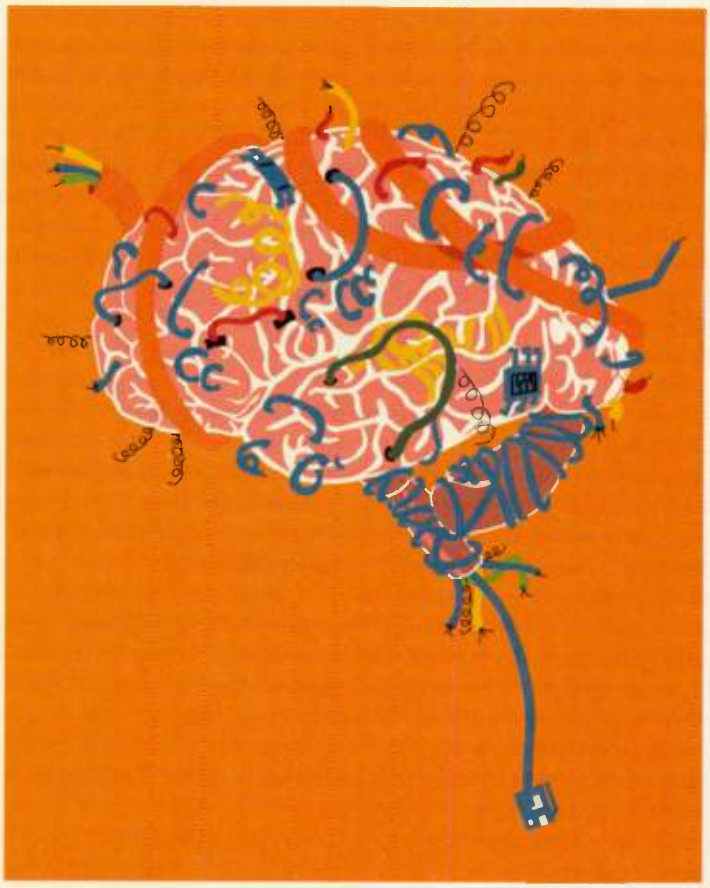
For my colleagues in the theater, however, *Wrong Mountain*'s early closing had chilling implications, even more so than *La Bête*'s. As voices of American playwrights become increasingly marginalized, the rare, hopeful sign of powerful Broadway producers putting their weight behind a new American drama quickly gave way to the depressing spectacle of a critical response that in too many instances descended to the level of personal vilification. The effect that this event will have on an already unhealthy state of affairs remains to be seen.

As for myself, I persevere in my work, indebted, as always, to the many theatergoers, critics, and colleagues who have taken such extraordinary measures to express their belief in me as an artist. It is my sincere hope that the brief (though glorious) lives of *La Bête* and *Wrong Mountain* on Broadway will not deter commercial producers from taking risks on dangerous new American plays. I have no doubt that American playwrights will continue to write them. ◘

Disclosure: This magazine's editor in chief was one of many small investors in La Bête.

closer to godhead

The Web has connected more sentient beings than any technology before it. Is it a global brain, or does intelligence require both connectedness and organization? BY STEVEN JOHNSON



CHRISTINE STEPHENS

A couple of years ago I was on a tour promoting a book I'd written about computer interface design and its impact on contemporary culture. It was, by most standards, an ordinary publicity tour for a title with a modest print run and some "cyber" edge to it—radio call-in shows and alternative-weekly interviews interrupted occasionally by confused two-minute segments on *Good Morning, Portland!* What distinguished this tour was that my publisher also specialized in "contemporary spiritual" titles, so the in-house publicist sent galleys of what I thought was a decidedly un–New Agey book to every New Age radio station, print zine, and ashram in the country. What's more, some of them ended up taking the bait, and so the tour assumed a slightly schizophrenic air: NPR in the morning followed by a Q&A with post-hippie alternative magazine *Magical Blend* in the afternoon.

The questions from the Harmonic Convergence set turned out to be as consistently smart and forward-thinking and technologically adept as any I'd encountered on the tour. The New Agers were sensitive to the nuances of my argument and refreshingly indifferent to the latest IPO pricing. (Contrast that with the TV reporters, who seemed incapable of asking me anything other than "What's your take on Yahoo!'s market cap?") But just when I'd start kicking myself for anti–New Age prejudice, my interlocutors would roll out a Final Question that went something like this: "You've written a great deal about the Web and its influence on modern society," they'd say. "Do you think, in the long term, that the rise of the Web is leading toward a single, global, holistic consciousness that will unite us all in Godhead?" I'd find myself stammering into the microphone, looking for exit signs.

There's only one way to answer this sort of question: "I'm not qualified to answer that." That's the response I gave the first five times I was asked about the Net's emerging "global brain," though each time I thought to myself that there was something fundamentally flawed about the concept, something close to a category mistake. For there to be a global consciousness, the Web itself would have to be getting smarter, and the Web wasn't a single unified thing—it was just a vast, but inert, network of linked data. You could debate whether the Web was making *us* smarter, but that the Web itself might be slouching toward consciousness seemed ludicrous.

Two years later the question is still bouncing around in my head, and I have to admit I'm warming up to it, in a roundabout way. The notion of a global brain wired by the Net has come to seem a lot more plausible over the past few years, and recently it found a mainstream advocate in the form of the journalist Robert Wright, whose controversial new book, *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, argues that the connectedness of modern society is only the latest stage in an epic process of *complexification*, one that started when a pair of single-celled organisms first decided to share resources several billion years ago. A long-standing contributor to *The New Republic* and *Slate*, Wright was nominated in 1988 for a National Book Critics Circle Award for an earlier work, *Three Scientists and Their Gods*. *Nonzero* makes a powerful argument for the interrelationship between biological and cultural evolution, one that will be familiar to early *Wired* subscribers and Santa Fe Institute buffs. Although Wright drinks occasionally from the Kool-Aid of French philosopher/priest Teilhard de Chardin—long the patron saint of the

cyber-rave scene—he is neither a crystal-addled mystic nor a techno-utopian. When someone of his stature made the case for the "global brain," I couldn't help but take notice.

Did Arthur C. Clarke and *The Matrix* have it right all along? Is the Web itself becoming a giant brain? I still think the answer is no. But now I think it's worth asking why not.

TO UNDERSTAND Wright's argument here, you have to jettison two habitual ways of thinking about what a brain is: First, you have to forget about gray matter and synapses. When Wright says "brain" he means a device for processing and storing information; by this definition, any library is a kind of brain, as is the intricate molecular code of our DNA. Second, you have to accept the premise that brains can be a collective enterprise. Being individual organisms ourselves, we're inclined to think of brains as discrete things, possessed by individual organisms. But those categories—individual brains in individual bodies—turn out to be little more than useful fictions. Ants do their "learning" at the colony level—growing less aggressive with age, or rerouting a food assembly line around a disturbance—while the individual ants remain blissfully ignorant of the larger project. The "colony brain" is the sum of thousands and thousands of simple decisions executed by individual ants. Each ant possesses a remarkably complex language of pheromone signals it uses to communicate with its neighbors and to distinguish ants belonging to other colonies. But the ants themselves are little more than robots, following precise and inflexible rules that govern their behavior. The individual doesn't have anything like a personality, but the colonies do.

IN ORDER FOR THERE TO BE A HOLISTIC GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS, THE WEB ITSELF WOULD HAVE TO BE GETTING SMARTER.

Replace "ants" with "neurons," and "pheromones" with "neurotransmitters," and you might as well be talking about the human brain. So if neurons can swarm their way into sentient brains, is it so inconceivable that the process might ratchet itself up one more level? Couldn't individual brains connect with one another—this time via the digital language of the Web—and form something greater than the sum of their parts? Wright's not convinced that the answer is yes, but he's willing to state that the question is "non-crazy."

As he puts it: "Today...talk of a giant global brain is cheap. But there's a difference. These days, most people who talk this way are speaking loosely. Tim Berners-Lee, who invented the World Wide Web, has noted parallels between the Web and the structure of the brain, but he insists that 'global brain' is mere metaphor. Teilhard de Chardin, in contrast, seems to have been speaking literally: Humankind was coming to constitute an actual brain—like the one in your head, except bigger. Certainly there are more people today than in Teilhard's day who take the idea of a global brain literally. Are they crazy? Was Teilhard crazy? Not as crazy as you might think."

Part of Wright's evidence here is that the *Homo sapiens* brain already has a long history of forming higher-level intelligence. Individual human minds have coalesced into "group brains" many times throughout the course of modern history, most powerfully in the communal gatherings of cities. In Wright's view, the city functions as a kind of smaller-scale trial run for the Web's worldwide extravaganza, like an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical that gets the kinks out in Toronto before opening on Broadway.

Here Wright's argument is at its strongest and most original. A city, after all, is not just an accidental offshoot of growing population density—it's a kind of technological breakthrough in its own right. Sustainable city life ranks high on the list of modern inventions—as world-transforming as the alphabet (which it helped engender) or the Internet (which may well be its undoing).

CITIES SOLVED THE SHORT-TERM PROBLEM of housing and sustaining population densities that had been unthinkable in the age before agriculture, but they served another positive function as well: They were information storage and retrieval devices. Cities brought minds together and put them into coherent slots. Cobblers clustered near other cobblers, and merchants gathered near other merchants. In late-medieval towns, ideas and goods flowed readily within guilds, and the proximity between guilds led to productive cross-pollination, which ensured that good ideas didn't die out in rural isolation. It's no accident that the great majority of the last millennium's inventions blossomed in urban settings. Like the folders and file directories of some oversize hard drive, the group brain of city life endowed information with far more structure and durability than it had previously possessed.

Wright's position is that the Web has emerged as a digital heir to that proud tradition, uniting the world's intellects in a way that would have astonished the early networkers of Florence or Amsterdam. To the extent that the Web has connected more sentient beings than any technology before it, you can see it as a kind of global brain. But both brains and cities do more than just connect—and therein lies the problem with Wright's hypothesis.

THAT PROBLEM CENTERS on the fact that intelligence requires both connectedness and organization. Plenty of decentralized systems in the real world spontaneously generate structure as they increase in size: Cities organize into neighborhoods or satellites; the neural connections of our brains develop extraordinarily specialized regions without any master planner drawing up the blueprints. Has the Web followed a comparable path of development over the past few years? The real issue that Wright fails to address in *Nonzero* is this: Is the Web becoming more organized as it grows?

You need only take a quick look at the NASDAQ Most Active list to see that the answer is an unequivocal no. Internet portals and search engines exist in the first place because the Web is a tremendously disorganized space, a system where the disorder grows right alongside the overall volume. Yahoo! and AltaVista function, in a way, as man-made antidotes to the Web's natural chaos—an engineered attempt to

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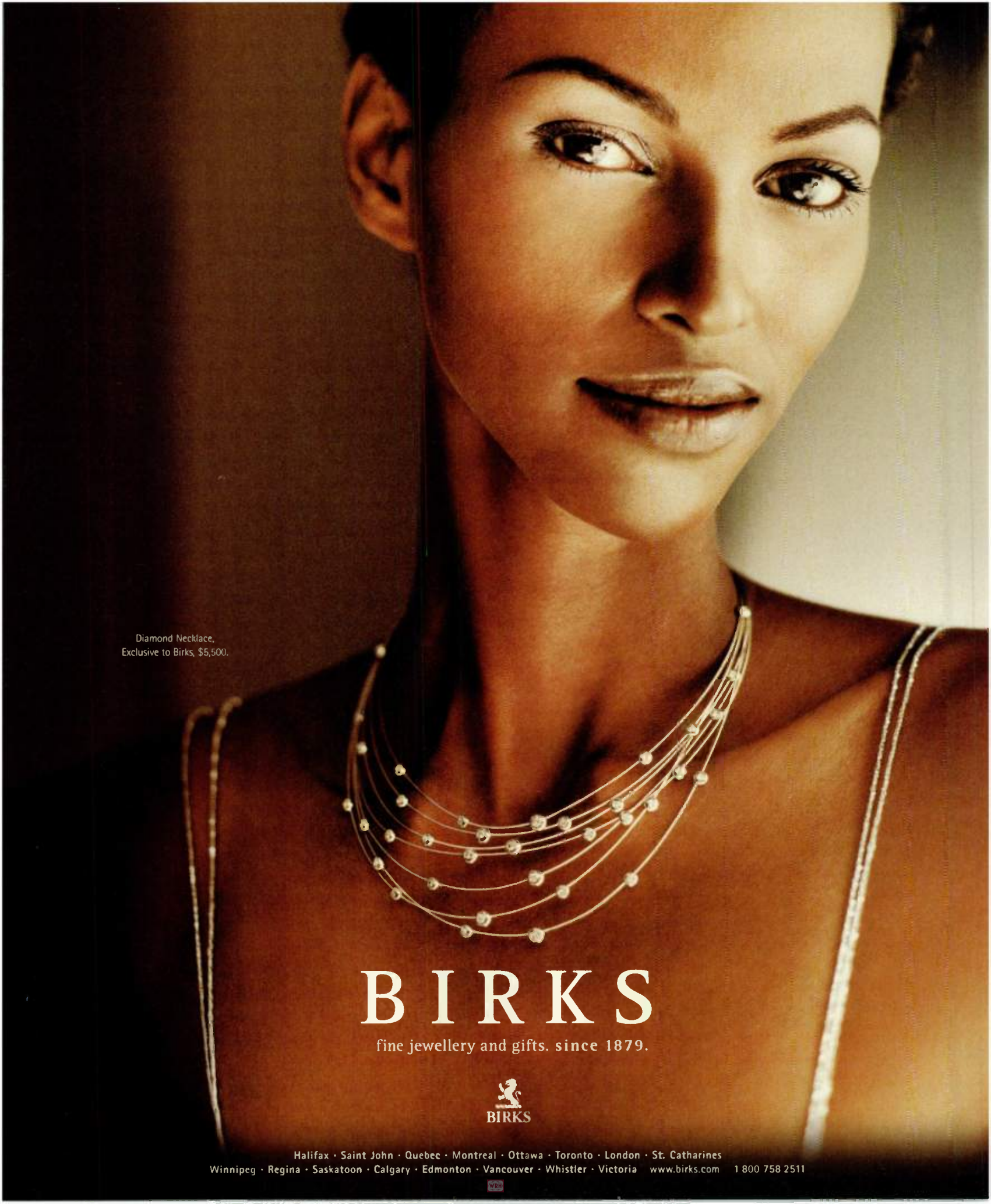
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restore structure to a system that is incapable of generating structure on its own. This is the oft-noted paradox of the Web: The more information that flows into its reservoirs, the harder it becomes to find any single piece of information in that sea.

Keeping to Wright's analogy, imagine the universe of HTML documents as a kind of city spread across a vast landscape, with each document representing a building in that space. The Web's city would be more anarchic than any real-world city on the planet—no patches of related shops and businesses, no meatpacking or theater district, no bohemian communities or upscale brownstones. The Web's city would simply be an undifferentiated mass of data, growing more confusing with each new "building" that's erected. The city would be so confusing, in fact, that the mapmakers (the Yahoos and Googles of the world) would generate almost as much interest as the city itself.

If the Web would make a miserable city, it would do even worse as a brain. Here's Steven Pinker, the author of *How the Mind Works*, in a *Slate* dialogue with Wright: "The Internet is in some ways like a brain, but in important ways not. The brain doesn't just let information ricochet around the skull. It is organized to *do* something: to move the muscles in ways that allow the whole body to attain the goals set by the emotions. The anatomy of the brain reflects that: It is not a uniform web or net but has a specific organization in which emotional circuits interconnect with the frontal lobes, which receive information from perceptual systems and send commands to the motor system. This goal-directed organization comes from an important property of organisms you discuss: Their cells are in the same reproductive boat and thus have no 'incentive' to act against the interests of the whole body. But the Internet, not being a cohesive replicating system, has no such organization...."

THE WEB IS A SPACE WHERE DISORDER GROWS ALONGSIDE OVERALL VOLUME.

The point is that intelligent systems depend on structure and organization as much as they do on pure connectedness. A latter-day Maxwell's Demon who manages to superglue a billion neurons to each other wouldn't build anything like the human brain because the brain relies on its own "neighborhoods" to make sense of the world, and those neighborhoods emerge only out of a complex interplay between neurons, the external world, and our genes. (Not to mention a few thousand other factors.) Some systems—like the Web—are geniuses at making connections but lousy with structure. The technology behind the Internet—everything from the microprocessors in each Web server to the open-ended protocols that govern the data itself—has been brilliantly engineered to handle dramatic increases in scale, but it is indifferent, if not downright hostile, to the task of creating higher-level order. There is a neurological equivalent of the Web's ratio of growth to order, but it's nothing you'd want to emulate. It's called a brain tumor.

WHAT BOTH WRIGHT and Pinker fail to note is that things needn't be this way. The fact that the Web as we know it tends toward chaotic connections over complex order is not something intrinsic to all computer networks. By tweaking some of the underlying assumptions behind today's Web, you could design an alternative version that could potentially mimic the self-organizing neighborhoods of cities or the differentiated lobes of the human brain—and could definitely reproduce the simpler collective problem-solving of ant colonies. Like Jessica Rabbit, the Web's not inherently bad; it's just drawn that way. Modify its underlying architecture, and the Web might very well be capable of the groupthink Wright envisions.

How could such a change be brought about? We're only now beginning to understand how to answer that question, thanks to the insights of complexity theory and other disciplines' investigations into self-organizing behavior. But we're blessed with a number of instructive clues, including one that will seem counterintuitive at first glance: the lack of feedback built into the Web's architecture. That lack boils down to a simple limitation, albeit one with profound consequences: HTML-based links are one-directional. You can point to ten other sites from your home page, but there's no way for those pages to know that you're pointing to them, short of your taking the time to fire off an e-mail to their respective Web masters. Every page on the Web contains precise information about the other addresses it points to, and yet, by definition, no page on the Web knows who's pointing back. It's a limitation that would be unimaginable in any of the other systems that Wright analyzes: It's like a Gap outlet that doesn't realize that J. Crew just moved in across the street, or an ant that remains oblivious to the other ants it stumbles across in its daily wanderings. The intelligence of a harvester ant colony derives from the densely connected feedback between ants that encounter each other in certain contexts and change their behavior according to certain preordained rules. Without that feedback, they'd be a random assemblage of creatures butting heads and moving on, incapable of displaying the complex behavior that we've come to expect from the social insects. (The neural networks of the brain are also heavily dependent on feedback loops.) Self-organizing systems use feedback to bootstrap themselves into more orderly structures. And given the Web's feedback-intolerant, one-way linking, there's no way for the network to learn as it grows, which is why it's now so dependent on third parties to rein in its natural chaos.

Hypertext aficionados have been griping about HTML's one-way linking for years (the hypertext visionary Ted Nelson's Xanadu project included two-way links), but only now are software designers starting to build network systems that embrace real feedback as a means toward a more intelligent Web: programs like Alexa's "Related Links" feature, currently integrated into the Netscape browser; the filtering algorithms of Google, which calculate a given site's relevance based on the number of other sites that point to it; even the "customers who bought this book also bought:" feature on Amazon.com. More encouragingly, though, the latest iteration of XML—the successor of sorts to the Web's common language, HTML—contains a powerful set of standards for two-way linking, and all the straws in the wind suggest the Web industry is finally waking up to XML.

Will two-way links lead us to Godhead? Probably not. But they are bound to make the Net more orderly and maybe even bring it closer to Wright's global brain. Until that time, though, we still have a lot to learn from the ants. ◘

zeus bless america

Taken out of context and mistaken for anti-Semitic, my newspaper column was slammed across the country by journalists who hadn't read it. BY MARVIN OLASKY

I'm a journalism professor at The University of Texas at Austin, a senior fellow of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, and the editor of *World*, a weekly news magazine with a biblical perspective. For the past four years I've also been a columnist at the *Austin American-Statesman*, my local daily. Many of my columns have created controversy in central Texas: I'm a Christian conservative; most Austinites are liberals. Readers are sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, but at least they read. However, what I wrote on February 16 was condemned—although rarely read—way beyond Austin.

George W. Bush—for whom I'm an occasional, informal, unpaid adviser—was under attack because of his visit to Bob Jones University. John McCain supporters were looking for an opportunity to drape one more albatross around him. I chose the wrong time to have some fun with a literary allusion that could easily be taken out of context. My February 16 column began: "The main character in Tom Wolfe's 1998 novel, *A Man in Full*, realizes the meaninglessness of prosperity without purpose and then converts not to Christianity but to faith in Zeus."

Olasky says that what he wrote became "the farce that launched 1,000 quips"

After arguing that a more realistic (for Atlanta, where the novel is set) Christian conversion scene could have cost Wolfe favorable book reviews, I offered a political parallel: Some journalists turned against Bush when he started publicly talking about his faith in Christ. Maybe those who "grew up in nominally Christian homes but never really heard the Gospels," I wrote, were now rebelling against Christianity and searching for an alternative faith.

McCain, I wrote, supplied the alternative: "[A] message with Bush's upside but without the Christian albatross. Instead of talking about faith-based charities, McCain emphasized patriotism. Instead of stressing the biblical virtues of faith, hope and charity, McCain spoke of honor, duty and other classical virtues—good things all, but not a substitute for the Bible. McCain, no threat to journalists' personal peace and affluence, gained the covers of news magazines and garnered votes....McCain's emphasis on the classical virtues gives them a post-Clinton glow without pushing them to confront their own lives."

Had I stopped there, I would have been merely politically incorrect. But I added, "McCain has a similar appeal to neoconservative journalists such as William Kristol and David Brooks. Last week, they noted approvingly that for McCain, 'cultural renewal does not depend on a religious revival.' " I also cited a quotation from *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich: McCain, Rich said, is "the first major GOP presidential candidate in years who is not running as a pious moral scold."

I did not know it at the time, but all three of the journalists I quoted are Jewish. Given the religious sensitivities before the New York primary, I should have selected my three examples to reflect the title of Will Herberg's classic book, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. But I wasn't thinking in those terms, and when someone sent my Austin article to the *Forward*, a weekly Jewish newspaper in New York, hysteria resulted. A February 25 *Forward* headline declared: "Big Bush Crony Blames 'Zeus-Worshipers.' Three Jewish Journalists Scorned by Mushamad." (That last word means "convert": Complicating the story is my own religious history—I grew up Jewish, became a Marxist, and converted to Christianity in 1976, when I was 26.)

Over the next several days, I hit the trifecta: I was slammed in *The Washington Post*, the *New York Post*, and *The Jerusalem Post*, not to mention in *The New York Times*, in *Newsweek*, on National Public Radio, and even on

STEVEN PUMPHREY

FOX News Channel. Some stories insinuated anti-Semitism. Only an article in the online magazine *Salon* explained my use of the Zeus reference. If I had thought that reporters would give me the benefit of the doubt because I have a track record—13 scholarly and analytical books, hundreds of articles, and positive references to Judaism—I was mistaken. Mine was the farce that launched 1,000 quips.

Most of the journalists who piled on over the subsequent week simply reported what others had reported, playing their version of whisper down the lane, a game in which kids whisper to each other a message that becomes more garbled each time. Here's how it went, starting with *New York Post* columnist Deborah Orin on February 25: "GEORGE W. BUSH has a new religious flap on his hands—his adviser Marvin Olasky has claimed three reporters, all Jews, who have criticized Bush, follow the 'religion of Zeus.'" No context.

The next day, a journalist I had named, *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich, struck back: "Olasky...has spun this theory at a moment when Pat Robertson is targeting Mr. [Warren] Rudman, the most visible Jew in the McCain campaign." The following day, *The Jerusalem Post* reported, "A Jewish-born evangelical Christian who advises Texas Governor George W. Bush came under fire at week's end by one of the three Jewish writers he had attacked for following 'the religion of Zeus.'"

The day after that, David Brooks wrote in *Newsweek* that "[Olasky] accused me of worshipping Zeus." No context. Thomas Edsall of *The Washington Post*, speaking on National Public Radio, cited Orin's column and said, "There's a Bush supporter named Marvin Olasky who wrote a whole essay for *The Austin Statesman*, whatever the paper is, and he described the press...[as] believers in the religion of Zeus, I think he said, or something like that. And really what he was referring to were three Jewish conservative reporters."

MOST OF THE JOURNALISTS WHO PILED ON SIMPLY REPORTED WHAT OTHERS HAD REPORTED.

On his FOX talk show, Alan Colmes said, "You have this guy, his name is Marvin Orlovsky, who coined the phrase 'compassionate conservativism,' another Bush adviser. Put up on the screen what he said about three Jewish journalists...'the religion of Zeus.'" Colmes ended his screed by saying, "George W. Bush should disavow...that comment, shouldn't he? We're talking about candidates who are in bed with people who make bigoted comments."

No, we should be talking about journalists who get their information from other reporters who don't even read the article they're critiquing. The real question of character is how we react when confronted with having gotten something wrong. I tried to contact the journalists who had insinuated anti-Semitism or other religious bigotry. Eli Lake of the *Forward* seemed apologetic when I asked him why this became a story in the first place but told me his editor had assigned him the task and he had to do it. When Rich and I spoke on the phone, I mentioned that I live in Texas and hadn't known all three of these East Coast journalists were Jewish. "How could you not know?" he said. I asked Orin about her having taken a sentence out of context and also implying anti-Semitism. She defended her story but added, "It's a tabloid. We have short space." I complained to *Salon* editors about their headline: "Bush's 'compassionate' advisor singles out Jews." The story itself, given the ugly premise, was fair, and reporter Jake Tapper told me that "the headline, like the decision to keep it, wasn't mine."

I wrote letters to *The New York Times*, the *New York Post*, *The Jerusalem Post*, and *Newsweek*, but only the Jerusalem publication has published one. The *Forward* did print a column-length piece from me and seemed decent about the whole thing, as did the Anti-Defamation League's Abraham Foxman, who could have gone for an easy score but instead stated publicly that he saw no anti-Semitism in what I had written.

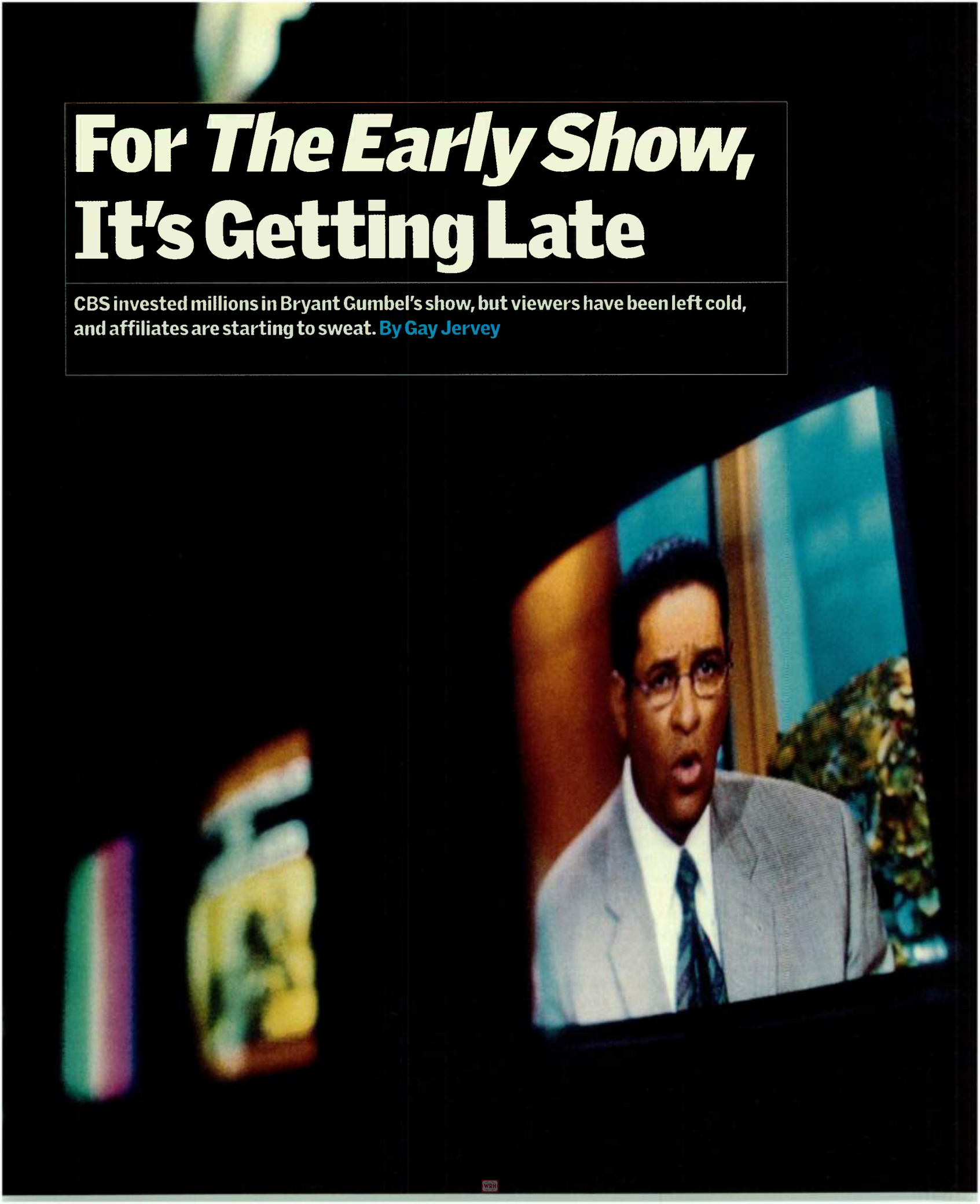
When a PBS *NewsHour* producer asked me to go on the show to talk about religion in the presidential campaign and mentioned Brooks would also be on, I leaped at the opportunity. On the program, I explained the contrast of classical and biblical virtues and noted the Brooks critique: "Instead of dealing with the substance, David has a column in this week's *Newsweek* that just ridicules that whole notion. And this is exactly what a lot of Christian conservatives object to. These folks are not poor and stupid and easily led and ignorant. These are folks who are intelligent but...they are just met with attacks and ridicule. It's an attempt to close off debate, and it's not something that's going to be successful either for the Republican Party or for the country as a whole." Brooks did not have an opportunity to respond on the show, but he wrote to me, "When I read your piece, I knew there was substance to it, and when the dust settles I hope to write something getting back to it." Ironically, the March 20 *New Republic* suggested my column had a different kind of substance than what I had envisioned. An article by Franklin Foer began, "Marvin Olasky was right. John McCain's campaign is crawling with Zeus worshipers....Jewish neoconservatives have fallen hard for John McCain." (I was commenting on largely secularized folks from varied religious traditions.) Foer reported that William Kristol has registered the website www.partyofzeus.com.

My favorite response came from Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*. He had noted without context that I wrote of "the religion of Zeus" and later wrote to me, "My apologies if my admittedly terse summary of your argument didn't do it justice." When I sent an account of other journalists' coverage, his response began with a reference to Colmes's error: "Dear Mr. 'Orlovsky'....I at least took the trouble to read the original article. I can see where this would hardly elevate your view of the media." I appreciate his note but can't resist one more literary allusion: Elevated journalism, Mr. Kurtz, it's dead—at least during a campaign cruising toward the heart of darkness. A version of my original column is available at www.theamericanenterprise.org/hotflash0308.htm. ■

ORIN RESPONDS *Frank Rich, David Brooks, and Deborah Orin were invited to read this column before publication and respond. Rich and Brooks declined. Orin's response:* "Anyone who wonders if Mr. Olasky was quoted out of context should look at his original, February 16 piece, in which he says, 'It's sad that leading journalists are acting as proselytes in the religion of Zeus.' The same piece also asserts that 'a lot of liberal journalists have holes in their souls.' Mr. Olasky's words speak for themselves."

For *The Early Show*, It's Getting Late

CBS invested millions in Bryant Gumbel's show, but viewers have been left cold, and affiliates are starting to sweat. By Gay Jervey



"We need them to screw up," Steve Friedman, senior executive producer of *The Early Show*, says of his rivals at the other networks.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LES STONE/CORBIS SYGMA

The luncheon was breezy and the food a delight. Trattoria Dell'Arte, a popular Manhattan restaurant where you can sneak glances at Diane Sawyer, Steve Martin, Ron Howard, and the Baldwin brother of your choice, was bustling. The gathering's host, Bryant Gumbel, was in fine form that day last fall. Over antipasto, Parmesan, and San Pellegrino, he engaged with his guests—the producers of his upcoming new morning show—and chatted about sports, food, movies, and books. According to several who were there, Gumbel epitomized the gracious host. He disarmed the group with his ease and informality, encouraging them to talk about the lighter things in life and enjoy a glass of wine. Please, he insisted, order what you'd like.

And that, his guests would soon find out, would be the end of that. What the *Early Show* staff did not know as they enjoyed Gumbel's company was that, for the most part, personal contact with their new anchor would end when they left the restaurant. As cordial and charming as Gumbel can be when he so desires, these days he is known among the staff of the struggling *Early Show* for an echoing inaccessibility, to the point that all but his fellow on-air talent and top producers correspond with him largely through e-mail, and, even then, only when necessary.

"The unwritten rule was you could e-mail Gumbel but were to have no direct contact," remembers a former *Early Show* producer. "You were not to call him. His offices were not in the same building as ours....He never came to the newsroom. In one of our first meetings with [*Early Show* senior executive producer] Steve Friedman, people said, 'Hey, we have no contact with Gumbel,' and Steve just shrugged, 'Well, you went to lunch with him and that was your contact.' Steve made it clear that that would be the extent of any real up-close dealings....It was as if they were creating a class system. Very dysfunctional."

"Bryant can be the most jovial guy on e-mail, but you can't talk to him," says a current employee of *The Early Show*. "He just does not deal with anybody. He is very aloof. It is weird."

Different anchors have different styles—there is the bubbling, girl-next-door élan of Katie Couric and the smooth elegance of Diane Sawyer. Unfortunately for CBS, Gumbel's modus operandi reflects a distance and an isolation that seem to shoot ice into the airwaves. So far, despite a new studio widely reported to cost $30 million and a program that many believe to be much improved from both a technical and a programming standpoint, *The Early Show* has had spotty success in finding viewers. Many say that the problem is the visceral antipathy that Gumbel (who declined to be interviewed for this story) provokes. "People just don't like the guy," an *Early Show* staffer says. "I have friends call me up and say that they just can't stand him. They can't stand watching him." Or as Roseanne, a thirtysomething single woman who joined a focus group on *The Early Show* sponsored by *Brill's Content*, suggested, "I used to watch him...on [NBC] with Katie Couric. He was literally putting her down. This guy's got such a bad attitude." Roseanne's reaction upon hearing that Gumbel would be anchoring a new show? "I was like 'Oh, no. He's back!...Now I'm not watching that channel.'"

Roseanne is not alone. Since *The Early Show* was relaunched with Gumbel and coanchor Jane Clayson, on November 1, 1999, the program has scored lower ratings than it did before, when it featured lesser-known hosts and a no-frills, low-rent set. According to Nielsen Media Research, from December 27, 1999, to March 5, 2000, *The Early Show* scored a household rating of 2.4 versus 2.6 for the same time period last year, a 10 percent decline. (Each rating point represents just over 1 million TV households.) At the same time, NBC's *Today* has averaged a 5.4, up a bit from its performance last year, and ABC's *Good Morning America* has jumped to a 4.0 rating from 3.4 (see "A Brighter Morning," page 74).

Numbers such as these—and attitudes such as Roseanne's—resonate with an audience that CBS cannot afford to ignore: its affiliates, who ultimately have the choice of whether or not to run the show in their markets. Some are showing signs of skittishness and were willing to air their concerns during interviews for this story. Of ten representatives of local CBS stations contacted for this article, only one was bullish on the show. Most were openly worried.

"Our numbers are down substantially, and it is very disappointing," says Kathleen Keefe, the general manager of WKMG, the CBS affiliate in Orlando. Keefe indicates that the local programming WKMG used to run from 7 to 8 A.M. outscores Gumbel et al. by a full Nielsen point. "There are days when we get a [rating of] 1.1, and you think how could that possibly be? It is puzzling. The show is better than its ratings give it credit for. It is not like you watch it and say, 'This show stinks.' But it definitely is a problem."

"We all expected it to do better than the program that existed before it," agrees Paul Karpowicz, the chairman of the CBS Affiliate's Advisory Board, who is also a vice-president of Lin Television Corporation, in Providence, Rhode Island, which owns and operates 13 stations in the 50 states and Puerto Rico. "It is not like a golf game when you want your score to go down." He says *The Early Show* will be "a huge issue" when the affiliates have their meeting, which begins May 31 in Las Vegas.

IT'S 7:20 A.M. ON TUESDAY, February 29, and Bryant Gumbel has just returned from several days of hosting a celebrity golf tournament to benefit the United Negro College Fund. In the control room of *The Early Show*, Steve Friedman is pacing and rocking, darting his eyes from 40-odd monitors to a bank of television screens flickering with the smiles, coifs, and ever-so-white teeth of the competition: Matt Lauer, Katie Couric, Diane Sawyer, Charles Gibson, and the talent at both Fox News Channel and CNN. "I can't believe what *GMA* is putting on the air at the top of the show—a 90-year-old grandmother walking across America for campaign-finance reform," Friedman says, rolling his eyes. "We led with the Mozambique floods, and *Today* is doing politics. They have Jeb Bush, Gary Bauer. Politics, politics. It's a tough call. Tough call," he mutters. "But, mark my words, that Mozambique story will be like the Somalia or Ethiopia stories of a decade ago. Mark my words!"

"Why don't we put on [Bush campaign chief strategist] Karl Rove and [McCain adviser] Mike Murphy?" Pitts suggests.

"Get Rove and Murphy," replies Friedman. "I think that they hate each other, and we must have hate on the air!" he says, laughing, as his whirling foot nearly collides with a Diet Coke can on the floor.

At 8:15 A.M., *Today* is running a cooking segment, in which Couric and Lauer are making pasta puttanesca. Friedman sighs and throws his hands up in the air.

"The *Today* show is no longer about the world," he says, shaking his head. "It is about 'us.' Them! It is *Friends*. It's all about them! It is not about the wax museum. It is about Al Roker's exhibit at the wax museum. It's about *them, them, them*! Right now they are popular people, and they can pull it off. But it is a question of how long. How long?"

After the show, Friedman, 53, gallops to his office, a bastion of boys-club memorabilia. Three television screens are constantly tuned to CNBC, ABC, and CBS, and Friedman's shelves are cluttered with baseballs autographed by the likes of the Atlanta Braves' Hank Aaron and Ernie Banks of the Chicago Cubs. Friedman eyes an autographed photograph of the Beatles taken during their first world tour, in 1964, quickly checks his e-mail, and then holds forth on two of the things he loves to talk about the most: Bryant Gumbel and *The Early Show*. Friedman and Gumbel worked together at the *Today* show from 1981 to 1987, when it blossomed with Gumbel and cohost Jane Pauley, and again from 1993 to 1994, with Couric.

Hearing Friedman talk, you get the sense he is caught in a time warp of sorts. And there is good reason for that: Friedman hopes to topple first *Good Morning America* and then *Today*, the very institution he helped make so successful during the 1980s. It may not happen right away, he says. But whatever the naysayers might predict, Friedman swears that he and Gumbel can take the CBS show and make it a winner. Friedman is known for a swashbuckling bluster and street-smart, bellicose style that he cultivated in the sandlots of Chicago. This is a man, after all, who proudly tells the anecdote of smashing an old black-and-white monitor at NBC after he was informed it would take weeks to get a color set unless the old one was broken. He responds to doubts about the future of *The Early Show* with high-decibel answers that contain no small amount of hyperbole. If he and Gumbel just keep putting a good show on day after day, every-

"It is puzzling. The show is better than its ratings give it credit for," says the general manager of one CBS affiliate. "It is not like you watch it and say, 'This show stinks.' But it definitely is a problem."

Friedman then turns to one of his producers and asks, "What did Bryant say about the man outside?"

"There apparently is a man outside who is dressed like one of the Honeymooners," the producer responds. In the next segment, Gumbel is set to interview Joyce Randolph, who played Trixie in the classic television series.

"He is dressed like Jackie Gleason," offers Lyne Pitts, the show's widely respected executive producer, who after some 19 years at CBS came to *The Early Show* last December from the weekend evening news.

"Bryant knows he's out there and doesn't want to use it," another producer replies.

Friedman shrugs. So much for that.

Half an hour later Friedman remains focused on the wall of monitors. "*Today* has the granny walking across the country on, too. Well, if you are going to do it," he says, "7:48 is the right time to do it, not at the top, which is what *GMA* did."

"We passed on the grandmother," explains Pitts.

Not long afterward, Friedman asks, "What are we doing tomorrow?"

thing will be okay, he says. "I believe that we are doing God's work here," he insists. "We will work until this works, and if it doesn't work people will die, and I will find other people." He pauses and grabs a baseball bat from behind his desk. "I want to take this bat and pretend that I am Robert De Niro in *The Untouchables*. I want to swing this bat. Bryant is not the king of morning TV for nothing."

Much as he did with *Today*, Friedman structures *The Early Show* around four distinct segments; in essence, he produces four half-hour shows. The 7:00–7:30 A.M. period is devoted to hard news and is aimed at people on their way to work. "Hard-hitting news and big names are what you want for that first half-hour," Friedman stresses.

Ideally, the 7:30 A.M. slot features a "below the fold" story, which Friedman terms a "discretionary" front-page news story. Then, at 7:40, "you want to do an interview that changes the pace. We have done the news; we have done the below the fold; now we want to change the pace. You don't always want to be throwing fastballs. You want to be throwing some sliders, too." After the 8 A.M. news entrée, the show's second hour is devoted largely to lighter fare for the stay-at-home crowd, including

segments from contributors Martha Stewart, who worked with Friedman and Gumbel on *Today*, and Lisa Birnbach, Martha Quinn, Laurie Hibberd, and Bobby Flay.

Friedman shrugs when asked why the show has not scored higher ratings. "We knew that it would be a long, bitter struggle. We have established phase one, putting out a quality show. We had to do phase one, but that is not enough. We have to prove to people that our show is better than the others. We have got to prove that we belong....We have been tested on the big stories—politics, the plane crashes. The stuff we did out of Iowa and New Hampshire was great. We're proud of what we are doing here.

"Look," Friedman continues as he swivels his chair and trades his ominous baseball bat for a somehow friendlier football. "*Glacial* is the way to describe movement in the morning. Remember, it is our 17 weeks against 24 years for *Good Morning America* and 48 years for the *Today* show." He tosses the football high into the air with a gregarious, self-assured grin. "It is going to take years. We need help from the other guys. We need them to screw up. We need Diane and Gibson to leave, and we know it is *when*, not *if*, Diane goes....We need Katie or Matt to get off their game. Our job is to get the kinks out, so that when that happens, we are ready. We have got to get our act together. There are a lot of rumors about [executive producer] Jeff Zucker at the *Today* show. If he leaves, what will happen to them?...We are hoping that there will be some catastrophe to help us." (Friedman says that he is not referring to any speculation that Zucker, who recently underwent treatment for colon cancer and is now cancer free, might leave *Today* because of his health. He says it is his understanding that Zucker may be interested in moving on to other things.) "We know what we are doing," Friedman continues. "The big thing is, when is it going to pay off in the ratings?

"But, for anybody to say let's make a judgment after 17 weeks...." He trails off, filling the air with a bullish, bombastic huff. "Anybody who does that is f---ing crazy."

Many focus-group members could not name cohost Jane Clayson and were critical of Bryant Gumbel.

AP PHOTO

"I SEE THE SMIRK"

Raucous and passionate, Friedman is the quintessential adrenaline-charged TV producer. He truly believes that his show is at least as good as his competitors'—maybe even better—and that frustrates him. But morning TV is a different animal. Viewers at that hour are loyal. By and large, they do not channel surf. They reward the warm, the fuzzy, and—most of all—the familiar. What's more, CBS has a whole lot of history going against it. Since the days of *Captain Kangaroo*, the network has lagged behind in that time period and never settled into a long-lasting, comfortable groove. Rather, CBS has churned through formats, anchors, and correspondents more frequently than its competition and has therefore, over the years, failed to establish a resilient franchise.

But if you are supposed to attack when your enemy is weak, CBS is doing just the opposite. The *Today* show purrs along like a machine with America's Sweetheart, Katie Couric, flanked by all-purpose stand-up guy Matt Lauer. ABC has the soothing, authoritative Diane Sawyer and the reassuring Charles Gibson. Despite what Friedman hopes, none of those anchors appears to be going anywhere in the near future. It is possible that no one could break this deadlock: not Gumbel, not Friedman, not the expensive set, not the plaza being constructed on Fifth Avenue. But if *GMA* and *Today* are, somehow, vulnerable, Gumbel is the key.

And that might well be the problem.

The 51-year-old anchor is not a simple case. His talents are considerable. He has great interviewing skills and a high comfort level with live television. His friends stress his straightforwardness, his authenticity, and that he can be a really nice guy. Nonetheless, time and again, words such as "arrogant" and "condescending" are attached to his name. Those traits play poorly with an audience that is brushing its teeth and getting the kids ready for the school bus. This is not a time when viewers want to be challenged. And as for public relations, allies say Gumbel's problem is that he refuses to play the glad-handing game so often necessary to cultivate popularity.

"He does not do much to help himself," concedes one good friend. "Bryant does it his own way...and that has hurt him." Furthermore, one must raise the question of just how much race contributes to the persistent charge that Gumbel is full of himself. Many Americans, whether they would like to admit it or not, have atavistic and complicated responses to successful African-American men. To what extent is Bryant Gumbel, with his high visibility and reported $5 million yearly salary, a victim of this? And then there is his bluntness, which some might admire as candor and others say is just plain rude.

To better understand what ails *The Early Show*, *Brill's Content* hired Langer Associates, Inc., a New York research and consulting firm, to conduct two focus groups in Westchester County, New York, that tested the responses of average viewers. Although reactions to segments of the show differed in nuance, the participants tended to dismiss Gumbel's cohost, Jane Clayson, as personable enough but something of a lightweight. Some found her charming, if in over her head. As for Gumbel, participants praised his professionalism and interviewing technique but disliked—many vehemently—his demeanor. And it was clear that they connected deeply with the competition, particularly the talent of

A Brighter Morning

While CBS tries to get its A.M. act together, ABC is cautiously celebrating its own resurrection. What a difference a year makes. By Abigail Pogrebin

Who knew a miserable bride could be so helpful? *Good Morning America* has Darva Conger to thank for its highest ratings week since 1996—an average of 5 million viewers versus the *Today* show's 6.1 million. For *GMA*, that's a 27 percent increase over the same week last year. Diane Sawyer nailed the first network interview with the brief spouse of FOX's sullied multimillionaire, Rick Rockwell, two weeks after their nonhoneymoon.

It was an undeniable coup: 16 million people had tuned in to Darva and Rick's strange union and were now intently watching its unraveling. Every morning show was gunning for the scoop. Darva chose Sawyer and ended up hanging out in ABC's studio all morning, skipping her scheduled *Today* appearance and taping another interview with Sawyer for *20/20*.

"That was an excellent booking for them," says Jeff Zucker, executive producer of NBC's *Today*, "but even with that, they finished more than a million viewers behind us." Zucker is correct—*Today* still dominates. From December 27, 1999, to March 5, 2000, it averaged a 5.4 rating, compared to *GMA*'s 4.0—an 18 percent increase for *GMA* from a year ago. And although Zucker points out that *Today* has withstood ABC's arrows—new anchors, new studio, and the network's boost from *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*—it's no longer trouncing *GMA*. In a year, ABC has closed the gap from 3 million viewers to 1 million, and no one disputes that the broadcast is much improved since its nadir, in the fall of '98, when it had an alarming 2.9 rating versus *Today*'s 5.3, causing ABC president David Westin to call in the cavalry in January 1999.

Sawyer and her cohost, Charles Gibson, are widely touted for bringing journalistic rigor and a charming rapport to the broadcast. The news interviews are edgier, the questions less obvious. When Sawyer interviewed Al Gore's daughter Karenna back in February, she asked if her mother's song-lyric crusade had embarrassed her. When Gibson talked to candidate Bill Bradley in January, he asked him: "Would you be as outspoken as you're being right now about the vice president if you hadn't lost so badly in Iowa and trailed in the polls in New Hampshire?"

Darva Conger (left) and Diane Sawyer on *Good Morning America*

The new *GMA* has smarter writing, better bookings, and plenty of gimmicks that can be clever or annoying, depending on your point of view: the maternity chronicles of Cindy Crawford, for instance; "Lose Weight with *GMA*"; and the E-cave experiment—can three young Texans survive in their apartments for one week by shopping on the Internet? "They're a much more aggressive program and a much better program, and we're now aware that they're out there," says Zucker. "It was the *Titanic*, and it was on the bottom of the ocean floor and clearly they've righted the ship."

The Sawyer-Gibson Solution was supposed to be a temporary rescue, through spring 1999. But 14 months later, ABC veterans say that even Sawyer, the bigger star, shows no sign of moving on. That hasn't eliminated the question of who will take her place, but for now she's keeping her dawn job.

"She is tremendously competitive," says one ABC News insider, "and there's a part of her that would love to stay around to watch *GMA* kick the *Today* show's butt." People who have produced for Sawyer speculate that she enjoys the fact that *GMA* has expanded her airtime and her ABC portfolio. *20/20*, which Sawyer continues to anchor once a week, will always be identified with Barbara Walters and has been overshadowed—as has *Dateline* and other newsmagazine shows—by the game-show craze. "What Diane is doing," says Zucker, "is putting all of her energy, all of her booking, all of her weight into *GMA*....Everything she was going for for *20/20* she's now going for for *GMA*."

Despite her 30 years in the business, Sawyer works as if she were fresh out of journalism school. She has a punishing schedule between her *GMA* and *20/20* duties, and it goes way beyond showing up on time for makeup, which is often the only thing expected of the "talent." "She has a level of energy that I've never seen before," says *GMA* news anchor Antonio Mora. "Through the whole show, she keeps thinking and second-guessing things to make things better."

The only person working harder is executive producer Shelley Ross, 47, a tough, Armani-clad live wire, whose typical schedule is 4 A.M. to 10 P.M., with late-night Sundays. Ross made her name at ABC News covering the Menendez and O.J. trials and is credited with helping to revive *GMA*, but not without some cost to her staff's quality of life. At least half the editorial team has quit since Ross came on board. "She's in the 'whatever it takes' mode," says Doc Jarden, who left to be a vice-president of documentaries and specials for Court TV. "You look at the results and the show's better and the numbers are better, so it's working." (Ross declined to comment.)

"Shelley does remind me of a great campaign manager," laughs George Stephanopoulos, ABC News political analyst. "It's the mentality of winning every minute, hour, day, week, month. She's relentless that way."

Gibson is less hands-on when it comes to the broadcast, but six *GMA* insiders say he's a key to the show's revival. "He is a guy who is always thoroughly prepared," says Antonio Mora, "and cares very much about what he's doing." Mora and others say Gibson is at the top of his game: Besides anchoring *GMA*, he also does a night of *20/20* and occasionally substitutes for Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel. And all agree that Sawyer and Gibson have settled into a comfortable rhythm together—they rib each other easily and seem proud of each other's strengths.

The affiliates are relieved. "It's a much more competitive show," says Patrick Scott, chair of ABC Affiliates Association—and advertisers are anteing up for airtime. "If a show is higher-rated, it's worth more." Tom DeCabia, an ad buyer for Paul Schulman & Co., says, "In the early-morning war, ABC has to be happy considering where they were a year ago."

But the anchor question becomes more high-stakes with every ratings lift: Who will fill the chairs to sustain the upswing? Jack Ford, the assumed heir apparent, is biding his time as a contributor to *GMA* and *20/20*, but ABC News insiders say it isn't clear he can carry the show. Ford declined to comment. The female seat is even more uncertain. ABC News contributors Elizabeth Vargas, Cynthia McFadden, and Nancy Snyderman have been mentioned.

New York *Daily News* TV critic Eric Mink says it's too early to celebrate. "Is *GMA* a better program? Yes. Are Gibson and Sawyer really accomplished professional anchors? Yes. Is the program in a state in which they could be replaced tomorrow and the show wouldn't suffer? Absolutely not." ■

IDA ASTUTE/ABC

the *Today* show. For example, in the sessions, nearly everyone talked about Couric and Lauer as simply "Katie" and "Matt," while they almost always referred to Gumbel and Clayson as "Bryant Gumbel" and "that girl." As 64-year-old Leonard, a retired grandfather who talked at some length about Gumbel's "ultra-ego," said of Couric with a smile, "[I feel] like she's sitting in the room with me."

"I am not a fan of [Gumbel's]," said 40-year-old Joline, who works in sales and watches *Good Morning America*, in large part because Sawyer and Gibson are so easy to take. "At that hour of the morning, I am not looking for people to get hopped on....It's enough getting two kids out of the house. [Gumbel is] nasty, arrogant, just very tough. And that's not what I am looking for at that hour."

More ominously for CBS, some affiliates are starting to say the same thing. "I have concerns about Bryant Gumbel in the morning," declares Sherry Burns, the vice-president and general manager of WJXT-TV, the CBS affiliate in Jacksonville, Florida. "He just has such an attitude. He is just too abrasive for morning. At that hour, you can be confrontational, you can be direct, but you just can't be abrasive. And he is. And I am not out on a limb with this, because if I were, the numbers would be better."

Gumbel's attitude certainly was on display one morning in mid-February. Dr. Emily Senay, a CBS medical correspondent, delivered a report on Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)—a condition in which lack of sunlight in the winter can supposedly cause lethargy and depression. From the moment she arrived, Gumbel was unapologetic in his derision of the subject. And that was not lost on Senay. The first sentence out of her mouth was "I see the smirk." A few minutes later, having explained the mechanisms of SAD, Senay asked, "Doesn't it make sense to you? I mean, we sort of evolved cued to sunlight, and the less sunlight...."

"You don't really want my answer on this," Gumbel replied.

"No, I guess I don't," Senay said.

Gumbel then said: "No, I mean, but in all seriousness and [at] the risk of you slapping me, isn't what they call Seasonal Affective Disorder now what your dad and my dad simply referred to as 'Hey, you know what, it's the winter blahs, get over it'?"

"Yeah," Senay conceded, "I think that that is true. But there are some people who get a really severe form of that. Would you buy that?"

"Yeah," Gumbel quipped. "There are some people who really get outdone because they have a bad hot dog, too. But I mean it's....you know what I mean; it's just the blues."

"Listen," Senay asserted. "This is really a legitimate problem, much more common for women than men."

The segment soon ended, but the conversation kept right on going—and how. Minutes later, during the co-op (an informal chat that takes place between half-hour breaks, when the vast majority of stations are running local news), Gumbel described SAD as "so much Yuppie psychobabble." Offstage, Senay heard Gumbel's dig and returned to the set.

"She's coming back to defend herself," Clayson warned. "Look at her."

"She's roaring back in," said Gumbel.

As Senay joined the group, Gumbel prodded, "And why do we have to have a medical name for [every] little thing that might bother us nowadays?" Cutting Senay off, Gumbel continued, "We have shopaholics. We have foodaholics, right....We have sexaholics....I mean, give me a break. People, whatever happened to responsibility and just, you know what....I mean, you feel bad, you get over it....There are people who see rain on their window and start crying too."

The week before, Gumbel had been equally unsympathetic—and on a potentially far more sensitive subject. That day, the program featured segments on teenage eating disorders, a California woman who had awoken from a 16-year coma, and a congressional bill to wipe out the so-called marriage tax penalty. Following this last segment, in another co-op, the *Early Show* team engaged in some banter about marriage. Although few viewers would have witnessed the exchange, his remarks are nonetheless revealing.

It could very well have been an innocuous, Mars versus Venus debate, but Gumbel had something he wanted to say. It started when Jane Clayson suggested, "[I think women want] a big wedding and lots of little kids." Then weatherman Mark McEwen asked, "What are the two things that guys want?" Gumbel declared, "Single-digit handicap and freedom." Gumbel then went on: "Maybe this is a terrible thing—it is a terrible generalization, but I think it...it may be accurate. My suspicion is that if you asked guys [on the] morning of [the wedding] if, you know what, we can back out of the whole deal. Nobody'll be hurt. Nobody'll be hurt. Nobody'll be shamed. You know, let's just call the whole thing off and get out of here....I...I think almost every guy on Earth would say, 'You know what, count me in....I'm out of this, baby.'" It may not have been lost on viewers—especially women, who outnumber male morning-show viewers by some 3 to 1—that this riff on love and marriage came at a time when Gumbel's own messy divorce was in the news.

A VERY PUBLIC BRUISING

"Some people love him. There are others who hate him," says Steve Friedman with a shrug. He is doodling on a piece of paper, writing his name in childlike, looped script. "Having Bryant gave us instant credibility. Here is the man who won at *Today* with Jane Pauley, with Katie Couric, with [executive producer] Jeff Zucker, and with me. I love the fact that [he] has opinions and is not afraid to express them. Morning TV has become a little too saccharine. And there is no better live interviewer on television than Bryant Gumbel....Everybody at CBS breathed a sigh of relief when he agreed to do the new morning show. We didn't know if he would be interested in doing it again."

"Some people love [Gumbel]," says *Early Show* senior executive producer Steve Friedman. "There are others who hate him and to them, I say, 'Go somewhere else!'"

When he left *Today*, in early 1997, Gumbel made it clear that he wanted to move on to prime time, which he did. In October of that year, CBS launched *Public Eye With Bryant Gumbel*. The program was canceled after barely a year. "What went wrong?" muses a producer who worked on *Public Eye*. "It was the combination of a poor use of Bryant's talents and an overall lack of identity for the show. CBS made the decision that live interviews don't work on prime time....I'm a big fan of Bryant's professionally. There was not one thing that he touched that he did not make better."

The question for the network, then, became what to do with Gumbel. For a while, at least, the answer appeared to be nothing. The word was, if you wanted to find Gumbel, try the golf course. Meanwhile, Gumbel's old pal Friedman had, since November 1997, been vice-president and station manager of WCBS-TV in New York. In March 1998, Andrew Heyward, the CBS News president, and Friedman began discussing the network's morning show. Since 1996 the program's format had largely blended an hour of local affiliate programming with an hour of network- [CONTINUED ON PAGE 128]

ON THE TRAIL

The No-Quote Zone

Before Super Tuesday, reporters on George W. Bush's 727 got as much access as they did on John McCain's Straight Talk Express. So what's the scoop? You'll never know. By Seth Mnookin

When it comes to the press, George W. Bush has learned détente. At the beginning of his campaign, he simply walled himself off. Now, in early March, he is working his campaign plane like a stripper works the VIP room at Scores: He makes eye contact with every member of the press corps, many of whom have been virtually living with the man since the fall, and, one by one, makes them feel special. He asks about their husbands and wives, their children, their favorite sports teams. He has nicknames for many of the regulars: Frank Bruni from *The New York Times*, for example, is Pancho or Panchito, an appellation that got play at a press conference.

The ploy seems to work. When I ask two reporters if they are friends with Bush, they pause before finally answering a reluctant no, and many members of the traveling press (with the notable exception of the Texas scribes) seem to bask in the governor's attention. Bush, after all, is the man who has an odds-on chance of becoming the next president of the United States. And he is legendarily charming.

I fall for it, too. When I first meet up with the Bush campaign, the governor immediately seizes upon the fact that I am writing about the media and forges an us-against-the-world partnership.

And so it goes, right down the aisle. With reporter after reporter, Bush makes a personal connection, often based on an implied conspiracy. He pats reporters' stomachs and rubs their heads.

Indeed, in anticipation of meeting up with the Bush campaign again somewhere down the road, I can't help pausing before comparing Bush to a stripper. It's a snide observation, after all: A comparison to a teacher and a classful of eager students might be more apt. But that's just the point. Even seasoned journalists admit that the better you get to know a person, the tougher it is to go for the jugular. And so I wonder: Maybe I can pull my punches just a bit. Because I don't want him to be mad at me.

As recently as January, the press covering Bush got to speak with him only rarely. They traveled on different planes and buses, trailing the governor around the country. Bush limited his press briefings, or "media avails," to a few a week. For more than a year, this strategy worked: Even while the press grumbled about scripted stump speeches and limited access, Bush maintained his status as the anointed nominee of the Republican Party.

But then Johnny Mac came on the scene. John McCain was everything Bush wasn't: unscripted, quick on his feet, forthright, and revealing. He oozed candor. He dubbed his campaign bus the Straight Talk Express, drawing a contrast to Washington power brokers and political bosses. He invited reporters into his bus for rolling, roiling on-the-record conversations about everything under the sun; the *Los Angeles Times*'s T. Christian Miller called it a "cavalcade of whimsy. A rolling press conference. Hell on wheels." The press loved it. New Hampshire loved it. For a while, it seemed as if the whole country loved it.

A lot of ink was spilled heralding McCain's approach, with armchair pundits either waxing rhapsodic about the man's refreshing honesty or slamming the media for giving the charismatic former prisoner of war a free ride. (Indeed, on the Bush plane, the press and Bush's campaign staff coined a term for reporters who were thought to be under the McCain spell: They've been "doughnuted," the Bush reporters said, in reference to the endless supply of doughnuts that were handed out on the Straight Talk Express. Bush reporters—and even Bush himself—talked about how this or that reporter was suffering from Stockholm syndrome: sympathizing with McCain after spending so much time cooped up on a bus with him.)

Whether it was the doughnuts or the sheer volume of straight talk, from the Bush campaign's perspective, something had to be done. Despite his well-chronicled difficulties with the English language, George W. Bush is no dummy. And neither is Karen Hughes, his fiercely loyal campaign spokeswoman. So they devised a strategy that gave them the informality of McCain's campaign bus without any of the attendant risks, opening up the Bush campaign plane with one major caveat: On Bush's chartered Delta 727, no quotes are allowed. The plane, as Bush reminds new reporters in uncharacteristic moments of seriousness, is entirely off the record. And this is a hard-and-fast rule: When I asked a campaign spokeswoman if I could tell a specific anecdote about when I met Bush in order to convey his informal side, she told me, "Only if you write it so it doesn't seem like it was on the plane."

This arrangement is not unusual. Historically, campaign planes have been off the record, or at least candidates had the privilege of choosing how they wanted to play it. But

A sound operator in Bush's traveling pool waits for the governor to begin an interview in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

ADAM NADEL

John McCain changed the expectations of the press and the public. Although Bush is more accessible than Al Gore—*The Washington Post*'s Ceci Connolly notes of Gore, "The travelling press has almost no access or interaction with him"—Bush still comes up short when measured against McCain, a man who opened his strategy sessions to the press. And so a new tension is born: Will the governor continue to be allowed to show reporters the "human Bush," as Hughes terms it, without suffering any of the risks of warts-and-all coverage? For the time being, at least, the answer is yes.

Now that Bush is the unofficial nominee of the Republican Party, it's easy to say that, as far as the war with McCain goes, Bush won the only battle that counts. But the question remains for future politicians: Which campaign's media strategy was more savvy? Conventional wisdom would say it was McCain's; after all, the senator forged such deep connections with reporters covering his campaign that at least one got teary-eyed after McCain dropped out of the race. It wasn't for nothing that McCain senior strategist Mike Murphy told *The Wall Street Journal*, in the wake of the South Carolina primary, "They used their base, the Christian right. So we had every right to use ours, which is the media."

Although some reporters traveling with McCain objected to Murphy's quote, there probably is some truth in it. Katharine Q. Seelye, who covers Gore for *The New York Times*, explains, "When you engage reporters and treat them like human beings, it always helps. If you haven't built up that relationship, there can be a more hostile atmosphere." Seelye notes she doesn't get that interaction with Gore: "Almost everything he does is canned. Even the off-the-record stuff is not that valuable."

But Gore was in a race with Bill Bradley, perhaps the only politician in America who could make the vice-president seem invigorating. Bush's opponent, in contrast, had eager book buyers lining up by the thousands to get McCain to sign his autobiography, *Faith of My Fathers*.

It was McCain, after all, who rode the Straight Talk Express into the hearts of independent voters and moderate Democrats.

Voters across the country said they liked McCain because of his candor, because he seemed to have nothing to hide. "He makes me feel more comfortable," Kristin Atkinson, a 27-year-old Ohio voter, said on a crisp Saturday morning when McCain visited Cleveland's historic West Side Market. "I like how open he is all the time. We've gone through eight years of not being talked to openly like that." As McCain liked to point out, he went from having 3 percent of voters supporting him last fall to being the most popular politician in America.

But it seems to me that Bush actually had the superior strategy, a strategy based on navigating between informal bull sessions and full-on interviews. Members of the media might have admired McCain, but they still had to do their jobs. That included reporting on McCain's on-the-bus statements, many of them refreshingly honest but politically troubling. When McCain was asked what he would do if his 15-year-old daughter, Meghan, became pregnant, he replied, "Obviously, I would encourage her to know that the baby would be brought up in a warm and loving family. The final decision would be made by Meghan with our advice and counsel." His answer made the news, and the anti-abortion lobby took it as a sign that McCain was soft on abortion. Soon graphic, full-color posters of aborted fetuses began shadowing McCain on the trail, serving as a gruesome backdrop to his boisterous rallies. When McCain said that he had served with gay men in the navy, and he knew this without being told—"I think that it's clear to some of us when some people have that lifestyle," he said—it made the papers, and snide editorial cartoons soon followed. When McCain referred to Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as "agents of evil" in the wake of his damn-the-torpedoes speech attacking the religious right, it not only made the news—it all but derailed his candidacy.

Because of his campaign's no-quote zone, Bush hasn't had to worry about getting sidetracked by press coverage of his off-the-cuff remarks. When Bush belittled Al Gore's intelligence or scoffed about rational people supporting gay marriage, it stayed out of the news. When he made even more incendiary comments about McCain, reporters laughed them off, and then refused to talk about the incidents outside the plane. (Indeed, I can report these comments only because other reporters decided to recount the tales on the condition I not name them in this article.)

John McCain was everything Bush wasn't: unscripted, quick on his feet, forthright, and revealing. He oozed candor. For a while, it seemed as if the whole country loved it.

And without scurrilous details to add flavor and distraction to daily coverage, reporters are left to write about Bush's message, which was the plan all along.

Indeed, when Bush is on the record, it's a very different story from his in-flight bull sessions. No random musings, no free associations. When the cameras are rolling and the pencils are poised, Bush is almost scarily on-message. Take this exchange at a brief press conference following an airport rally in Rochester, New York. Before the questions started, Bush announced that his message of the day would be about education.

A reporter asked if Bush would be able to beat Gore. *"You can't draw votes if you don't have a clear vision, on education for example."*

Did Bush coordinate an ad attacking McCain that was paid for by longtime ally Sam Wyly, who shelled out more than $2 million for the spots? *"I want to educate children..."*

Why is Bush polling better than McCain among women voters? *"The reason is my education plan speaks clearly to a brighter future."*

A half-hour later on a puddle-jumper flight from Rochester to Hartford, Judy Keen, who is covering Bush for *USA Today*, joked, "So, Governor, I'm a little unclear about what the message is today." Bush, fingering his lucky Tommy Hilfiger tie—it's half red with white stars and half blue and white stripes—shot Keen a mock glare before breaking into a broad, knowing grin.

Rewind six months. It's the fall, and John McCain is just another wannabe contender with a small bank account. His competitors include Senator Orrin Hatch, Gary Bauer, and Dan Quayle. Bush, on the other hand, seems to already have the nomination in hand, and he is skipping debates, ignoring New Hampshire, and shoring up his donations.

But the media are getting restless; anointed candidates are no fun. Suddenly, a rash of articles suggests that Bush might not have the smarts to improvise. In a December *New York Times* article titled "Jabs by Opponents of Bush Subtly Poke at His Intellect," Frank Bruni leads with an anecdote about how Alan Keyes speaks about "candidates who seemed merely to repeat scripted lines...." Even before McCain's landslide win in New Hampshire, stories similar to Bruni's threatened to eclipse the aura of inevitability surrounding Bush.

But Bush didn't get distracted. "The Bush campaign made a conscious decision that it's better for him to stay on-message rather than let him loose and risk errors and gaffes," Bruni said after a campaign stop in Stony Brook, New York, where Bush appeared with New York governor George Pataki and New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani. ("See, I'm a

STEPHAN SAVOIA/AP

uniter, not a divider," Bush said, pointing to the two longtime combatants.) Bruni noted that this approach, although the norm in presidential campaigns, can be "frustrating" for reporters. But, Bruni said, the Bush campaign has decided that the downside, which is having "reporters and news stories portray him as being overhandled and programmed, is better than the alternative," which is distracting gaffes and missteps. (Bruni also noted, "I'm not sure it's accurate or any kind of syllogism for people to conclude that because Bush sticks to his script it means he's a dummy.")

If Bush seems like a pro at staying on-message, it's because he's had lots of practice; it's been Team Bush's modus operandi since Bush's first Texas gubernatorial race. Wayne Slater, who has covered Bush for *The Dallas Morning News* since 1993, inadvertently helped shape this strategy. "In late 1993, I went to San Antonio and quizzed Bush on education, and he had no idea what he was talking about. There were some very basic things that he just did not understand about education in Texas. It wasn't a huge deal, but to them [the Bush campaign], they saw he wasn't ready. So they pulled him out of the Texas press corps and he spent several months developing his stump speech and learning about policy. He went to school: He had a whole team of lobbyists to teach him about government. The next time I really got to talk to him, in May or June of '94, I was amazed at how much he had learned," Slater says.

On Bush's chartered 727, no quotes are allowed. When Bush belittled Al Gore's intelligence or scoffed about rational people supporting gay marriage, it stayed out of the news.

"If you go and spend extended time with him, you probably get the same answers, or slight variations on the same answers, time and time and time again," says R.G. Ratcliffe, who has covered Bush for the *Houston Chronicle* since 1993. "Just like they did in Texas, on a national level, part of the reason they started limiting his accessibility was because his familiarity with a lot of national issues was not really there, and so they wanted to keep him from exposure that would have risked a series of gaffes that would make the guy look too stupid to run."

Ratcliffe gives the strategy credit. Despite the surge of interest in McCain—an interest fueled both by his compelling life story and his novel approach toward the press—"the Bush campaign's strategy of limited media access," Ratcliffe says, "kept him the undisputed front runner from January '99 to January 2000. It created an image that he was the inevitable nominee and the inevitable next president."

Karen Hughes has been keeping Bush "on-message" for almost seven years now, ever since she made sure that when running for governor, Bush didn't deviate from his four platforms of reform: welfare, juvenile justice, tort, and education. (Slater and Ratcliffe can both still recite the platform even though it's been more than six years since they covered the race.) The press got so sick of this four-pronged approach that, according to Hughes, in a speech soon after his election, Bush joked that he had a fifth proposal, which was, natch, to institute the first four.

It was Hughes—dubbed "The High Prophet" by Bush (a play off her maiden name, Parfitt) and "The Enforcer" by *The New Republic* in a memorable profile last November—who devised Bush's off-the-record strategy on the plane. When I spoke with her in early March, Hughes was coming down with the flu. A physically imposing woman—the *New Republic* piece listed her as 5 feet 10 inches tall—Hughes was slumped into a plastic chair at the food court of the Rochester airport, her head in her hands and her eyes closed. Thirty yards away, her boss was giving his stump speech. When I sat down with her, her whole demeanor changed: She sat up straight and fixed the ever-present BUSH2000 brooch she wears on her lapel.

"I've always believed in accessibility," Hughes, a former political reporter at Dallas's NBC KXAS-TV, said. (When I read this line back to some reporters, one newsman assumed I was kidding. "That's the biggest crock I've heard in my life. And I've heard some big crocks," he said.) Hughes then told me that the reason the plane is off the record is that reporters asked for it that way.

"Some of the reporters felt that to do a good job, they needed to see him relaxed as well as in public settings, so we decided to do that off the record on the plane, because he has so many on-the-record sessions anyway. And if the plane was on the record, it would be a zoo. Besides, he's not going to say anything much different on the plane. It's not at all that there are secrets; it's just that he doesn't have to worry about choosing his words in a soundbite form," she says.

But despite Hughes's assurances, the no-quote zone on his plane troubles his press corps. The night before my conversation with Hughes, I was in a hotel bar in Buffalo, debating with a handful of Bush's traveling press whether they were being snowed by allowing Bush his off-the-record privilege, whether they were abdicating their responsibilities by agreeing to this arrangement. (I was allowed in on the hotel bar conversation on the condition that I not use reporters' names or direct quotations.) Most of the reporters said they felt uncomfortable with the situation; at least two later said they were worried the arrangement might be unethical.

This concern points to a paradigmatic shift occurring within journalism. John McCain would like it to be a lasting change. On one of the flights in which McCain actually attempted to hold a press conference at 30,000 feet, McCain was asked whether he had changed the way future candidates would run their campaigns. "I hope so. I hope so. I hope so," he said. "It's the best way to get out the message. I know Governor Bush is much more accessible than he used to be and I applaud him for that."

Reporters aren't so optimistic. Many of the McCain reporters who are staying on the trail are shifting over to the Bush camp, where they are likely to suffer culture shock at the lack of access. The afternoon John McCain announced he was "suspending" his bid for the Republican nomination, he invited the press out to his vacation home in Sedona, Arizona, for a good-bye picnic. On the bus ride back from the 9-acre, three-cabin spread, a handful of journalists were joking about the transition they were about to make. "Thank you, Frau Hughes," one quipped. "May I please have another comment?" [CONTINUED ON PAGE 129]

With the power of *The New York Times Magazine* behind her, showbiz chronicler Lynn Hirschberg seduces the entertainment elite into letting her enter their world. She uses her pen to make loyal friends and bitter enemies, and she's not above giving herself the Hollywood treatment. By Katherine Rosman

The Player

"I'm 40!" says the 42-year-old Lynn Hirschberg.

But really—what Hollywood woman doesn't lie about her age? It's all so very *showbiz*.

And so was Hirschberg's 40th-birthday party, which was held in August 1997 at the Manhattan apartment of magazine scion Jonathan Newhouse and his wife, Ronnie, who are friends of one of her close friends. Dressed in vintage clothes (which, except for her underwear, her pants, and her shoes, constitute her entire wardrobe, she says), she mingled with guests—Miramax's Harvey Weinstein, Conan O'Brien, and designer Helmut Lang, among others. David Letterman couldn't make it, so he sent a case of champagne. They are all friends of Hirschberg's in that Hollywood sense of air-kisses and exchanged favors.

Hirschberg is not a Hollywood power broker in the conventional sense. She's not a publicist. And she's not an agent, nor a manager, nor a studio executive. She's not even a gossip columnist. She is the premier chronicler of the entertainment elite for *The New York Times Magazine*, and most of the famous guests at her birthday party have been the subjects of favorable Hirschberg stories in the *Times* or elsewhere. On the beat for almost 20 years, Hirschberg stands at the nexus of the Los Angeles entertainment and New York publishing worlds. Perhaps more than anyone else in her field, she reports from the inside, not from the sidelines, where most of her peers are forced to reside.

Hirschberg's pieces almost always deify or demonize. "She can make your career," says publicist Bumble Ward. She can also knock you down. For all of the people who celebrated Hirschberg's 40th, there were plenty of absentees. And they didn't send flowers.

"Doesn't she have some dog that's like her kid, or something?" asks Heidi Fleiss, the former Hollywood madam and subject of a 1994 *Vanity Fair* Hirschberg profile. "Let's put it this way: If it was another place and time, she wouldn't have that dog anymore. But I've moved on." When Hirschberg savaged Courtney Love in a 1992 *Vanity Fair* profile, fans of the singer-actress released a bootleg CD of Love songs called *Bring Me the Head of Lynn Hirschberg*. After being profiled by Hirschberg for *Esquire* in 1984, James Woods referred to her in *The Village Voice* as "a degenerate scum-sucking pig." And that's the nicest thing he said.

Given her track record, how does Hirschberg persuade celebrities to let her in the door? Charmed by her quirky, engaging manner, even the wary and the jaded can be seduced into cooperating with her—and then are shocked when they read their Sunday paper. Her subjects are also often lured by the cachet of the *Times* and the legitimacy it brings, bait Hirschberg has used for nearly four years to catch some of Hollywood's biggest fish.

NATALIE ASCENCIOS

To Hirschberg, the reason people open up to her is simple. "I think there was a time in my life where I believed you needed to have a gimmick or some kind of trick in order to get people to talk," she says. "But I think the truth is that people talk to you because they want to and they want to tell their story. They want to say what's on their mind, and that's really the reason. It comes down to how interested you are in what they have to say....It's just a matter of how much you want to listen."

Some of those Hirschberg has listened to have become her friends. Her Hollywood friendships are, in part, responsible for her success. In her one on-the-record interview for this story, Hirschberg downplayed the idea that she benefits professionally from her starry relationships. But in the entertainment industry, a fine line separates the professional from the personal. "She ends up being friends with 50 percent of the people she profiles," says Leslie Klotz, senior vice-president, executive development for Ralph Lauren, who became friends with Hirschberg when Klotz ran the media relations department at the Creative Artists Agency, the powerful talent agency. "That's a lot of clout in Hollywood."

THE GUILTLESS KILLER

Hirschberg's career has spanned an array of publications. Like a serial monogamist, she has leaped from magazine to magazine with unusual frequency. She started at *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone* in the early eighties and by the early nineties had become a contract writer for *Vanity Fair*. In 1994, she moved to *New York* magazine for a year, then did a stint at *The New Yorker*, where she didn't publish a single word. By 1996, Hirschberg was writing for the *Times* magazine, for which she has been reporting exclusively since 1997.

Hirschberg gets more access to subjects than almost any other journalist covering an industry in which press coverage is increasingly sanitized by publicists. Her maneuvering, networking, and persistence have enabled Hirschberg to persuade wealthy, privileged, and shrewd players to let down their guard so that she can watch as they hang themselves.

Consider "Gone Hollywood," Hirschberg's 1985 *Esquire* story on *Beverly Hills Cop* coproducer Don Simpson, which depicted an egomaniac bingeing on power. One passage: "Simpson, dark and bearded and dressed in all white, smiles....'People want me,' he says. 'They may hate me, but they want me. *That's* being a member of the club. And without that, you might as well be dead.'...'YOU PRICK!' Simpson is screaming into the receiver. He is half-shouting, half-orating at Steve Roth, a producer and fellow club member....He stares down at a piece of paper and then, dramatically, holds up the typed

sheet....'These,' he says, 'are members of the club. AND THEY ALL CALLED ME!'"

The story landed Hirschberg on the media map. But Simpson, who died in 1996, never got over it, says Kim Masters, a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair* and the author of *The Keys to the Kingdom: How Michael Eisner Lost His Grip*. "He was devastated by that piece," she says. Masters was not present when Hirschberg interviewed Simpson, but she knew Simpson well and argues that Hirschberg's depiction of him was one-dimensional. "Don was a far more compelling and engaging person than portrayed....He could be a jackass, don't get me wrong," she adds. But Hirschberg's dissection of Simpson "was not representative of the person I knew."

Acknowledging only one dimension of a complex person is a technique of misrepresentation, argues Heidi Fleiss. "The cruelest thing on earth is a half-truth because it sounds so real. You write things about a person that would seem right—'I'm sure that's true; I'm sure she would do that'—and everyone believes you," says Fleiss. "It's totally unfair." Fleiss says she was shocked when she read the piece Hirschberg wrote about her. "I remember that right after we were done [with the interviewing] I was going to New York. She said, 'When you're in New York, you should come stay with me. We'll go out and party.' I remember she said some things to indicate that we were going to remain friends." (Hirschberg says that she believes she gave Fleiss "a fair shake.")

Taryn Manning also thought she and Hirschberg were friends. Manning, a 21-year-old actress, was prominently featured in "Desperate to Seem 16," Hirschberg's story of actresses trying to make it in a *Dawson's Creek* world. In the September 5, 1999, *Times* magazine cover story, Manning and her contemporaries were portrayed as starstruck, empty-headed fame seekers.

When she approached Manning about the story, Hirschberg played to the actress's ambition. "'This article is going to be very good for your career,'" Manning recalls Hirschberg having said to both her and her manager. The writer told the actress that her face would appear on the magazine's cover, that it would be great exposure; Hirschberg emphasized the *Times* magazine's huge circulation, which is more than 1.6 million. Manning agreed to the interview. "I thought it was going to be this awesome article about the process of trying to 'make it,'" she says.

At no point did Hirschberg give the actress any impression that she would be mocked in the article. Even after Hirschberg returned to New York, Manning says, Hirschberg kept up the guise of friendship. "She called and said she missed me," Manning says.

And then, on the morning of September 5, the article appeared.

Manning dashed from her Hollywood apartment and drove to a newsstand. After buying *The New York Times*, she ducked into an alley "so I could have some privacy when I read it." She skimmed the piece looking for the parts about her. When she began reading how Hirschberg had characterized her and their conversations, "I was stunned. *Stunned*," she says. "She made me look like a cocky little girl, when, really...I work so hard. *So* hard."

Manning claims that Hirschberg fabricated some of the quotes. For example, Hirschberg quoted Manning as saying that her best friend and roommate, Paloma, was jealous of Manning's success. Hirschberg wrote: "'She cries,' says Taryn....'She sees all the scripts I have at home, and she's so talented, and she cries.' Taryn walks down the hall toward Paloma's room. 'If only you looked 15,' Taryn says, standing in her doorway." The passage is pure fiction, Manning declares. "I would have never said that," says Manning. "I did not say that." Hirschberg replies, "There's no question she said that," and adds, "I was genuinely fond of [Manning]."

It's telling that most of Hirschberg's hard-hitting stories take down easy targets—those who are widely disliked in Hollywood, those who are on their way out, or those who are simply powerless. After all, it's not as risky as it might appear to rip apart a show-business executive who is unpopular in Hollywood circles and whose career is rumored to be on the verge of collapse.

Witness the deconstruction (and possible self-destruction) of Jamie Tarses, the youngest person and, at that point, the only woman to be president of a network entertainment division—in Tarses's case, at ABC. "Jamie Tarses' Fall, as Scheduled," a *Times* magazine cover story in July 1997, was a brilliant reporting feat: Hirschberg captured a Hollywood player at a make-or-break career moment. For an executive in charge of a network's entertainment lineup, Tarses came off as panicked and insecure.

Hirschberg described Tarses as a flirt and a girly-girl who finds that charming the ABC executives gets her only so far: Tarses "runs paranoid scenarios through her mind, over and over. Whom to believe, what to believe—it's all exhausting. 'I only know how to be myself,' Tarses says, as she sits at her desk and undoes her hair and then gathers the curls up again, squeezing them through a rubber band. Then she adds: 'I have never had a mentor, and sometimes, like today, I think that would really be helpful. Men have an easier time having mentors. I always felt I had to do it on my own....Sometimes I wish they would just fire me,' she says later. 'It would be so much easier.'" (Tarses declined to comment for this story.)

Tarantino says Hirschberg's *Pulp Fiction* piece was ahead of the pack.

In the month following its publication, 65 media outlets wrote about Tarses's lambasting, and *Times* columnist Maureen Dowd devoted a column to it. Hirschberg calls the article "an accurate representation of [Tarses] at that time." Tarses resigned from ABC in August 1999.

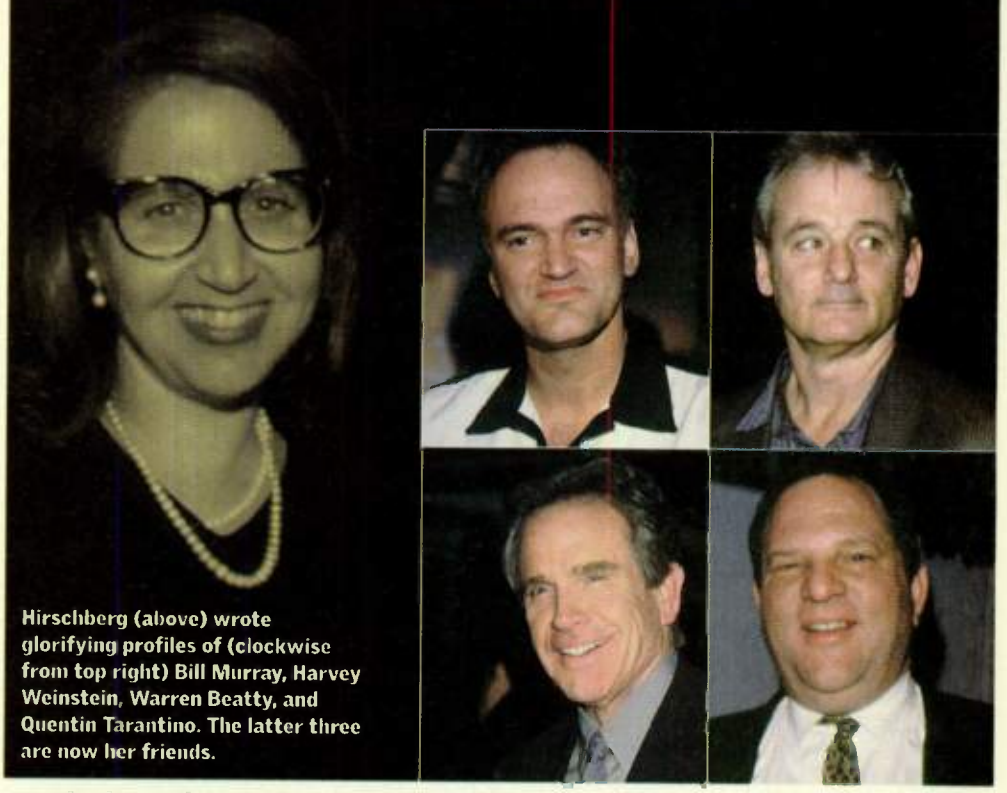
Supporters of Hirschberg agree that her pieces are extreme, but they don't believe that the writer approaches her reporting with preconceived notions of how the story might turn out. "There are puff pieces and then there are hard-hitting pieces," says Kurt Andersen, who was the editor in chief of *New York* when Hirschberg wrote there and who agreed to an interview for this article on the condition that it explicitly state that he spoke only on the record. "The tough ones hit right

NORMAN

between the eyes and get more attention, that's true," he continues. "But it's false to think it's a choice between a puff piece or a hatchet job."

Hirschberg points out that those who complain about how they are portrayed in her work have biases. "People often have trouble reading about themselves," she says. Besides, some show-business insiders applaud many of Hirschberg's efforts to expose empty suits and vacuousness in Hollywood. "Her deconstruction of Jamie Tarses," said Andy Borowitz, the humorist and screenwriter, in an e-mail interview, "is a piece of journalism for which many people in the entertainment industry will be eternally grateful." Hirschberg's only goal, she says, is to "cover culture seriously."

Hirschberg writes powerful stories that either deify or demonize. "She can make your career," says publicist Bumble Ward.



Hirschberg (above) wrote glorifying profiles of (clockwise from top right) Bill Murray, Harvey Weinstein, Warren Beatty, and Quentin Tarantino. The latter three are now her friends.

HIRSCHBERG: PATRICK MCMULLAN; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NINA PROMMER/GLOBE PHOTOS; STEVE GRANITZ/RETNA; RETNA; ANTHONY DIXON/LFI

HIRSCHBERG TELLS STORIES

Although Hirschberg says her role as a journalist places her in a constant search for truth, she's not afraid to give her own life the Hollywood treatment. Take, for example, her account of how she got her start in the world of magazine journalism.

In the early eighties, while living in Berkeley, California, Hirschberg says, she sent numerous story pitches to Betsy Carter, then a senior-level editor at *Esquire*. Carter repeatedly turned down her ideas.

But one day, Hirschberg says, Carter told her to write a story "on spec" and that she might buy it if she liked it. Hirschberg says she chose to write about the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon. "I went to Vegas on my own nickel, and I conned everyone into believing I was on assignment for *Esquire*," Hirschberg says.

Hirschberg says she turned the piece in and Carter rejected it. (Carter says she doesn't remember the details of her early correspondence with Hirschberg.) "I sent it to 20 other editors," Hirschberg continues, "and one day I got a call from David Rosenthal," then the assistant managing editor of *Rolling Stone* and now the publisher of Simon & Schuster's adult-trade division. He told her he wanted to buy her piece for $1,000, "which seemed like an IPO in those days," she says.

Soon thereafter, Hirschberg says, Rosenthal offered her a full-time job at *Rolling Stone*. She bought a one-way ticket to New York—"I threw up on the plane," she says with a laugh—and showed up at *Rolling Stone* to start her job.

When she got there, Hirschberg recalls, Rosenthal asked, "'What job?'....It turns out he had offered the same job to every reasonably attractive writer in New York...but the job didn't exist."

It's a made-for-the-movies story, full of setbacks, plot twists, and triumphs. But it is one that Rosenthal calls "absolute bulls--t." He says he assigned Hirschberg the piece and that she did not bring it to him. And, he adds, he never offered her a full-time staff job. "The version of events is way, way off," Rosenthal says. "It's really wrong." When told the story had come from Hirschberg, Rosenthal said only, "It's no reflection on one's veracity, only one's memory. And I trust mine." Hirschberg says she stands by her recollection.

Hirschberg has told fanciful tales about herself to subjects while interviewing them. Dallas Garred, an advertising creative director, remembers that when Hirschberg profiled him for a 1986 *Esquire* piece called "The Office," he "found her life so fascinating that she kept having to turn off the tape recorder to answer [my] questions about her life."

Certainly, the life that she told Garred about is fascinating. She told him about a car accident she was in that occurred in Eastern Europe with her ex-fiancé—"I think he was an Olympic fencer," Garred recalls, "and I think there was a car accident that [Hirschberg] was involved in when they were engaged or something and she was almost killed and her mother came and somehow spoke the language spoken there; she was asking [the Olympic fencer] to punch her in the face or something to knock her out because she was in so much pain. It was unbelievable....I think he kind of left her while she was in the hospital and then her mother came to take care of her."

The story recalls others she has told in the past. Three sources relate that they have heard Hirschberg say she was once engaged to an Olympian. But such friends as the director Quentin Tarantino and the Hollywood manager and producer Gavin Polone—who says he has talked to her on the phone at least once a day for the past 11 years—say that they have no knowledge of her ever being engaged.

Also, three sources who have known Hirschberg for more than ten years say that it was her mother—Stella Kleinrock, a Los Angeles psychologist—who was in the car accident in Eastern Europe, not Hirschberg. Adam Moss, the editor of *The New York Times Magazine*, who edited the piece about Dallas Garred while he was at *Esquire*, says, "I do not in anyway condone misrepresentation in the getting of a story" and adds that "no one has ever suggested to me that [Hirschberg] has misrepresented herself on any story I have worked on."

Hirschberg has embellished her educational background as well. "I believe that she went to Harvard for a while," says Moss. "I don't know the details and I don't know exactly how long she was there, but I do know that she graduated from Berkeley." Three additional sources say Hirschberg has told them that she attended Harvard before transferring to and then graduating from the University of California, Berkeley.

Officials at Harvard, however, have no record of a student named Lynn Hirschberg. She did attend Berkeley from August 1975 until December 1979, according to Berkeley's Office of the Registrar, but did not receive a degree. When asked if she had claimed to have attended Harvard, Hirschberg's only comment is "I went to Berkeley." Even when told that officials at Berkeley say she did not graduate, Hirschberg insists that she did.

Moss says he has no reason to believe allegations of Hirschberg's lying. "I have never known Lynn to be untruthful, nontruthful, whatever the word is. I've never known Lynn to fib, to lie. Others may have had that experience; I haven't. All I really care about in this job is that the stuff I publish is true," Moss declares. "I have probably published more work of Lynn's than any other editor, and not one word has ever been doubted."

Hirschberg says, "I stand by the veracity of everything I've written." Still, she adds, she regrets having misrepresented herself in the past. "I made mistakes about ways that I behaved with [interview subjects] a long time ago, and it was based largely on my own feelings of insecurity—about being a journalist and about...being able to get the job done. They were errors in judgment," she says. "Although I make mistakes, now I think I make less of them. And I try harder to be true to whatever situation I'm in without inventing something to make someone like me."

EYES WIDE SHUT

There is no industry more controlling of its image in the press than Hollywood. Actors and executives arm themselves with handlers whose job it is to seek and deliver the kind of coverage that can easily be mistaken for press releases issued by the marketing limb of movie studios. Publicists know that writers make names for themselves by skewering the famous, and Hirschberg's byline is well known. "I don't think there's a subject alive of Lynn's who doesn't know her body of work before they agree to participate in the story with her," says Moss. "And they know she tells it like she sees it....I think people go into stories with her—or they ought to, anyway—with their eyes open."

But then what enables Hirschberg to gain entrée to Hollywood's private worlds? First, Hirschberg is the entertainment community's gatekeeper to the *Times* magazine. "There is nothing more prestigious than being profiled in *The New York Times Magazine*, especially when you're waging a publicity campaign," says Gigi Semone, director of publicity for Disney's New York office. Semone worked with Hirschberg when she profiled Bill Murray in the *Times* magazine when he was starring in *Rushmore*. (According to Hirschberg, she also persuaded *The New York Observer* and *GQ* to cover the film.) As far as generating buzz and gaining credibility for a film, says Semone, the *Times* magazine "is it."

The power of the *Times* led Michael Ovitz (much to his later regret) to let Hirschberg through the door, says a movie industry executive. Ovitz, the former head of CAA, likely felt the imprimatur of the *Times* magazine would help launch his new management company, Artists Management Group, according to the executive. "I don't think Mike Ovitz was going to get on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* any other way....She played him for a fool." The story portrayed Ovitz as childish, vindictive, and insecure. Hirschberg wrote: "When a prospective employee, a young, talented Hollywood agent with a solid client list, asked Ovitz recently why he should come to work for him, Ovitz replied, 'Because I have a Picasso and you don't.' Perhaps he was joking but probably he was not....Ovitz's paintings are also meant to be advertisements. These paintings reassure him that he is who he thinks he is—that he is Big." (Ovitz declined to comment for this article.)

Vanity, which may have played a role in Ovitz's cooperation with Hirschberg, often helps Hirschberg's cause. "In Hollywood, people think that they're endlessly charming and that they can be the one who won over Lynn Hirschberg," explains another journalist who has covered the entertainment industry. "These are people who have big egos," adds the movie executive, "and they like to think they can control her. She gives the impression of being controllable."

To subjects, Hirschberg comes off as a nonthreatening reporter. "She infiltrates people's lives by seeming empathetic," says one source who has watched her at work. "She brings her dog with her everywhere, and she just seems like this harmless, kooky woman with her dog. People think she's a character and forget about her shrewd eye."

Leslie Moonves, the CEO and president of CBS Television, whom Hirschberg glowingly profiled for *New York* magazine in 1995, says that Hirschberg gets unusual access because of her intelligence and preparation. Moonves allowed Hirschberg to attend high-level staff meetings, something he says he had rarely done with a journalist before. Hirschberg immediately struck him as a reporter who "got" the TV business. After the profile ran, says Moonves, he received a number of compliments from his peers but "the one that was most striking was from a colleague who said, 'For the first time, my mother now understands what I do for a living,'" he recalls. "Because—forget the fact that it was flattering, which I felt it was—it was the first time that a journalist actually captured what the network television business is about and what all of us are faced with."

Hirschberg's profile of Jamie Tarses captured a Hollywood executive at a make-or-break career moment.

The New York Times's Moss says that Hirschberg's knack for persuading people to talk openly comes from her genuine fascination with Hollywood. "Lynn becomes obsessed with every subject she writes about," he says. "And you feel her interest so intensely that it's a very wonderful feeling, and I suspect that people appreciate that and they like her and they want to spend time with her."

Quentin Tarantino, whom Hirschberg favorably profiled in *Vanity Fair* just before *Pulp Fiction* became a phenomenon, agrees. "She loved my movie. It was all positive," he says. "But it was more than just positive; she was just really excited about it. You know, she was excited about it like she was one of the *producers* of it or something."

"She infiltrates people's lives by seeming empathetic," says one source. "She just seems like this harmless, kooky woman with her dog. People think she's a character and forget about her shrewd eye."

Hirschberg penned damning stories about (clockwise from top right) James Woods, Jamie Tarses, Michael Ovitz, and Heidi Fleiss.

If Hirschberg's subjects ever feel misled by her intentions, that is because they may be confusing her obsessive fascination for affection, speculates Hirschberg's friend Gavin Polone. Polone tells a story about Hirschberg to explain: "She'll eat a red pepper and say, 'I like this red pepper.' And then she'll eat 18 red peppers till she has to vomit. And I think it's the same way with a lot of her articles. I think she becomes obsessed with it until the article comes out, until she's reached her capacity to take in as much as she can. And then she purges the article in some respects. I don't mean to say that her articles are vomitous, but it just comes out of her because she's taken in so much....She gets so obsessively involved in it that it's almost as though she can't contain the article anymore."

While she reports, she seems taken with her subject because she truly is, argues Polone. But that doesn't mean she won't get over her crush when the time comes for her to write her article. "Eventually," he explains, "she's eaten too many bell peppers."

FRIENDS (AND ENEMIES) IN HIGH PLACES

Hirschberg says she has a close friendship with Warren Beatty. When asked if they are friends, Beatty answers cryptically, "One never knows." How often do they talk on the phone? Once again, Beatty hedges: "If Lynn Hirschberg calls me, I talk to her. I might call her about something. I mean, I think she's a smart woman."

They have known each other since 1998, when she wrote a profile of him for the *Times* magazine to coincide with the release of *Bulworth*. The story Hirschberg wrote on Beatty was affectionate. "Warren Beatty is seductive, and it's not just a sex thing...." she wrote. "I first spoke to Beatty last fall. 'Good evening,' he purred into the phone. It was late morning. His voice—light, insinuating, sly but disarming—is all midnight. Years ago, when he was in his 20's, he would begin calls with 'What's new, pussycat?' and you can see how this would work."

Beatty says he had reservations about cooperating with Hirschberg. When the story ran, "I was surprised by the piece—pleasantly surprised....I don't think you can ever expect a puff piece from this woman," he says.

Beatty has been in show business for more than 40 years; he's wise to Hollywood ways. And now that Hirschberg counts him as a buddy, she can dial him up to talk about life or business. A source close to Michael Ovitz says that Beatty called Ovitz on Hirschberg's behalf, telling Ovitz he should grant her access to him for a profile. (Beatty denies this, and Hirschberg comments, "I would be very, very surprised" if Beatty made that call.)

Beatty is hardly Hirschberg's only powerful friend. There's Polone, who gave Hirschberg exclusive access to his client Conan O'Brien for a *Vanity Fair* piece as he prepared to take over *Late Night* from David Letterman. Hirschberg's article was kind to O'Brien. She's also pals with Ari Emanuel, the powerful agent who heads up the Endeavor agency. (Polone says that Emanuel brokered Hirschberg's access to Jamie Tarses. "Absolutely untrue....Ari stayed far away from the Jamie Tarses story," answers Hirschberg. Emanuel declined to comment for this piece.)

Then there's Harvey Weinstein, whom Hirschberg profiled (along with his brother, Bob) in 1994 for *New York* magazine. He's now a friend as well, though Weinstein points out, "She's still a reporter and I still run a company, so the boundaries are clear." For no charge, Hirschberg created a magazine mock-up for Weinstein, who was considering launching a publication. (She named the magazine *Bluff*, Hirschberg says, after her late dog.) Weinstein also talked to Hirschberg about publishing a compilation of her profiles with his Miramax book imprint. The book never happened. "Lynn felt it was a conflict of interest, and she walked away from the money and the deal," says Weinstein.

Hirschberg doesn't just profile and befriend the powerful. Like most other successful operators, she is savvy at facilitating business deals for friends that will leave those friends in her debt. In 1993, for example, Hirschberg brokered a *Times* magazine cover story about her then close friend, the producer Scott Rudin, written by her friend Philip Weiss.

Though the story itself didn't involve her, Hirschberg left little doubt that she considered it her baby. "She even had a dinner for Rudin and Weiss the night it came out," says one entertainment executive familiar with the arrangement. "That's how much she felt like she godfathered it."

The piece benefited all parties—including Hirschberg, argues another source familiar with the arrangement. "It helped Phil Weiss's career enormously. It helped Adam [Moss] because he got a juicy story, and it helped Rudin because it got him on the cover of the *Times* magazine," the source says. Because of deals like these, "people feel very indebted to her. It benefited her because it solidified her relationships with these people."

Hirschberg confirms that she brokered the Rudin profile, and says that she doesn't see anything unusual [CONTINUED ON PAGE 130]

HIRSCHBERG: PATRICK MCMULLAN; CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LISA ROSE/GLOBE PHOTOS; STEVE GRANITZ/RETNA; WALTER MCBRIDE/RETNA; STEVE GRANITZ/RETNA

For the author (far right) and his family, the newspaper was a second home. Pictured in 1956: (top, from left) Arne and John M. Jones Sr.; (bottom, from left) John Jr., Sarah, Gregg, Edith, Alex

A Family Chronicle

I have resented *The Greeneville Sun* and I have loved it, but more than anything else I am bound to it, as my family has been for almost a century.

By Alex S. Jones

The matriarch: Edith O'Keefe Susong knew nothing of newspapering when she took over the *Democrat*.

My grandmother, Edith O'Keefe Susong, loved to tell the story of how she first got into the newspaper business. She would say that in early October of 1916, she put on her hat and went downtown to take charge of *The Greeneville Democrat*, the smallest of three newspapers in our heavily Republican county in East Tennessee. She had been a schoolteacher and knew absolutely nothing about newspapers, but had two children to feed and "if a rabbit has to climb a tree, he'll climb a tree." This was one of her favorite expressions and was always delivered with a slightly exasperated tone, as though it were utterly self-evident. During her first week on the job, one of the other newspapers in town tartly observed that as the *Democrat* was now being managed by a woman, "It will not be alive when the roses bloom again."

At this point in the tale, my grandmother would take a deeply satisfied breath and say, "Four years later, I owned both the other papers, and do you know why?" It was always my part to gasp that I did not. She would then fix me with her most piercing look and say, "Because they were drunk, and I was sober!"

She consolidated the three papers into a daily, *The Greeneville Sun*, and was the publisher for nearly 60 years. In 1974, she hung the copy for "Cheerful Chatter"—her weekly column—on the hook, was sick for two days and died, surrounded by her family and greatly mourned by her beloved Greene County.

For as long as I can remember, *The Greeneville Sun*—circulation 15,000—has been a member of my family. Usually, the *Sun* was like a difficult but revered uncle who could order my father to abandon his supper at a moment's notice to obey some capricious demand. At other times, the paper was like a sibling who smelled of ink and had a personality as distinct and familiar as that of my brothers and sisters. I have resented the *Sun* and I have loved it, but more than anything else I am bound to it, as my family has been for almost a century. My father is the publisher, my younger brother is co-publisher, and my older brother is editor. My mother now writes "cheerful chatter," which she insists on putting in the lower case as a tribute to my grandmother. One brother-in-law and one sister-in-law are also working at the family business. I have lived in New York City for nearly a third of my life and get to Greeneville only a few times each year. Yet when I try to imagine what it would be like to drive into my hometown only to find another family owning the *Sun*, I find the prospect inconceivable.

Since 1986, my wife—Susan E. Tifft—and I have spent untold hours studying two extraordinary newspaper families, which resulted in two books: *The Patriarch: The Rise and Fall of the Bingham Dynasty*, about the family that owned *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Kentucky, and *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times*, which is the saga of the Ochs and Sulzberger family. The Binghams were a proud and respected family that shattered after three generations, while the Ochs/Sulzberger family, now in its fourth generation at the helm of the *Times*, embody the power of a newspaper to inspire family unity and sacrifice. For the ever dwindling number of small-town newspaper families, both the failure of the Binghams and the success of the Ochs/Sulzbergers are cautionary tales, with lessons to learn and comparisons to draw. What, we ask ourselves, is the secret of preserving a

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE JONES FAMILY

"Four years later I owned both the other papers, and do you know why?" my grandmother would say. "Because they were drunk, and I was sober!"

family tradition, of keeping a shared sense of purpose that is essential if the paper is to pass to another generation? Certainly these questions have been asked in my family, and it is a complex riddle. As with the families behind *The Courier-Journal* and *The New York Times*, the answers for my particular family begin with untangling threads from long ago. If I have learned anything it is that the past is alive in the present.

THE SOUTHERN BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS extend from Harpers Ferry, some 65 miles northwest of Washington, D.C., across Virginia and through Tennessee. From the front door of my grandmother's house in Greeneville, their purple-blue peaks loom like the backdrop of a stage set that frames the town. Greene County was settled by the Scots-Irish in the late 18th century and, even today, has three distinct cultures: the mountains, an untamed and beautiful place where strangers are not welcome and not far from where Davy Crockett was born by a little creek rather than on a mountaintop; the county, which harbors a deep rural suspicion of town people; and Greeneville, the county seat.

Like most families in the South, ours was saturated with mythology about our illustrious antecedents. My grandmother had particular regard for the family's patriarch, Thomas D. Arnold, a two-term congressman in the 1830s and '40s whose stern and dignified visage stares down from a painting at her home. When my older brother did his senior thesis on General Arnold, who was also a brigadier in the Tennessee Militia, he discovered—to my grandmother's outrage—a very human character who was the likely source of the family's streak of pugnacity, if not mulishness. In Congress, he was the implacable enemy of President Andrew Jackson, Tennessee's favorite son, and his blistering attack on Sam Houston, who had been governor of Tennessee, prompted a Houston admirer to shoot him on the steps of the Capitol. The bullet struck his right arm, but General Arnold pulled a sword out of his cane and mounted such a furious counterattack that he was about to kill the man when another congressman pulled him off.


The Greeneville Democrat-Sun
LINDBERGH REACHES FRANCE

Latest edition: Edith Susong borrowed from her parents to buy up the competition.

By far his most serious moment came on the eve of the Civil War when, though he was by then quite old, he campaigned with his usual fury against Tennessee's seceding from the Union, which was an especially lonely role as all his sons and sons-in-law were strong Confederate sympathizers. East Tennessee's topography had made it unsuitable for large plantations, so slavery was relatively modest, and there was a deep divide over secession, with neighbor against neighbor. Greeneville may be the only town in the South with a monument on one side of the courthouse lawn to the soldiers from Greene County who fought for the Union and, 30 feet away, a granite slab dedicated to the memory of a rebel general killed there. Greeneville was also the home of Andrew Johnson, who refused to leave his seat in the U.S. Senate when Tennessee finally seceded and eventually became the 17th president.

The Civil War was treated as recent history in my childhood, and even more so in my grandmother's time. The Union sympathizers, which were a strong majority, were Republican and the former Confederates were Democrats—a pattern that still holds in many families after nearly 150 years. Our family, Thomas D. Arnold notwithstanding, were Democrats, with all that implied. I am descended from General Arnold's oldest daughter, Martha Washington Arnold, who chose as her husband a man with the same unrelenting stubbornness as her father. John Coleman Marshall, a doctor and Confederate veteran, was so embittered by the war that after it ended he refused to take the required oath of allegiance to the Union, preferring to hide out in a shack in the wilds of Virginia where his first child—my great-grandmother—was born. She was named Quincy, after one of her grandfather's heroes, John Quincy Adams, and she inherited both the brains and the bloody-mindedness of General Arnold and Dr. Marshall.

Eventually Dr. Marshall was persuaded to return to Greeneville, but he died when Quincy was 12, having sired four additional daughters, who lived in a house on Main Street. The household was dominated by Quincy, who at her full height was barely 5 feet tall, and seemed to relish warring with the neighbors. Her philosophy of life was derived from reading—again and again—Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and she was firmly of the belief that anyone who thought differently than she did was "a damned fool," an expression she applied to virtually all women and to most men. Eventually, Quincy Marshall married William Henry O'Keefe, who had come to town to manage the railroad station and gone into business. He was her exact opposite in temperament: sweet, even-tempered, and with a whimsical sense of humor. An Irish immigrant from County Cork, he would introduce himself to strangers by saying, "My name's O'Keefe. I'm French." It was to this unlikely pair that my grandmother Edith, who was later to lead us into newspapering, was born, in 1890.

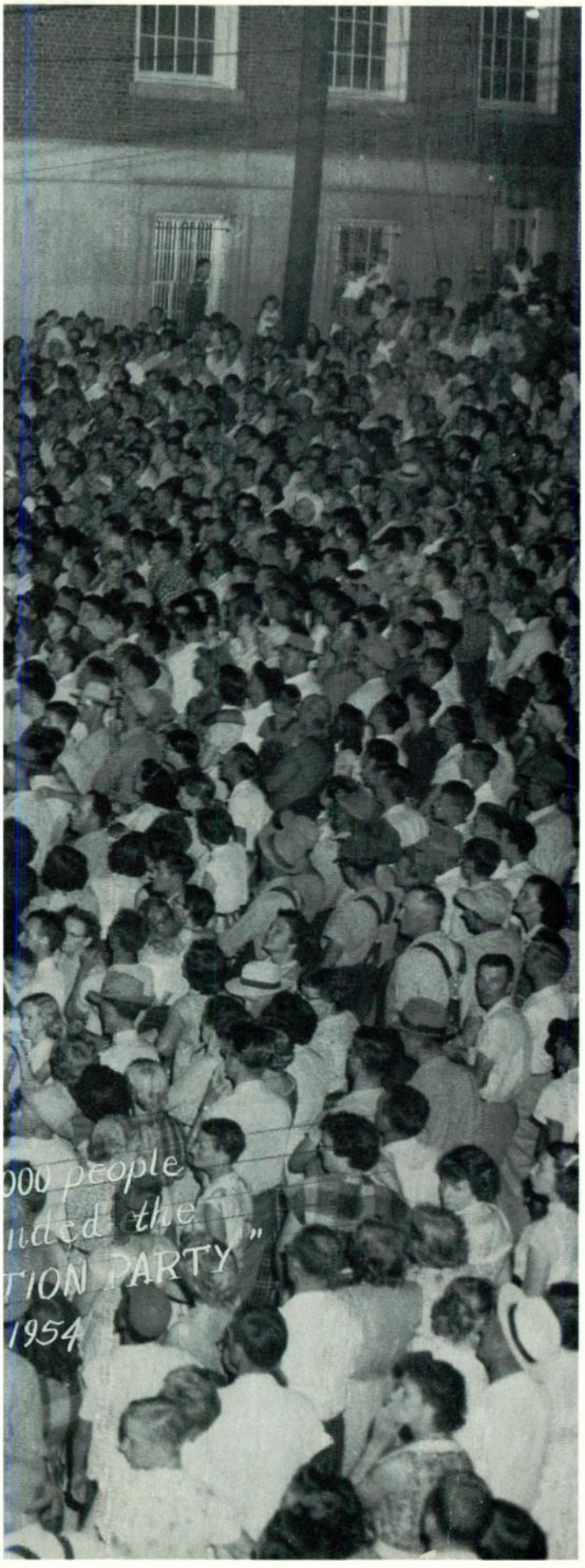
Late in her life, my grandmother let me interview her about herself, and she told me a different version of many of the sunny family stories I had heard many times before. She said that, as a child, she was extremely competitive. Her greatest prestige came from her ability to walk a high wooden fence that she could navigate faster than any of the boys. She could also outrun them, play baseball and football with them, and generally dominated the field. "And when I got to be about 12," she told me, "and found that I could no longer hold my own and excel, that they were so much stronger than I was and so much abler than I was, it was a very great shock and humiliation to me....I couldn't do anything but hang my head and I've always been sorry since then that I wasn't a man."

Edith's mother, Quincy, took charge of her early education, and she did not go to an organized school until she was in the 9th grade. Her education was completed by two years at what is now St. Catherine's School in Richmond, courtesy of some generous relations, and a short time at Agnes Scott College outside Atlanta. She then returned to Greeneville and became a schoolteacher. In 1911, she married Dave Susong, a handsome and promising graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law. He built her a house with his own hands and, over the next four years, she had two children while he practiced law.

Jones's forebears (below, left to right): Thomas D. Arnold, the author's great-great-great-grandfather; (left to right) great-great-great-grandmother Loretta Arnold, great-great-grandmother Martha Washington Arnold, grandmother Edith O'Keefe (as an infant), great-grandmother Quincy Marshall O'Keefe; Quincy O'Keefe at 80

Maternal grandparents David Shields Susong and Edith O'Keefe Susong: By 1915, Dave's law practice and the marriage were a shambles and the unpaid bills were mounting. It was then that the owner of the *Democrat* "caught him drunk and unloaded [it] on him."


THE GREENEVILLE DAILY SUN
ESTABLISHED 1876



Civic center: A 1954 election night party staged by the *Sun* attracted 15,000 celebrants.

Some 60 years later, as a reel-to-reel tape recorder turned in the living room of my home in Greeneville, she told me how she got into the newspaper business. She had been 21 when she married Dave and was deeply in love, but very naive. She had never tasted alcohol, for her father only had the occasional hot toddy to treat a cold, and so she was very confused to find that Dave's personality could change from being affable and agreeable to extremely unpleasant after as little as one glass of wine. She found she was "not at all patient" with a drunken husband and by the time their second child—my mother—was born in 1915, Dave's law practice and the marriage were a shambles and the unpaid bills were mounting. It was then that the owner of the *Democrat* "caught him drunk and unloaded this small newspaper on him." Dave, who was all but broke, had to get the note co-signed by his older sister Emma. "I fought it bitterly and tried to get his sister not to sign the notes," my grandmother said. "I didn't realize that I was flying in the face of Providence and trying to prevent myself having a means of a livelihood." Dave's sister, ever hopeful that her brother could turn his life around, signed the note.

The paper seemed almost certainly doomed. It was a Democratic paper in a heavily Republican county, going against two better-equipped Republican papers, *The Greeneville Searchlight* and *The Greeneville Daily Sun*, which was the largest of the three. It was, as she recalled, "utterly and absolutely antediluvian," with a few cases of worn type, two ancient job presses, and a crude, hand-operated two-page Country Campbell press. To print the 600 copies every week, each letter of each word had to be assembled by hand and then a single sheet would be fed into the press to print first one side, then the other. This large sheet would be folded to produce a four-page paper, hand addressed and taken to the post office for mailing. The two employees, Mr. Kennon and Mr. Nelson—as Edith always respectfully referred to them—tried to keep the machinery running.

"Had I realized how utterly impossible was the task I was undertaking," my grandmother once wrote, "I'd have turned at the door and fled."

As Edith had feared, Dave took little interest in the paper, but she tried to help out, writing short items and social news. Mr. Kennon, who saw the end near, began urging her to take over, and she demurred that she knew nothing whatever about newspapers. But as bad came to worse financially, she began to see the *Democrat* as her only hope. Dave had paid nothing on the note so Edith went to Emma and said that if the note were assigned to her, she would assume the principal and unpaid interest.

As Edith wrote on the fiftieth anniversary of her first full day on the job, October 1, 1916, "I tripped down the two blocks to the location of my 'plant' with wings on my feet. I had a mortgage for $4,000 in my hand, but I also had a means of livelihood for my two children and I was ready to go to work with a will....Had I realized how utterly impossible was the task I was undertaking, I'd have turned at the door and fled....But since I had no slightest comprehension of what I was trying to do I breezed gaily in, greeted the two employees, and prepared to take over."

The Jones family, circa 1960: (back row, left to right) Gregg, Alex, John M. Jones Jr.; (front row, left to right) Edith, Arne, Sarah, John M. Jones Sr.

John M. Jones Sr. in the *Sun* newsroom the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. At left, Jones reading the paper's special JFK edition; at right, Jones keeps an eye on The Associated Press wire.

For all her gutsiness, my grandmother was more like her father than her mother in that she sought to pour oil upon the roiling waters and preferred cooperation to confrontation.

She learned quickly that her competitor's crack about the paper not being around when the roses bloomed heralded an enduring problem about her gender. A year's subscription to the *Democrat* cost one dollar, and the custom was to pay during the tobacco market. Many times, farmers would walk into the office to buy a subscription and say to her, "Sister, where's your Pap?" They would not entrust their dollar to a woman, and, if one of her male employees was not there to accept the money, they would often walk out the door. She also found that predatory suppliers and others would try to take advantage of her on the basis of her sex, and began identifying herself on documents and letterhead as E.O. Susong, to suggest the publisher was a man, the standard upon which she wished to be professionally treated.

She reported and wrote the stories, kept the books, designed and sold the ads, folded and addressed each week's papers, and took them to the post office. To build circulation, she enlisted her small children, who accompanied her as she went virtually house to house. Republicans and Democrats alike would buy a subscription or take out an ad because they felt sorry for her. "They knew the whole story, and they wanted to help," she said. After four years of constant, unrelenting work, she had managed to pay down her debt and stay in business, but little more. Throughout that time, she had continued to live with Dave in the hope he would change, but the marriage deteriorated even further and she moved with her children into her parents' home, where she had grown up.

The author's grandmother lived in the white frame house at left; the newspaper office was right next door.

Then, one day in 1920, Mr. Kennon, her most able and valued employee, came to her and said, "Mrs. Susong, I hate to tell you this, but [another employee] and I have decided to buy the *Searchlight*." She was devastated. The two men were all but irreplaceable, and what's more, they were going into business against her. "I didn't sleep for two or three nights, wondering...what I would do, and this is the way I solved it. I did them a favor by convincing them they could not do it. I said, 'Who is going to write your advertising? Who is going to write your news?...Who's going to handle your books?...You boys are preparing to lose every penny you put into this investment.'" She told them that they must tell the owner they had changed their mind, which they did. "As soon as they told him," my grandmother said, "I bought it." If they were angry, it didn't show and Mr. Kennon worked as her production chief until he died, decades later.

She used similar guile to buy the *Sun*, which was owned by W.R. Lyon, who was both a rabid Republican and a heavy drinker. As his fortunes ebbed, he began borrowing paper from Miss Edith, as she became known. In October, Lyon ceased publication, and my grandmother, knowing full well that he would not sell to her under any circumstances, arranged for a lawyer friend to offer to buy his paper on behalf of some out of town business interests. The purchase of the *Searchlight* had wiped out both her cash and her credit, so, to buy the *Sun*, she turned to her parents, who agreed to become partners and helped to put up the $16,500 to buy the paper. Her father, who had a very dim view of newspapers and newspapermen, reluctantly agreed to become business manager. And her mother, the fiery Quincy, took over the editorial page. Miss Edith merged the papers into a daily called *The Greeneville Democrat-Sun*, built a small brick building on the narrow strip of land next to her parents' house, and was truly launched.

I WAS BORN IN 1946, 30 years after that October morning when my grandmother had first set out for the *Democrat*, and even as a very small boy I began to be aware that something was different about my family. My father, for reasons that were obscure to me, almost never got through supper without being called to the telephone, almost always by someone outraged about an item in the paper. My world had two basic anchors: the house I lived in with my parents and four siblings and "the office," as the *Sun* was called, which included the house next to the paper across a narrow alley where Edith and Quincy still lived. The house was a two-story white frame home literally built around a two-story log cabin. The center of the action was the kitchen, and the small study behind it where my grandmother would hammer out her endless flow of columns and articles and what she called "personals," which were tidbits of benign gossip about who had company and who had gone on a trip. They were the most popular items in the paper, next to her weekly column, "Cheerful Chatter."

The acquisition of the other two newspapers had not ended my grandmother's problems by any means. Lyon, the former owner of the *Sun*, waited three years until Edith had paid off the note, and on the very next day went into competition against her, which lasted for years. But my grandmother had a gift for small-town newspapering. She quickly grasped that the community did not need a partisan paper but one that would appeal to all Greene Countians, so *The Greeneville Democrat-Sun* became *The Greeneville Sun*, and its declared political affiliation changed to independent from Democrat. For all her gutsiness, my grandmother was more like her father than her mother in that she sought to pour oil upon the roiling waters and preferred cooperation to confrontation. "I am a man of peace," she would say, which I thought rather odd until I learned she was actually quoting her father, who spent much of his time trying to calm his wife, the volatile Quincy. The issues she most cared about were such things as terrible roads and the appalling environmental impact of intense tobacco farming on the land. She helped lead an extended campaign to persuade farmers to take a chance on buying expensive milk cows so as to entice Pet Milk Company to locate a plant in Greeneville. The development vastly altered the county's economy.

My father bought a .38 caliber pistol and kept it in a filing cabinet at home after a man walked into his office and casually pulled a gun while warning him not to run some pictures of strikers destroying cars in a local dispute.

Many times, though, her painstaking groundwork would go up in flames because of a scorching editorial by Quincy, who was a warrior who took few prisoners. My grandmother told me of one particularly despairing moment when, unbeknownst to her, Quincy had slipped a devastating editorial into the paper that was a bitter assault on a person my grandmother had patiently cultivated. Distraught and furious, my grandmother had marched across the alley and found her mother in her bedroom, smoking a cigarette and cool as ice. "Mother, how could you have done this?" she said. "Now all my hard work is for naught and I'll have to start all over again." Quincy looked at her and gave the response she always gave in such situations. "Well, why don't you just take me out and kill me?" Repentance there was none.

Quincy Marshall O'Keefe had waited all her life for such an opportunity, and she rarely shrank from speaking her mind. Her fundamental political perspective was that America was headed down the drain of permissiveness and corruption that had destroyed Rome. She had no patience for scoundrels, big government, malfeasance, and what she regarded as stupidity. She was against such horrors as suffrage for women, on the grounds that they would merely waste the vote by doing whatever their husbands told them. When prohibition passed, my grandmother—an active member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the time—told me she had rushed home to announce the glad news. "Oh, Mother," she said, "isn't it wonderful that no other woman will have to go through what I have gone through?" Quincy gave her a disgusted look, shook her head in pity, and said, "You poor, deluded fool."

But there was also a gentler side to Quincy. She adored Greene County's natural beauty and wrote an occasional column, simply called QMO, extolling such things as the climate, which had four distinct seasons, as compared to that of Florida:

"East Tennesseans are of sterner stuff, not for them the perfumes and dilettantism of lazy lands, but the thrilling call of stern mountains, the enchantments of their peaks and foaming rivers. Palm trees and orange blossoms are all right for a change but pine trees and maples, oaks and tulip trees with the rest of their sturdy brethren, are the verdant wilderness that produces autumn's bewildering beauty." (October 22, 1932)

Making up pages: Floyd Melton (left) and Ken Hood set type in the old *Sun* composing room.

IN THE COURSE OF RESEARCHING our book on the Ochs and Sulzberger family, Susan and I spent more than a year going through every file in *The New York Times* archives. In the slough of one afternoon, I opened yet another file from the papers of Adolph Ochs, the patriarch of the *Times* and the family. To my astonishment, there was a letter from Quincy, dated December 21, 1926, attached to an editorial she had written about Mr. Ochs. In the editorial, she asked what accounted for the "genius of Mr. Ochs" that had allowed him to rise from poverty with little education to become the greatest and most respected publisher in America. Her answer: his mother. She said that without the hard-headed practical drive and common sense that Bertha Levy Ochs bequeathed, there would most likely be no *New York Times*. Also in the file was Mr. Ochs's response, explaining how pleased he was about what she had said.

When I knew Quincy, she had become "Granny" and was still capable of ferocity, though she preferred to treat her great-grandchildren to her famous buckwheat cakes. She was well into her 80s by then, but as fearless and plainspoken as ever. She died in 1958 at 92 and in 1979 was named to the Tennessee Newspaper Hall of Fame, where her picture hangs just down the row from Adolph Ochs.

MY GRANDMOTHER HAD TWO CHILDREN: Alex, named for Dave Susong's father, and Martha Arnold Susong, my mother. My Uncle Alex, for whom I am named, fled Greeneville as soon as he could and lived his life in New York as a banker. My father, John M. Jones, comes from Sweetwater, Tennessee, a similar small town about a hundred miles southwest of Greeneville. His family was in the textile business, and my father—the oldest son—was expected to join the firm. Instead he joined an uncle's paint company, married my mother, and had my older brother, John Jr. Then came World War II, and he volunteered for a group that later became known as Merrill's Marauders, the precursor to today's U.S. Army Rangers, whose mission was to go behind Japanese lines in Burma and attack them. Amazingly, he survived and returned in 1945 with every expectation of returning to the paint business.

My grandmother had survived W.R. Lyon and other competitors, the Depression, and the war, but all those battles had finally caught up with her. She was weary and not well, and she asked my father to come to Greeneville to help her, just for a year, so he could see whether newspapers appealed to him. He knew no more about newspapers than my grandmother had known in 1916, but he was intrigued. After only a few months, he fell completely in love and agreed to stay permanently, but not as an employee. He bought the stake in the paper that had belonged to Quincy, which had come in exchange for her financial help when my grandmother bought the *Sun* decades earlier. John M., as my father was called, and Edith then began a partnership that was to endure with virtual total harmony for nearly 30 years.

THE GREENEVILLE SUN OF THE 1950s and 1960s was a paper of its day, for better and worse. The worst was its acceptance of racial prejudice as simply the way things were. Relative to many other parts of the South, there were few blacks in Greeneville, because a century earlier there the farming economy had not lent itself to slavery. Even so, this was the issue of the era, and my family was conservative, which is to say they believed that separate but equal was the best arrangement. I am

No stopping the presses: The Jones family today: (back row, left to right) Gregg, Alex, John M. Jones Jr.; (front row) Arne and John Sr.

ANNE KATRINE SENSTAD

not proud of that. I am proud that when the civil rights movement came, my father and grandmother were instrumental in ensuring that Greeneville became an integrated place without the violence and insults that plagued so much of the South.

While Greeneville was a tranquil hamlet where I was given almost total freedom to wander and roam from the time I was 8, there was also a frisson of potential violence that was always just over the horizon. My father bought a .38 caliber pistol and kept it in a filing cabinet at home after a man walked into his office and casually pulled a gun while warning him not to run some pictures of strikers destroying some cars in a local dispute. As it happened, the photographer had been so nervous that he had forgotten to take the lens cap off his camera.

I felt I learned a lot about my county one Saturday night when I was about 10. My father got a call around midnight from the police. They had picked up a man in a stolen car at the local drive-in theater, and he had confessed to killing the car's owner a month before. The killer had dumped the body off Bald Mountain Road, one of the toughest parts of the county. The man had agreed to take the police to the body and they wanted to know if the *Sun* could send a photographer. In those days, the paper took a lot of police photos. My father was determined to go himself and when he asked me if I wanted to accompany him, I jumped at the chance.

At about 2 A.M., our convoy of three or four cars began traveling up the mountain road in search of the victim. As we passed each lonely house, a light would come on. And then, as we climbed, I could see other lights higher up the mountain going on, one after another, like yellow pinpricks in the pitch darkness, as though they knew we were coming and why we were there. The body, which had been dumped down a steep leaf-covered slope, was in pieces when we found it. Bears apparently had gotten to it. Almost the moment it was found, the man was put into one of the police cars, which turned around and roared off down the mountain. Within minutes, another convoy arrived, filled with men armed with shotguns. They were the victim's family, and I had no doubt that they would have tried hard to kill the man on the spot had he still been there.

To me, the newspaper was a second home, peopled by faces I had always known. My first job was carrying proofs of ads all over town so that people like Charlie Justis down at C.W. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 131]

The X-Rated Files

An online community of female writers hijack male TV characters into erotic scenarios too hot for the small screen. By Austin Bunn

Illustrations by Owen Smith

"Personally, I practice safe sex. However, I don't write safe sex." —Zoë Rayne, slash fiction writer

At first, the only way Zoë Rayne could write it was to write around it. She would sketch out the exposition, the conversation, all of the foreplay—anything but the sex. Then she would uncork a bottle of wine and drink from it as she wrote further, daring herself to put her desire onto the page. "As outspoken and willing to talk as I am, it was still embarrassing to write," she says. "The more I drank, the less inhibited I was."

It's not hard to understand her psychological resistance. The stories that spill from Rayne (a pseudonym) are, to put it lightly, intense. Rayne's high-risk short-story *Nemesis* features bondage, oral sex, and explicit anal rape, gracefully tempered by some spooning at the end. Though nearly impossible to quote discreetly, suffice it to say that in this sentimental hard-core, stirrings in the loins don't stay stirrings for long. More startling still is that the only characters are FBI agent Fox Mulder, his boss, Walter Skinner, and his antagonist Alex Krycek, all male characters hijacked from Chris Carter's FOX television show *The X-Files*. The female Rayne is a stylist of explosive, high-resolution gay sex.

Rayne likes to put pleasure in the first person. In one of the story's more tender moments, Mulder and the wounded Krycek work a little sexual healing:

> *I almost pulled away from him, but emotions overwhelmed me and I relaxed into his kiss. When he finally eased the pressure of his lips against mine and opened his eyes to look at me, I could hardly find the words to ask him what I needed to know.*
>
> *"Alex, why?"*
>
> *"Why what?" he whispered, brushing back a lock of my hair that had fallen in front of my eyes.*
>
> *"Why me, why now, why a kiss?" There was so much that I wanted answered. He had never kissed me before. He'd always said kissing made him feel too exposed.*
>
> *A ghost of a smile crossed his lips. "Because," he said, "I wanted to kiss you...."*

If you didn't know her gender you'd assume that Rayne was a gay man. It's as if she's researched the physics, the entire anatomic organization, of gay sex. In fact, she has. But Rayne's *Nemesis* wasn't written for public consumption. The 31-year-old Rayne belongs to a highly literate online community of women who are predominantly heterosexual and who write the stories for one another. Their work couples the male characters from *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *ER*, *Sports Night*, *The Practice*, and numerous other shows with playful abandon. They share it on mailing lists, personal websites, e-mail. Rayne, who is married and works full time as a graphic designer outside Denver, has produced some 20 stories herself—a small industry of gay-male erotica written by and for women. Some are raw and sinister. Others are almost sweet, undeniably erotic. Rayne is typical of an emerging face of sexuality made visible in the Internet era: fluid, blunt, and more risqué than you would have imagined. If you're shocked and incensed by the subject matter, Rayne and the rest couldn't care less: Your sexuality is your own problem.

This is the randy, irreverent world of "slash" fiction, where radical sex is just an overture. Born in underground zines but burgeoning online, slash has more on its mind than just incendiary gay intercourse. Slash itself is part of a much larger category of fan fiction, a subgenre that tweaks, extends, and expands the narrative of television shows (coitus optional). Slash (and fan-generated fiction generally) rescripts the power imbalance between television and television audiences. If TV makes us passive, slash rejects that role and reasserts the audience's power through the back-channel broadcasts of the Internet. In an era of ubiquitous two-way communication devices, these fictions might keep TV, the biggest one-way communication medium we've got, from becoming utterly obsolete.

It's difficult to quantify just how much slash is out there. A Google.com search lists more than 8,000 slash sites, but that number is misleadingly low because the websites that categorically list the erotica contain thousands of stories, at least one for

Celebrity skin: The male characters from *The X-Files* hook up in slash fiction.

practically every show. And that doesn't include all of the story challenges and dares that slash writers pose to one another—stories that travel solely via e-mail. It's not uncommon for slash writers to produce dozens, even hundreds, of stories each.

In the 1990s, these fan-generated fictions exploded through the viral infection of the Net. Such popular fan-fict shows as *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—anything with plot holes, preternatural activity, and mood to spare—have sparked exponentially more fictional stories than have been broadcast. One popular website, FanFiction.net, has collected some 13,000 stories—about the same number produced by the online news service Wired News.

The early generation of fan fiction was the result of a primary technological innovation—the photocopier. Print fanzines, riffs on *Star Trek* with names like *Off Duty*, *Fever*, and *Final Frontier*, were distributed covertly at sci-fi conventions in the mid-1970s. Science fiction provided the original and deepest vein of material because "sci-fi requires a lot of imaginative involvement for it to make sense," says Samuel Delany, a science fiction author and professor of English at the State University of New York, Buffalo. "The more imaginative involvement, the more libidinal involvement there will be."

Fan-fict writers elaborated the worlds they felt were ignored by the shows' producers, "repairing or dismissing unsatisfying aspects," MIT scholar Henry Jenkins writes in his book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. According to Jenkins, television is our communal culture, to be retold and reworked freely despite the policing by its corporate custodians. Fan-fict writers, then, are like the boy in the children's book who loved the Velveteen Rabbit to life. "Only the boy has the power to bring the toy to life and only the boy grieves its loss," Jenkins writes. "Only the boy can make it 'Real.'" The fans' affection for characters on the screen is translated into the urge to continue and complete them. Fan-fict writers are simply trying to become "active participants" in the construction of meaning, writes Jenkins.

Then came slash, and the bunny dropped out of the picture fast. In the 1970s, in America and elsewhere the first new strains of fan-fict emerged that linked *Star Trek*'s Kirk and Spock in frisky interludes. The stories were deemed K/S stories (hence the name "slash") and were tame by current standards. "In the first decade or so, slash stories were all veils, flowers, loving and kissing and stroking," says Delany. "It was definitely sex, but it was never heavy on the four-letter words." The early slash productions, like the underground K/S novel called *Dreams of the Sleepers*, were suffused with a winking humor. Constance Penley's book *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America* mentions one passage: "Space isn't the final frontier...*You* are!" says Kirk. Spock replies, "Indeed. Then perhaps, Jim, we should...boldly go...where no man has gone before."

A space embrace: The original slash coupled *Star Trek*'s Kirk and Spock.

Slash proliferated during the 1980s, but its audience was limited by paper distribution. "Before the Internet, slash was only in zines, and zines were only sold at conventions and conventions were for only for sci-fi," says Cinder (a pseudonym), a 24-year-old slash writer. "Nobody could get slash. When the Net came along, it really widened the audience." The transition from ink to bits not only increased the audience for slash but also accelerated its evolution. The Net provided a free network for the stories to propagate and granted greater anonymity to its readers, reducing the shame that might have kept them from reading or writing the erotica in the first place.

Slash then infected other source material and began to hybridize. Though fantasy and sci-fi shows such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Star Trek: Voyager* are still engines of slash, the sexual sabotage has now moved to more conventional TV dramas like *ER* and *Homicide*, crossovers between shows, and even films. ("Somebody dared me to write a *Titanic* slash, and it got out of hand—bondage, sadomasochism, cross dressing," says Cinder. "I just wanted to punish Leo for some reason.") Writers in search of pornographic realism, always a component of slash, were now assisted by graphic websites like "Minotaur's Sex Tips for Slash Writers," created by a gay male slash fan. With photographs and explanatory captions, Minotaur walks curious women through the various positions of gay sex. Though he's not a prolific writer, he serves as a speaker at conferences and considers himself "a technical consultant" to slash.

The need for an operating manual reveals a lot about the authors themselves. By most accounts, slash authors are straight women, with a burgeoning lesbian contingent (and a minute gay following). The values of straight culture are reflected in slash's esteem

for the institution of marriage, a respect nested inside a deeply unconventional form. In a telling example, the slash community is deeply divided over whether happily married characters are slashable. "There's a het relationship [in *Now and Again*] that's integral to the show," writes Brenda Antrim, who has authored more than 100 slash stories, in an extended e-mail interview. "So that might be a show that won't have a lot of slash written about it."

But why do these women choose to write gay porn? The answer, the authors claim, should be self-evident. "If you like ice cream, then you will like ice cream on top of ice cream," says Rayne. "If you like men, then you will think that two men are better." Certainly, lesbian scenarios in straight-male pornography are so prevalent as to be cliché. Slash illuminates the converse desire: a voyeuristic thrill that straight women get from watching, or at least reading about, gay male sex. (Another telling detail is that many slash stories are "first time" stories, where the characters are testing out gay sex.) Slash, its writers believe, reflects a common, if often ignored, key of female sexuality.

"I believe I was embarrassed and uncomfortable with writing [slash] because so much of the underlying message of our culture is that women's sexuality is either unimportant or unacceptable to express," Rayne writes via e-mail. "It's not acceptable for me to think or talk or write about sex because I'm a woman. Men, however, are free to 'discuss' sex and their sexuality in many public venues." (Japan, interestingly enough, has *bishônen manga*, its own professionally produced homoerotic novels read by young girls, and *yaoi*, a popular slash based on the form. "It's considered 'safe' for teenage girls to read gay male stories in graphic novel form because there aren't any women displayed in a sexual way," Antrim says, "so it's not threatening to them.")

Rayne's reasoning still fails to explain the preponderance of gay sex scenarios. If women are the prime producers of the stuff, one would imagine that slash would be as full of male-female fantasies as male-male fantasies, but that's not the case. In fact, slash writers are adamant that slash, by definition, is specifically about gay relationships—straight narratives, known as het stories, exist, but they are not central.

Gay sex is the primary paradigm for slash because it represents a shift in conventional arrangements of power, a revolt against what's allowed in a conventional medium such as television. "As soon as a guy and a girl start to be attracted to each other, somebody has got to become a pillow and it's all downhill from there," says slash writer Cinder. Slash authors claim they choose two men because they want to describe relationships of "equality"—a kind of feminism without females—and it's impossible to find male and female characters on television who have equal status. "I prefer to write about people in relationships who are essentially equal in power," says Antrim, and "that led me to writing slash, in part because there aren't many women of equal power with men in most media."

It's not so much that slash writers want to abandon power dynamics; slash is suffused with issues of surrender, control, and reversal (graphically described in stories such as *Nemesis*). Rather, the authors demand that there be no "received" power arrangements handed to them by television. "Whenever there is a het pairing, there's always an inherent power imbalance, based on our cultural expectations," adds Rayne. "With two men, there is no 'artificial' power imbalance, and you're free to explore the natural power dynamics between the two men in question."

The slash community even seems to police itself for female heroines within gay narratives—what they call Mary Sues. A Mary Sue is typically a ravishing savior, a "character too good to be true," says Rayne, "a statuesque woman, with long red hair, lavender eyes." It's not the fact that Mary Sues are poorly written that incenses slash writers but that the characters are transparent—"It's the author as she would like to be," says Rayne.

For a group of people so comfortable with taking characters out of context, slashers themselves are resistant to having their own work interpreted and appropriated by the media. Sources for this story rejected interview requests, asked for anonymity, or asked that their testimony be erased after the fact. They fear retribution from the networks for their poaching. Each slash author runs disclaimers at the top of stories in a preemptive strike against lawsuits. The disclaimer for Cinder's NC-17 *The Practice* slash, for example, lets readers know that she knows that the characters "don't belong to me. Wish they did. I'd let them have more fun." According to one writer who requested anonymity, "The less attention we [slashers] draw to ourselves, the less chance there is that the actual copyright holders of the characters we write about will become offended."

In an era of constant two-way communication, slash fiction might keep TV, our biggest one-way communication medium, from becoming utterly obsolete.

That fear may be slightly exaggerated; when approached with samples, the television production companies that provide the source material weren't particularly concerned with slash. But the industry wasn't always this laissez-faire. In 1981, the official *Star Wars* fan club issued a letter that read, "Lucasfilm Ltd. does own all rights to the Star Wars characters and we are going to insist upon no pornography," which was a successful deterrent. The operative word here is *was*. The year-old "Master Apprentice" mailing list for *Phantom Menace* erotica coupling Obi-Wan Kenobi, played by Ewan McGregor, and Qui-Gon Jinn, played by Liam Neeson, counts nearly 1,000 members.

Although studios have been actively targeting fans who fleece production stills and soundtracks, most slash sites have little to fear, since they are generally just text. Most recently, lawyers for Twentieth Century Fox Television, which owns the intellectual property rights to *Buffy*, sent out "cease and desist" letters late last year to webmasters of *Buffy* fansites that allegedly violated copyright. In protest, *Buffy* fans are calling for a national fansite blackout day in mid-May. Their anger is understandable. As MIT's Jenkins believes, fan culture is fundamentally folk culture, which, like Robin Hood and King Arthur, belongs to everyone: "Only recently did we begin to privatize culture, erect fences around it and claim it as property. Fans are continuing to operate according to very traditional notions of what a culture is, while the producers are the ones who have a perverse attitude."

Slash writers argue that it's not only culture that has fences around it but sexuality as well. They want to rupture taboo—to erode the slashes in our categories masculine/feminine, gay/straight. In their minds, all it takes is an act of imagination. "Our understanding that gay sex is a rare and obscure act is exploded," writes Rayne in an e-mail. "No, I don't know what it's like to be a gay man. How many writers know what it is to be shot by a space weapon?" ■

For more information on slash fiction, see http://members.aol.com/ksnicholas/fanfic/slash.html

IN PRAISE OF THE GREATS

LITERARY CRITIC HAROLD BLOOM HAS DONE MORE TO DEFEND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CLASSICS THAN ANYONE ELSE ALIVE. HERE HE REMINDS US WHY LITERATURE MATTERS.

The press has noted Harold Bloom's penchant for self-dramatization. Still, I was surprised to walk into the Greenwich Village row house he and his wife live in to talk about *How to Read and Why*, his new tribute to the rewards of the reading life, and find him nearly horizontal on a Barcalounger-type chair, his eyes closed and a thick arm hanging limply off the chair. He talked about the wounds he had suffered in the cultural wars, defending the importance of the Great Books. "I'm a somewhat tired old fellow," he says. "My dear...I've limped off the battlefield."

Bloom has been teaching at Yale University for 45 years and at New York University for more than a decade. He has published so many books he can't count them—23, in fact—and written the introductions for a 900-odd-volume library of literary criticism. His work has been of acknowledged importance. But it turns out that, at 69, Bloom has retired on one front only to attack on another. He has embarked on a new project. He wants to do an end run around the academic establishment and take his case for the classics directly to readers. "I've watched with dismay during the seventies and eighties the real decline of literary studies at all the colleges," he says. He refers to "the various French diseases...Foucault, Lacan"—adding that by now there are hardly any readers left in academe. He's making "a conscious attempt" to find what "Dr. Johnson and Virginia Woolf have taught [him] to call 'the common reader.'"

Book No. 1 of this project was *The Book of J*, about the authorship of the first five books of the Bible, in 1991. No. 2 was *The Western Canon*, published in 1994. Book No. 3 was *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, published in 1998. The "extraordinary flood of letters" these three books prompted encouraged Bloom to take his preaching beyond the converted. The result is *How to Read and Why*. "It's an authentic self-help book," he says, "not what the publishing industry calls a self-help book." Its goal is to encourage a deep and meaningful encounter with classic literature. It's Great Books with an incomparable professor.

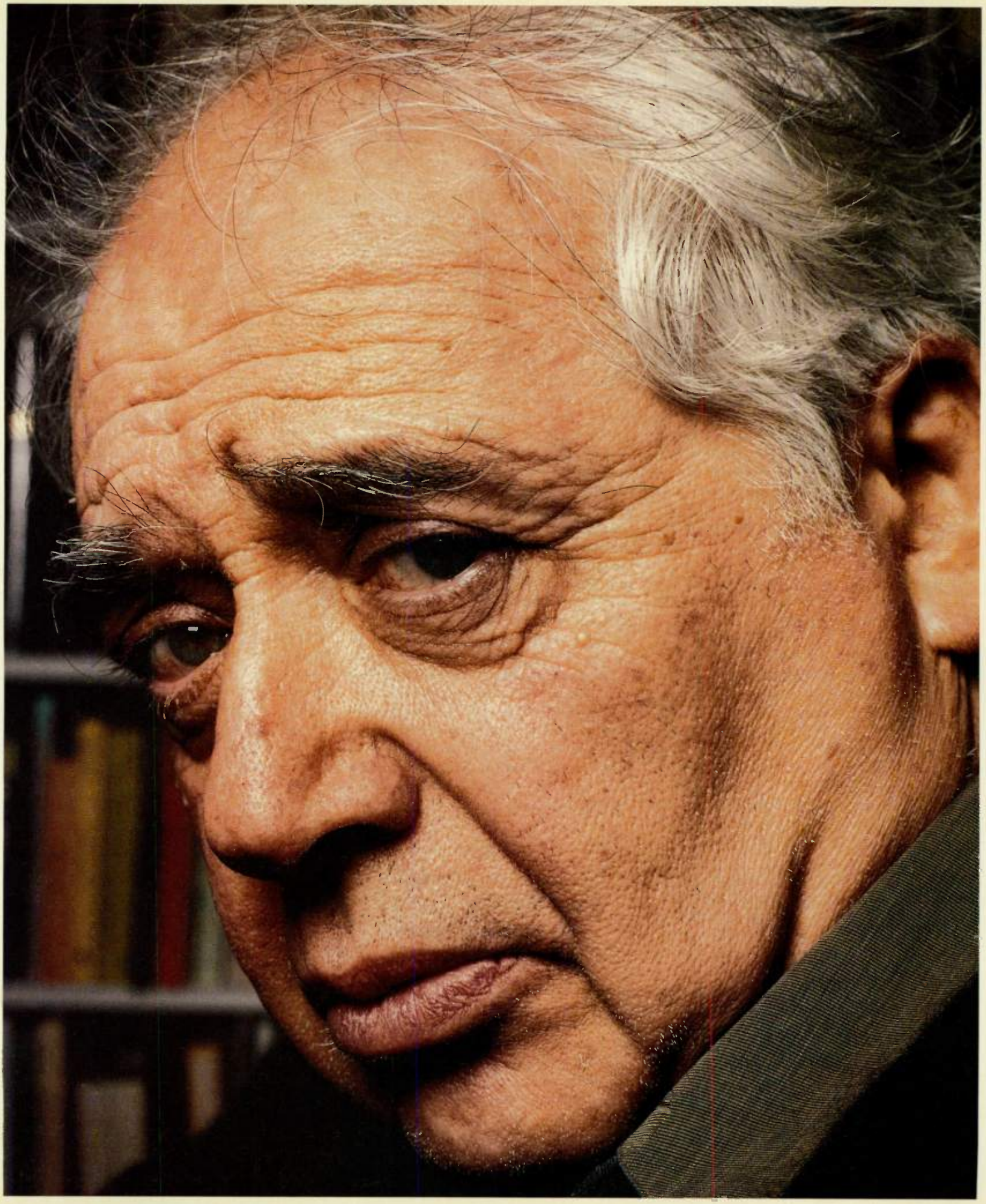
How to Read and Why, excerpted below, is meant to be read in snatches. It contains three dozen entries on individual poems, stories, and novels. The entries explain obscure language, explore the use of symbols, and relate key passages to the whole in order to bring out what is remarkable in the text. Bloom does this for works from Ivan Turgenev's story *Bezhin Lea* to Cormac McCarthy's dark western *Blood Meridian*. And, of course, there is Shakespeare—in this case, *Hamlet*. For Bloom, it all begins and ends with Shakespeare, without whom he cannot imagine life. He was pleased to discover that *Shakespeare* had become a national best-seller and remains enormously proud of the work. With long, quavering fingers, he asks me to retrieve a copy from his long shelves of books (he estimates that between his offices and his homes in New York and New Haven, he has 40,000). He inscribes it. Then he rises to his feet and hands me the book with a subtle flourish. The message is clear: For Shakespeare we should stand. D. T. MAX

BY HAROLD BLOOM

There is no single way to read well, though there is a prime reason why we should read. Information is endlessly available to us; where shall wisdom be found? If you are fortunate, you encounter a particular teacher who can help, yet finally you are alone, going on without further mediation. Reading well is one of the great pleasures that solitude can afford you, because it is, at least in my experience, the most healing of pleasures. It returns you to otherness, whether in yourself or in friends, or in those who may become friends. Imaginative literature is otherness, and as such alleviates loneliness. We read not only because we cannot know enough people, but because friendship is so vulnerable, so likely to diminish or disappear, overcome by space, time, imperfect sympathies, and all the sorrows of familial and passional life.

I try to teach how to read and why, proceeding by a multitude of examples and instances: poems short and long; stories and novels and plays. I do not consider my selections an exclusive list of what to read, but rather a sampling of works that best illustrate why to read. Reading well is best pursued as an implicit discipline; finally there is no method but yourself, when your self has been fully molded. Literary criticism, as I have learned to understand it, ought to be experiential and pragmatic, rather than theoretical. The critics who are my masters—Dr. Samuel Johnson and William Hazlitt in particular—practice their art in order to make what is implicit in a book finely explicit. In what follows, whether I deal with a lyric by A. E. Housman or a play by Oscar Wilde, with a story by Jorge Luis Borges or a novel by Marcel Proust, my principal concern will be with ways of noticing and realizing what can and should be made explicit. Because, for me, the question of how to read always leads on to the motives and uses of reading, I shall never separate the "how" and the "why" of this book's subject. Virginia Woolf, in "How Should One Read a Book?"—the final brief essay in *The Common Reader, Second Series*—charmingly

Portrait of Harold Bloom by Ethan Hill



warns: "The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice...." But she then adds many codicils to the reader's enjoyment of freedom, culminating in the grand question "Where are we to begin?" To get the deepest and widest pleasures of reading, "[w]e must not squander our powers, helplessly and ignorantly...." So it seems that, until we become wholly ourselves, some advice about reading may be helpful, even perhaps essential.

Woolf herself had found that advice in Walter Pater (whose sister had tutored her), and also in Dr. Johnson and in the Romantic critics Thomas De Quincey and William Hazlitt, of whom she wonderfully remarked: "He is one of those rare critics who have thought so much that they can dispense with reading." Woolf thought incessantly, and never would stop reading. She herself had a good deal of advice to give to other readers, and I have happily taken it throughout this book. Her best advice is to remind us that "there is always a demon in us who whispers, 'I hate, I love,' and we cannot silence him." I cannot silence my demon, but in this work anyway I will listen to him only when he whispers, "I love," as I intend no polemic here, but only to teach reading.

It matters, if individuals are to retain any capacity to form their own judgments and opinions, that they continue to read for themselves. How they read, well or badly, and what they read, cannot depend wholly upon themselves, but why they read must be for and in their own interest. You can read merely to pass the time, or you can read with an overt urgency, but eventually you will read against the clock. Bible readers, those who search the Bible for themselves, perhaps exemplify the urgency more plainly than readers of Shakespeare, yet the quest is the same. One of the uses of reading is to prepare ourselves for change, and the final change alas is universal.

I turn to reading as a solitary praxis, rather than as an educational enterprise. The way we read now, when we are alone with ourselves, retains considerable continuity with the past, however it is performed in the academies. My ideal reader (and lifelong hero), Dr. Samuel Johnson, knew and expressed both the power and the limitation of incessant reading. Like every other activity of the mind, it must satisfy Johnson's prime concern, which is with "what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use." Sir Francis Bacon, who provided some of the ideas that Johnson put to use, famously gave the advice: "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider." I add to Bacon and Johnson a third sage of reading, Emerson, fierce enemy of history and of all historicisms, who remarked that the best books "impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads." Let me fuse Bacon, Johnson, and Emerson into a formula of how to read: Find what comes near to you that can be put to the use of weighing and considering, and that addresses you as though you share the one nature, free of time's tyranny. Pragmatically that means, first find Shakespeare, and let him find you. If *King Lear* is fully to find you, then weigh and consider the nature it shares with you; its closeness to yourself. I do not intend this as an idealism, but as a pragmatism. Putting the tragedy to use as a complaint against patriarchy is to forsake your own prime interests, particularly as a young woman, which sounds rather more ironical than it is. Shakespeare, more than Sophocles, is the inescapable authority upon intergenerational conflict, and more than anyone else, upon the differences between women and men. Be open to a full reading of *King Lear*, and you will understand better the origins of what you judge to be patriarchy.

Ultimately we read—as Bacon, Johnson, and Emerson agree—in order to strengthen the self, and to learn its authentic interests. We experience such augmentations as pleasure, which may be why aesthetic values have always been deprecated by social moralists, from Plato through our current campus Puritans. The pleasures of reading indeed are selfish rather than social. You cannot directly improve anyone else's life by reading better or more deeply. I remain skeptical of the traditional social hope that care for others may be stimulated by the growth of individual imagination, and I am wary of any arguments whatsoever that connect the pleasures of solitary reading to the public good.

I COME THEN TO MY FIRST PRINCIPLE: CLEAR YOUR MIND OF CANT.

The sorrow of professional reading is that you recapture only rarely the pleasure of reading you knew in youth, when books were a Hazlittian gusto. The way we read now partly depends upon our distance, inner or outer, from the universities, where reading is scarcely taught as a pleasure, in any of the deeper senses of the aesthetics of pleasure. Opening yourself to a direct confrontation with Shakespeare at his strongest, as in *King Lear*, is never an easy pleasure, whether in youth or in age, and yet not to read *King Lear* fully (which means without ideological expectations) is to be cognitively as well as aesthetically defrauded. A childhood largely spent watching television yields to an adolescence with a computer, and the university receives a student unlikely to welcome the suggestion that we must endure our going hence even as our going hither: Ripeness is all. Reading falls apart, and much of the self scatters with it. All this is past lamenting, and will not be remedied by any vows or programs. What is to be done can only be performed by some version of elitism, and that is now unacceptable, for reasons both good and bad. There are still solitary readers, young and old, everywhere, even in the universities. If there is a function of criticism at the present time, it must be to address itself to the solitary reader, who reads for herself, and not for the interests that supposedly transcend the self.

Value, in literature as in life, has much to do with the idiosyncratic, with the excess by which meaning gets started. It is not accidental that historicists—critics who believe all of us to be overdetermined by societal history—should also regard literary characters as marks upon a page, and nothing more. *Hamlet* is not even a case history if our thoughts are not at all our own. I come then to the first principle if we are to restore the way we read now, a principle I appropriate from Dr. Johnson: Clear your mind of cant. Your dictionary will tell you that cant in this sense is speech overflowing with pious platitudes, the peculiar vocabulary of a sect or coven. Since the universities have empowered such covens as "gender and sexuality" and "multiculturalism," Johnson's admonition thus becomes "Clear your mind of academic cant." A university culture where the appreciation of Victorian women's underwear replaces the appreciation of Charles Dickens and Robert Browning sounds like the outrageousness of a new Nathanael West, but is merely the norm. A side product of such "cultural poetics" is that there can be no new Nathanael West, for how could such an academic culture sustain parody? The poems of our climate have been replaced by the body stockings of our culture. Our new Materialists tell us that they have recovered the body for historicism, and assert that they work in the name of the Reality Principle. The life of the mind must yield to the death of the body, yet that hardly requires the cheerleading of an academic sect.

Clear your mind of cant leads on to the second principle of restoring reading: Do not attempt to improve your neighbor or your neighborhood by what or how you read. Self-

improvement is a large enough project for your mind and spirit: There are no ethics of reading. The mind should be kept at home until its primal ignorance has been purged; premature excursions into activism have their charm, but are time-consuming, and for reading there will never be enough time. Historicizing, whether of past or present, is a kind of idolatry, an obsessive worship of things in time. Read therefore by the inner light that John Milton celebrated and that Emerson took as a principle of reading, which can be our third: A scholar is a candle which the love and desire of all men will light. Wallace Stevens, perhaps forgetting his source, wrote marvelous variations upon that metaphor, but the original Emersonian phrasing makes for a clearer statement of the third principle of reading. You need not fear that the freedom of your development as a reader is selfish, because if you become an authentic reader, then the response to your labors will confirm you as an illumination to others. I ponder the letters that I receive from strangers these last seven or eight years, and generally I am too moved to reply. Their pathos, for me, is that all too often they testify to a yearning for canonical literary study that universities disdain to fulfill. Emerson said that society cannot do without cultivated men and women, and prophetically he added: "The people, and not the college, is the writer's home." He meant strong writers, representative men and women, who represented themselves, and not constituencies, since his politics were those of the spirit.

The largely forgotten function of a university education is caught forever in Emerson's address "The American Scholar," when he says of the scholar's duties: "They may all be comprised in self-trust." I take from Emerson also my fourth principle of reading: One must be an inventor to read well. "Creative reading" in Emerson's sense I once named as "misreading," a word that persuaded opponents that I suffered from a voluntary dyslexia. The ruin or blank that they see when they look at a poem is in their own eye. Self-trust is not an endowment, but is the Second Birth of the mind, which cannot come without years of deep reading. There are no absolute standards for the aesthetic. If you wish to maintain that Shakespeare's ascendancy was a product of colonialism, then who will bother to confute you? Shakespeare after four centuries is more pervasive than ever he was before; they will perform him in outer space, and on other worlds, if those worlds are reached. He is not a conspiracy of Western culture; he contains every principle of reading, and he is my touchstone throughout this book. Borges attributed this universalism to Shakespeare's apparent selflessness, but that quality is a large metaphor for Shakespeare's difference, which finally is cognitive power as such. We read, frequently if unknowingly, in quest of a mind more original than our own.

THE POEMS OF OUR CLIMATE HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY THE BODY STOCKINGS OF OUR CULTURE.

Since ideology, particularly in its shallower versions, is peculiarly destructive of the capacity to apprehend and appreciate irony, I suggest that the recovery of the ironic might be our fifth principle for the restoration of reading. Think of the endless irony of Hamlet, who when he says one thing almost invariably means another, frequently indeed the opposite of what he says. But with this principle, I am close to despair, since you can no more teach someone to be ironic than you can instruct them to become solitary. And yet the loss of irony is the death of reading, and of what had been civilized in our natures.

I stepped from Plank to Plank
A slow and cautious way
The Stars about my Head I felt
About my Feet the Sea.

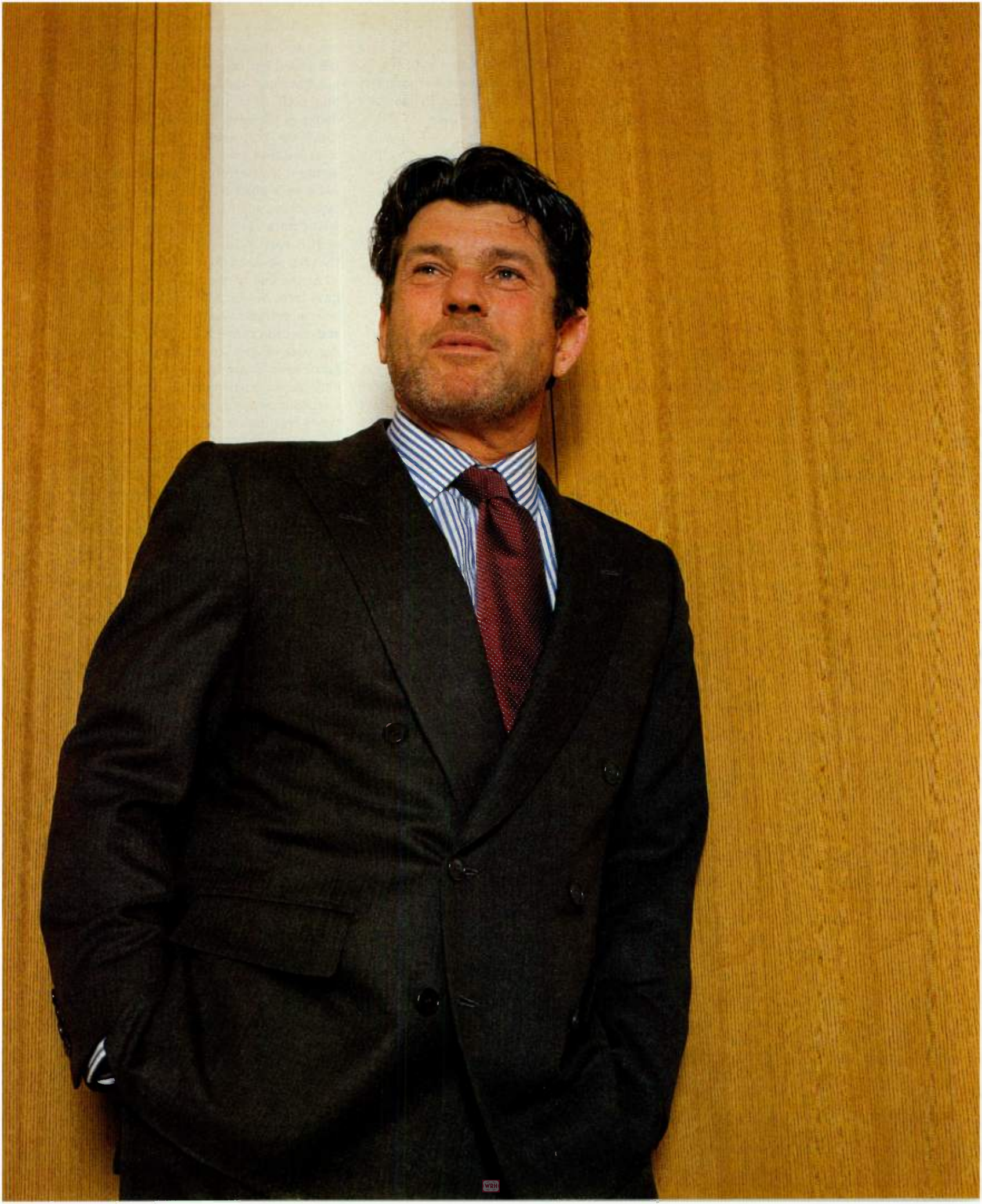
I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch—
This gave me that precarious Gait
Some call Experience.

Women and men can walk differently, but unless we are regimented we all tend to walk somewhat individually. Dickinson, master of the precarious Sublime, can hardly be apprehended if we are dead to her ironies. She is walking the only path available, "from Plank to Plank," but her slow caution ironically juxtaposes with a titanism in which she feels "The Stars about my Head," though her feet very nearly are in the sea. Not knowing whether the next step will be her "final inch" gives her "that precarious Gait" she will not name, except to tell us that "some" call it Experience. She had read Emerson's essay "Experience," a culmination much in the way "Of Experience" was for his master Montaigne, and her irony is an amiable response to Emerson's opening: "Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none." The extreme, for Dickinson, is the not knowing whether the next step is the final inch. "If any of us knew what we were doing, or where we are going, then when we think we best know!" Emerson's further reverie differs from Dickinson's in temperament, or as she words it, in gait. "All things swim and glitter," in Emerson's realm of experience, and his genial irony is very different from her irony of precariousness. Yet neither is an ideologue, and they live still in the rival power of their ironies.

At the end of the path of lost irony is a final inch, beyond which literary value will be irrecoverable. Irony is only a metaphor, and the irony of one literary age can rarely be the irony of another, yet without the renaissance of an ironic sense more than what we once called imaginative literature will be lost. Thomas Mann, most ironic of this century's great writers, seems to be lost already. New biographies of him appear, and are reviewed almost always on the basis of his homoeroticism, as though he can be saved for our interest only if he can be certified as gay, and so gain a place in our curriculum. That is akin to studying Shakespeare mostly for his apparent bisexuality, but the vagaries of our current counter-Puritanism seem limitless. Shakespeare's ironies, as we would expect, are the most comprehensive and dialectical in all of Western literature, and yet they do not always mediate his characters' passions for us, so vast and intense is their emotional range. Shakespeare therefore will survive our era; we will lose his ironies, and hold on to the rest of him. But in Thomas Mann every emotion, narrative or dramatic, is mediated by an ironic aestheticism; to teach *Death in Venice* or *Disorder and Early Sorrow* to most current undergraduates, even the gifted, is nearly impossible. When authors are destroyed by history, we rightly call their work period pieces, but when they are made unavailable through historicized ideology, I think that we encounter a different phenomenon.

Irony demands a certain attention span, and the ability to sustain antithetical ideas, even when they collide with one another. Strip irony away from reading, and it loses at once all discipline and all surprise. Find now what comes near to you, that can be used for weighing and considering, and it very likely will be irony, even if many of your teachers will not know what it is, or where it is to be found. Irony will clear your mind of the cant of the ideologues, and help you to blaze forth as the scholar of one candle.

Going on 70, one doesn't want to read badly any more than live badly, since time will not relent. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 133]



US AND THEM

DIARY OF A LAUNCH

People magazine's circulation is 3.6 million. _US_'s is 1 million. As the perpetual underdog relaunches as a weekly, no one is more optimistic or has more to lose than Jann Wenner.

By Abigail Pogrebin

"Foxy Brown got arrested for drunk driving."

It's Tuesday morning, March 7, and the staff of *US* magazine is gathered around a cherry conference table in a sprawling Manhattan office. They're here to discuss the debut issue of the new weekly incarnation of *US*, an entertainment-news magazine that began in 1977 as a biweekly, went monthly, and has never been overwhelmingly respected or successful.

"Who's that?" asks Terry McDonell, the brusque 54-year-old editor in chief. Someone reminds him that Foxy Brown is a raunchy rap star, but McDonell doesn't seem interested in her car accident, and the person who suggested it agrees: "She only crashed into a fence, so there's not much of a story there."

"Can we get an interview with the fence?" someone jokes.

THIS IS THE FIRST MEETING of the first condensed news cycle for *US Weekly*'s launch, and it's time for staffers to take stock—as they will every morning of this week—of what's in the works, which photos are coming in from which parties and awards ceremonies, and which stories should be pitched or replaced. The magazine must "close" in six days, which means that every page must be designed, written, fact-checked, tweaked, and shipped to the printer. The assembled staff is well dressed and appears strangely unworried, no one less so than Jann Wenner, 54, the father of rock-and-roll journalism—creator of *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1967 and the owner of *US* since 1989, when he bought it from Warner.

The relaunch issue

Wenner, in his blue-checked shirt and black loafers, leans against the glass-paned wall of the conference room, looking rested and genuinely unfazed by the fact that he's about to challenge the behemoth *People* magazine (3.6 million circulation versus *US* magazine's 1 million) and that $50 million of his own company's money is riding on this undertaking. "Glad to be here; glad to see all of you," he says with a smile, seeming somewhat at a loss as to what he has to impart. "It's an exciting time. We're legitimately a week away from deadline now. So, good luck, everybody, and Godspeed."

Not exactly a rousing rallying cry, but working up the crowd doesn't seem to be Wenner's style anymore. His infamous drug-revved days, once the stuff of media gossip and social myth, have passed. He admits he's happy this time to leave the quarterbacking to McDonell, with whom he first worked 24 years ago at *Rolling Stone* and then tapped to edit *Outside* magazine and, later, the macho, sports-minded *Men's Journal*. "He's got great ideas, energy, leadership, charisma," Wenner says of McDonell, who is a vice-president of Wenner Media. "He knows how to make things happen."

McDonell, who also edited at *Newsweek* and *Esquire*, is a ruddy bear of a man who does not appear to heed the fitness tips he used to publish in *Men's Journal*. Between him and Wenner, it feels like the dads are running the high school newspaper. *US Weekly* is aimed at a younger, hipper reader, 18 to 34—"That means no Judge Judy on the cover," says McDonell—but the guys at the controls are either over 50 or pushing it. "Isn't it nice," Wenner says with a smile, "[that] at my age, I still get to determine what's hip in this country? I'm still pretty good at that."

As you watch them, it becomes clear that the wisdom of their experience nullifies their lapses in hipness. McDonell can recognize the merit of a pop phenomenon even if he's not a fan. And he has hired a young staff—75 people, average age 27, whom he and Wenner trust to keep *US* current. "At *Rolling Stone*," Wenner admits, "I don't listen to the latest stuff going on in music. My taste is stuck in a particular era—Beatles, Stones, Motown. I appreciate what's going on today, I like some of it personally, but a lot if it I don't pay attention to."

In his spartan office overlooking 52nd Street, McDonell is all business, and unenthusiastic about having to articulate a vision for the new magazine. "What I do not want to do is to appear clueless with a bunch of air talk about how highfalutin this is," he says. "It will all come out in the execution, right?"

He hunches over the magazine's lineup. "You try to have a whole issue together," he explains, "and hope that some news knocks it out. I would doubt very much that what comes out of this meeting is going to be what you're ultimately able to read in the magazine."

Opposite: Jann Wenner at *US Weekly*'s offices
Photography by Henny Garfunkel

At the head of the conference table, McDonell runs down his latest changes to the feature mix: "We're going to add the Ashton Kutcher story" (about the star of Fox's hit *That 70's Show*). "We're going to take Puffy out" (rap mogul Sean "Puffy" Combs's arrest for gun possession is old news). "We don't have the news calories on this Puffy story," he tells his staff. "If something breaks this week, we will jump on it....But without a news lead, it's not what we do."

McDonell has also decided to replace an article in which stars pick their favorite Oscar winners. He likes a "stronger" piece that's just come in about stars like Matt Damon recalling their own Oscar night experiences.

JonBenét Ramsey's parents have written a new book and agreed to talk to Barbara Walters. That's a one-page story.

It's primary day and California is voting on Proposition 22, which prohibits gay marriages. McDonell wants to cover it, but there's a risk of sounding dated by press time. Halle Berry's been accused of a hit-and-run accident, but their exes to round out the story.

The only thing set in stone is the cover: Julia Roberts, who is promoting her new film, *Erin Brockovich*, is featured in dramatic black-and-white portraits by *Rolling Stone* photographer Mark Seliger. She has given a brief interview to the screenwriter of *Notting Hill*, in which Roberts starred.

Design director Rina Migliaccio, whose credits include *Sports Illustrated for Women*, says *US*'s photography will distinguish it visually. "We're...giving it a lot of space and treating paparazzi images as if they were fine works of art," Migliaccio says. "And they look really different than any other magazine does because of their hugeness." McDonell announces he likes a planned feature on model-turned-singer/actress Bijou Phillips, 20, the youngest in the rock-and-roll family of John Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas. "We've got interviews with Papa John and Mackenzie [of *One Day at a Time* fame]," someone tells McDonell. "Those are the two family members we could get access to."

Mackenzie: sister or daughter? "I don't know," he confesses. "I think daughter." Leerhsen, 45, strolls into McDonell's office. "Charlie," McDonell asks his deputy, a former assistant managing editor at *People*, "is Bijou Mackenzie's daughter or sister?"

"Bijou is her...." Leerhsen is also flummoxed. "Good question. Daughter, I think."

Unsatisfied, McDonell dials Roger Wolmuth, 50, an executive editor and another *People* alumnus. He has the answer: Bijou is Mackenzie's half-sister.

It wasn't meant to be a "gotcha" test on who's who in pop culture, and McDonell doesn't seem to register it as such. But it is a glimpse of how this team must strike a balance between the wisdom of its generals and the gut of its troops.

McDonell emphasizes that it's not enough to chase what's "hot"—you have to know what's interesting. "I don't buy the 'hot' part," he says. "I think that's a false word....It just sounds like jargon to me. If you do pieces about celebrity well, you're basically just

"*People* is kind of dowdy," says *US Weekly* editor Charles Leerhsen. "It's dowdy-looking with dowdy stories in it." *US* isn't interested in stories about "real" people. "No children who are lost down wells," says editor in chief Terry McDonell. "No moon rock collections."

McDonell couldn't be less interested. Executive editor Megan Liberman is not so quick to dismiss it. "There may be more developments," she says. "I keep hoping they're going to arrest her or something." Liberman is keeping in close touch with their L.A. bureau chief, Todd Gold, a defector from *People*. "I'm going to talk to Todd today to see if there's anything coming out of the courthouse."

McDonell is unmoved. "I just think this is such bulls--t. I just can't emphasize that enough." He pauses. "I've been wrong before." McDonell clearly wants a meatier scoop.

Tobey Maguire—star of *The Cider House Rules*—is available for an interview feature if he gets a small picture box on the cover, known as a "cover chip." "Give Tobey his chip," Wenner chimes in from the sidelines.

Country crooners Amy Grant and Vince Gill are getting married on Friday. Both left a marriage and a family to be together. "That's a great story," says McDonell. Will the lovebirds give an interview? "We're begging for phoners" (phone interviews), says a staff member. "A few quotes in a 400-word story would go a long way." Executive editor Charles Leerhsen suggests finding photographs of them with

Gossip reporter Marc S. Malkin, who was wooed to *US* from the New York *Daily News* along with his partner Marcus Baram, chimes in: "You know there's a party tonight for Bijou at *Playboy* for the *Playboy* cover." (She's the latest pinup.) McDonell is pleased. "Well, that's great," he says. "Because she's of the moment now, right?" He's not really asking, but he doesn't seem to really know, either.

McDonell is interested in the Bijou Phillips story because it allows *US* to look back "at a very long arc of rock-and-roll show business." But he's unsure how Bijou is related to

Photography will help distinguish the new *US*.

doing pieces about human nature, about people in extraordinary situations. I mean, who could be in a more extraordinary situation than some of the people that we write about?"

Wenner expounds on the notion of celebrity and its magnetism. In a separate interview in his luxurious office, which has custom-designed furniture, he puts his feet up on a marble window ledge and insists that this weekly is driven by something real. "*US* magazine proceeds with the understanding that popular culture can appear frivolous," he begins, "but you have to understand that underlying it is the idea that popular culture is very meaningful to people. People live their lives through it. They certainly get fashions and style, but more than that, they get philosophy from it; they get ideas about their own life, the way to live life, the way you relate to other people, what social justice is about."

That said, this venture is not driven by Wenner's desire to explore sociological phenomena. In fact, Wenner says, it wasn't even his idea. It was proposed by his distribution company, DSI, which also handles marketing, merchandising, and distribution for *Newsweek*, the *National Enquirer*, and the *Star*. He says his

business advisers told him readers would buy *US* four times more frequently if it were newsier. When it was a biweekly and a monthly, it was inevitably behind the news curve and rarely looked timely, let alone prescient. Wenner became convinced there was room for another strong celebrity newsweekly; *Entertainment Weekly*, he says, is "boring," and *People*, if it doesn't change course, will age and lose steam with its older audience. *InStyle* was also a motivation: Wenner says its successful mix of celebrity and fashion was born at *US* magazine but exploded at *InStyle*. "[They] just blew *US* out of the water and took away a significant part of our ad base...and I think they did a terrific job of it. That's part of the reason we decided we had to do something...to claim that franchise back." (The new *US* will devote 12 pages to fashion every week.)

After testing the waters with outside investors, Wenner decided to finance the project on his own. He admits he sweated the decision until he made it: "Maybe I'm living in a fool's parade or something, but I feel very confident and strong about it, and I've never doubted it." But he knows the day of reckoning is nigh. "The only weird thing is that I know that a week from next Wednesday, we'll get the first sales results in. That's the only event that's causing me any butterflies."

Wenner says his confidence is rooted in the amount of due diligence that was done long before this week arrived. His company took 18 months and a half-dozen prototypes to get the formula right. "We got ourselves involved in a very detailed, very methodical, very scientific kind of process," he says.

And an expensive one. Wenner is paying $5 million to $8 million for choice real estate in the all-important supermarket checkout lines across the country. *US Weekly*'s success or failure depends in large part on the impulse buy. Those of us who are guilty of having flipped absentmindedly through a magazine in the checkout line only to return it to the wrong slot do not realize what an ulcer we've just given that magazine company, and how crucial the number and placement of those magazine "pockets" are. Whereas *US* used to have approximately 70,000 pockets from the middle to the bottom of the rack ("the mop level," says Wenner), it will have 150,000 new racks at eye level—right next to *People*.

But it's not enough for publishers to buy those racks. In such a competitive market, the supermarket chains want winners, and they won't keep showcasing a title nobody's buying. "You've got to sell," acknowledges Wenner. "If it doesn't work, you're out. In six months or so—a year or something like that." He says, however, that his business plan has defined success conservatively. "We don't have to blow them out to have a big success," he says, estimating that *US* will make money if it grows from its 1 million circulation to 1.2 million. "This is not a Hail Mary play....I have my own money at stake, and I'm not big on throwing it away."

Editor Leerhsen (left) and editor in chief McDonell can spot a pop phenomenon even if they're not fans.

He also has nothing to prove. Wenner's family owns the $500 million–plus privately held Wenner Media, and he claims that if this challenge isn't going to be fun, it's not worth it. "I don't want to build an empire—I'm not driven in that way," he says. "I've got too many other things in my life that I enjoy doing—skiing, traveling, etc.—to be that obsessed with it."

IT'S THURSDAY MORNING, five days before the close, and the group is gathered once again.

Ashton Kutcher is being held for a later issue. The Puffy story is back in because the writer managed to find eyewitnesses to the nightclub skirmish and what Leerhsen calls "hip-hop insiders." Says McDonell, "We have the only description of what happened inside that club."

The photo department is trying to get permission to use a picture of Paul McCartney dancing on the bar of Manhattan's Hogs & Heifers. The news pages are still up in the air: "Bryant Gumbel's divorce is getting nasty," one staffer offers; Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee have broken up yet again; and Richard Pryor has obtained a restraining order against his son.

What's the latest on Halle Berry? "It's still in play," says executive editor Liberman. "They haven't actually indicted her yet, but we're working on the civil suit." (The woman Berry hit is suing the star.) Wenner announces troop movements. "[*People*] is in full-out counterprogramming against us," he tells the staff. He says the magazine is holding regular meetings to discuss how to deal with *US Weekly*, has added a style section and more paparazzi pictures to battle *US*, and has even rushed out its own Julia Roberts cover "to hurt our sales."

Time Inc. editor in chief Norman Pearlstine scoffs at this notion: "Julia Roberts does seem like a pretty obvious cover if you're *People* magazine, it seems to me." He says *People* is not paying special attention to *US Weekly*. "They're just another magazine," says Pearlstine. "We compete with every other magazine....Given our size and who we are, it's ludicrous to think we're thinking that much about them."

Wenner says Time Inc.'s public posture is all spin: "They're taking us very seriously, and if I were them, I would too." Leerhsen, who worked at *People* for six years, says its managers have to be concerned that its average reader is over 39 years old. "Down the road, you can foresee they're going to have a problem—they're having some already now....A lot of the readers are in their mid- and upper 50s and older....People that age don't care about Cameron Diaz or who Ben Affleck is or isn't dating."

Leerhsen says *US Weekly* is positioning itself as cooler, [CONTINUED ON PAGE 132]

Without realizing it, each of us is leaving a data trail on the Internet, exposing a shocking amount of private information to who-knows-who. What are the implications—and how can people protect themselves? By Charles Jennings and Lori Fena

Privacy Under Siege

Privacy in a post-Internet world is something we are only beginning to understand. Our public networks are vulnerable, as is illustrated by the "hundredth window," a kind of computer-security fable: No matter how many bars and locks you have on your windows, if you leave just one window open and unguarded, you will be vulnerable.

As cofounders of TRUSTe, an organization based in Cupertino, California, that provides a seal of assurance regarding websites' privacy policies, we are particularly aware that online privacy and security can be compromised no matter how vigilant we are: Try as we might, we can no longer avoid the scrutiny of the data collectors. Computers and sensors are embedded in the most mundane environments, and data are frequently collected about us without our volunteering it. Every day, millions of people willingly provide personally identifiable information (PII) about themselves to the data collection pros—analysts who use the Internet and other modern technologies to capture personal information.

PII refers to anything in an electronic network that can be linked in some way to a flesh-and-blood human being; to someone with a name, an address, and a life; to you, for example. (If data—such as your click trail through a website—can be traced back to you, it's PII.)

The information may include a name, a phone number, an address (home, business, or e-mail), and any number of unique identifiers (social security number, credit card number, driver's license number)—but it must have at least one such identifying element to be useful to professional data collectors.

Exchanges of PII take place through a variety of electronic and nonelectronic means, in virtually every segment of modern life. They often happen almost subconsciously. We want money from a cash machine; we want service from a doctor; we want product warranty protection for a new purchase; we want to visit a news site on the Web; we want a discount on groceries—so we provide information about ourselves. We barely stop to think about where this information is going, who will get it, where or how long it will be stored, or for what it will be used. [See "10 Reasons You Should Care About Internet Privacy," page 111.]

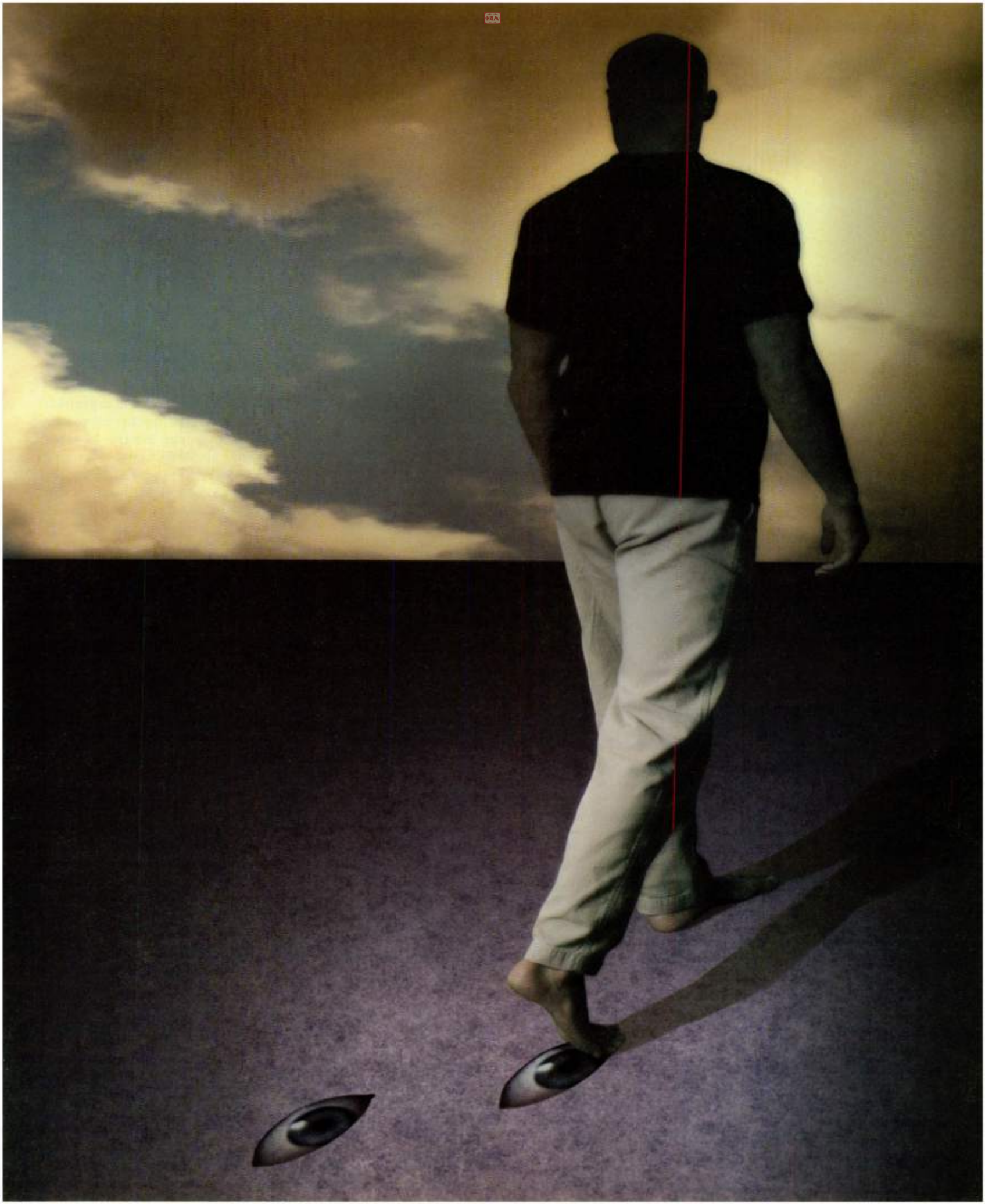
The concept of PII—the idea that data belong in a special class when tied to an actual, identifiable human—is especially useful when we try to come to grips with questions involving privacy, technology, and commerce. PII is like uranium: quite valuable but more than a little dangerous when it falls into the wrong hands.

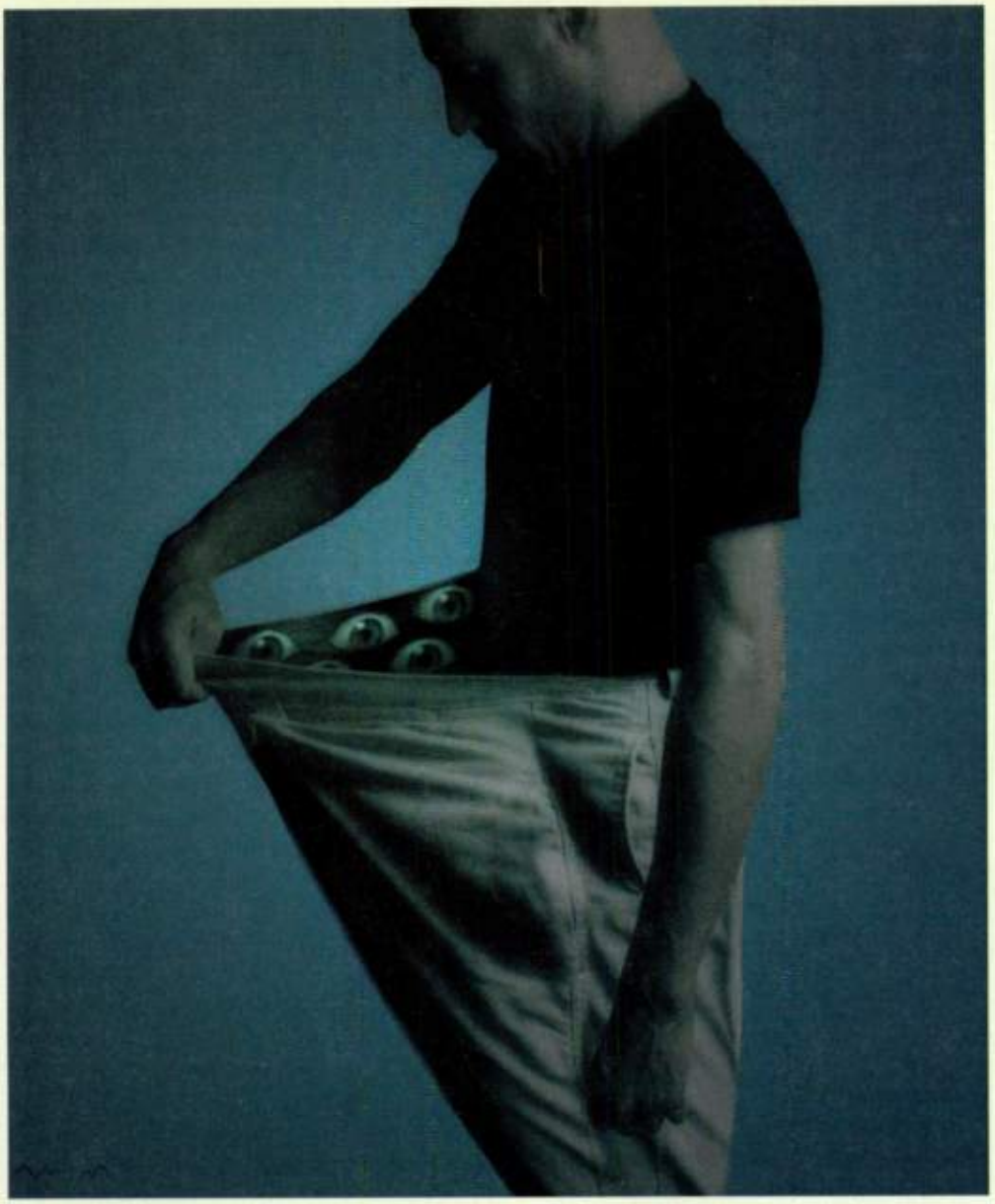
The real news about PII—about the collection and use of information about you—is that its use is increasing rapidly. The more that is known about you—and the more data collection firms that know about you—the easier it is for the next one to learn still more.

IT WAS LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO that the Child Online Protection Act, or COPA, whizzed through Congress with almost no hearings or expert testimony from Internet insiders. It was a motherhood-and-apple-pie bill, a chance for members of Congress to show their constituents that they were protecting the nation's youth from the scourge of pornography on the Internet. Their intentions were laudable, but their execution was flawed. There is probably no business sector on the Web that is more adept at collecting personal information than that of sex site operators, and COPA's passage in 1998 was a huge assist.

The reason is simple: To protect children from porn, the legislation contained a provision about verifying the age of visitors to X-rated sites. [For useful ways to safeguard kids, see "Guidelines for Cyberkids," page 112.] The ACLU and other organizations teamed up to challenge the law, and the act was ruled unconstitutional. But although the law could not be enforced, and the sex site operators therefore did not need to meet this particular

Photo illustrations by Matt Mahurin





If you are an active Internet user, some of your personal information is being used somewhere in the digital world almost every day. In the future, you won't have to touch a keyboard or a mouse to trigger the network that captures data about you.

age verification requirement, many still mined the bonanza they had been handed.

Since no one under 18 can obtain a credit card, the only good way to determine whether someone is 18 or older when entering a site is to require a credit card number. The authentication/verification routines of credit card processing systems are the only widespread online, real-time systems that can determine someone's age.

Many porn sites across the world now require visitors to provide a credit card number in order to get "free" access to a site for a short period of time—generally, several days to a week. This procedure generates accurate PII, because the credit card verification system requires a proper name and even a correct zip code before a card will be approved. And although no e-mail address is needed for a credit card authorization/verification routine, nearly all sites require that as well. (Some sites even send passwords via e-mail to ensure that their visitors' e-mail addresses are correct.) Many of the "cardholders" were undoubtedly 14- to 17-year-old boys who had copied down their parents' credit card numbers—thus putting Mom or Dad's PII in places that they might never want it to go. In effect the legislation could have been considered Dad's Data Collection Act.

The moral of this story is not just that government has a propensity to screw up when regulating systems it does not understand—though that is one inference, certainly. (It's one thing to pass a law saying that you have to be 18 years old to enter an adult Web domain, but it's another to figure out a way to make it constitutional.) The scarier conclusion is that a massive amount of PII, and PII linked to credit card numbers, has been collected by porn operators around the world. And although we have nothing against porn site operators, personally, neither would we pick them (as a class) to be one of the prime holders of our national credit card number archive.

EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT visiting pornography sites, if you use the Internet at all, a great deal of PII about you is scattered around the public network already. Once collected and organized, these data can be stacked together to produce a new kind of electronic identity—in other words, an online profile about you containing the most private details of your life. Many different types of people and organizations can use this path to find you, and find out things about you, for a wide variety of purposes, not all of which are pleasant—or legal.

Rich profiles about each of us—containing information about our tastes and preferences, our Web surfing habits, our computer configuration, our past behavior—are just starting to be assembled and put to use in ways that leverage both the reach and speed of the Internet. Merchants, employers, police, journalists, health care providers, financial institutions, tax collectors, advertisers, website operators, and personal information brokers, among others, collect and use these profiles routinely. Soon there will be more information about us passing through the network than is known by our very best friends.

One company, for example, maintains a database containing information on more than 95 percent of all consumers in the United States, with the information in the database modeled to predict buying patterns for financial products and services. Because this information is stored in a proprietary database, and is sold primarily to financial services companies, most of us have had little reason to complain (however uncomfortable we might feel about the database's mere existence). Even if we have been targeted with direct marketing mailers, at worst, this company's database has been an annoyance.

We may even have benefited from the database—the information has helped financial companies achieve greater marketing efficiency, thereby allowing them to serve us at more competitive prices. But what if all the

10 REASONS YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT INTERNET PRIVACY

IDENTITY THEFT. Using PII acquired from a variety of sources—ranging from government data banks and online directories to stolen credit card receipts and rummaged garbage—computer-savvy thieves construct a phony new "you" that they use to purchase goods on the Internet, fraudulently receive government benefits, withdraw savings, and more. The FBI calls this one of the fastest-growing white-collar crimes in America.

PARTY-LINE-STYLE ONLINE SNOOPING. This has become easier with high-speed cable Internet access. Relatively simple security practices can prevent that teenage genius next door from gaining access to your private files, but a great many people will learn the hard way why such practices are necessary.

IDENTITY SPOOFING. This form of online impersonation usually does not involve intent to defraud but nonetheless can be malicious and dangerous. One common kind of identity spoofing is pretending to be someone you're not in a newsgroup, chat room, or e-mail message. Adept computer users can spoof not only your name but your actual e-mail address, so the message appears to be fully authentic.

ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF THE WORKPLACE. Managers will have real-time remote surveillance capability via networked video cameras and through routine screening of their employees' e-mail. (Surveys show that more than one fifth of all employers currently monitor their employees' e-mail.)

IDENTITY REVERSE-ENGINEERING. Health care providers, among others, have long understood that even an anonymous information profile can sometimes be traced back to an individual person. If the health histories of all the employees at a certain company were to become publicly available, for example, an individual familiar with the workforce might be able to put two and two together to find out that Jack has a heart condition or that Amy has herpes.

MOUSE-PRINTS. Tools that track your behavior online—to record which websites you visit and even how long you stay there—are proliferating. The resulting information (which can be parsed down to the time you spend viewing specific marketing messages and in which order) can be extremely valuable.

E-REVENGE. This category includes the posting of slanderous or even salacious content about others in newsgroups, online community chat groups, and other realms of Internet publishing.

ELECTRONIC LIFESTYLE MONITORING. Imagine a link between supermarket purchasing patterns and insurance actuarial tables to generate individual policy rates for insurance. (Too much liquor and butter in that shopping cart? That'll be an extra $50 a month on your life insurance, please.)

HACKER VANDALISM. At a RAND Corporation conference, a high-ranking U.S. official revealed that a single branch of the military reported more than 5,000 full-root access hacks (essentially, that the hacker has complete control over the computer in question) in a single year. Much of this activity falls in the category of youthful high jinks, but a growing trend toward politically motivated hacking, or "hactivism," is rising as well.

"LINE A TRIPPING." A new term for the recording and distribution of supposedly private phone conversations. The Internet twist on the old wiretap game is to record a conversation, enclose it as an audio file, and then send it as an e-mail attachment to interested, or titillated, third parties. The rise of Internet telephony will make this unseemly practice much easier, since all the tools needed to capture phone conversations can be conveniently located on the desktop, just a click away. CJ and LF

A DAY IN A NONPRIVATE LIFE

7:00 A.M. Wake up, take shower, dry hair, make and drink coffee, use up remaining milk in refrigerator. You can still wake up at home with some expectation of privacy. You know that your shower, at least, is private.

7:47 A.M. Log on to the Internet to check news and stocks, check e-mail on personal account. Your identity travels the Net with you, leaving a solid, easily traceable trail. Every click of your mouse is being recorded somewhere, and every transaction you complete can be stored and analyzed.

9:10 A.M. Drive into the city, use automatic toll payment to make commute faster. As this system speeds you through the tollbooth, your car is being identified and information about your whereabouts is being stored.

9:30 A.M. Have breakfast meeting with prospective customer, pick up the bill with a credit card. The credit card companies—the banks as well as the payment processors—are some of the biggest collectors of personal data about you. Plastic is never anonymous.

10:46 A.M. Go into office building, use electronic badge to enter parking area and building. These badges can locate you in a particular place at a particular time—data that are ostensibly held in confidence by your employer for security purposes. But it can be used for other purposes as well, such as in job reviews.

11:10 A.M. Check/send e-mail from work account, log on to Internet to research the competition and gain access to analyst reports. Your employer may be collecting information about your online clicks—and it is within his or her rights to do so if you are using your system at work.

1:38 P.M. Go to Amazon.com to buy a book, recommend it to a client's management team. The Amazon folks post a privacy policy on their site and try to behave like a responsible, privacy-sensitive merchant, but nonetheless, the company's databases contain a great deal of personal information about the subject matter that most interests you.

2:00 P.M. Participate in a business alliance conference call using a teleconference service bridge. Many of the phone companies that provide this kind of teleconferencing service require you to provide your identity to access the call—for security reasons. This information is logged into these companies' database systems and can be accessed if required by the purchaser of the service or law-enforcement officials.

6:15 P.M. Log on to favorite travel site to purchase tickets and select seat for upcoming business trip. Information about your travel patterns is often resold to carriers within the travel industry but can also be used to gauge your relative wealth and amount of leisure time.

8:17 P.M. Leave building, use badge to exit prepaid underground parking. Somewhere, someone knows what time you left the building. In fact, he or she may even have noticed how tired you looked as you passed the networked security camera.

8:35 P.M. Stop in at grocery store to pick up milk and ice cream, use discount card and make a quick cash purchase. The computerized scanning systems linked to your personal discount card capture information that your grocery store can use to maintain a profile of you and your family.

10:43 P.M. Log on to an Internet health site to research father's illness, request information. Although you know the information you are requesting is for your father, the site owners don't. Two months later, though you may be a healthy 37-year-old woman, you receive a free sample of an herbal supplement that is reputed to help treat prostate cancer.

CJ and LF

GUIDELINES FOR CYBERKIDS

Children are spending more and more time online, where they are especially vulnerable to the deceptions of shady marketers. On its GetNetWise website (getnetwise.org), the nonprofit public-interest consortium Internet Education Foundation (IEF) has posted some excellent guidelines families can follow to keep their children safe online. Here are some highlights of IEF's advice, by category:

AGES 2–4
At this age, children start interacting with the computer, and it often makes sense for parents and kids to explore together. Sitting down with your child at the computer is not just a safety issue but also a chance to bond with him, and a way to make sure he has a pleasant Internet experience. Around age 3, as your child becomes more independent and wants to explore, you can choose a safe website for him to visit, but don't let him wander around outside that site on his own.

AGES 4–7
While learning how to access information over the Net is a very important skill, children this young should visit only sites that you have visited and feel are appropriate. Also, it's important that kids this age don't get frustrated; make sure the sites they visit enhance their sense of discovery. Some starting points you might want to consider:
- American Library Association 700+ Great Sites (ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/amazing.html)
- The Children's Partnership's suggested sites (getnetwise.org/kidsites/cpmore.shtml)
- CyberAngels' CyberMoms' list of approved sites (getnetwise.org/kidsites/cybermomsmore.shtml)

AGES 7–10
During these years, kids become a bit more social, and peer pressure starts to be a factor. Children this age should be encouraged to surf a bit on their own, but that doesn't mean you should ignore their Web journeys. Consider putting the computer in a shared family space, such as the living room, den, or kitchen, so that your child can have access to Mom and Dad while using the computer. That way, your child can be "independent" but not entirely on her own. Also, encourage your child to branch out and explore beyond her favorite websites. Help her search for new ones to enjoy.

AGES 10–12
If the kids aren't already doing so, now's the time they should start using the Internet to help with schoolwork. Also, it's a great resource for their other interests, such as hobbies and sports activities. Make sure, however, that your child doesn't spend all her time online.

It's important to help children at this age begin to realize that not all information on the Internet is true. One way to teach this to them is to run a search on a subject they're fascinated with and already know a lot about—an athlete, musician, or other favorite topic. See just how much false information they can find.

AGES 12–14
Since many kids become gregarious around this time, they're likely to be interested in online chat. Make sure your kids understand never to give out any type of personal information without first checking with you. Also make sure they understand that it might be dangerous to get together with anyone they meet online without first checking with you.

It's natural for kids this age to want to look at photos and explore sexual subjects, at least to some degree. While they're exploring, make sure they know that you're around—and aware of what they're doing.

If you try to use filtering and monitoring software you may run into some resistance. If you do decide to use filtering software, explain to your children that you are doing it to protect them from material that you consider to be harmful. As GetNetWise notes, "Just as you might not let them go to certain places in your community, you are exercising your parental right to keep them from surfing to certain types of places in cyberspace."

AGES 14–17
Your teenager is becoming more mature in many ways, but remember that teens are more likely to take risks—both online and offline—than younger kids are. While it's extremely unlikely that a teenager is going to be kidnapped by someone he meets in a chat room, there *is* always the possibility that he'll meet someone online who makes him want to strike up an in-person relationship. Teach your teen not to be naive: It's important to understand that people can assume online identities, and that someone your teen meets on the Internet is not necessarily who he or she seems to be.

CJ and LF

financial indicators currently in this database—in addition to new ones—were available to everyone, in a highly accessible format? What if our bank accounts, our investments, and our credit history were suddenly posted online to be used by anyone for any purpose?

BY NOW, THE DYNAMIC PACE of Internet Age technologies is old news. We know that Internet-linked microprocessors will inhabit the smallest nooks and crannies of our lives. What we may not yet understand is that the impact of all these networked data-swapping devices will be profound, and that a tsunami of new PII will soon be flowing into corporate databases, government files, news media, direct marketing lists, commercial websites, and individual PCs.

Among the gazillion bits of information that will flow each day through this network of connected devices will be a sizable number that can spell out your:
- exact location and patterns of movement, at any given moment
- address and phone number
- financial status, buying habits, and credit record
- health history and profile
- social, political and religious affiliations

These are just a few of the more than 200 categories of personal information that online companies can currently track. If you are an active Internet user, some of your PII is being used somewhere in the digital world, by somebody, almost every day. For example, credit card data warehouse operators are expert at mining information about what you buy to better understand your behavior as a consumer. As the network encompasses devices beyond the desktop, you won't have to touch a keyboard or a mouse to trigger the network or sensors that capture data about you. The swipe of a frequent user card, a password entered at an ATM, a cellular call, passage through the E-ZPass tollbooth, an online search or purchase, the renewal of a driver's license, the reading of news online—each of these activities can expand a growing PII profile that will follow you [see "A Day in a Nonprivate Life," page 111].

As computing power grows, and as the number of connected computers climbs toward a billion, the ability of each computer in the global electronic grid to know and reveal things about you will grow as well. Many customers might be more than happy to donate their fair share of personalized data with the expectation of getting good deals. When all systems are working properly, and fairly, the Internet industry's ability to know your tastes, preferences, and needs can be a wonderful thing. And yet PII collection and

manipulation via the Internet have a dark side as well. In fact, personal information about you can easily make its way into a world where identity theft, online fraud, online revenge, identity spoofing, racial redlining, and various forms of stalking and harassment are threats. This dark side of the data flow is more than just the exhaust of our hot new Internet Ferrari; it's a clear and present danger on the road ahead.

DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES of Internet companies often take place furtively, and PII trading generally occurs behind locked doors, out of the public view. Site security, certainly a key factor in trustworthiness, is almost impossible to ascertain from the outside (short of a hack attack). A company's general reputation and the relative quality and reliability of its online product and service offerings can clearly increase or decrease public trust in that company's website, but judgments about a company's products, brand, and general image do not necessarily correlate with its actual trustworthiness online.

Trust, in the Internet sense, requires a whole new perspective and a whole new set of tools and measurements. For public networks to grow and thrive without invading our privacy, it's essential that new methodologies for answering the "Whom Can I Trust?" question become a part of the Internet's infrastructure. Admittedly, building such a system would be no trivial task. Copious amounts of data about website operations, policies, and practices would have to be collected, organized, and analyzed; overall company policies and practices would have to be monitored, even those behind its security firewall; and a very sophisticated back-end operational infrastructure would be required to serve up pertinent information upon demand. Such a trust solution would have to support a simple, user-friendly desktop interface (a software application or browser plug-in), so that ordinary users could easily and simply take advantage of it.

All in all, a big order—but the good news is that most of the technology needed to construct such a system already exists. Consider the big personal credit rating companies, such as Experian, Inc., and Equifax Inc. They maintain huge databases with information about the trustworthiness of millions of people, at least insofar as their reliability in paying bills is concerned. Many of the people whose daily bill-paying activities are tracked in these huge data banks frequently move, change jobs, get married, and otherwise become moving targets. Maintaining records of the trustworthiness of the most important 50,000 websites would seem easy by comparison.

THE FIRST STEP IN TRACKING the trackers is to look for their traps. In the case of surreptitious data snatchers, we would want to look for technologies and websites that capture information about us without our knowing it. Unfortunately, unless you are a technologist, monitoring a Web session can be difficult, if not impossible. Everyone, however, can read a privacy policy. Covert data-gatherers dislike the trend of posting privacy notices on websites because posting such policies actually increases legal liability. A company that secretly gathers personal data in Web sessions or sells personal data without disclosing this practice is less at risk, legally speaking, than those who post policies but don't follow them.

When we provide personal information, we barely stop to think about where the information is going or how it will be used.

The absence of a privacy policy thus says a great deal about a company's practices, and in our experience, sites operating with responsible, full-disclosure privacy statements and policies that let you choose whether your data should be included tend to be more trustworthy overall. Privacy policies are currently the best available litmus test of a website's ethics. (For an excellent example of a comprehensive privacy policy with all the right user options and controls, go to Yahoo! and click on the "Privacy Policy" link at the bottom of its home page.) On the other hand, if a company secretly tracks your Web journeys, secretly sucks up data from your browser or hard drive, buys and sells information about you without your knowledge or consent, refuses to tell you what data it has collected about you—that says a great deal about its honesty in other matters.

As you point your browser around the Net, here are two things to remember:

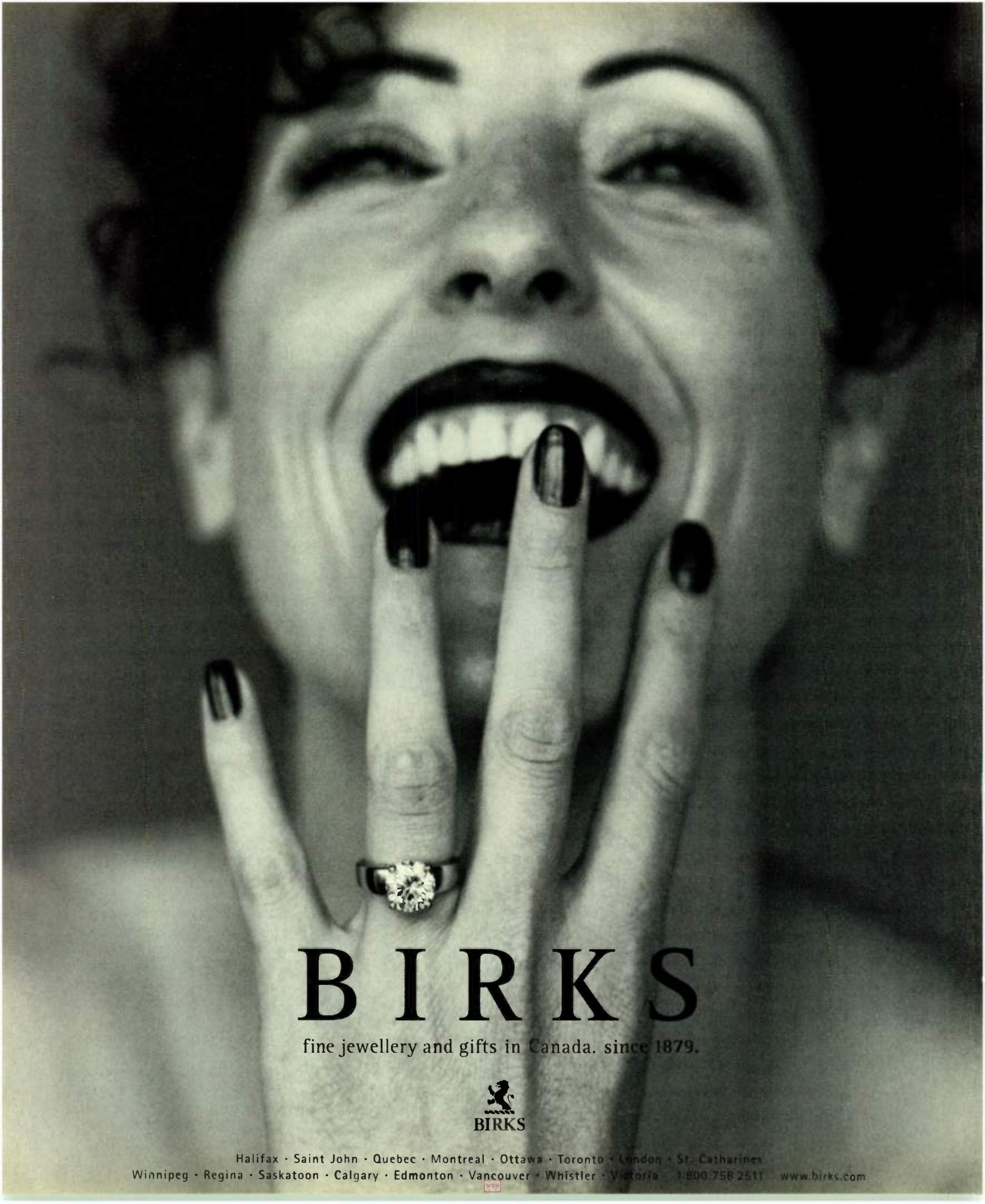
- Data collection is occurring everywhere, all the time. The combined efforts and successes of Microsoft Corporation, Intel Corporation, Oracle Corporation, and other high-tech vendors have reduced the cost of compiling data about you to a small fraction of the value that is derived from collecting it. Unless you choose to live the life of an unplugged hermit, much of your daily activity is now being recorded in corporate and government databases, whether you know it or not.
- Public safeguards are few. During this early developmental phase of the Internet especially, you must make up your own norms of behavior and your own rules about whom you will trust. Over time, companies will develop more sophisticated, more transparent corporate policies, and legislatures and courts will codify at least some social norms. Until then, you are left to your own devices to evaluate the situation and protect yourself as best you can.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, the World Wide Web Consortium, a key technical standards-setting body for the Web (based in Cambridge, Massachusetts), has been working on a proposed Platform for Privacy Preferences Project, known most commonly by its nickname, P3P. These standards will, in essence, put your own personal privacy protocols into force when you exchange information with a website.

P3P essentially enables a "digital handshake" agreement between the software in your PC and software at the sites you visit. With this handshake, privacy rules of your own setting become a basic part of your Internet protocol. With P3P-enabled software, there can be no exchange of data between you and a site until such a handshake has occurred.

At this writing, the standard is already at the working draft stage, and applications designed to implement P3P are available on the market (although their value is minimal today, because P3P requires cooperation of merchants to become efficient and practical). But if properly implemented and widely adopted, P3P could be a major step toward making the network a more trusted environment.

If we expect and demand trustworthiness on the Net—not just in the delivery of goods and services but in the use of our private, personal information—perhaps our expectations and the true promise of the Internet as a creative social force will be fulfilled. ■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CREATORS

READ'EM AND EAT

Tim and Nina Zagat have built a dining-guide empire on the opinions of amateur food critics—a formula tailor-made for the Internet. By Bridget Samburg

"I have a funny story to tell," Tim Zagat says. He and his wife, Nina, are leaving Jean Georges, a top-rated Manhattan restaurant that looks onto Central Park and is, in the words of the Zagats' New York City restaurant guidebook, a "world-class" "dazzler" where chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten performs "brilliantly," the staff is "impeccable," and patrons may need to "arrange financing" to cover the $85 prix fixe cost of a meal.

The Zagats have just finished a light Jean Georges breakfast of fresh fruit (him) and bread with jam (her). The occasion for Tim Zagat's funny story: an encounter the couple had minutes ago with Phillippe Vongerichten, the chef's brother. As the Zagats started to leave the restaurant, Vongerichten pointed to a lobby wall where his brother plans to mount his many awards. "I can come over and get a plaque?" Phillippe Vongerichten asked, referring to the trademark trophy given free to any restaurant in the United States that scores a Zagat food rating of at least 20 points out of a possible 30.

The restaurant's food rating dipped to 27 in the 1999 book (when it opened, the previous year, it earned an impressive 28), which sent Jean-Georges Vongerichten into a tizzy. "He was so upset he sent the plaque back," Tim Zagat says. "Now they want another plaque." Zagat laughs and waves his hand at the silliness of it all (the rating is back to 28 this year). Zagat doesn't understand why anyone would be upset by such a minor blip considering what he sees as the service his company offers restaurants. "Someone in the restaurant business," he says, "should know that they are getting free marketing from us."

Those in the restaurant business—or in any number of lifestyle fields, for that matter—are now in line for even more of that free marketing. On February 14, the Zagats—who have used their formula of cleverly constructed blurbs and 30-point-scale ratings of food, service, and decor to create restaurant guidebooks for some 45 (mostly U.S.) cities—announced that they had received $31 million from a group of investors. The couple say they plan to spend the money turning what has been a closely held, mom-and-pop business since they started it, 17 years ago, into what they hope will quickly become a dominant Internet brand name. In addition to pumping up the company's Zagat.com site, the money will go, in part, toward developing an online reservation system and a new travel survey, as well as easing access to a variety of Zagat data through cellular telephones and handheld computers (the guides are already available via Palm organizers in 11 cities). Also in the works: a possible initial public offering next year and an e-commerce effort to sell products ranging from restaurant and hotel gift certificates to sauces and steak knives.

The Zagats' new backers are an impressive group of Internet venture capitalists: General Atlantic Partners; Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers; Nathan Myhrvold, Microsoft's chief technology officer; and Nicholas Negroponte, the director of MIT's Media Laboratory. These and other investors now own a 25 percent piece of a $120 million consumer information empire they suspect is a can't-miss dotcom proposition.

To some degree, the Zagats anticipated the power of the Internet. In creating their guides,

KIMBERLY BUTLER/PEOPLE WEEKLY

Spreading their influence: Nina and Tim Zagat's diners' democracy drew impressive dotcom investors.

the Zagats say, they always saw themselves developing a kind of democracy of foodies. Tim Zagat, 59, says the surveys have thrived because they are an antidote to what he sees as the alienation felt by people in modern American society: "People feel less engaged today. To speak in a meaningful way has largely been lost." And these days the number of people who eat out regularly, either because they want to or because they have to, is larger than ever. What's more, the public's palate has taken a liking to haute cuisine and international flavors, all of which makes the Zagats' stab at the Internet—a limitless forum for communities of shared interests—a logical next move.

"The Internet is all about empowering consumers," says General Atlantic partner Bill Ford, "and that's what the Zagat Survey started out as twenty years ago."

The Zagats' existing website doesn't carry advertisements, nor are users charged a registration fee. The site has nonetheless proven profitable. Between last May—when it launched—and December, the company saw a 25 percent spike in guidebook sales, a surge the couple attribute to their online presence.

In 1999, Tim Zagat says, the couple sold 600,000 copies—at $11.95 apiece—of their New York City guidebook alone. That's a big leap from what started as a hobby in 1968 for two lawyers living in Paris who canvassed their friends for information on that city's restaurants. They kept at the pastime after returning to New York two years later, and in 1979 they formalized their amateur reviewing by printing a two-page mimeograph. The couple's first official guidebook came out in 1983. It sold 7,500 copies at $4.95 apiece, and they broke even. For 1984, at the urging of a friend, the Zagats began publishing gold-embossed deluxe editions for corporate clients; those now account for half of the company's revenue. That year the Zagats sold 18,000 copies of their New York book; in 1985, 40,000 copies. In 1986 they tested their success elsewhere and published surveys for Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. All four hit the best-seller lists in those cities that year.

"The whole idea of the business was, here we were, two busy professionals that had to make decisions when someone would say, 'Let's meet for dinner,'" says Nina Zagat, 57. "We didn't have anything available to meet our needs, so we created something."

The Zagats have their detractors, professional restaurant reviewers among the most vocal (see "The Critics Carve Up the Zagat Survey," page 117). Nonetheless, it's clear the couple are poised to spread their gourmand-information monopoly beyond the turf served by their burgundy guides. So what goes into making these books?

THIS YEAR THE COMPANY will send out nearly 1 million surveys in the cities it serves. Tim Zagat says those surveys go to "white collar institutions where we know people eat out as a way of life," members of food and wine societies, law firms, medical practices, and any individual who asks for one. The questionnaires are simple: four to six pages filled with column after column of restaurant names, along with boxes for numerical voting (from 0 to 3) in the categories of food, decor, and service. The scores are added, averaged, then multiplied by 10 to yield a final rating. The formula makes it mathematically impossible for any restaurant to score above 20 unless at least some voters award it top marks of 3. Each survey also provides a space for comments, which respondents are urged to make "descriptive, pithy and witty."

Once the surveys come in, Zagat employees begin compiling the data in order to tally the final ratings for food, decor, and service. No photocopied surveys are accepted, only the original color-coded forms. Computer programs scan for unusually high food ratings paired with unusually low cost ratings, a possible indication that a restaurateur (or his employees) is trying to influence the results by making it look like his eatery offers excellent food at cheap prices.

The local editors of each guide—in New York, it's Tim Zagat—are in charge of sifting through the comments to craft the trademark 25- to 75-word blurbs that accompany a restaurant's listing. In exchange for their contributions, each survey respondent is promised a free copy of the guide to which they submit. Other than that, the Zagats pay nothing for their content.

THERE'S NO WAY OF KNOWING FOR SURE IF THE PEOPLE SURVEYED HAVE EATEN IN THE RESTAURANTS THEY REVIEW.

The percentage of questionnaires used to put together the guidebooks varies from city to city. Of the 80,000 distributed in New York for this year's book, for instance, about 25 percent were used; the rate in St. Louis was less than 10 percent. The ratings for Boston are based on more than 3,650 surveys, New Orleans on more than 1,400, and Los Angeles on about 7,040. Local editors in cities with low return rates—and consequently less copy from which to choose—have more influence over the content of the blurbs.

The Zagat system has its pitfalls. The most significant: There's no way of guaranteeing that a person who mails in a survey has eaten in the restaurants he reviews; no receipts are required as proof. What's more, various incidents have undermined the books' credibility. In this year's Boston guidebook, galleys of which were sent to the *Boston Herald* in October, the newspaper's restaurant critic, Mat Schaffer, noticed that The Federalist, a Beacon Street eatery that didn't open until January 3, appeared in the book as though it were already open. The printing of the Boston book was delayed and the entry modified.

In 1998, the New York City guide reported that Ratner's, a kosher dairy restaurant on Manhattan's Lower East Side, served "chicken soup that will cure anything short of amputations." But Kosher dietary law prohibits a dairy establishment from serving meat, including chicken. The error was corrected by the second printing, Tim Zagat says. He adds that the error most likely occurred when an editor, not realizing the mistake, culled the inaccurate comment from a survey. "We correct these mistakes as soon as we can," says Zagat.

Louise Despard, who worked as an editor on the 1996 and 1997 New York guides, says that when the company needed to squeeze in a write-up of a restaurant that opened too close to press time, Zagat employees "were offered the chance to go out and review them. We would write the reviews." That would seem to violate the entire Zagat voice-of-the-people philosophy. Tim Zagat's response: "They don't review them per se. They try to get a sense of the restaurant."

The safeguards used to prevent the most blatant forms of ballot stuffing—discarding photocopies and computer-scanning for egregious price-quality disparities—have yet to be adapted for the online venture. More than 400,000 users registered with Zagat.com between May 1999 and February 2000, but their votes have not been released because of questions about their authenticity. "Ratings on the Internet have generally had a bad reputation," says Tim Zagat, adding that he is concerned about "not losing the integrity of what we're doing."

Zagat says the problem is twofold. First, he has found that those who complete an online survey tend to vote after just returning from dinner rather than waiting and comparing one dining experience with others. Zagat says he hopes online voting will become more like the paper polling, which, he says, tends to reflect diners' voting "systematically and dispassionately."

The second problem is trickier: "We need to make sure that restaurateurs or a hacker can't get in and play a game with this," he says. "So far, we haven't reached either goal."

There are restaurateurs who might just want to play that game. Many are irked by the company's method of surveying and the way in which unsophisticated diners are given license to influence their sophisticated businesses. "I think it's an extraordinary thing, to let people give their opinions in a world where they often don't have one," says a Manhattan restaurateur who, like five others interviewed for this article, asked that his name not be used. "Empowering average people to write about something that is deeply researched and off the center of what they are used to is maybe, at best, inappropriate."

Zagat disagrees: "If you honestly synopsize what [the respondents] are saying, recognizing the differences, then you are doing something better and more accurate than the single-surveyor method."

Not all restaurateurs chafe at the Zagats' influence. Danny Meyer, who co-owns four Manhattan restaurants, three of which appear on Zagat's "Top 50 Food Ranking" list, says the company's data are invaluable. "It's like getting an annual report card."

TIM ZAGAT BECOMES particularly animated when he gets going on the subject of one of his company's new high-tech permutations: a cellular phone available only in Japan. Like other ideas that have fueled the Zagat empire's expansion—the lucrative corporate-sponsored guides, the aggressive Internet push—this one did not start with Tim and Nina Zagat; in this case, the idea came from the cell phone maker. The Zagats now have a licensing agreement with NTT DoCoMo, Inc., to which they sell their brand-name content. The Japanese company, in turn, installs the information on their phones.

With the touch of a button, those phones show the user the five restaurants closest to where he is standing, provide a Zagat write-up of each, display a map and directions for each, and check on whether a table is available. Says Zagat: "You can eat well if you have this phone."

Call it information at its most digestible. ◘

THE CRITICS CARVE UP THE ZAGAT SURVEY

HAL RUBENSTEIN

Restaurant critic, New York magazine

There isn't a restaurant critic in America who doesn't secretly hate the Zagats. Why shouldn't they? Before the Zagats chomped their way across America, it was possible for critics to assemble their reviews, get a decent advance, and make a couple of bucks releasing a compendium of their raves and snipes. Now nobody gives a stale brioche what we think past our initial declarations.

The drawback to the guides is that they are only as good as their sources. New York City's survey is cutting and sharp, and San Francisco's is impressive in its ability to suss out that obscure Burmese oasis buried deep in the heart of Oakland. But the accuracy is hit-or-miss when aiming at Asian eateries in Vancouver; the overall ratings for Los Angeles are as out of line as an agent's come-on; and the Miami handbook is proof that to those blind with hunger, the one-eyed man with a fork is king. Everyone's a critic, today's culture mavens complain. Well, yeah. And you can blame the Zagats for that.

SEYMOUR BRITCHKY

Author, with André Soltner, of The Lutèce Cookbook

It is now more than 20 years since a gentleman eating at a famous New York steakhouse was overheard to part with his now immortal pronouncement: "I don't care if this steak *is* tough," said he. "It's still the best steak in New York."

If that particular commentator has not yet been done in by his diet, he may well be among the 19,227 voters whose opinions determined the ratings in this year's Zagat guide. He was not, of course, a dispassionate observer. Once he learned to love his steakhouse, he was a fan. And like all fans—of baseball teams, certain sopranos and violinists, pop stars and politicians—his devotion carried on in disregard of merit or demerit.

Right there is the absurdity of the Zagat method. Once you learn to hate a restaurant you never go back, and since you do not evaluate a restaurant for Zagat unless you have been there in the past year, those who continue to rate a place are, disproportionately, its admirers—fans—while the opinions of detractors go unrecorded.

As long as people buy Zagat guides to find out what the public thinks, so that they may think the same, followers will pursue followers, popular restaurants will remain popular, and Zagat will persist as the bible for the millions.

GENE BOURG

New Orleans–based food writer, former restaurant critic, New Orleans Times-Picayune

I suspect that Zagat's success is due more to its informational value than its restaurant rankings. Most of us involved in the restaurant-rating game quickly learn that readers look at least as much for easily accessed information as for opinions.

As for Zagat's ratings, I think they're no more a reflection of an individual restaurant-goer's opinions than are ratings by a fair-minded, knowledgeable reviewer for a newspaper or magazine. Most professional reviewers have the advantage of sufficient space to deal with nuances in a restaurant's food, service, and decor, and to provide descriptive detail—little of which you'll find in Zagat's snippets from survey respondents.

The New Orleans Zagat Survey lists 537 restaurants, and contains its share of anomalies: Angelo Brocato's, a popular Italian confectionery, is ranked at 25, a point higher than Gerard's Downtown, which serves some of the most distinctive food in the city. Such incongruities pop up in just about every compilation that tosses temples of fine dining and hamburger dispensaries into the same pot.

STEVEN A. SHAW

New York–based writer, contributor to Salon, Food Arts, Redbook

The lowest-common-denominator Zagat Survey is more high-school election than Constitutional Convention, more popularity contest than plebiscite. Just because a restaurant is popular doesn't mean it's good. Otherwise, the number one restaurant in the world would be McDonald's.

Who are the nameless, faceless Zagat multitudes? We know they dine out more than the average person—or at least they say they do. The survey's voting controls (i.e., none) are embarrassing even by Central American standards. A shut-in from Bozeman could easily vote in the New York survey. There's nothing to prevent people from voting multiple times for their friends' restaurants, evaluating unvisited restaurants based only on the opinions of friends, and engaging in "teach them a lesson" or "let's make them number one" conduct. Online voting will no doubt make it even easier to cast fictitious and ill-considered ballots.

MIMI SHERATON

New York–based food writer, former New York Times *restaurant critic*

About the only really positive thing I can say about the Zagat guides is that they provide a handy list of restaurant addresses and telephone numbers that is a little more focused than the Yellow Pages.

Most of all, I question the validity of those ratings for my taste. I see no evidence that the Zagats even know if a respondent went to the restaurants he or she is voting on. I am not aware that they even ask for a copy of a check to prove it.

I have been told by two restaurant owners that customers come in with Zagat forms, say they are respondents, and expect special service, free meals, or both. I have also heard a restaurant owner ask his press agent to find 25 or 30 people to send in Zagat forms, voting favorably on his restaurant so that he can get into the guide. "No problem," said the press agent.

TIM ZAGAT RESPONDS TO SHERATON'S LAST POINT: "Restaurateurs have tried to infiltrate the system. We have the means to prevent that."

JONATHAN KANTOR

THE NEWSPRINT REVOLUTION

In Iran, a group of journalists struggle to establish democracy in the face of angry clerics and assassins' bullets. By Jacki Lyden

It was a week after the parliamentary elections, and journalist Akbar Ganji could not have been more pleased. The cheers of the crowds at Tehran's Hosseini-e Ershad mosque rang in his ears. Students, hundreds of them, were exultant. Even a former deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance was inside the mosque, praising the Iranian press, comparing its work to the golden age of Persian literature. Ganji signed autographs, accepting a share of the credit for the landslide reformist victory.

Ganji was the author of a series of key exposés linking former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to violence against intellectuals and writers. His well-timed articles had followed the trail all the way to the Ministry of Intelligence. They had enraged the hard-liners and interfered with Rafsanjani's political ambitions. The former president, who had hoped to become speaker of the Parliament, instead barely edged in as a member. Ganji was the exposé artist, the Woodward and Bernstein of Tehran's press. This was not a role lightly undertaken in Iran.

Yet the energetic 39-year-old looked relaxed as he rode back to work. Like nearly all of the other reformist journalists, he had received his share of death threats, both at home and at the offices of the newspapers that publish him, but he liked living on the edge. The interviewer dropped him off and watched him disappear behind the iron fences of the *Fatth* newspaper, which had recently been the object of an attack with a percussion grenade that broke the building's windows. No one was seriously hurt, but it was a warning of the sort one didn't ignore.

"Well," said Ganji, with a little smile, "it's all a sweet lethal game."

ON MARCH 12, JUST TEN DAYS AFTER the mosque rally, an attempt was made to assassinate the publisher of *Sobh-e Emrouz*, the respected daily in which Ganji's exposés ran. A man got off a motorcycle (described by witnesses as being of the type used by Ministry of Intelligence agents) and shot Saeed Hajjarian. The bullet lodged in his spine. At press time his prognosis was grim.

Journalist Akbar Ganji traced recent killings of intellectuals to the Ministry of Intelligence.

ABBAS KOWSARI

Hajjarian was a well-chosen target. He was not just the publisher of an important paper but a trusted adviser to President Mohammad Khatami and a key strategist of the reformist victory in the Parliament. Without him there could be no Ganjis. To shoot him was to put the fledgling Iranian journalistic community—and also Khatami himself—on notice.

Even before the attempt on Hajjarian's life, anyone who picked up a pen in Tehran understood the risks. There is no shortage of shadowy militants with government guns and the belief that Islam commands their use. All the same, despite three years of shutdowns, jailings, and attacks, the reformist press has undeniably come into its own. There are dozens of reformist papers. Hajjarian's *Sobh-e Emrouz* ("This Morning"), *Asr-e Azadegan* ("Time of the Free"), and *Fatth* ("Victory") are the most powerful. They have much in common, such as elegant typography, a broadsheet format, and a shared pool of writers. Each is led by a male journalist in his thirties or forties with impeccable revolutionary credentials.

Hajjarian was a former deputy minister of intelligence. Among the other top reformist editors and publishers are an ex-cleric, two war heroes, and various former intelligence agents. Ganji served in the Revolutionary Guards, the crack internal police force. Several spent their teen years, when the revolution was young, handing out literature for Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Call theirs the Revolution of Second Thoughts.

"Democracy is our mission now," said one, publisher Hamidreza Jalaeipour. "We had an era of charisma under Imam Khomeini. An era of the oligarchs under Rafsanjani. And now, we have this mission for democracy. To tell you the truth, that is what the revolution was always supposed to be about. It was supposed to be anti-authoritarian."

Since the landmark 1997 presidential election that brought the moderate Mohammad Khatami to power, the momentum toward a more open society has been swift. And the United States has taken notice. The White House recently lifted some sanctions on Iran and hinted that more might follow. In Iran itself, barriers continue to fall. Now only the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is above criticism. Government, lesser mullahs, powerful businessmen, are all fair game. Despite Western coverage to the contrary, it should be clear: These papers aren't calling for Iran to emulate what most Iranians still consider the West's decadent ways. They are working to create a democratic society in which law and religion are separate. To achieve this goal, they have gone up against obstacles in a state where the public's right to know is by no means guaranteed.

Consider Ganji's work. His series of articles began last summer. Opponents of the regime have been dying or disappearing mysteriously for years—as many as 80 people in the last decade—but finally, after a series of especially brutal murders in late 1998, President Khatami's government had the popular mandate to move against a number of rogue

Protesters outside the hospital in which Iranian reformist newspaper publisher Saeed Hajjarian lies unconscious after the March 12 attempt on his life.

Ministry of Intelligence agents and imprison them. Ganji believed that the government had not gone far enough. He suspected Rafsanjani himself had a role in the killings. An admirer of Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes, he traced the killings all the way to higher-ups in the Ministry of Intelligence.

"The killers had their own organization within the Ministry of Intelligence," Ganji remembers. "It was like a dark room no one could get in. I never actually said Rafsanjani ordered the hits. He didn't have to. I said he stood for political darkness. I said he didn't believe in democracy, freedom, human rights, or the civil society we're trying to build, that he worked behind closed doors." In print, Ganji alludes to a "master key," widely understood to mean former minister of intelligence Ali Fallahian. Fallahian also ran for Parliament—and lost, thanks to Ganji and the press.

I WAS IN IRAN TO WITNESS the beginning of the long process by which the press grew into the power it is today. On the first of seven trips there, in 1995, I met with a group of young intellectuals who were starting a magazine called *Goftegu* ("Dialogue"). After long isolation, they were hoping to engage with the West, to have conversations about the theory of democracy and the limits of pluralism. It was a startling if elite proposition—these young Westernized thinkers, making instant coffee, arguing and debating at a quaint villa.

BARRIERS HAVE FALLEN, ONE AFTER THE OTHER. NOW ONLY THE SUPREME LEADER, AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI, IS ABOVE CRITICISM.

They were on risky ground. Since the revolution the government's control of information has been extensive. Radio stations and television stations are run by the state. The Ministry of Culture licenses newspapers. But with the election of Khatami, a former minister of culture himself, the reformists became the people handing out those newspaper licenses. The tables were turned. Within months, there were a dozen new papers on the scene.

The story of the free press in Iran is less the story of a wholesale change in government policy than of people who just will not give up. "You were here; you must remember my first paper, *Jameah*," says Hamidreza Jalaeipour when I call him. I did remember. It had been only two years ago, in February 1998. Young men in suspenders and young women with fresh manicures mixed with others in Islamic attire. They raced about the hallways in the old villa where the paper was housed. It was like putting out *The New York Times* from a Persian garden. The Eden didn't last. After an impressive debut, the courts closed down *Jameah* ("Society"). The Ministry of Culture had prepared for that eventuality by issuing publishers like Jalaeipour spare licenses in advance. He next started *Toos*, named for the birthplace of the 9th-century poet Ferdowsi, whose epic poems of Persian kings and queens Iranians interpret as challenges to theocracy. But *Toos* quickly ran into trouble, too, when in Issue No. 45 it reported that Ayatollah Khomeini had asked the president of France, then Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, for asylum when he first fled to Paris. This revelation implied that the revolution was not inevitable. Not only was the paper closed down, but, after an excoriating speech from the head of the judiciary, *Toos*'s offices were ransacked and its editor beaten up. Then Jalaeipour, the editor, and two writers were imprisoned.

HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN/AP

That's when Jalaeipour's mother intervened. "I'm a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war," the 41-year-old Jalaeipour explains. "I fought at the front and was there the whole time, from 1981 to 1989. So I know something about fighting. I lost three brothers in the war. That makes my mother the honored mother of martyrs. So when I went to prison, my mother wrote to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. No response. Then she gave a newspaper interview to say how outraged she was. She said, 'How can they take my son from me when I've already given three?' The Supreme Leader's office called her and arranged a meeting." Jalaeipour was pardoned.

Khamenei must have regretted it. Immediately, Jalaeipour began publishing *Neshat* ("Joy"), which was closed after six months. The courts said the paper's call for an end to the death penalty violated the Koran's edict of "an eye for an eye." Enter *Asr-e Azadegan*, with its spicy political coverage, not to mention articles about the Internet. Jalaeipour says of his latest creation: "Each time, I manage to publish a little longer, get a little bigger. *Asr-e Azadegan* is up to 150 issues and counting. Our circulation is 300,000. Of course, if they close me down again, I've got another license. I can always get more." He laughs.

The fact that Tehran is such a small, gossipy community helped lay the groundwork for the new press freedom. Even before Khatami was elected president, an informal publishers' group—about 25 people including Hajjarian and Ganji—were meeting in coffeehouses, steam baths, and restaurants to talk about reform. They felt close to the young people who wanted change—a potentially commanding group in a country where 70 percent of the population are under the age of 30. They passed on their thoughts to candidate Khatami through Hajjarian and other emissaries. One or two even wrote campaign literature. They were determined not to let the gains slip away.

Top: publisher Hamidreza Jalaeipour (left) on one of his frequent trips to court; bottom: *Fatth* editor Emadedin Baghi (right) goes over the layout with a staff member.

"We were very aware that there might be a coup d'état against Khatami," says Emadedin Baghi, an editor at *Fatth*, who was also part of the informal press group. "Many people thought he wouldn't last six months." Baghi, 38, is as calm and judicious as Ganji is fiery and Jalaeipour gregarious. His father was an anti-shah activist, and for a long while the family lived in exile in Iraq, where Baghi was born. He returned as a teenager and for 12 years studied theology, part of that time at a clerical school in the holy city of Qom. He briefly wore a robe and turban, although he now favors tight-fitting pinstriped suits.

"I've investigated some of the same killings as Ganji," he says. "We started to write about them, so that people could see we weren't afraid. By now we have our own sources in the Ministry of Intelligence. As we wrote, people began to trust us, and the families of victims came forward with information. They could see we were risking our lives. Now we have hours of calls every day on our answering machines, asking for help."

He has received his own death threats. He was denounced from the pulpit by the former head of Iran's judiciary. "Do you think nothing should be prohibited?" the man challenged Baghi at Tehran's Friday prayers. "Would you drink alcohol in your own home?" The next day another ayatollah suggested death without trial was a fit punishment for such heresy. The threats still come by telephone, by mail. Sometimes strangers just stand in front of his house. "They never say who they are," he says. "They just threaten you. They just tell you you're a traitor, anti-revolutionary stuff like that. I don't tell my friends. I think we shouldn't worry a group of young people who are just starting in journalism that speaking out means getting cut to pieces."

These journalists do not aspire to the sort of nonpartisanship American newspapers espouse. They consider their papers substitutes for opposition political parties, which do not have official status in Iran. They think of the ire they've aroused among conservatives as proof they are doing their jobs right. After the killings in 1998, newspaper editors were offered bodyguards, but they refused them. Fear would have gotten in the way of their message. Despite the dangers, newspapers continue to be a lure for young men and women. To sign up as a journalist is to join a cause, a crusade. "I think a reporter should be like a hawk flying high above looking for prey to catch," says Baghi. "A reporter should be in the bazaars hunting news. We don't have such people yet. But we're getting there."

UNTIL NOW THE CONSERVATIVE COURTS HAVE BEEN USED TO CLOSE PAPERS. THE FEAR IS THAT THE VICIOUS ATTACK ON HAJJARIAN SIGNALS WHAT'S NEXT.

But after the shooting of publisher Hajjarian, the reformist press was clearly feeling exposed and called for President Khatami to do more to protect them. Khatami, shaken, vowed not to turn back. No one knows what is next. Until now the conservative courts, rather than guns, have been used to close down Iran's insurgent papers, according to Ann Cooper, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent watchdog group. She worries "that the vicious attack on Hajjarian is a sign of what's next." Ironically, Hajjarian's *Sobh-e Emrouz* was the only important reformist paper that had never been shut down.

The journalists remain determined. "With a single shot to the temple they are trying to show that whatever you vote for, you're not going to get it," wrote *Sobh-e Emrouz* the day after the assassination attempt. "Firing on Hajjarian was like firing on a mountain, and mountains will always remain firmly on the ground."

Akbar Ganji wrote an article the same day in which he recounted his last conversation with Hajjarian: "The other day when we were leaving [the paper] for home I told Saeed that unless they put 'the master key' [former minister of intelligence Fallahian] on trial, the truth will not be revealed. He said Fallahian might flee the country. We said good-bye and I told him that he should be careful. He laughed it off and said, "'You should be the one who takes care of himself. It's you who they are after,' but the truth is we are all threatened in one way or another."

Ganji has no plans to back off. In a recent interview with the paper, he explained that opposition to democracy was to be expected in a country with Iran's tradition of authoritarian rule: "Establishing a democracy is like releasing a genie from the bottle," he said, "genies that have been trapped in the bottle for a long time." ◘

This article was reported with assistance from an Iranian journalist who did not wish to be named.

ABBAS KOWSARI

ANNALS OF PUBLISHING

The New Yorker is throwing itself a birthday party. Can't be in town to celebrate? No problem: Head to your local bookstore and read all about it. By Jesse Oxfeld

February marked the seventy-fifth birthday of *The New Yorker*, the venerable weekly known for its wit, sophistication, and quality journalism—and always, seemingly by law, cited for its wit, sophistication, and quality journalism. *New Yorker* readers are a devoted bunch; so that they all might take part in the celebration, Eustace Tilley will throw himself an enormous—if tardy—birthday party on the first weekend in May. The New Yorker Festival, running at venues across Manhattan, will feature fiction readings, panel discussions, performances, and conversations. But those west of the Hudson can celebrate, too. Head to a local bookstore, where you'll find recent tomes on almost every aspect of the magazine: histories, memoirs, and tributes to departed editors, as well as collections of fiction, nonfiction, and the legendary cartoons.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

There are three sorts of books about *The New Yorker*: the tell-all memoir, the serious history, and the jeremiad. The categories often blur, but the books nevertheless provide valuable insight into the magazine and its people.

GONE: THE LAST DAYS OF THE NEW YORKER

By Renata Adler
(Simon & Schuster, 2000, $25)

This controversial book is notable mainly for the bitterness with which the longtime staff writer laces into her enemies, real or perceived, and even her ostensible friends. "I had hoped to finish this book without addressing either Ved Mehta's *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker* or Lillian Ross's *Here But Not Here*," she writes—on only page 26, and then launches into 15 pages of vitriol. Adler's eagerness to attack ultimately undermines her book's point. The magazine "is dead," she argues, without the legendary William Shawn guiding it—yet she registers complaint upon criticism of the way in which even he ran things.

SOME TIMES IN AMERICA AND A LIFE IN A YEAR AT THE NEW YORKER

By Alexander Chancellor
(Carroll & Graf, February 2000, $25)

This memoir, from the English journalist who for one year edited the "Talk of the Town" section under Tina Brown, does little to diminish the standard criticisms of him. Indeed, the book frequently buttresses the argument that Chancellor was insufficiently familiar with the magazine and his section's traditionally Manhattan-centric viewpoint. Chancellor confesses that he had rarely read *The New Yorker* before Brown offered him his post. And he even attempts to explain away an infamous episode that occurred during his tenure there—that he was so fascinated by the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, which he saw being installed on his way to work one morning, that he proposed an item on this old-hat-for-actual-New Yorkers ceremony.

HERE AT THE NEW YORKER

By Brendan Gill
(Da Capo Press, softcover, 1997, $15.95; originally published by Random House, 1975)

Gill is the godfather of the insider-memoir subgenre; he published *Here at The New Yorker* in 1975. But even this comparatively geriatric work has been updated to include the tumultuous Si Newhouse/Tina Brown era. In 1997, not long before his death, Gill penned a new introduction for the book, which was reissued then and remains in print. Though some never forgave the 61-year *New Yorker* veteran for having breached the magazine's vaunted walls of privacy, he did so in classic Gill form, with humor and wit. In the 1997 introduction, he tells how Robert Gottlieb, freshly installed in the editor's chair, cut Gill's salary in half. The esteemed critic couldn't have been pleased about this—who would have been?—but true to form, he tells the story as a marvelously droll anecdote that leaves Gottlieb looking reasonable and Gill looking foolish.

ABOUT TOWN: THE NEW YORKER AND THE WORLD IT MADE

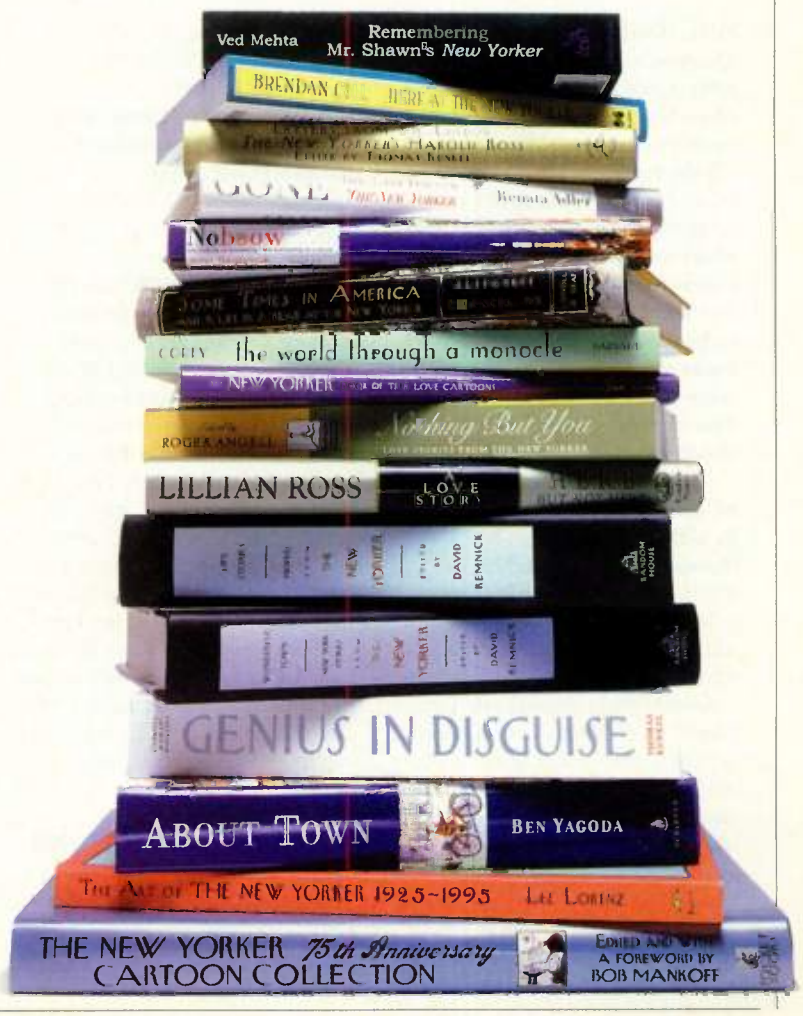
By Ben Yagoda
(Scribner, 2000, $30)

A rarity among recent books about the magazine, *About Town* is a noncontroversial, nongossipy history of *The New Yorker*. Yagoda is an English professor at the University of Delaware, and his prose tends toward the academic: somewhat dry and frequently footnoted. The book is based in large measure on *The New Yorker*'s archives, which enables Yagoda, when discussing certain oft-retold stories, to achieve a far greater degree of accuracy than memoirists who rely predominantly on their own recollections. For example, when reporting on "Tiny Mummies," Tom Wolfe's notorious attack on the magazine, which ran in the *New York Herald Tribune*'s Sunday magazine, *About Town* includes quotes from both Mr. Shawn's letter attempting to stop publication of the story and the letter from the *Herald Tribune*'s editor that Shawn received in response.

THE WORLD THROUGH A MONOCLE: THE NEW YORKER AT MIDCENTURY

By Mary F. Corey
(Harvard University Press, softcover, 2000, $14.95; originally published by Harvard, 1999)

Corey is a UCLA historian, and her book is the most academic of the bunch. It focuses on the late 1940s and the 1950s, arguing that the material contained in *The New Yorker* highlighted contradictions inherent in its readership's culture. For example, Corey says, racist cartoons, along with ads for high-end material goods, would appear alongside earnest articles advancing progressive and pacifistic causes.



NORMAN

NOBROW: THE CULTURE OF MARKETING—THE MARKETING OF CULTURE

By John Seabrook
(Alfred A. Knopf, 2000, $23)
In this memoir-cum-cultural analysis, staff writer John Seabrook argues that Tina Brown didn't bring the world of buzz to *The New Yorker*—the world of buzz brought Tina Brown to *The New Yorker*. Seabrook reworks many of his articles from the magazine to make the argument that the culture at large has fundamentally changed. No longer, he says, do old high culture/mass culture distinctions apply; instead we live in one giant Nobrow culture in which high art is merely a subculture. In that world, an arbiter—such as the old *New Yorker*—of acceptable high-status culture is no longer useful. What is instead valued is a cultural expression that is original and defies expectations. If that's the case, then a magazine must hype itself and make waves to survive, and Brown was merely the instrument to bring that reality to *The New Yorker*'s cloistered world.

HAGIOGRAPHY

***The New Yorker* has had only five editors, and the first two, founding editor Harold Ross and his hand-picked successor, William Shawn, ran the magazine for a combined 62 years. Perhaps because of their longevity, perhaps because of their brilliance, perhaps for some other reason no one understands, Ross and Shawn inspired tremendous respect, reverence, and legend. All books about the magazine deal in some way with these two imposing figures; some, though, are devoted to nothing else.**

HERE BUT NOT HERE: A LOVE STORY

By Lillian Ross
(Random House, 1998, $25)
Ross, a star writer under Shawn, reveals in far too personal detail what was long suspected but unmentioned at the magazine: that for 40 years Ross was Shawn's mistress. Shawn's wife, Cecille, knew of her husband's long relationship with his writer—and tolerated it—but the so-called second wife was roundly condemned for publishing this book while Shawn's legal wife was still alive. *Here But Not Here* is full of detail on their lives and the relationship. "After forty years," begins its best-known passage, "our lovemaking had the same passion, the same energies (alarming to me, at first, in our early weeks together), the same tenderness, the same inventiveness, the same humor, the same textures as it had in the beginning." Maybe so, but do we really need to read about it?

REMEMBERING MR. SHAWN'S NEW YORKER: THE INVISIBLE ART OF EDITING

By Ved Mehta
(The Overlook Press, softcover, 1999, $16.95; originally published by Overlook, 1998)
This book, by a longtime staff writer who admits in his preface that "I did venerate [Shawn] as I would a hero," was published contemporaneously with *Here But Not Here* and nicely matches Ross's book in both the author's intent and the reaction it elicited. *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker* is designed as a tribute to the legendary editor, and like its partner, it was criticized. In this case, though, the complaint was Mehta's self-importance—his book, critics said, was as much about its author as about Shawn.

GENIUS IN DISGUISE: HAROLD ROSS OF THE NEW YORKER

By Thomas Kunkel
(Carroll & Graf, softcover, 1996, $14.95; originally published by Random House, 1995)

LETTERS FROM THE EDITOR: THE NEW YORKER'S HAROLD ROSS

Edited by Thomas Kunkel
(Modern Library, 2000, $26.95)
Genius in Disguise is the definitive work on *The New Yorker*'s founder. The new *Letters From the Editor* supports Kunkel's argument for Ross's genius by reprinting hundreds of his letters. The missives are delicious—blunt, witty, and sarcastic. One, to E.B. White, takes to task the star writer, who is reported to be "up in arms" over a change made to a piece of his: "If you are up in arms about this, you are up in arms against a mere typographical error." Another, to Ross's soon-to-be ex-wife, is refreshingly candid: "Living with you on the basis that I have in the past is, I have concluded, impossible. You are a disturbing and upsetting person."

WRITING COLLECTIONS

With so many *New Yorker* books available—and so many of them filled with such salacious gossip—why buy a volume of anything as anodyne as magazine pieces? Because this magazine's writing, whether fiction or fact, is just so good.

WONDERFUL TOWN: NEW YORK STORIES FROM THE NEW YORKER

Edited by David Remnick
(Random House, 2000, $26.95)
Wonderful Town anthologizes 44 pieces of the magazine's famous short fiction, all stories set in New York City and its environs. Many of the great writers of the century are featured here, from J.D. Salinger and E.B. White to Philip Roth and Saul Bellow. Current editor David Remnick chose the selections; he also provides a history of *New Yorker* fiction.

LIFE STORIES: PROFILES FROM THE NEW YORKER

Edited by David Remnick
(Random House, 2000, $26.95)
Life Stories was published as a companion to *Wonderful Town*. It's also edited by Remnick, and his introduction is an essay on the *New Yorker* Profile. The 25 biographical essays showcase great writers on legendary subjects: Truman Capote on Marlon Brando, Lillian Ross on Ernest Hemingway. The range of subjects stretches from Wolcott Gibbs's 1936 skewering of *Time* co-founder Henry Luce to Susan Orlean's 1995 Profile on show dog Biff Truesdale, with its memorable opening sentence: "If I were a bitch, I'd be in love with Biff Truesdale."

NOTHING BUT YOU: LOVE STORIES FROM THE NEW YORKER

Edited by Roger Angell
(Modern Library Paperbacks, 1998, $15; originally published by Random House, 1997)
Nothing But You is, as its subtitle suggests, a collection of 38 love stories. Compiled by longtime *New Yorker* fiction editor Roger Angell, the collection includes short fiction from John Updike, John Cheever, and Woody Allen.

CARTOON COLLECTIONS

***The New Yorker* is perhaps best known for its cartoons. There are innumerable collections of cartoons from the magazine in print—volumes culled from the magazine by topic, volumes compiling the work of an individual cartoonist, and volumes purporting to provide the best of all *New Yorker* cartoons.**

THE NEW YORKER 75TH ANNIVERSARY CARTOON COLLECTION

Edited by Bob Mankoff
(Pocket Books, 1999, $40)
This handsome collection was issued late last year in anticipation of the big birthday (and presumably in time to make a handy Christmas gift). Mankoff is the magazine's cartoon editor, and for this retrospective he chose 707 classic images from the nearly 62,000 in the magazine's archive. He also penned a wittily self-deprecating introduction that explains how he selected them. You'll find work from every great *New Yorker* cartoonist here, from 18 Charles Addamses to 20 Jack Zieglers.

THE ART OF THE NEW YORKER, 1925–1995

Edited by Lee Lorenz
(Alfred A. Knopf, softcover, 1996, $25; originally published by Knopf, 1995)
This book was compiled for the magazine's seventieth anniversary. Its introduction by Lorenz, Mankoff's long-serving predecessor as cartoon editor, provides a brief, quasi-philosophical musing on the nature of the *New Yorker* cartoon.

THE NEW YORKER BOOK OF TRUE LOVE CARTOONS

(Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, $20)
This volume is too small to be a coffee-table book. It's merely an end-table book, really, but an enjoyable one, and its 101 cartoons illustrate the magazine's droll take on love, sex, and relationships. An entire series of these small collections, organized by topic—*The New Yorker Book of Lawyer Cartoons*, *The New Yorker Book of Dog Cartoons*, and so forth—has been published over the past decade. ■

HEY, WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?

They gaze into our future and tell us what lies ahead. But how did these astrologers learn to read the stars, the moon, and the planets? By Jane Manners

ROBERT BREZSNY

Syndicated newspaper astrologer, "Wild Astrology" (formerly "Real Astrology"), 1980–

B.A., Goddard College (Plainfield, Vermont), 1973

Astrological training: Studied with Peter Kubaska, Isabel Hickey, and Antero Alli; correspondence course with The Builders of the Adytum (founded by Paul Foster Case); relied on the works of Carl Jung, Dane Rudhyar, and Rodney Collin

Selected work experience: Part-time janitor, 1978–87; contributing editor, *Details*, 1995–96; singer-songwriter, 1983–present; performance artist, 1979–present; author: *The Televisionary Oracle* (North Atlantic Books, 2000)

What do you try to do with your horoscopes? *Let people know that their imaginations are their most important asset....I believe in astrology about 75 percent....My goal is to awaken readers to the hidden agendas and subconscious programming that are at work in their lives.*

NICHOLAS CAMPION

Astrologer, *Harper's Bazaar*, 1992–

B.A., history, Queens' College, University of Cambridge, 1974; M.A., University of London, 1976

Astrological training: Relied on *Margaret Hone's Modern Text-Book of Astrology*, attended lectures at London's Astrological Association and the Astrological Lodge; diploma from the Mayo School of Astrology, 1979

Selected work experience: Private consultant, 1975–95; astrologer: *Daily Mail* (London), 1986–92; *British Vogue*, 1987–90; *New Woman* (London), 1991–94; *Bella* (London), 1993–present; *Zest* (London), 1994–present; author: *The Practical Astrologer* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987); *The Great Year* (Penguin Arkana, 1995); *Zodiac* (Quadrille Publishing, 2000)

What do you try to do with your horoscopes? *I try to be thought-provoking and uplifting.*
Will Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles marry? *No....I'm not thinking astrologically. I don't think they need to get married...because they seem to be getting on perfectly well as they are.*

DEBBI KEMPTON-SMITH

Astrologer, *Tatler*, 1999–

Astrological training: Studied with Roy Alexander, Ronald Davison, Carolyn Dodson, Charles and Vivia Jayne, Jim Lewis, Jeff Mayo, Al Morrison, Bob Pike, and David Williams, as well as astronomer George Lovi; certified by the Astrologers Guild of America, 1979; relied on the works of Nicholas Campion, Svetlana Godillo, Dr. Walter Koch, and Richard Blackmore Vaughan; attends classes and lectures at the Hayden Planetarium (New York City)

Selected work experience: Personal consultant, 1970–present; staff writer, *Yoga and Health*, 1971–74; astrologer: *Seventeen*, 1985–91; *Harper's Bazaar*, 1988; *Glamour*, 1990–91; author: *Secrets From a Stargazer's Notebook* (Topquark Press, 1982); *The Late Night Guru Guide* (serialized in *Yoga and Health*, 1973–75)

What are your 21st-century predictions? *Astrology and astronomy will reunite in some form again. At the moment astrology is an object of great derision, but as we get closer to understanding quantum physics we're going to find a model for why it is that astrology works....[In] 2008–9...architecture is going to get great because people will realize that the buildings in the public places they walk through really do affect society's behavior. [In] 2012, the fascination with the ocean will start....There will probably be lovely bubbly cities under the water.*

MICHAEL LUTIN

Astrologer, *Vanity Fair*, 1990–

B.A., Romance languages, Trinity College (Hartford), 1962; studied Spanish literature, Yale University (New Haven), 1962–63

Astrological training: Relied on the works of Charles Carter, Michel Gauquelin, Marc Edmund Jones, Alan Leo, and Grant Lewi and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*; attended lectures at The United Astrology Congress

Selected work experience: Private consultant, mid-1970s–present; astrologer: *Vanity Fair*, 1984–89; *American Way* (in-flight magazine of American Airlines), 1989–present; *German Vogue*, 1996–present; playwright and lyricist: *I Was Nostradamus' Girlfriend* (1989); author: *Childhood Rising* (Delacorte, 1991)

What's the hallmark of your practice? *Giving power back to the people. The horoscope helps people become so aware of what they're doing and saying that they make their future.*
Do you think that people's fates are set? *People who face life and death bravely can change their fate. But if you're shivering and cowering in the corner, waiting for the planets to move, then your fate is doomed.*

KATHARINE MERLIN

Astrologer, *Town & Country*, 1988–

Studied journalism, Boston University, 1966–67

Astrological training: Studied with Isabel Hickey; attended lectures at the C.G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology (New York City); relied on the works of Stephen Arroyo, Cyril Fagan, and Dane Rudhyar

Selected work experience: Private consultant (New York City), 1971–present; freelance journalist, 1974–89; author: *Character and Fate: The Psychology of the Birthchart* (Penguin Arkana, 1989)

What do you give your readers? *A sense that there is some meaning... that we're not living in utter chaos, that there are relationships between us and the forces of the universe, that we're all part of something.*
Have you made any memorable predictions that have come true? *One client called me and said, "You told me I was going to be under pressure and wired...and I just got braces put in my mouth."*
Merlin is your real name? *Yeah, it's the name I was born with.*

STEVEN SHAW

Astrologer, *Swoon.com* (as "Celeste L. Smith"), 1996–

Bachelor of general studies, University of Missouri–Columbia, 1985

Astrological training: Relied on *The Astrologer's Handbook*, by Frances Sakoian and Louis S. Acker, and *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*, by Isabel Hickey

Selected work experience: Copy editor, *The Korea Herald* (Seoul), 1986–87; reporter and anchor, *WGRB-TV* (Campbellsville, Kentucky), 1987–94; editor, *The Russell County Reporter* (Russell Springs, Kentucky), 1995

What do you try to do with your horoscopes? *I don't view the future as immutable....I try to tell people what to look out for so that they've got a sporting chance to avoid disaster or maximize an opportunity.*

BREZSNY: PAUL SHRAUB; KEMPTON-SMITH: ROBERT RATTNER; LUTIN: GASPER TRINGALE; MERLIN: LISA ROMEREIN

SHATTERING CONVICTIONS

After the seventh death row inmate in four years was freed in Illinois, two *Chicago Tribune* reporters set out to examine the death penalty system. What they found led the governor to halt all executions in his state. By Leslie Heilbrunn

George Ryan, the conservative Republican governor of Illinois, is known for his strong law-and-order, pro-death-penalty stance. So it came as a shock when, on January 31 of this year, he declared a moratorium on executions in his state: "I cannot support a system, which, in its administration, has proven to be so fraught with error and has come so close to the ultimate nightmare, the state's taking of innocent life," he said.

This dramatic reversal can be credited in no small measure to two *Chicago Tribune* reporters, Ken Armstrong and Steve Mills, who produced a five-part series last November exposing fundamental flaws in Illinois's death penalty system. Among their findings: Since the reinstatement of the death penalty in Illinois in 1977, 127 of the 285 capital convictions had been reversed on appeal; in 33 cases, the defense attorney had been or later would be disbarred or suspended; 46 convictions had turned on the unreliable testimony of jailed informants; 20 had depended on doubtful forensic evidence; and 35 black defendants had been convicted or sentenced by all-white juries.

Steve Mills (left) and Ken Armstrong spent eight months investigating the Illinois death penalty system.

JEFF SCIORTINO

Rarely does journalism have such a direct impact on a major area of public policy. The effect of the *Tribune* series was unequivocal: "The facts and figures that they came out with in their story convinced me that we had to do something," Governor Ryan said in a recent interview. "When you look at those numbers, you say, 'How can you go on with this system that could be doing this?'...There could be some innocent people who just didn't get represented the way they should, so that's what really turned my head on it."

Since 1987, 13 death row inmates have been exonerated, 10 in the past five years. New DNA evidence cleared three of these defendants; the others were freed because of new evidence or witnesses' recanting of their testimony. With each new exoneration, it became increasingly difficult for Illinois officials—and reporters—to call every one a mere anomaly.

In February 1999, Anthony Porter, convicted in 1983 of a double murder, became the tenth death row inmate to be cleared of all charges against him. Porter, who had come within 48 hours of execution, was saved by a Northwestern University journalism class taught by Professor David Protess. With the help of a private investigator, the students procured a recantation from the prosecution's eyewitness and a videotaped confession from the actual killer. The Porter case was particularly chilling because the defendant had come so close to execution and because the supposedly rock-solid case against him turned out to have been built on sand.

The *Tribune* had reported each death row exoneration as it occurred, but the Porter case spurred the paper to take a closer look at the whole system. "The cases just kept rolling in, and there was no doubt that innocent people were on death row," explains metro editor Paul Weingarten. "It just reached a critical mass where we said, 'This is something that we really have to take apart.'"

The paper, which has endorsed the death penalty in its editorial pages, assigned legal reporter Armstrong, 37, and police reporter Mills, 39, to the task. They were exempted from their everyday duties for eight months to focus on the project—an allocation of resources almost unheard of in today's cost-conscious newsrooms. Nothing came easily in this investigation. A list of all the death penalty cases since 1977 didn't even exist when the reporters set out to establish how many cases needed to be examined. Mills and Armstrong compiled a list of their own by scouring newspaper clips, by working in cooperation with four state agencies, and by finding every capital case that had been overturned by an appellate court or by the Illinois Supreme Court.

After compiling the 285 cases, Armstrong

and Mills assembled briefs and opinions for each and created a 20-category chart of the information they wanted to monitor. The most basic categories covered such questions as which attorneys defended and prosecuted which cases, the race of the defendant and of the victim, and the kind of evidence used. Armstrong and Mills also examined the more pertinent issues arising in the recent exonerations: Had a jailhouse snitch been tapped or accomplice testimony been exploited? How credible was the forensic evidence? Had there been a confession—perhaps one that might have been coerced? Did any of the defendants have a background of emotional or physical abuse, mental instability, or even retardation? Armstrong and Mills drew up a short list of 40 cases in which they felt the verdicts were suspect. "We wanted to find cases that illustrated themes, that would speak to a larger issue," explains Mills.

One such case was that of Steve Manning, a corrupt former Chicago police officer who was sentenced to death for having murdered a trucking-company owner in Cook County. Armstrong gleaned from the state Supreme Court opinion that the evidence against Manning consisted mainly of testimony from a jailed informant, Tommy Dye. Armstrong and Mills's handling of the Manning case and their exposure of Dye as a pathological liar and long-term snitch typify the painstaking reporting the pair conducted throughout the series. "Manning, Dye testified, admitted committing the execution-style killing during six hours of tape recordings that Dye secretly made," Armstrong and Mills wrote in the third article of the *Tribune* series. "But when the tapes were played in court, there were no murder confessions. Dye's explanation: Manning's confessions were lost in two seconds-long gaps in the recordings, one caused by a malfunction, the other by Dye bending over and inadvertently covering the microphones."

On January 18, just two weeks before the governor declared the death penalty moratorium, Cook County prosecutors dropped their charges against Manning, making him the thirteenth death row inmate cleared since 1987. Manning and his defense attorney were quoted in the *Tribune* as saying they believed that the paper's investigation of Dye exposed the weaknesses in the case and led to its dismissal.

Even more striking to the reporters than the sensational individual cases was just how widespread the system's problems were. For example, Armstrong says that although he and Mills knew defense attorney competence would be an important issue, he never imagined that they would find 33 instances of incompetent representation—including several lawyers who were cited in multiple cases. Armstrong presented six different lists of defense attorneys' names to the lawyer disciplinary agency in Illinois, and each time, he says, "I'd figure [they'd] say, 'Nothing there, nothing there, nothing there.' And every time [they'd] say, 'I've got two more; I've got three more; I've got five more lawyers.' It just boggled the mind."

Lawyers and journalists involved in death row cases were not surprised by the cracks in the system that Armstrong and Mills exposed, but they say the scope of the journalists' work brought the death penalty debate to a level beyond polemics. The reporters made a conscious decision to address only the system itself. There was little mention of the defendants' character, the victims, or the morality of the death penalty. Their use of statistical analysis and of vivid case studies provided conclusive and disturbing evidence that the system was indeed broken.

"Look at the headline: 'The Failure of the Death Penalty,'" says Protess, the Northwestern professor whose students helped clear three men on death row. "The reporting is so thorough that they are able to safely draw conclusions from what they found, which is not true of a lot of investigative stories....'Is the Death Penalty Failing?' would be a more typical headline. What we have here is that it's failed—and then they back it up in five parts." ■

dept.

THE MONEY PRESS

CROSSING OVER

Working in the heady atmosphere of Silicon Valley, more and more journalists are being tempted by Internet gold—and joining companies they once covered. The trend raises some prickly ethical questions. By Chipp Winston

For nearly a week, Stephen Buel wasn't quite sure what to do. He'd lie awake in bed, hours before dawn, his mind spinning with excitement over an Internet start-up he had written about several days earlier in the *San Jose Mercury News*. The company, Cybergold, Inc., planned to launch a Web service that would allow writers and artists to post their work online, "to operate," as Buel had written, "on their own—unmolested by editors, producers, or bosses—selling directly to the public." The idea had inspired him.

In fact, Buel, an Internet media reporter who'd been at the *Mercury News* for nearly five years, was so taken by the concept that, after a week or so of fitful sleep, he called Nat Goldhaber, founder and CEO of Cybergold—not to inquire about posting some of his work online but to ask for a job. That was in late March of last year. Three months later, he left the paper to join the nascent Web venture.

Buel was among the first in a wave of 11 business-technology reporters and editors who have left the *Mercury News* in the past year to join Internet companies, including online journalism ventures. The *San Francisco Chronicle* lost just as many in that time; three copy editors left in the month of February alone. It's a phenomenon in newsrooms across the country—four have departed *The Wall Street Journal* in recent months—but nowhere more than at Bay Area papers, which, by virtue of their proximity to Silicon Valley, are in the thick of the dotcom mania.

The allure is staggering. Reporters in the valley often hang out in the same circles as Internet-made millionaires. They regularly write about young entrepreneurs who have no more business acumen than they do. And, to hear some tell it, they are routinely offered jobs with stock options that make their salaries look like grade school allowances.

As one *Mercury News* reporter puts it, "The reason so many [people] are leaving to go to dotcoms is because this is California's second gold rush, and they don't want to wake up when they're 80 years old and tell their grandchildren that they didn't even bother to buy a shovel."

But the rush to join the new economy—a phenomenon certainly not confined to journalists—underscores the potential for a conflict of interest that is unique to journalism. At what point does or should a reporter refrain from covering a company he might be interested in joining? How should a reporter handle a story about a company whose CEO has just offered him a job? Does all the money swirling around Silicon Valley create an atmosphere in which reporters or editors might be tempted to go "soft" on the entrepreneurs they cover in order to land work sometime in the future?

The journalists interviewed for this piece wrestled with these questions as they faced their own career choices. Listening to their stories helps spotlight the tightrope that more and more journalists must walk these days, as they balance the need for objective reporting with their personal ambitions. And it conveys a sense of how Internet coverage is being shaped by the realities of working on and around the cutting edge.

Take Buel, for example. Holding a pair of chopsticks in a favorite Vietnamese restaurant,

a pink-stucco dive in downtown San Jose, the 41-year-old former journalist emphasizes that he did not set out to work for a company he was reporting on. "I was frankly embarrassed to find myself suddenly interested in working for a company I was covering. It has only happened once in my career. It was not my intention for that to happen. Suddenly I just found myself compelled by this idea," he says.

About three months passed between the time Buel wrote about Cybergold and the day he took the job. During that period, Buel says, he resisted three additional suggestions from his editor and from colleagues to write about the company. "I didn't say I can't because I'm talking to them about a job," he explains, adding that he determined his stories would not be harmed by leaving Cybergold out of them.

His is not an isolated case. Talk to top editors around the country and they'll tell you that journalists have a long tradition of taking jobs in the industries they once covered. In Hollywood, reporters have often sought work in the entertainment business. On Wall Street, financial reporters regularly become security analysts. And, of course, journalists across the board have at times become public relations people for the companies they have chronicled.

"Is this something revolutionary and new?" asks Michael Malone, editor of *Forbes ASAP*. "It's the same game that has gone on for a hundred years in journalism, only today it's being done in Internet time."

Another difference now, says Steve Yoder, San Francisco bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal*, "is that the potential for very quickly getting remunerated very richly exists like it never has before." And because so many of the journalists leaving traditional media become editors or writers for the dotcom companies they join, "for the first time in recent memory journalists can do something where they can have a chance for substantial remuneration and yet still do what appears to be journalism."

In late February, Jodi Mardesich, then a Silicon Valley–based reporter for *Fortune* magazine, announced in a column on the magazine's website that she was leaving journalism after 13 years as a computer industry reporter to join a start-up called drspock.com, Inc. She had written a positive story about the parenting website in the same space less than a month earlier.

"There's something about being here in Silicon Valley, listening to these idealistic and hopeful entrepreneurs talk, that gets to you," she wrote in her good-bye column. "But for me, nothing really resonated until last month when I met with Ted Shelton, CEO of drspock.com." Then, in the next paragraph, she added, "After the piece went up [on Fortune.com], I didn't wait for the phone to ring. I called Shelton and asked him if he needed a writer."

Mardesich, for her part, says that she "can see how her column might raise questions," but the bottom line, she says, is that "I wrote the first story because I thought it sounded like a cool company. If I had known I wanted to join the company initially, I wouldn't have written about it." (Mardesich's sign-off column apparently did not go over well at *Fortune*. When asked about it, managing editor John Huey would say only, "I think Jodi's column speaks for itself.")

GILLMOR GOT AN OFFER AFTER COMPLETING AN INTERVIEW FOR A STORY HE WAS WRITING. "I JUST DIDN'T WRITE THE COLUMN," HE SAYS. "IT JUST FELT WRONG."

Last summer, *Mercury News* high-tech columnist Chris Nolan caused a stir among media insiders for buying friends-and-family stock from the CEO of Autoweb, a potential news source, and then flipping it for a $9,000 profit. She ultimately resigned from the *Mercury News* in a blaze of national publicity. But in defiance of her colleagues' expectations, she did not jump to an Internet company; she is now a freelance columnist for the *New York Post*. In a column that appeared in *Salon* in March, she described the environment for journalists in Silicon Valley.

"[W]hen I landed in California, it quickly became clear that I had entered a world where journalism wasn't a career but some sort of job people took while waiting for something better to come along," Nolan wrote. "Venture capitalists and CEOs, even other journalists, seemed to think the business was filled with people wanting—in fact, often asking—to work for the people they interview."

Nolan wasn't the only one to brush against an Internet company and then choose not to join. Dan Gillmor, a highly respected technology writer who's been at the *Mercury News* for more than five years and has covered the industry since 1991, sits back in a newsroom nook at a desk overrun with clutter and describes the handful of offers he's received from Internet concerns. He recalls interviewing someone for a possible column one time. At the end of the conversation, a job offer was on the table. "I just didn't write the column," he says. "It just felt wrong. It felt like I had been pitched in a way that would make me wonder why I was writing the column."

Of course, he doesn't blame companies for trying to recruit journalists. And although he thinks it's conceivable that a reporter would write a positive story about a company in the hope of going to work there, he has never seen any evidence that anyone actually slanted a story to that end. "Journalists," he says, "are by and large honorable people who don't do that."

In the end, the long-standing touchstone in journalism that reporters should not cover companies in which they have any vested interest remains the framework for the discussion and the best safeguard against biased coverage. Realistically, there's not much editors can do to prevent their writers from joining any of the companies they cover. And they don't seem too concerned about the prospect anyway.

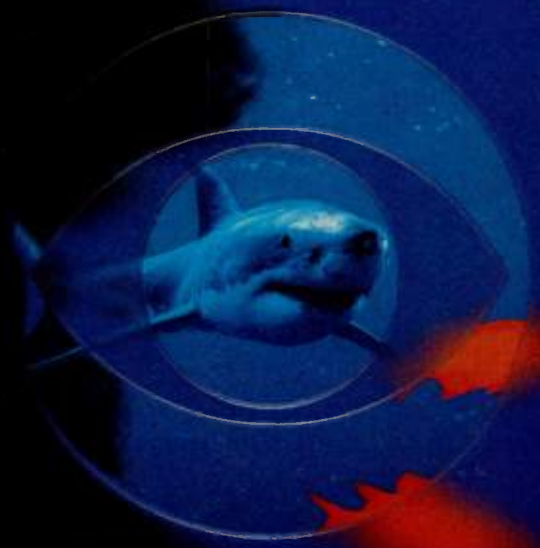
"It's the kind of thing that would be difficult to know until after the fact," says Jerry Roberts, managing editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Alex MacLeod, managing editor of *The Seattle Times*, recently lost veteran sports reporter Glenn Nelson to a sports-related Internet start-up he had covered. "I'm an ethical purist," says MacLeod. "My father was a newspaper editor, and I grew up with absolute scriptures around appearance of a conflict of interest or real conflicts. But I'm kind of baffled by this situation. I don't know what to say or do." ■

DOUGLAS ADESKO

Former *Mercury News* reporter Stephen Buel has joined the new economy.

Know what you're getting into.



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It's Getting Late

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 75] produced tape. "I said we had two choices: Either we give it all back to the locals or we do a real national show," recalls Friedman. "Then in April we started talking about a plan for a network program....By September, early October, it was 'Let's go for it.' And I said, 'Let's get Bryant.'"

By all accounts, Gumbel was dubious, partly because he was still smarting from the cancellation of *Public Eye*. "Bryant was licking his wounds," says Friedman. In November, Gumbel, Heyward, and Friedman dined at Ben Benson's, a New York steak restaurant. "Bryant did not say yes, but he did not say no," recalls Friedman. "He wanted to know more about the plans. He wanted to make sure that the network was really committed and that they would give us sufficient time to get this thing off the ground."

To many, the issue was not whether Gumbel was hesitant but why on earth CBS would want him in the first place. Indeed, in the early to mid-1990s, when Gumbel was still at *Today*, both NBC and CBS had research indicating that Gumbel provoked an extremely strong negative reaction. At that time, the competitive data that CBS had collected helped persuade the network to stay the course with morning-show anchor Harry Smith, at least for a while. (Ultimately, in 1996, under pressure from the affiliates, the network jettisoned the popular team of Smith and Paula Zahn, whose show had come the closest of any to moving CBS out of third place.) To be sure, *Today* was a hit when Gumbel cohosted, first with Pauley and then Katie Couric. Nonetheless, that program's ratings rose after Gumbel left and was replaced by Matt Lauer. Likewise, *Public Eye* had access to research showing that Gumbel was polarizing.

"I have heard this polarizing business about Bryant over the years," responds Heyward. "He does not attempt to ingratiate himself. He is tough-minded that way. A lot of people in television try too hard to be liked, and Bryant does not. Obviously, I would not have pushed so hard if I did not think he was key. CBS would not have invested so much in the project without the critical mass of Bryant, the studio, and Steve Friedman."

In an October 24, 1999, *New York Times Magazine* story, Gumbel acknowledged that being loved was not his goal. "What's true is that I don't cuddle up to people and tell them things they want to hear," he said. "I'm pretty honest."

"MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY"

In the first week of June 1999, with the hoopla that accompanies a major network relaunch, CBS presented *The Early Show* to its affiliates at their annual meeting in Las Vegas. Some 75 percent of the affiliates ultimately agreed to carry the full two-hour show. Meanwhile, back in New York, as the staff geared up for the new program, the mood was one of edgy anticipation. "For a long time the big joke was that the morning show was the evil stepchild of CBS News," says one of the show's former producers. "For years we had been cruising along, happy to be number three. Now there was some hope because the network was finally dumping some money into the time slot. There was the feeling that maybe something could work. But it was a double-edged sword. Because of Gumbel. There was the sense of *This guy? Isn't the dominant public opinion that everybody hates him?*...But the big thing with Steve was that no matter what we did, Bryant Gumbel would make it better. Steve Friedman is just blinded by his faith in Bryant Gumbel."

Among other things, Friedman also apparently counted on the prospect that Diane Sawyer's departure from *GMA* was imminent. "He had these contacts at ABC who told him that Diane would be gone, and he was convinced of that," says one former producer. "He swaggered around as if we were immediately going to kick their butts. It was always *We'll get GMA first and then we will take on the* Today *show.*"

True to form, the minute Friedman arrived at the program, he tore through the halls, full of bravado. In Friedman's first meeting with the staff, remembers one former producer with a groan, Friedman boasted, "'When they write my biography, it will be called *My Way or the Highway*.' Instead of getting people on board, he came in swinging his baseball bat."

"I let people know that whether they like it or not, I am in charge," Friedman counters. "And if you don't like doing it my way, then there is the highway. I don't want people saying things like 'Gee, I don't think Bryant is such and such.' People who say things like that are gone! We do not want failure people around us."

One of the first things that Friedman did was find a group of contributors to broaden the show's coverage and appeal. Lisa Birnbach, the author of *The Official Preppy Handbook* and other books, likes to remember what she calls "my little Lana Turner moment." It was a rainy Saturday, and she and her three children were shopping at a pharmacy on Madison Avenue when Friedman walked in; she had met him years ago when he was at *Today*. "I introduced him to my children," Birnbach recalls, "and I said, half-kiddingly, 'Mommy needs a job.' Steve remembered me as this young author of *The Preppy Handbook*, and suddenly here I am with three children, and it struck him."

From the start, Friedman made it clear that he planned to re-create what he and Gumbel had achieved at *Today*. "Friedman is absolutely obsessed with the *Today* show," says a former producer.

Birnbach, who had done some work in television, later had lunch with Friedman at Trattoria Dell'Arte. "I was tap dancing, saying, 'I could do a story on this; I could do a story on that. Here are people I could interview,' and Steve said, '...Don't report on other people. Talk about your life. Talk about being a mother and a wife, and it will be great.' He suggested that the name of the segments would be 'Yikes, I've Grown Up.'" Out of that lunch came "Yikes, I'm A Grown Up!" which Birnbach hosts alternatively with Martha Quinn, one of the original VJs on MTV. Among other contributors, Friedman hired former *GMA* correspondent Laurie Hibberd to do "The Hib List," which focuses on anything that is "hip"—from vitamin C to dirty denim; investment banker Brian Finnerty for "Eye on the Street"; and chef and restaurateur Bobby Flay for a segment called "Boy Meets Grill."

From the start, Friedman made it clear that he planned to re-create what he and Gumbel had achieved with *Today*. Indeed, Friedman's feelings about *Today* are complex. "He made no bones about the fact that he was trying to do the *Today* show," recalls one former producer. "He said, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,' referring to the *Today* show format. In meetings he would say, 'Look at how Katie handled this or that.'"

"Friedman is absolutely obsessed with the *Today* show," agrees another producer who has left *The Early Show*. "Obsessed with destroying his creation. They were like the mortal enemy. He would say things like '*Today* is coming to kill our children. To take the breakfast off our table.' It's strange," the producer says, pausing. "The conundrum that Friedman has put himself in is that the only way he can be a success is if he breaks down the very thing that he

seems to be the most proud of, the *Today* show."

To the show's staff, Friedman sent a mixed message as to just how quickly *The Early Show* needed to gain traction and momentum. Although he was fond of referring to the relaunch as a "marathon, not a sprint," Friedman also stated in several meetings that by the end of the February sweeps, the show should be pulling a 3.0 rating. In addition, according to several media buyers contacted for this story, CBS's advertising sales department sold the show with a guaranteed household rating that ranged from a 2.7 to a 3.0. According to Nielsen, for the February sweeps, *The Early Show* fell two tenths of a point from the same period last year. (ABC averaged a 4.1 versus a 3.4 last year, and *Today* averaged a 5.3 versus a 5.1 last year.)

Outside CBS, Friedman made the rounds with PR agencies, publishing houses, and movie studios to introduce them to the show and let them know that CBS would no longer take authors or celebrities who had already appeared on other programs, as it had in the past. "Steve called early on...to express their commitment to working with entertainment, knowing that they had the lower ratings," recalls one studio publicist. "He knew that he had an uphill battle, and he said that he would remember the people who did him favors."

"Steve was very, very psyched about the show," recalls Leslee Dart, who is a friend of Friedman's and a partner in the publicity firm PMK, which represents Jodie Foster, Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise, and many other stars. Dart suggests that since then, despite his bravado, Friedman has seemed deflated in his more private, unguarded moments. "I got a phone call from him at the end of last year saying, 'I need you,'" Dart continues. "He said, 'I'm in big trouble.' He was calling his friends, and he should have been. But his calls were not undignified. They were, in fact, the opposite. Steve was saying, 'I need some help,' which I preferred to some blustery 'Everything is great. We are turning it all around.'" But in the beginning, Dart stresses, "Steve had high, high hopes. He thought that *GMA* was the most vulnerable. He thought that ABC was the one they could derail."

"DOES ANYBODY KNOW HER NAME?"

In the spring, CBS began a much-publicized hunt to find a coanchor for Gumbel that some executives dubbed Operation Glass Slipper. After several months, the network settled on 32-year-old Jane Clayson of Salt Lake City, who had been a Los Angeles correspondent for ABC since 1996. "With Jane, there was lots of thought that they wanted somebody totally neutral—milquetoast—so that Bryant could shine," suggests one former producer. "Steve would talk about finding Madame X and we all dubbed her Madame Invisible."

Observers have noticed that there are days when Clayson has seemed somewhat tentative and stiff and a bit out of her element with Gumbel—at times diffident and overwhelmed by him. She has had trouble establishing an identity. When asked if they knew her name, the nine members of one focus group fell into a collective, stuttering quandary. "Jane, Jane...." someone responded. "Pauley?" another suggested. The focus groups convened by *Brill's Content* were unanimous in their belief that Gumbel overshadowed Clayson and that the disparity in their ages and experience levels hurt the show. After seeing Clayson conduct a solo interview, one older man offered, "She is more relaxed without the big chief next to her. I could see that definitely." Added another: "She is stepping on eggshells....She might be a little intimidated by him, or a lot intimidated. He's got quite a rep."

Andrew Heyward says, "It is curious that people say that Jane and Bryant don't have a great rapport, because the irony is that they have a terrific relationship off the air....Something clicked a few weeks ago, and Jane really seems to have come into her own."

"If Jane Clayson were stock, I would buy it," asserts Friedman. "I think people will someday congratulate me for discovering her."

IT'S SUNDAY, MARCH 5—two days before Super Tuesday—and Friedman is getting ready for a noon conference call with some of his producers to prepare for Monday's show. He is also flicking the remote control in his den on Park Avenue and talking about Campaign 2000. All around him are dozens of antique Madame Alexander dolls that his wife, Beverly, has collected for years. On the walls are several paintings by George Rodigue, a Louisiana artist and good friend of the Friedmans' who is best known for painting *The Blue Dog*. And on the television, guests on CNN's *Reliable Sources* are talking about Matt Lauer's Friday ride on John McCain's Straight Talk Express. "We knew that Matt was going to do that," Friedman says. "That was a good way of doing a political interview....On Friday, we did guns and politics off the top." After talking to his team, Friedman retires to his dining room, which is decorated with a dollhouse his wife built and a wide array of Victorian Staffordshire plates, dishes, and platters. Friedman is excited, among other things, that tomorrow's program will feature Clayson interviewing Senator Bill Bradley just after he steps off the Staten Island Ferry.

"Look," Friedman says, falling into an impassioned mantra that he more than likely repeats in his sleep. "We have done phase one. It takes six months to figure out what we are going to do, another six months to do it, and another six months for people to see it....Sometimes patience is a great virtue. When you are in third place, you need help from [the competition] to kick the door down, especially in morning television....Let's hope CBS takes a lesson from the past, which is Don't Panic."

Several minutes later, Friedman—minus his baseball bat but still doodling his name—bellows, "I want to win!" ■

The No-Quote Zone

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 79] It's these reporters who might cause Team Bush's thus-far-successful strategy to tank. Indeed, at least one reporter who covered the Straight Talk Express has already tussled with a campaign staff that wanted to draw a clear distinction between what can and can't show up in the papers. As David Carr reported in D.C.'s *Washington City Paper*, Mike Allen, a *Washington Post* reporter, got his credentials yanked by the Bradley campaign after he wrote about an in-flight, off-the-record incident that had been recounted to him by other reporters. (The anecdote involved Bradley faking a heart attack and doing a dead-on imitation of Al Gore.) Fortunately for Allen, this occurred a few days before Bradley dropped out of the race.

What will happen when the veterans of the McCain campaign, with its open seating, in-flight games of liar's poker, and press vs. staff food fights, join up with the George W. Bush campaign, where the seats on the plane are spoken for well in advance, thank you very much? These reporters were given unprecedented access and witnessed an endless improvisation. "We never know what's going to happen, and from our perspective, that's a good thing," said Bob Kemper, who covered McCain for the *Chicago Tribune* on one of the final flights of McCain's campaign. Even Hughes admits she was fascinated by the McCain campaign. At one point, she wistfully mused, "What I would give to be a fly on the wall of that bus."

But Hughes did get a fly's-eye view, courtesy of the seemingly endless news reports coming out of the Straight Talk Express. For now, that's a view Hughes is determined to deny to the public. ■

The Player

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85] about a reporter acting as a journalistic matchmaker. Weiss agrees that all those involved benefited, but that "it was a great thing for the readers of the *Times* magazine. Lynn put no conditions on that story." He adds, "But boy, did it help my career." When contacted for comment, Rudin said he didn't feel comfortable discussing Hirschberg.

When you've been in the same business for years, it is not uncommon to make friends with the people in your work circle. But when you are a reporter whose job is to report without passion or bias, such relationships can potentially interfere with your mandate. "There is something of a Stockholm syndrome that develops in many beats where a longtime beat reporter starts to think and even act like those he or she covers," says *Washington Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz. "One reason that editors rotate reporters among different beats every three years or so is to get a fresh perspective and to make sure nobody is unduly influenced by the friendships they develop." Moss says that Hirschberg's Hollywood friendships do not bother him. "I think to be a great journalist, you have to know the territory you cover and in the process of knowing that territory—you're human—you will make friends and you will in some ways become part of that community," Moss says. "And you just have to watch yourself very, very carefully....I think Lynn does monitor herself very closely, and I watch her very closely."

Hirschberg also shows great proficiency in cultivating other sorts of mutually beneficial relationships. Consider her close alliance with Peter Kaplan, the editor of *The New York Observer*, a weekly newspaper popular in New York's media circles. Kaplan and Hirschberg have never worked together, but their friendship has benefited both. People argue that Kaplan supports Hirschberg even to the detriment of his own newspaper. On one occasion, says Nikki Finke, the former *Observer* West Coast editor, Kaplan delayed the publication of her *Observer* story on Jamie Tarses so that it wouldn't scoop Hirschberg's piece in the *Times* magazine. "I was flabbergasted," says Finke, who is now *New York* magazine's West Coast editor.

Finke says she called Kaplan to protest, but he told her his hands were tied. "'Lynn's too helpful to this newspaper,'" Finke says Kaplan told her. Hirschberg confirms that she persuaded Kaplan to hold Finke's story. "I twisted some arms on that. I'm not going to deny it," she says. "One gets a bit fierce about something one's been working on for a year." Kaplan says his memory of it is foggy. "I can't remember the timing....But we did not hold up the piece so Lynn could go first. That is not my recollection." (Finke responds: "Peter knows exactly what happened. He made me hold off to benefit Lynn.") Kaplan does admit that Hirschberg is an important source of information at the *Observer*. "She's a very generous person, and she's certainly friendly to the paper," he says.

So friendly is Hirschberg to the *Observer*, notes Kaplan, that when she was reporting her *Times* magazine profile of Warren Beatty, Hirschberg persuaded Beatty to meet with Kaplan as well. "She delivered Beatty to me," he says. Kaplan wrote a front-page story for his paper that ran in the May 11, 1998, edition. "She brokered it. It's undeniable," says a journalist who is familiar with the deal. "She really hurt Adam Moss, her benefactor." Moss says he doesn't mind that Hirschberg scored a big feature for the *Observer* because he doesn't consider it a competitor.

Testing Moss's patience is a risky endeavor for Hirschberg. Arguably, his support of Hirschberg has gone from luxury to necessity. Hirschberg's career nearly imploded a few years back, and Moss stuck by her. By 1997, Hirschberg had a contract with the *Times* magazine, but she took a freelance assignment from *Vanity Fair* to profile Jerry Seinfeld for the May 1998 cover story. But in April, newspapers reported that editors at *Vanity Fair* suspected Hirschberg had given Seinfeld a copy of the profile before the magazine went to the printer. In almost every circumstance, it is verboten to show a subject a story before it is published in the magazine; it is also an explicit violation of *Vanity Fair*'s (and most other magazines') policy. Hirschberg denies that she gave Seinfeld the story. "I did not give Jerry the piece, and I feel no remorse about anything that took place on my end regarding that situation," she says. "I feel much remorse about other things in my life but not about that, because I did nothing wrong."

But two sources confirm that when an acquaintance of an editor at *Vanity Fair* was on the *Seinfeld* set, this acquaintance saw a copy of the manuscript in an envelope bearing Hirschberg's name in Seinfeld's possession. (*Vanity Fair*'s editor in chief, Graydon Carter, declined to comment.)

The incident was a debacle for Hirschberg, and Carter implied that he believed Hirschberg had committed the infraction. "You set up things so that this can't happen, and all you can do if it comes from the reporter is not to use that reporter in the future," Carter told *The Village Voice*. He has kept his word; Hirschberg hasn't written for *Vanity Fair* since.

In fact, in the early fall of 1998, *Vanity Fair* was trying to land Julia Roberts for a late-1998 cover to coincide with the release of *Stepmom*. Roberts's agent, who is a good friend of Hirschberg's, agreed to deliver Roberts if the piece was assigned to Hirschberg. Carter declined the offer based on those conditions, says someone familiar with the arrangement. (A *Vanity Fair* spokesperson confirmed this account. A press representative for Roberts says she is not aware of any such arrangement.)

"Lynn is the Joan Collins of the journalism world," says one editor, laughing. And when she's angry, she can hold a grudge.

Most editors would run from a writer whose methods have been called into question. But Moss defends Hirschberg. He says he thinks that the Seinfeld/*Vanity Fair* allegation "comes from people who have agendas where Lynn is concerned and would like to see her fail," though he declines to elaborate.

Carter is not the only colleague or friend to become estranged from Hirschberg. Over the course of her career, Hirschberg has been close to and then fallen out with professional contacts, former colleagues, and editors. "Lynn is the Joan Collins of the journalism world," says one editor, laughing. And when she's angry, she can hold a grudge—as David Hirshey, executive editor of HarperCollins, knows all too well. In 1996, Hirshey says, he was asked by the publisher at *Los Angeles Magazine* to recommend a candidate for that magazine's top editing post. "If you want to go for dishy celebrity journalism," Hirshey says he told the publisher, "there's Lynn Hirschberg. If you want tough-minded feature writing, there's Michael Caruso." (Caruso got the job.)

It was, says Hirshey, "an unforgivable sin for me to have recommended anyone other than Lynn...and I was excommunicated for two years from the Church of Lynn Hirschberg." Journalists aren't usually referred to in such theological terms. But make no mistake—like her articles that describe only the good guys and the bad guys, people consider Hirschberg God or the devil.

Hirshey says that Hirschberg didn't speak to him until he mended the fracture by "relentlessly sucking up to her." Air-kiss. Air-kiss. A happy ending, Hollywood style. ■

A Family Chronicle

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 95] Justis Appliances could make sure the items and the prices were correct. Which was rare. My next job was making pigs, a task that was incredibly dangerous for a kid, though neither I nor anyone else seemed to notice. The fundamental technology for newspapers in those days was to type the words on a linotype machine, which would create a line of type from molten lead. I would gather these lead slugs and melt them in a furnace, which was in the corner of a small, grimy room. I would then pour the molten lead into molds to create pigs, the heavy lead bars that were the raw material of the linotype process. The job was not unlike asking a 12-year-old to tend a blast furnace.

Finally I graduated to running the linotype, and I still carry the scar on my wrist from a "squirt," when there was a gap in the line of steel slugs used to make the imprint, and the molten lead spurted through like a fountain. I really didn't mind as I was getting a graduate education in life from people like J.C. Johnson, the skinny head pressman who was always smeared with ink, but who waltzed elegantly with my grandmother every year at the *Sun* Christmas party. Or Floyd Melton, who taught me to operate a linotype and now runs the high tech advertising composing room of today's *Greeneville Sun*. Or "Tiny," the sports editor, who in his later years began working without his teeth as he smoked his endless Pall Malls. Or Edwin "Gube" Harmon, who started life working on a bread truck and became the paper's advertising boss. I don't think I ever saw Gube when he didn't put his arm around my neck and say, "I've got a good'un for ye," and then tell me a good'un.

Often wandering through the back shop was one of the most indelible characters I've ever known, Mr. Edgar Williams, known as "Hoghead." His father had once worked at the *Democrat*, feeding sheets of newsprint into the old press. Hoghead was a bum, but a brilliant one. He managed over a long life to persuade people to pay him to stay away from them, and devoted his energies and intellect to devising ways to extract tribute without actually working. My father had no use for him and refused to pay him off, which made him a particularly desirable challenge to Hoghead.

My father's office had a door that opened to the alley between the newspaper and my grandmother's home, and one day the door burst open and Hoghead said, "John M., I see a tree blew down in your yard," which was quite true. "For fifty dollars, I'll have that tree cut up and stacked by dinner time," which in my part of the world means lunch. Though he took a very dim view of Hoghead, my father agreed. Sure enough, when he went home to lunch, the tree had been cut and stacked. He was told that Hoghead had appeared at the head of a platoon of laborers equipped with all kinds of power tools and, under his direction, had made short work of the tree. My father duly paid the fifty dollars.

A few days later, he got a whopping bill from Waddell Hardware for the rental of power tools. Hoghead was not seen for some weeks, but then one day the outside door to my father's office burst open once again. Hoghead leaned through the doorway, gave a snaggled, satisfied grin, and said, "Gotcha, John M."

Do such tales bind me to that place and to that newspaper? Without question. As do memories, such as the biannual *Sun* Election Parties. In our world, the most important election was on the first Thursday in August on alternate years, when the primaries were contested for various state and local offices. In our county, winning the Republican primary for virtually any office was tantamount to being elected. And, similarly, the winner of the statewide Democratic primary signaled almost certain victory. Politics in Greene County had long been a bruising spectator sport, so it was not surprising when people began to gather outside the *Sun* on election night to get the most recent returns. Over the years, as the crowd grew, my grandmother began piping out recorded music. By the late 1950s, the *Sun* Election Party had become a huge affair, with Main Street closed in front of the paper, a flatbed truck straddling the street and free country music. The service clubs sold hot dogs and drinks. My grandmother and my father would function as generals, guiding the tabulation of returns as they were reported, precinct by precinct, reading them out loud between songs, which always included Tiny singing a lovelorn ballad called "Foggy River." Those balmy August nights, with cheering and jeering and—it seemed—the whole county in attendance, are a piece of the best of America that has been lost to technology. With television, the returns were available at home, and the custom died out.

Throughout these years, there was rarely a time when I climbed into a car with my father that he didn't have a talk with me along the lines of "This thing is there for you and your brothers and sisters, but if you don't want it, I'll sell it. But I think you would be making a big mistake." It was, for all of us, a full court press that lasted most of our childhood. My grandmother took a somewhat different tack. She told stories, such as the one about how she had gotten into the newspaper business and about Granny calling her a deluded fool over prohibition. My mother, who was occupied with five children, was also involved body and soul with the paper, as though she felt her purpose in life was bearing and rearing the children who would someday take it as their responsibility.

I think that none of these things was as powerful as simply seeing my father and grandmother work, which they did with a daily joy. My father rose at 6:30 and went directly to the office, returning around 8:00 for breakfast. He returned again most days for a quick lunch, then was there for supper until the phone rang. My grandmother, on the other hand, made breakfast last most of the morning. She had had a gallbladder problem that robbed her of her appetite, so in her later years, she mostly pushed food around on her plate. But each morning, as she sat at the breakfast table, a stream of people would come in the door to say hello to Miss Edith, sometimes bringing the personals that she would then batter out on her old typewriter in the little room off the kitchen. Other people brought gifts like quail, one of the few foods she fancied, or just dropped in to chat. She was clearly respected and beloved, and she respected and loved the people of her native soil in turn.

In 1966, when she celebrated her fiftieth year in the newspaper business, she expressed her thanks directly to the people who had supported her all those years.

"The people of Greene County are MY people. Shoulder to shoulder, we face the past, the present and the future in a world of fear, confusion and challenge. Thank you, my good comrades, for my golden yesterdays and the shining faith I hold for tomorrow."

When she died, at 84, in 1974, I saw my father weep for the first time in my life.

THROUGH A CIRCUITOUS ROUTE, which included a long period of flight from the family business, I found myself the editor of *The Greeneville Sun* in 1978, and came to know the newspaper and the town in a new way. Greeneville, of course, is vastly changed from the sleepy village of my childhood. The downtown, which was packed with people on the Saturday mornings of my youth, became a virtual ghost town, and the bypass, with its strip malls, is now the commercial center. But the fundamentally tolerant cast of the town has not changed. One day, as I returned from lunch, I saw a group of white-clad people standing in front of the paper and I recall thinking, "I didn't know there was a circus in town." We were being picketed by the Ku Klux Klan, in full regalia, something never seen in Greene County in my lifetime. They were angry because I would not allow them to advertise for members in the *Sun*. I had gotten some threatening materials stuffed in my mailbox at home, but the idea of the Klan in Greeneville was almost too incongruous to be

believed. I later learned that they were not local people, and had been extremely frustrated that their efforts to drum up business had come to naught. We covered the picketing, quoted them, and ran a picture that we put on the front page. That group was never heard from again.

But I also witnessed a true small-town newspaper nightmare. The publisher of a neighboring paper reported that a grand jury in Greeneville was investigating a local assistant district attorney for cocaine smuggling. It had always been our belief that it was unfair to take someone's reputation away from him by reporting a secret investigation before any charges had even been brought. As a matter of principle, we decided not to match the report, which we knew was true. The rival publisher viewed this as an opportunity to win Greene County subscribers, and went after the story with a vengeance. When we still remained silent on the matter, he sent hawkers to sell papers on Greeneville's streets and even right in front of our building.

While we tried to explain our position, the ethical point began to get lost in a growing paranoia that there was a cover-up afoot, and our rival fanned the flames. Our town began to come apart at the seams. Staff members came to work with stories of being accused of protecting criminals. Phone calls and letters demanded to know why we wouldn't tell the truth about what was going on. The nadir came when the rival paper's publisher sent my father a copy of a letter to the editor that accused him of being a cocaine kingpin. The publisher said he was going to run the letter and that my father had two days to reply. Ultimately, the publisher decided not to print the letter, because the letter writer's sister pleaded that her brother was mentally unstable and had been institutionalized.

By this time, we were so far out on our limb that even publishing the information would have done no good, so we hung on and sweated out the days while the grand jury deliberated. Finally, the grand jury issued an indictment. We held the paper four hours to ensure the full text of the grand jury report appeared first in our afternoon paper, rather than in the rival morning paper. What we published was almost a special edition.

The town quieted and, indeed, some people had the grace to thank us for taking the stand we had taken. But the lesson was just how fragile the psyche of a town can be, and how critically important the local paper can be.

I decided to leave Greeneville in 1983. I had met my wife while on a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard and, although she said she would marry me, she was also determined to accept a new job writing for *Time* magazine. After a lot of soul searching, I judged that I could live happily in New York, but that she could not live happily in Greeneville. It has proven a very good decision, in every respect. My departure cleared the way for my brother John to return to the paper as editor, and he has been a better editor for the *Sun* than I would ever have been. My brother Gregg came to the paper straight from college, and has become co-publisher with my father, which has also been a huge blessing. At my father's prodding, *The Greeneville Sun* became one of the most technologically advanced papers in the state. He also saw the opportunity presented by other small papers in our area and, over time, the family business has grown to include three small dailies, several nondailies, radio stations, a regional business publication, and regional magazines focused on running, outdoor life, and tourism. Thanks to Gregg, we provide Internet access in several East Tennessee counties, and have active websites at all our papers. Our papers win their share of prizes each year, but the measurement that makes me proudest is that, relative to the population, the *Sun* has led the state for years in penetration of its market. In other words, in Greene County, a lot of people feel they need the *Sun*.

We are now focused, as a family, on the transition that faces us. My parents are in their mid-80s, and the question of what happens after them is unanswered. But our family adopted the Sulzberger model of inheritance, which means that everyone shares equally, as compared to the Graham family model at *The Washington Post*, in which those running the paper have an extra measure of control. In our family, any three of us could theoretically force a sale, and those running the paper will be working for their siblings. Although this arrangement might appear destabilizing, in our case it fosters a sense of shared power and interdependence that binds us together. In 1986, I wrote an article about the break-up of the Bingham family and the sale of their papers and brought it to Greeneville for my father to read. He took it into his study and came out ashen. It was his ultimate nightmare, and I am sure the Bingham story has spurred us to look at our family more critically, to avoid their fate.

Why do some families sell their papers and others resist? Sometimes there is no choice. But I once asked an investment banker who specialized in putting family papers on the block how he managed to persuade these longtime newspaper owners to give up their whole way of life. He tapped his forehead and said, slyly, "If I can get them on the yacht up here, it's done." One of his minions came to see my brother Gregg once when my father was out of town to suggest that Gregg should lead his siblings in a revolt to sell the paper, regardless of my father's wishes. Gregg escorted him out of the building.

My family is not without tensions and pressures. We are quite, quite human. But my parents forced us to get to know each other, with such stratagems as putting us in the same car each Christmas and going to see the University of Tennessee play in a college bowl. For years, we thought we traipsed off to bowl games each year because they had become rabid football fans.

I cannot say what will happen to *The Greeneville Sun*.

Often, when I am in Greeneville, I go to Oak Grove Cemetery and visit the graves of my grandmother and other loved ones, who are there in abundance. General Arnold has an impressive monument, and Quincy Marshall O'Keefe lies at peace beside her patient husband. But it is my grandmother's stone that I am always drawn to most powerfully. I have conversations with her. We talk about the paper, usually. When I join her, I hope that another generation of the family will come visit me and talk to me about the paper that is our shared legacy, still. ◘

US and Them

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 107] more "stylish," and entirely celebrity-focused. "*People* is kind of dowdy," says Leerhsen. "It's dowdy-looking with dowdy stories in it." *US* isn't interested in stories about "real" people. "No children who are lost down wells," says McDonell. "No moon rock collections."

"Our readers look at *People* and say, 'That's my mother's magazine,'" says Wenner. There must be a lot of moms in this country, because according to Mediamark Research, Inc., an independent multimedia research company, *People*'s readership tops 35 million; no other magazine comes close. *US*'s ad pages are puny compared to *People*'s—538 in 1999 versus *People*'s 4,332. And *US*'s staff of 75 is dwarfed by *People*'s 265, with 190 stringers all over the world. Time Inc. has also cashed in on celebrity-focused content with *InStyle* and *Entertainment Weekly*. "Where we go head to head, we hope we'll be better, smarter, cleverer, have better access, better reporting, better writers," says Wenner.

Ah, *access*. It's the key to generating headlines and buzz. An exclusive interview. A visit to the star's home. Any magazine can collect

paparazzi shots and interview friends and neighbors, but who gets entrée? It depends on what you exchange. Last September, Wenner told *The New York Times*, "We will be nice to celebrities," and no one has let him forget it. "Some days I hear they're going to be giving as many wet kisses as the celebrities require," says Time Inc.'s Pearlstine. (No kisses are sloppier than the ones planted by Time Inc.'s *InStyle*.)

"We're pro-entertainment," Wenner clarifies. "We're not here to deal with people's dirty secrets or expose things they don't choose to expose; these are not politicians; these are not public officials.... They're entertainers; they're artists, and they deserve our respect. It's exactly the same formula as *Rolling Stone*. *Rolling Stone* is not known for being fawning."

"I cannot tell you how bored I am with being asked about whether or not I'm going to be nice to celebrities," says McDonell with a sigh. So how will he handle it if a writer finds something unflattering about a celebrity subject? How truthful will the magazine be? "What, you're asking me if I'm going to tell the *truth*?" McDonell asks, bristling. "I think I'm going to try to do that, yeah."

The *US* team says it will get cooperation from stars because publicists don't like *People*'s editorial treatment. "Eighty to 90 percent of the stars will not talk to *People*," says Wenner. "They don't like it. They don't feel comfortable in it. *People* has a bad reputation out there—it looks pedestrian; it's not very elegant. They've hurt a number of people out there; they've burned a number of people."

That's not supported by heavyweight publicist Simon Halls, whose firm Huvane, Baum, Halls represents superstars such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Aniston, and Helen Hunt. "*People* has a huge readership," says Halls. "It has a high level of credibility, and they're good, decent people to work with." That said, he's never agreed to a *People* feature for any client. "That's not to denigrate *People*; it's just never been something that's been part of the PR strategy for my clients." Halls is also taking a wait-and-see attitude with *US*: "A year ago, *US* started to use more paparazzi shots, and started to focus on things like *who's Hollywood's best dressed*, [who has the] *best bodies*, [who's] *most in love*. We got a little more wary of working with *US* because it became much less controllable and much more about celebrityhood."

ON MONDAY AFTERNOON, the day of the close, McDonell sits alone in the conference room waiting for a tardy staff. "This shows deep respect and fear of the editor in chief," he jokes. The halls are surprisingly calm considering this is the countdown. McDonell has the complete first issue in front of him in a loose-leaf binder, and when the staff assembles, McDonell starts flipping through it. "What's the latest on Halle Berry?" Liberman is still unsure. "We're going to write the story as if she gets indicted this morning," she says, "and it could happen any time between now and 8 o'clock tonight." They're waiting till 5 P.M. Los Angeles time to close the story. There are two Gill/Grant wedding pictures to choose from. One has the couple facing each other lovingly, the other has them posing with bagpipers. McDonell likes the first. "It looks like it was actually a moment they were having together," he explains. Design director Migliaccio has received new paparazzi shots, which thrill her: "A-list, baby!" she exclaims. She has chosen Demi Moore making an unusual public appearance. "We can actually gauge, by all of the paparazzi that we get in," explains Migliaccio, "that Demi Moore has not been out in the public in almost a year." They've also chosen an almost unrecognizable picture of Tom Hanks in a beard worthy of Rip Van Winkle. "Any time you have a celebrity who looks completely different than the last time you saw him," says McDonell, "and you can run that picture, you should do it."

As McDonell adjourns the meeting, he announces a party to celebrate the first close. "We'll have a lot of smoking and drinking when we get the issue back on Wednesday," he promises. Wenner is already celebrating. "Failure is not an option," he says simply, "because it's not going to happen. You know, I hate to say these things because I may have to eat my words. But the planning for it has been too careful." He knows he didn't need to risk this; he could have kicked back on his custom office couch and continued to ride the romantic legacy of the renegade wunderkind–turns–millionaire magnate. "I like doing my own thing," he says, smiling. "If it works, I'm going to have a lot more fun, a little more power, and should make a bunch of money." ■

In Praise Of The Greats

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 103] I don't know that we owe God or nature a death, but nature will collect anyway, and we certainly owe mediocrity nothing, whatever collectivity it purports to advance or at least represent.

Because my ideal reader, for half a century, has been Dr. Samuel Johnson, I turn next to my favorite passage in his *Preface to Shakespeare*:

"This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions."

To read human sentiments in human language you must be able to read humanly, with all of you. You are more than an ideology, whatever your convictions, and Shakespeare speaks to as much of you as you can bring to him. That is to say: Shakespeare reads you more fully than you can read him, even after you have cleared your mind of cant. No writer before or since Shakespeare has had anything like his control of perspectivism, which outleaps any contextualizations we impose upon the plays. Johnson, admirably perceiving this, urges us to allow Shakespeare to cure us of our "delirious ecstasies." Let me extend Johnson by also urging us to recognize the phantoms that the deep reading of Shakespeare will exorcise. One such phantom is the Death of the Author; another is the assertion that the self is a fiction; yet another is the opinion that literary and dramatic characters are so many marks upon a page. A fourth phantom, and the most pernicious, is that language does the thinking for us.

Still, my love for Johnson, and for reading, turns me at last away from polemic, and towards a celebration of the many solitary readers I keep encountering, whether in the classroom or in messages I receive. We read Shakespeare, Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, Dickens, Proust, and all their peers because they more than enlarge life. Pragmatically, they have become the Blessing, in its true Yahwistic sense of "more life into a time without boundaries." We read deeply for varied reasons, most of them familiar: that we cannot know enough people profoundly enough; that we need to know ourselves better; that we require knowledge, not just of self and others, but of the way things are. Yet the strongest, most authentic motive for deep reading of the now much-abused traditional canon is the search for a difficult pleasure. I am not exactly an erotics-of-reading purveyor, and a pleasurable difficulty seems to me a plausible definition of the Sublime, but a higher pleasure remains the reader's quest. There is a reader's Sublime, and it seems the only secular transcendence we can ever attain, except for the even more precarious transcendence we call "falling in love." I urge you to find what truly comes near to you, that can be used for weighing and for considering. Read deeply, not to believe, not to accept, not to contradict, but to learn to share in that one nature that writes and reads. ■

LETTERS

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18] Fact-checking is not checking that facts originally appeared in near-verbatim form in other sources. Fact-checking is confirming that new research and/or analytical reduction of previous research conforms to a record established and/or reported by widely respected experts.

GLENN FLEISHMAN, SEATTLE, WA

A BRILLIANT JOURNALIST

It's sad that the only coverage of Christopher Hitchens, one of the most brilliant journalists of our times, you have given is a poor attempt at slander.

PETER KILANDER, CHICAGO, IL

INSULTING

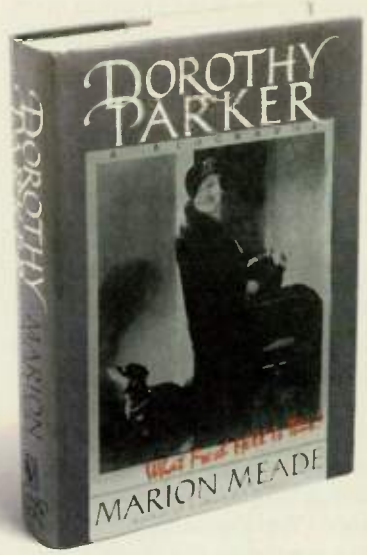
I read Christopher Hitchens's response to Marion Meade's piece about plagiarism in the March issue. He implies that no one reads *Brill's Content*, insulting all of its readers, including me. Tell Mr. Hitchens that, unlike *Vanity Fair*'s housewife readers, *Brill's* readers include many, many writers, who will no doubt be very wary and leery the next time his fact-checkers come slithering in.

JOHN FOSHEE, AUSTIN, TX

A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE

Our thanks to you and Marion Meade for her article "The Secret Plagiarists." It reminded us of our experience.

After ten years of hard work at our own expense we were pleased to have University Press of Mississippi publish our nonfiction book, *A Lost Heroine of the Confederacy: The Diaries and Letters of Belle Edmondson*, in 1990.



One of Marion Meade's biographies

We were originally interested in Waverley, an antebellum mansion near Columbus, Mississippi. When we learned that Belle had been a refugee there from her home, near Memphis, Tennessee, our focus shifted to her smuggling and spying for the Confederacy.

A few years ago, a cable television series produced a segment about Waverley. However, the segment used the research we had done without giving any source credit at all.

LORETTA AND WILLIAM GALBRAITH, LOUISVILLE, KY

STICK WITH FOOD

Calvin Trillin should stick to writing about food. His column [The Wry Side, February] on Howard Rubenstein is a nasty diatribe emanating from stupidity and prejudice. [Rubenstein] is indeed a PR genius. His skills have been honed by years of experience dealing with demanding clients and tough issues. The bottom line on Trillin's bilious column is that there's no food for thought here.

STUART DIM, BROOKLYN, NY

THE LOVE CANAL

Thanks for the story on what [Al] Gore really said about Love Canal [Out Here, March]. I watched all the smirking coverage by [George] Stephanopoulos, [Cokie] Roberts, [William] Kristol, [Sam] Donaldson, etc., my heart sinking because they were so willing to smear and so unwilling to verify/confirm/reveal exactly what was said by Gore.

Why? Is it because they all know that serious public figures/authentic candidates will never pursue them with a lawsuit for libel? Gore's only recourse is to "apologize" if what he said was misinterpreted.

CINDY FUNKHOUSER, SAN DIEGO, CA

WHAT ABOUT SLASHDOT?

I expect you'll see lots of comments on your "Best of the Web 2000" [April]. Overall, great picks!

For best tech news for techies the Slashdot.org site is far better than TheStandard.com. *The Industry Standard* is worth citing for its coverage of technical marketplace developments. But for general technical information and specific technical details, Slashdot is far more reliable, comprehensive, and timely.

ADAM SCHWARTZ, DALLAS, TX

OVERLOOKED

I was extremely disappointed that in your coverage of the best political websites you completely overlooked the most practical and comprehensive website for all voters. Amid your praising of all the ".com" politics sites, you missed a very valuable ".org," namely, vote-smart.org.

PAUL JAFFE, ALEXANDRIA, VA

NOT ANOTHER COMMIE

Boy, I didn't think it was possible to find another "out of the closet" commie to replace Jeff Cohen [Face-Off, April], but you did [find one]. I've read [Robert] Scheer's—as he admits—leftist screeds, and like most of his ilk, [he believes] all media are too conservative.

But I will say that PBS is certainly not what could be called "conservative." It is corporately funded by companies looking for some feel-good "public service" rags with which to burnish their image.

DAVE SKINNER, WHITEFISH, MT

SHARED FRUSTRATION

Jeff Cohen's frustration with the media's tacit acceptance of the NRA's Second Amendment mythology [Face-Off, February] is certainly shared here at Handgun Control. The media are far from

NORMAN

REPORT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34] that the magazine receives, it seems to me that the policy editor Effron outlines is reasonable. Even on a monthly periodical, space limitations and deadline pressures conspire to force last-minute decisions on the length of articles as well as letters so that everything fits in the space available.

But I also think that letters challenging the magazine's fairness or completeness can, from time to time, be seen as an opportunity for some interactive journalism. An extended debate among the magazine's reporters and editors and those with specific and interesting criticisms of the journalism involved could provide useful media analysis by example. The magazine has attempted this with articles in which the subject was given the chance to respond within the article itself. This sort of journalism could conceivably provide enlightened content for the *Brill's* audience and staff as well.

A CLARIFICATION. Michael Wilmington, movie critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, reminds me that I failed to deal with a complaint he filed several months ago. He was concerned that his status as the newspaper's lead movie critic had been ignored in an article that surveyed movie critics whose words were used to promote the movies they reviewed ["We Loved It!" April 1999, by Kimberly Conniff]. The article included a list of the 14 "critics" most often quoted in movie ads. In that list, Gene Siskel, who has since died, was mentioned from the *Chicago Tribune*, but he wrote about movies as a columnist, not as the newspaper's movie critic. Even though Mr. Wilmington is not mentioned in the article, it does say that its survey was "[e]liminating the second-string reviewers for any publication...."

That sentence, combined with listing Mr. Siskel at the *Chicago Tribune*, could imply that a determination had been made that Mr. Wilmington was a second-string reviewer. Nothing is further from the truth. Mr. Wilmington is the lead movie critic of the newspaper. Although Mr. Siskel was one of the 14 most quoted film reviewers, it was a mistake to have listed him as the newspaper's movie critic. I apologize to Mr. Wilmington for not having clarified the unintended implication of the article before now. ■

alone in their error, however, since even friendly politicians feel it necessary to preface their support for gun-control measures by chanting their belief in the Second Amendment.

What Cohen did not mention, however, is the widespread uncritical acceptance of the NRA's latest message: that enforcement of current gun laws, rather than the passage of new ones, will solve the gun violence problem.

[W]e, the moderates unfairly characterized by Cohen as favoring only "minor regulation," are stuck trying to make a reasonable case against those whose prescription for ending school violence includes arming elementary school teachers with their very own handguns.

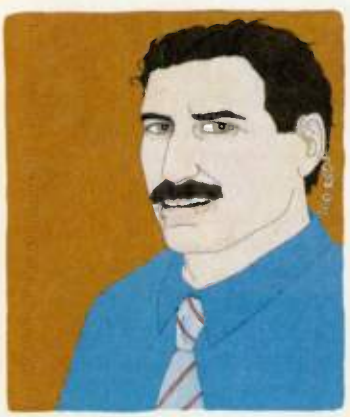
NAOMI PAISS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, HANDGUN CONTROL, WASHINGTON, DC

THE STOSSEL TRIANGLE

*John Stossel ["Laissez-Faire TV," March] has disrupted the symbiotic triangle that has dominated the consumer media for years. The triangle works like this: (1) plaintiff's lawyer provides an alleged victim; (2) fund-raising activist group validates the victim's allegation by positioning the victim's plight as an epidemic; (3) ratings-driven TV newsmagazine show titillates the viewer by bravely bringing the victim's "story" to light.

The elite beneficiaries of this narrative have been trying to silence Stossel because he has witnessed this scam for two decades. As demonstrated in *Brill's Content*'s article, these beneficiaries are unrepentant about wanting Stossel out of the way.

ERIC DEZENHALL, WASHINGTON, DC



ABC's John Stossel

STOSSEL: LARA TOMLIN

A VILLAIN LURKS WITHIN

*In the first of your redesigned issues, you invited readers to decide if the new look works for them. For this subscriber, it does not. Perhaps the sophomoric preoccupation with altering fonts, column widths, and line spacings are factors. For me the chief villain is the gray tint and matte texture of the paper.

DANIEL BRISLANE, ALLEGANY, NY

WHERE IS THE SKEPTICISM?

*I am really stunned by the complete lack of skepticism displayed in "Making It Work" [Interview, March]. As far as I can tell, it was basically an extended PR piece for AOL. To take one example, [Robert] Pittman says, "But we are probably on the extreme of protecting consumer privacy. We're almost rabid about it."

[E]verybody who's been on the Net for more than a few months knows that AOL is infamous for its appalling privacy violations. I can't believe that Steven Brill is ignorant of AOL's record, so I have to conclude that he deliberately gave it an easy ride.

The disclosure at the end of the article explains that Brill and AOL's Pittman are old pals from Time Warner, so I suppose that explains it. I view the article as an object lesson in why journalists should not be allowed to interview their friends, and I'm disappointed that it appeared in your magazine.

MATHEW MURPHY, CAMBRIDGE, MA

REPUTATION BUSTER

That was an interesting article about profiteering from "JonBenét, Inc." [February], but you ruined your reputation by pasting her picture all over the cover and thus profiteering yourself.

D.S. ROBINSON, BRICK TOWN, NJ

EXTREME CLOSE-UP

*From the moment I first saw the February cover, a full-page close-up of JonBenét Ramsey, I was in awe. Far from being prurient, tasteless, or tritely commercial, the cover represented the point of the main article better than all the words in the excellent piece.

The face by itself would have been questionable, but the knowledge of who the child was and the words "JonBenét, Inc. Books. Movies. TV. Careers." combined to make it a work of genius seldom seen on magazine covers today. The selling of this child prior to her death is epitomized by the baby-doll makeup, and the tragic and burlesque selling of her death is epitomized by the words appearing over her face.

DAVID VAUGHAN, LEONARDTOWN, MD

POOR COVER CHOICES

JonBenét? Martin Sheen? Your new format is great, but these cover choices do not inspire confidence. I know selling magazines is your ultimate goal, but many of us are "suffering" from celebrity fatigue. You can do better.

MICHELLE MCELROY, TUCSON, AZ

SHEEHY STRIKES AGAIN

In Gail Sheehy's *Hillary's Choice* ["Are Books Accurate?" February] there is a reference to Hillary Clinton's [1992] Super Tuesday speech: "[Even some who had been awed by her Super Tuesday speech commented], 'There's something a little Al Haig-ish about her' (referring to Nixon's chief of staff who seized the moment of his President's resignation to tell the world he was now in charge)."

The parenthetical clause is in reference to when [Ronald] Reagan was shot and [Alexander] Haig made his statement for the history books that "I am in control" (clearly forgetting the succession plan put forth in the Constitution). Al Haig did not say this when Nixon resigned.

When I saw this egregious factual error, I put the book down. How anyone could so utterly miss such an important historical event like that is beyond me.

JIM METCALF, APEX, NC

Gail Sheehy responds: This and the few other errors, which I regret, have been corrected for the reprint of *Hillary's Choice*.

Al Pacino from *The Insider*

HAMPERED BY IGNORANCE

*[Steven] Brill's article ["Truth or Fiction: Pick One," Rewind, March] is hampered by [his] ignorance about the history of art. On the stage of life, artists and philosophers have defined the "real"; lawyers and publishers have other roles. They might deal with the "truth" or "justice" but run for the hills when they start to tell you what's "real." *The Insider*, a work of art honored by professionals in its field, takes as a subject the convergence of corporate, journalistic, and individual accountability. That such a film, filled with complex information and multiple issues of coercion, would be summarily dismissed by the publisher of a magazine allegedly devoted to inquiry about "the media" is as depressing as it is revealing.

ROBERT HARPER, NEW YORK, NY

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BY MARK LEYNER

Relieved Pitcher

Rocker for Toleryl: 30-second spot

OPEN on news footage of JOHN ROCKER storming off pitcher's mound, his face contorted with rage, gesticulating belligerently at fans as he heads toward the dugout. SUPERIMPOSE quote from Sports Illustrated: *"The biggest thing I don't like about New York are the foreigners. I'm not a very big fan of foreigners."*

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
I'm John Rocker, relief pitcher for the Atlanta Braves. I used to have a lot of hate inside me. And I used to make a lot of vicious remarks to reporters that hurt other people and seriously jeopardized my career.

CUT to ROCKER strolling along beach at twilight, the frothy surf rhythmically lapping the sand, the setting sun casting a gorgeous crimson patina on the water.

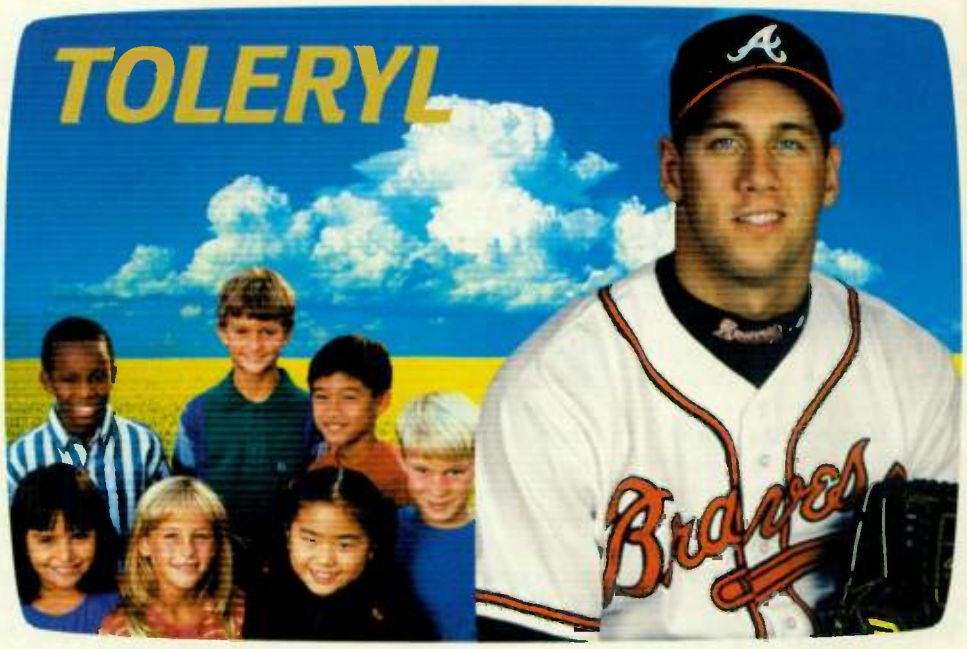
JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
But now, thanks to a remarkable new psychoactive drug called Toleryl, I'm a more thoughtful, more conciliatory, more tolerant individual. Toleryl eliminates those malicious impulses you feel when you meet someone who doesn't look or talk or smell like you.

DISSOLVE to montage of MRI and PET scans of brain, photomicrograph of neuron, and computer animation of neurotransmitters attaching to postsynaptic receptor.

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
You see, scientists have recently discovered that racism, homophobia, ethnocentric nationalism, and neo-fascism are all the result of excessive dopamine and norepinephrine activity in the brain. And now, with Toleryl, they're all treatable disorders.

CUT to ROCKER in clubhouse locker room playfully snapping his towel at the buttocks of teammate Reggie Sanders.

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
After taking Toleryl for only a couple of days, I began to notice that I wasn't making nearly as many bigoted, xenophobic remarks. And Toleryl works gradually, so friends and coworkers won't discern a sudden and seemingly insincere transformation. Braves outfielder Reggie Sanders—who I think is an Ibo or a Yoruban—knew something was different about me, but couldn't quite figure out what.



REGGIE SANDERS
You lose weight, John?

JOHN ROCKER
(grinning broadly)
Nope.

REGGIE SANDERS
Haircut?

JOHN ROCKER
Uh-uh.

CUT to ROCKER at home, watching Sidney Poitier in To Sir With Love. *We hear LULU singing, "But how do you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume...." EXTREME CLOSE-UP of ROCKER, as tears well up in his eyes.*

JOHN ROCKER
Toleryl's given me a lot more empathy and sensitivity. So now I'm able to appreciate an eclectic range of poignant movies...

CUT to ROCKER seated on team flight, wearing headphones and listening to the Pet Shop Boys' "New York City Boy" over headphones, immersed in Jean Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers.

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
...and books and music. And I think that's definitely helping me become more mature.

CUT to ROCKER, in his Braves uniform, standing in a lush golden field with a group of smiling children of different races, beneath a blue sky dappled with fluffy cumulus clouds—the TOLERYL logo superimposed on upper left screen.

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
Albert Schweitzer really knocked it out of the park when he said: "Until he extends the circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace." Now that I'm on the easy-compliance Toleryl maintenance program, I finally know that peace for myself.

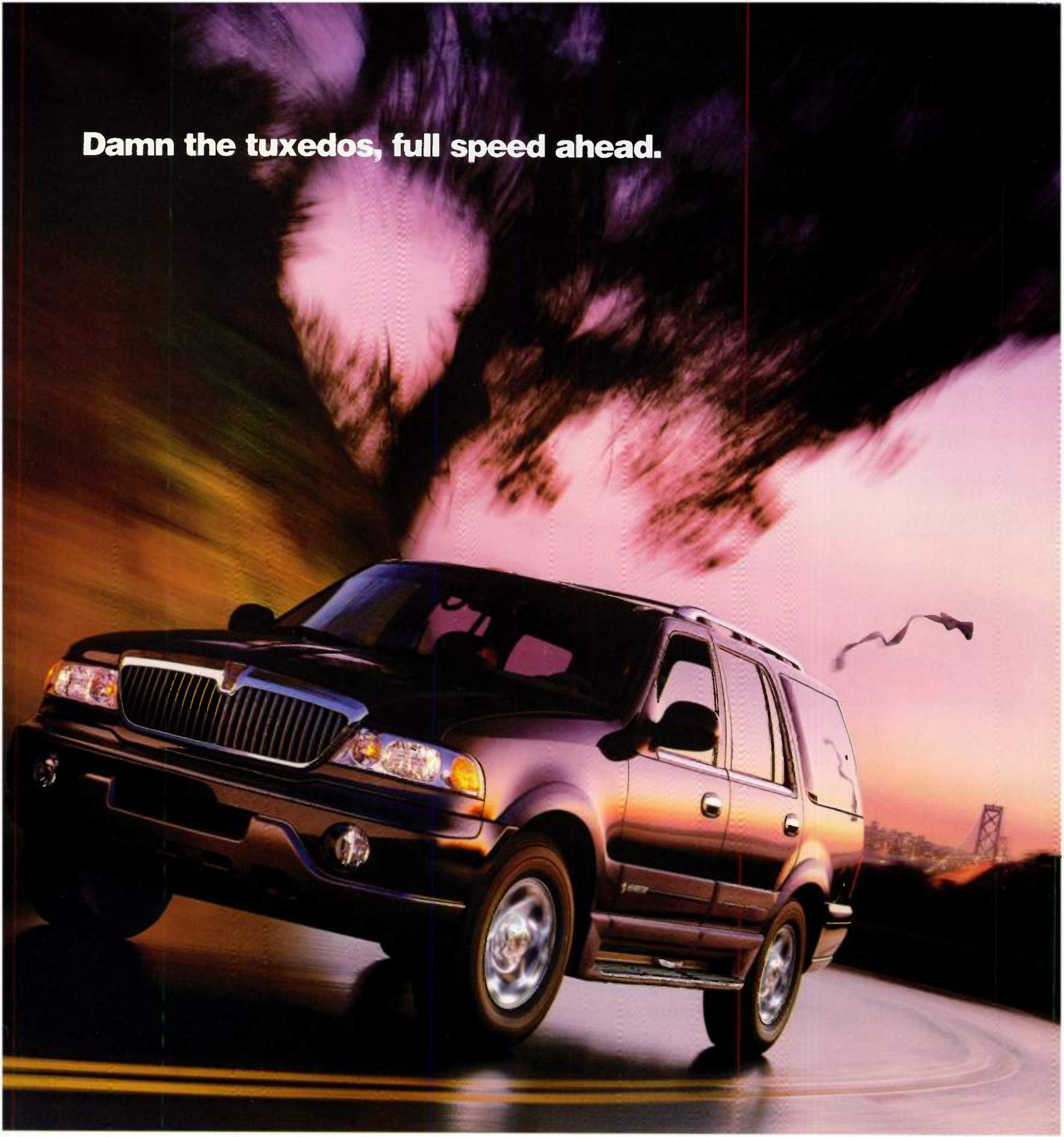
CUT to ROCKER playing golf with Nelson Mandela and Elie Wiesel. We hear Bob Marley's "Redemption Song." ROCKER high-fives Mandela, who has just finessed a chip shot within inches of the cup.

JOHN ROCKER (OFFSCREEN)
When Elie Wiesel called me a mensch... I realized that I felt better because I was a better person.

DISSOLVE to full-screen image of 500 mg. tablet of TOLERYL with tag line "Get Better."

VOICE-OVER
If you're a racist, anti-Semite, xenophobe, homophobe, or misogynist—ask your doctor about TOLERYL. Side effects may include Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, Necrotizing Fasciitis, Progeria, Hypopituitary Dwarfism, Hermaphroditism, Craniopagus Twins, Elephantiasis of the Testicles, Bed Head, the Inability to Distinguish Your Spouse or Significant Other From a Hat, Boils, Locusts, The Stigmata of Christ, and The Sudden Epiphany That All Sentient Creatures Are Your Mother and That the Material World Is an Illusion, Followed by Spontaneous Combustion.

ROCKER: ANDY LYONS/ALLSPORT; BACKGROUND: TONY STONE



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