TELEVISION QUARTERLY

$5.00
VOLUME XXIV
NUMBER 1
1989

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF TELEVISION ARTS AND SCIENCES

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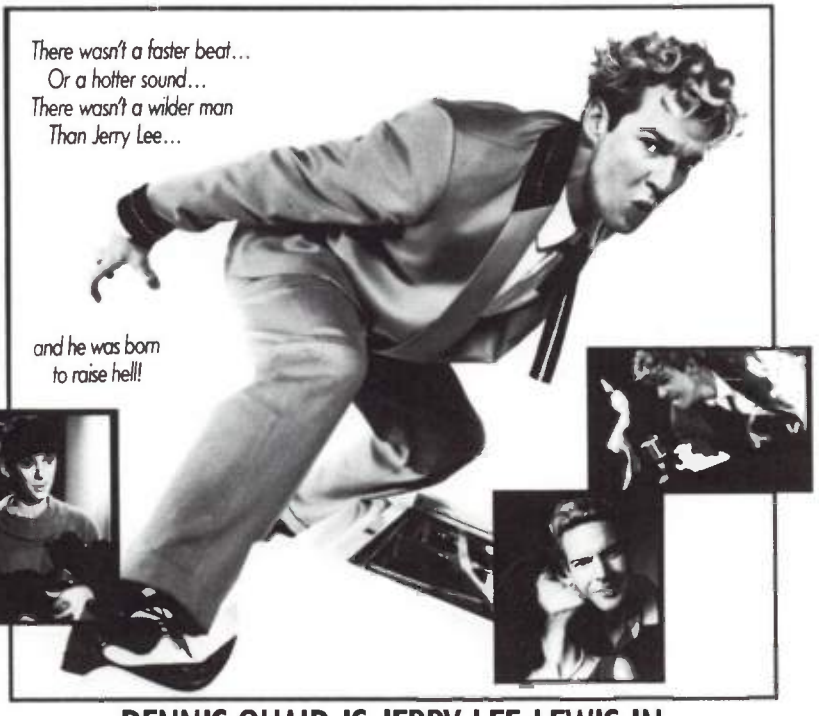

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THE JOURNAL OF THE
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TELEVISION QUARTERLY

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Television Quarterly is published quarterly by the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York, 10019 (212) 586-8424. Members of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences receive TELEVISION QUARTERLY as part of membership services. Inquiry regarding membership should be directed to the office of The National Academy of Televison Arts and Sciences. BUSINESS ADVERTISING OFFICES: Television Quarterly, 111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. EDITORIAL OFFICE: Televison Quarterly, same address. The subscription rates for non-members, libraries and others is $18.00 a year and $5.00 a copy in the United States; $20.00 a year and $6.00 a copy in all other countries. Special Student Subscription $14.00. Subscription orders should be sent to TELEVISION QUARTERLY, The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

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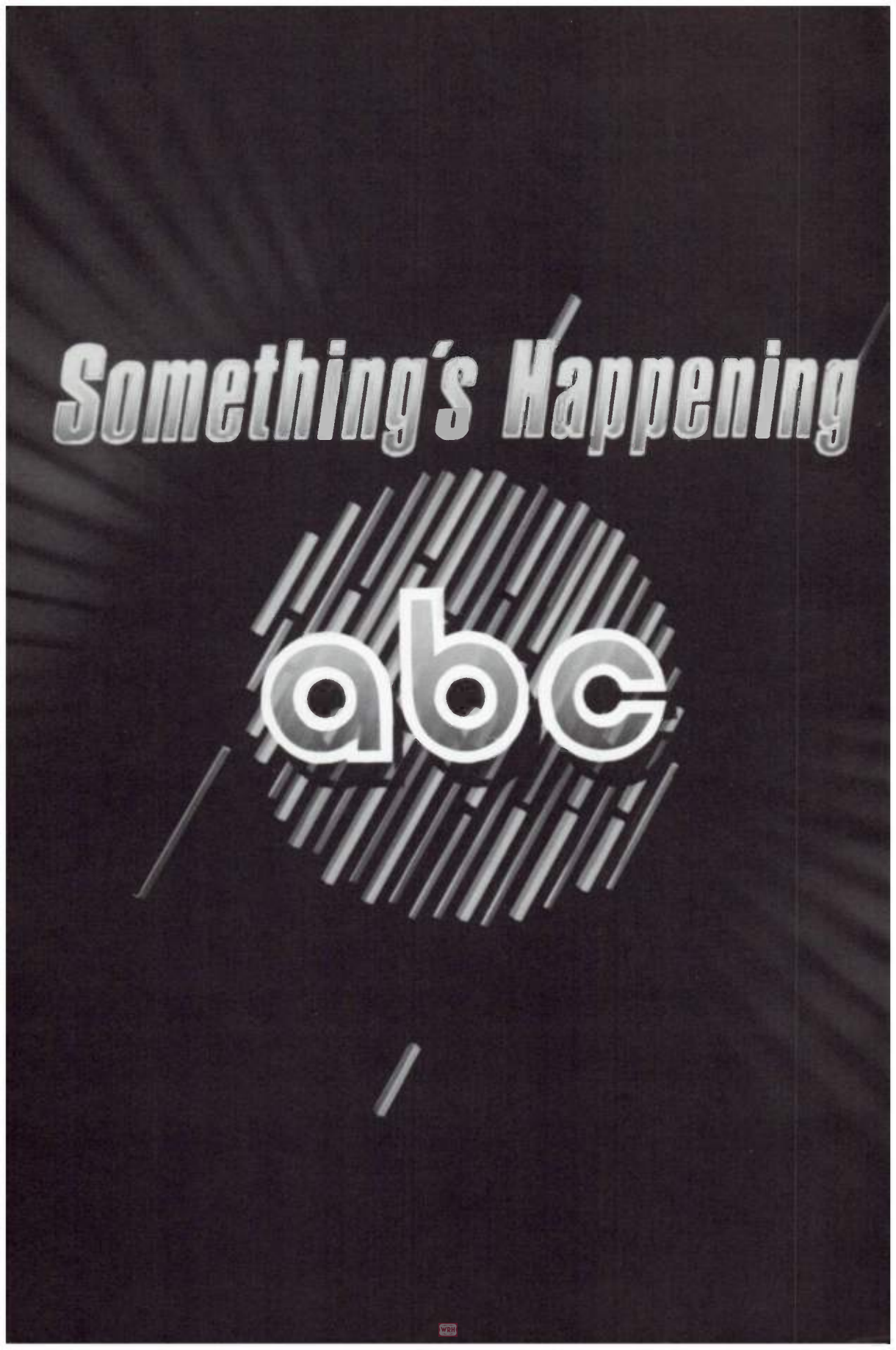

Something's Happening
abc

TED KOPPEL: A JOURNALIST'S CONTRIBUTION

TVQ'S Special Correspondent, Arthur Unger, Spends a Nightime with *Nightline.* It's the First in a New Series, "Primetime Prime Movers."

"The only thing we do that's really worth a damn is that we cast a little bit of light on injustice. Then the truly remarkable people come along and do something about it: the really good politicians, the great statesmen, the people who work for the benefit of mankind."—TK

BY ARTHUR UNGER

It is a calm night at Nightline.

Ted Koppel has already taped his interview with Maggie Thatcher and he has also sketched in the evening's discussion with the other guests. So, unlike previous times when I had interviewed him in the Washington D.C. DeSales Street offices of ABC News, there are few interruptions for his calmly frantic phone calls to reluctant guests and urgently laid-back conferences with production crew and staff writers. There is plenty of time for Ted to chat with me relaxedly, watch World News Tonight *on ABC with his feet up on the word processor, send out for our "greasy-spoon" dinner.*

Ted is short, slim, possessed of a thick shock of low-browed red-hair which gives him puppet-like good looks, inevitably compelling most interviewers to compare him to Howdy Doody and Mad Magazine's Alfred E. Newman. I am determined not to do that.

Instead, when he leaves me alone in his comfortably messy "down-home" office for a few minutes I prowl about making notes on what I hope will be revealing elements of his taste.

On one table there is a bonzai plant; over the sofa is hung a PRC red flag; behind his desk are many pictures including one of him on a camel in front of the Giza pyramid; a Marine Corps Marathon Through the Monuments poster. On a bulletin board and taped to the door are envelopes and letters, most of which are misaddressed or misspelled or otherwise slightly demeaning.

"Making good use of the time, Arthur?" he chuckles when he catches me taking notes upon his return. There is a dapper quality to his casual clothes—he wears a striped shirt, loafers, a gold watch and a gold ring.

Enough "revealing" data.

Since the start of Nightline *as "The Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage" in 1976, ABC's* Nightline *has become "The Think-*

ing Man's News Show," with the only competition for the title PBS's MacNeil/ Lehrer Newshour. *The show, with about 5.2/15 rating manages to hold its own against Johnny Carson's* Tonight Show *on NBC and is proving to be hardy enough to withstand the new competition of CBS's* Pat Sajak Show. *ABC is experimenting with strengthening its late-night position with a post-Koppel show,* Day's End.

There are certain sensitive areas in any interview with Ted Koppel. First, he does not want to discuss personal matters. But his entry in Current Biography reveals that he is married to lawyer Grace Anne Dorney and they have three daughters and one son. Second, he is reluctant to go into detail about his father, a German Jewish manufacturer of rubber-tires who is said to have been jailed in Germany before emigrating to England in 1938 where Ted was born two years later. Third, he gets annoyed when his hairline is discussed. Fourth, he is tired of interviewers who dwell on his nine-months in 1976 as a house-husband.

In the course of the interview which follows (in some cases the order has been rearranged for chronological clarification but the Koppel quotes are always verbatim), we manage to discuss all of the taboo subjects, some more candidly than others.

At the end of the interview, I rattle off to him a list of adjectives I have found in other articles about him: arrogant, pompous, overconfident, stodgy, condescending, tough, smooth, principled, self-effacing, restless, content, successful, dissatisfied, secure, dignified, brilliant, the smartest man on TV.

It turns out that "arrogant and pompous" were two words he had applied to himself many years ago when asked to reveal his bad points. The adjectives have dogged him ever since and he vows never to respond to such a question again.

Nobody asked me, but I have a few balanced adjectives of my own for him: warm but somehow aloof, cool but somehow compassionate, articulate but somehow didactic, intelligent but somehow not demeaning to those less so.

Ted Koppel and Nightline *have won two Peabody awards, seven duPont-Columbia Awards, five overseas Press Club Awards and 12 Emmys. (In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit that I was on the jury of the Overseas Press Club which this year awarded him the Edward R. Murrow prize for* Nightline In The Holyland*). Ted confides that one of his journalism heroes is Edward R. Murrow and it has been written in the* Boston Globe *that years from now, "TV newsmen are likely to invoke the name of Ted Koppel the way they now speak about . . . Edward R. Murrow."*

"The only thing we do that's really worth a damn is that we cast a little bit of light on injustice," he tells me. "Then the truly remarkable people come along and do something about it."

Sometimes, though, it is a truly remarkable man who casts that "little bit of light."

UNGER: *I guess we can call you a child of the Holocaust. You were born in England in 1940. Your parents were German Jews who fled the Nazis in 1938 after your father, a tire manufacturer, had spent some time in a German jail.*
KOPPEL: I think he was in jail only a couple of days. The Gestapo picked him up and then a friend of his who was a German judge arranged for him to be released and, you know, these were all non-criminal charges, anyway.

UNGER: *Those were pre-holocaust days?*
KOPPEL: No, it was not pre-holocaust. People were being sent to concentration camps from 1933 on. It was not the "boom" days of the holocaust. I mean people were dying in much smaller numbers, but they were dying in '34 and '35 and '36 and '37 and '38 . . .

UNGER: *So, you are a child of the holocaust?*
KOPPEL: I suppose so. The fact that I am here today in the United States, I assume, is a direct consequence of Hitler's rise to power. I mean if Hitler and the Nazis had not come in, I would prob-

ably be running my father's rubber tire factory today. I don't know if I would have become a journalist. Who knows?

UNGER: *In 1953, the family emigrated to the U.S. After attending the McBurney School in N.Y. you went on to Syracuse. Is it true that you went to Syracuse U. after being rejected at Princeton?*
KOPPEL: That's true. You must remember, I came to the United States at the very end of 1953. I went through high school in three years and so I went off to college in '56 and I didn't know one American college from another. I'd never heard of any of them and neither had my parents. And so I listened when an advisor told me that he thought I should apply to Princeton, and Middlebury with Syracuse as a back-up school. I got back an acceptance from Middlebury and they wanted a $50 deposit. My best friend at that time was also applying to Princeton so I said, "Well, I'll wait to see what happens with Princeton" and by the time Princeton rejected me, Middlebury no longer accepted the $50. The acceptance time had run out. And that's how I came to Syracuse.

UNGER: *You were a B student at Syracuse?*
KOPEL: That's probably putting it generously. Yes. I guess I was doing about a B.

UNGER: *What was your major there?*
KOPPEL: My major was speech, although I also did political science and some journalism.

UNGER: *And I gather that at that point, you had a kind of a British accent.*
KOPPEL: I had more than *kind* of a British accent. I had a British accent.

UNGER: *And how did you manage to lose that?*
KOPPEL: Well, you want to know something? I couldn't honestly tell you, Arthur, when it just disappeared. It sort of modified over the years. By the time I went off to college, my British accent was certainly less acute than it was when I first arrived here. And by the time I left college, I think it had all but disappeared.

UNGER: *Were you a better student when you went on to graduate school at Stanford?*
KOPPEL: Yes, I was a much better student at Stanford. I think at Stanford, I ended up with about a 3.6 average. I majored there in mass communications research and political science. I did my Master's thesis on the Eichmann trial.

UNGER: *Do you think you became a good student at Stanford because you found the career area you wanted?*
KOPPEL: No. I think it was because I found my future wife and she was a straight A student and I'm a very competitive fellah and I kept trying to compete with her and she kept beating my brains out.

UNGER: *After you finished Stanford, what did you do?*
KOPPEL: I came back to New York and applied everywhere—radio stations, television stations, newspapers, magazines, the wire services. I think there were even a couple of advertising agencies in there. I got nothing but rejection. In fact, at one point after my wife and I got married, we took all the letters of rejection and we papered one entire wall of the den with rejection letters.

UNGER: *What year was that?*
KOPPEL: This was 1962—well, actually, maybe late '61, early '62. I came back from Stanford and ended up working as a high school teacher for one semester at MacBurney, my old high school. All the while, I was applying for jobs, and finally got a job as what in those days was still called a "copy boy" at WMCA Radio in New York. And I worked there for almost a year. And during that period, I went out and did a couple of interviews—you know, some street reporting which they liked and used on the air. And then the union, AFTRA, called

up and said, "Hey, listen. If this fella is going to be on the air, he has to become a member of the union." Well, I was earning $90 a week and union membership, as I recall, was $350. But I joined. At which point, the union then turned around and told WMCA, "He is now a union member and you are going to have to pay him union wages, if he's on the air." And union wages would have bumped my salary up to about $300 a week from $90 a week. And the management at WMCA did what they perceived to be the only practical thing: "Well, in that case, we just won't put him on the air."

So I was now a member of AFTRA, still earning $90 a week and not on the air to boot. I recall shortly thereafter, going in and saying, rather like Oliver Twist with his bowl asking for another bowl of porridge: "Do you think you could raise my salary to $100 a week?" At least that would come out to $5000 a year and I was just recently married and my wife and I were expecting our first child and we really needed the money. She was a teacher at the time but she was going to have to quit because in New York in those days, they did not want pregnant women teaching in front of a class of impressionable children.

We needed the money badly. And they turned down my request for a raise. At that point, I started looking for another place to go to work. A man who has been a friend of mine for 25 years now, Jim Harriott, a disc jockey at WMCA, came in one day and he said: "Look, I know you want to get on the air and you want to get into news. I just got a job with ABC Radio on a program called "Flair Reports" which they are just beginning. It's not on the air yet. They are looking for seven people altogether and I think they only have four of them, so why don't you go and apply?" I went. I applied. I auditioned. They called me back a couple of days later and said, "Look, your audition was very good. But you're just too young." I was 23 at the time. And I said, "Well, I may be young, but you can't tell on the radio how old I am. I don't sound that young. And I really want the job." And they said, "I'll tell you what. We'll offer you a job as a news writer with ABC Radio News for $170 a week." Well, that was almost double what I was earning, but I said, "No. I didn't apply for that job. I don't want that job, I want the on-air job and I think you are being shortsighted because no one is going to know on the air how old I am. And either I can do the job or I can't." I hung out and sorta felt my heart sink because I had just let another major salary increase slip through my fingers. Three days later, the producer of the program called up and said, "Okay. You got it. It's yours."

So that's how I began with ABC.

UNGER: *Is it true that you were the youngest ABC reporter ever at that stage?*
KOPPEL: I think so. I don't know that as a fact, but it's probably true.

UNGER: Nightline *often makes news itself. Should TV news do that? Do you think that a function of TV news is to focus attention on itself?*
KOPPEL: I must say I find that a curious question, Arthur. Of course, it's a function. If we are interviewing someone on this broadcast who is very much in the news and whose utterances are going to make news, should we somehow hold back, "Oh, careful, don't say anything new. Don't say anything interesting."

UNGER: *But should someone like, say, Cronkite arrange for Sadat to visit Jerusalem?*
KOPPEL: Cronkite did not arrange for Sadat to visit Jerusalem. I mean that's one of the great myths of our time and it's one of the great myths of our time that I go to places like Israel and try to bring about a settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. That sort of nonsense is always proposed in questions and I always knock it down and people then think that there is some uncharacteristic form of modesty that I am exhibiting. The reality is that Anwar Sadat was a very canny politician who

did not wait for Walter Cronkite to suggest to him the possibility of going to Jerusalem. I assure you, it had occurred to Sadat before Walter asked the question. That's not taking a thing away from Walter Cronkite. He asked the *right* question at the right time and then proceeded to ask the right question at the right time of Menachim Begin. And what you had then was Walter Cronkite as facilitator. But people in foreign affairs frequently use the media as a means of floating an idea, floating a trial balloon which can easily be retracted later on because the press "got it wrong." Folks in politics and in foreign affairs do that sort of thing all the time.

UNGER: *Has it happened to you very much on Nightline.*
KOPPEL: Oh people are people, you know. Float trial balloons on *Nightline*. Of course! As they do on every broadcast. As they do on Brinkley, on *Face the Nation*, on *Meet the Press*. As they do in leaking stories to *The New York Times*.

UNGER: *Let's get back to* Nightline In the Holy Land. *What was the purpose of that? What were you trying to accomplish?*
KOPPEL: I must say that of all the things we have done, I don't recall anything that was more of a group effort than *Nightline In the Holy Land*. Everyone who worked on it contributed to creating a mosaic that I think in a total of seven and a half hours, probably taught more people in the United States more about the background of the conflict between Palestinians and Jews in that region than perhaps any other television program or series of TV programs that have been on. And it did it in a way that only a program like *Nightline* can do. That is bringing together history, the newsmakers of the time, putting it in front of an audience of concerned Jews and Palestinians with a panel of concerned Jews and Palestinians and airing the issue for several hours over several nights.

UNGER: *At one time you said you would not ever want to be a news anchor. Is that still the case?*
KOPPEL: Yes.

UNGER: *That's a direct answer. What do you think is wrong with today's dinner-hour news. Do you think it's a disappearing form?*
KOPPEL: No. And I'm not sure that I think there is anything wrong with it. Quite frankly, I think my colleagues do an excellent job at it and none better than Peter Jennings. It's just that what we have during the course of the week now, Arthur, is a much richer menu than existed in TV news 25 or 30 years ago. I mean, beginning with the early morning news programs at 6 and 6:30 and then picking up with *Good Morning, America* and the *Today Show* and *CBS This Morning* program and then the evening news programs and then *20/20* and *Sixty Minutes* and *West 57th* and *Nightline* and the Sunday programs which are much better today than they were ten years ago. If you look at the weekly output of news programs, we've probably quadrupled—in fact, I am sure that we have more than quadrupled—the amount of time that is devoted to news every week.

UNGER: *But mightn't that make the dinner-hour news a bit archaic in that people have access to other news sources?*
KOPPEL: No. It serves a different purpose. I mean it serves the same purpose it has always served. As Av Westin once put it: "They tell me whether my home's safe. Is my country safe? Is the world safe?" And basically, people tune in every night and you know let most of it wash by them and if they hear something that sounds particularly dangerous or interesting, then they sort of tune in. But it serves the same purpose as the old town crier. It serves the purpose of bringing people up to date on what the important events of the day are and we just do it a little more slickly nowadays and our reach is considerably further than it used to be when our forefathers were running around with bells and waking people up at 8 o'clock for the latest news.

UNGER: *Do you think Peter Jennings is doing a better job than the other authors?*
KOPPEL: Yes, I do.

UNGER: *How would you rate Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw?*
KOPPEL: Look, I think they are both first-rate professionals. I prefer Peter's style. I think that he's a little less frantic than Dan is. I just feel much more comfortable hearing the news from Peter. Maybe it's just because Peter and I have been very close friends for 25 years and I know him very well. I know what a solid human being and what a solid journalist he is. And I just know that when Peter's doing it, he's not just casually reading something that somebody thrust in his hand. I am sure that is also true of Dan and Tom, but I like Peter's style better and I know Peter better.

UNGER: *You've done a week in South Africa and a week in the Holy Land. Do you plan to do more of that sort of thing?*
KOPPEL: We also did a week in the Philippines and we also did a week in Southeast Asia, so we've done this four times now.

UNGER: *Do you have anything else in the planning stages?*
KOPPEL: We have three areas that we are looking at right now and I can't tell you which one we are going to do first: northern Ireland and Central America and eastern Europe.

UNGER: *Two things come up in all the clips I read about you. Both of these are things that undoubtedly annoy you. One of them is your hair, the other is your house-husband experience. Can we get those things out of the way?*
KOPPEL: No, they don't annoy me. The one is kind of trivial and the other is ancient history. But what do you want to know?

UNGER: *Have you ever considered changing your hair so that you have a different on-camera appearance?*
KOPPEL: I must tell you, I think I probably have. If you look at pictures of me over the past 9 years, you will find that it changes on an almost daily basis. You know, some people can sort of flick their hair back and it sort of falls neatly into place. I don't have hair like that. It stands out in all different directions and before I go on the air, I have to carefully brush it into place so it doesn't stick out in 15 different directions. When I get it cut, sometimes it will look really good for a day or two. And I suppose if I were really concerned about it, I would have it trimmed every three days so that it would look just that way, but I find that other people are a lot more concerned about my hair than I am.

UNGER: *And the fact that so many people think that it has not changed would indicate that their focus is on the right thing which is what you're saying . . .*
KOPPEL: Look, you know what happens, Arthur? People who are good journalists like you do what a good journalist does and that is go back and do research and read all the old articles. And then they raise all the old questions again and they are re-addressed and reborn. And then they come out in another article and some future journalist will pick up your article and say, there it was again and somehow, it just stays alive, time after time after time.

UNGER: *Let's go to the house-husband experience which appears in almost every clip. You took time off in '76 to care for your child and co-author a novel, In the National Interest,* with Marvin Kalb.
KOPPEL: Again, to just to put it into perspective, Arthur, it really is curious to me that nothing has really changed. I don't get annoyed about it, I get kind of frustrated. I mean America appears to be the same country today that it was thirteen years ago—that this should still be of interest; that this should be in any way considered extraordinary. I mean, my wife and I had been married for 13 years at that time. She had given up a distinguished academic career to marry

me and start traveling around the world with me. She was within six months of finishing her doctorate. And yet, no one ever focuses on the wife who gave up her career, so that her husband could become successful in his line of work. They only focus on the 9 months that I took off part-time because I was still anchoring the Saturday news up in New York—and working on a novel. It keeps coming up, it keeps coming up. And it frustrates her and it frustrates me because it suggests that a man taking off half-time for 9 months is still more important than a women taking off 13 years of her life and then some—because after all, she's still doing it.

UNGER: *But it's usually meant to be complimentary.*
KOPPEL: I understand that. I don't take it as anyone trying to do a number on me. Quite the contrary. I know it's meant to be complimentary, but that's exactly what's so frustrating . . . Isn't it kind of sad that what folks find that they have to focus on is that Ted Koppel took 9 months off so that his wife could begin law school and Lord knows, during that period, she was still working her buns off around the house.

UNGER: *What was the most positive result as far as you are concerned? What did you gain that you would not have had if you had continued working on a full-time basis? Let's assume that your family gained by having you there more time, but what was it that you gained?*
KOPPEL: Well, I guess if you set aside the family, I guess I gained the chance to find out if I had a book in me.

UNGER: *I felt that there were elements of your real you in the Darius character in your novel. At least, elements of your situation. Darius got into trouble with some people because of his close relationship to the Secretary of State in the story line. Some people felt that he was not unprejudiced in his coverage of the Secretary's activities. People have said that about you and Kissinger. Do you find that your relationships with government officials now is a hindrance or a help to you?*
KOPPEL: I don't have any.

UNGER: *You don't have any friends in government?*
KOPPEL: I don't. I mean, there are actually a couple of friends whom I've had—Larry Eagleburger is a man that I've known for many, many years and we are friendly and indeed I'm sure if he called me and asked me for a personal favor, or I asked him for a personal favor, that each would do it for the other. But we've known each other now for 15/16 years and he is now coming back into government. But during the entire Reagan Administration, I don't think I had a single friend in the Administration.

UNGER: *But haven't you been accused—most recently by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) of utilizing the same group of experts too often? Many of them are people who are friends. Others are simply well known media faces. Most tend to be establishment-oriented.*
KOPPEL: Henry Kissinger and I are good friends and I have maintained that throughout the years and maintain it to this day, but I have not seen him in about nine months. I would be surprised if we saw each other socially twice a year. The charges that FAIR made, I think are unreasonable on several grounds. I don't pick the guests on this program. We have four excellent bookers—two of them women, two of them men, one of them Hispanic, all of them considerably younger than I am—whose job it is to present guest possibilities to the Executive Producer and to me and on that basis, we pick them. Now point #1, *Nightline* is a news program. Point #2, we're a news program that likes to have the newsmakers on this program. Point #3 is for the past eight years, we have had a conservative, Republican, white male-dominated Administration in power. Point #4, when people come on my program they don't come on just so that they can give a little publicity speech. Presumably, my

role as an interviewer has *something* to do with whether these people are given a free ride or whether indeed they are sometimes given rather a hard time. FAIR addresses none of these issues. FAIR simply did a quantitative count of how many people appeared on the show many many times and how many of them were white, male and conservative. You know, I don't understand the thrust of the study, I really don't.

UNGER: *Well, their major point was that* Nightline *was in need of more representation from citizen's groups.*
KOPPEL: Why?

UNGER: *I guess they feel . . .*
KOPPEL: I don't care what *they* feel, what do you think? Why?

UNGER: *I guess it depends upon the direction the show wants to go.*
KOPPEL: Exactly. I mean ours is a news program. If citizens' groups are making news—in other words, if we were back in the middle of the Vietnam war or back in the civil rights period, and there was great *sturm and drang* and great crisis and the citizens' groups were marching in the streets, I would agree with you. I would say that having representatives of those citizens' groups on would be incumbent upon any news program that sees itself as a serious news program. But we're not an Op-Ed page, Arthur. We don't have any responsibility to say, "Well, we've had on five male conservatives over the past week, it's about time we had some female liberals on. Why? Says who? I mean, where is it written that says that that's what a news program has to do?

UNGER: *Actually it seems as if what FAIR's Executive Director, Jeff Cohen, would like to do is produce* Nightline *in his own image.*
KOPPEL: All I can tell you is—during the waning months of the Carter Administration and during the first months of the Reagan Administration, the media was being roundly beaten about the head and shoulders by conservative organizations and, ironically, we are still beaten about the head and shoulders by AIM (Accuracy In Media) because it is their perception that we don't put *enough* conservatives on. But, I'm not really interested in what I see as ideological charges made for ideological reasons. My central point is you don't come to the essence of a program like *Nightline* and whether it is fair or unfair by doing a quantitative count of names. You do it by a content analysis of what is said. What kinds of questions do I ask these people? Do I ask tough questions or do I throw them fancy questions?

UNGER: *Well, actually, you are answering some of Cohen's other charges. That there is a need for a broader range of topics.*
KOPPEL: Says who?

UNGER: *Too many flashy personalities?*
KOPPEL: Well, you know, I can't quibble if someone feels that our guests are too flashy. Again, as you correctly pointed out a moment ago, maybe what Jeff Cohen wants to do is be the producer of this program. But it would be a different kind of programming. Maybe it would be a better program, who knows? We put on the guests that we think will 1) satisfy a need to cover the news on that particular day; and 2) do it in such a way that an audience will stay up from 11:30 until midnight to watch it. A certain amount of flash and sparkle. . . . I make no apologies for what *Nightline* is.

UNGER: *Actually, probably FAIR's most pointed criticism—probably the most important—was that there should be less focus on the selling of U.S. foreign policy.*
KOPPEL: Well, FAIR feels that instead of putting a representative of the U.S. Administration on a program with a representative of the Sandinista government or a representative of the Soviet government or a representative of the Iranian government, that we should have on someone from the loyal opposition who

says, "Look, U.S. policy need not necessarily be what the Reagan Administration has in mind or what now the Bush Administration has in mind. There is an alternative." And I understand. There is a need to hear from such people, but unlike Jeff Cohen of FAIR, I do not believe that you do this thing on the basis of 53% of the vote being for the Republicans and 47% of the vote being for the Democrats and don't you therefore have an obligation to have 47% of your guests being liberal Democrats. No, I don't.

I think what we do in this country is that we have a Presidential election every four years and that President then becomes President of the United States, whether he is a liberal Democrat or a conservative Republican, he represents all of us. We may not *like* him, we may not like his policies, but nevertheless, he is the one representing the U.S. Government. His Secretary of State is the one making foreign policy; his Secretary of Defense is the one making defense policy. His Director of the CIA is covering intelligence policy and to have all these other people on simply because they are represented by the 47% of the vote, I don't think that's got anything to do with it. For four years, we are governed by the President and his Cabinet and their people. And they are the ones who are responsible for our foreign policy and they are the ones I want to talk to.

Now, if Jeff Cohen wants to produce another kind of television program, more power to him and it may be a very interesting one, but that's not the one we are doing.

UNGER: *So you obviously feel that the FAIR report was not helpful. But did you find someting in it that might be useful?*
KOPPEL: I think it very accurately reflects the paradox that we confront when we book programs like *Nightline* every day. And the name of that paradox is: if you bring someone on who is a complete unknown, then people will say, "Why did you bring him or her on? Who appointed that person expert?" If you bring someone on who is very well known, people say, "Aren't there other people in the country than those same tired, old names day after day after day?" And, indeed, that is an echo of what we frequently say when we are sitting around here and we're having our editorial meetings and we are trying to book guests. What is never reflected in surveys such as the one FAIR conducted or in a report such as the one they concluded—what is never reflected is whom you can get at a given hour; who is available; who wants to do the program; who indeed, can carry—it's not much, but 7 or 8 or 10 minutes and do it well—and sometimes, you know, we will put a guest on 6 or 7 or 8 times, because that person has proven himself or herself to be a good guest. So we are a lot less concerned about inviting them back because we *know* that in the few minutes that we have on a program to interview someone, that they give a lot of good material.

There's a lot of interesting stuff that come out in a relatively short period of time. And yes, sometimes we do go for the short end and it's easy then, we *know* what an Al Haig is going to say. We know that a Kissinger is going to say. We know what a Giorgio Abatov or a Vladimir Pozner is going to say. And when a story breaks at three in the afternoon or four in the afternoon and you are trying desperately to get people quickly together, sometimes you go for the easy bookings and *that* is a valid criticism. Indeed we are resolved that we will try to find a somewhat broader stable of potential guests, but it ain't so easy.

I'll be happy to have Jeff Cohen come in and sit in with us sometime as we go through the process of trying to book, but I will tell him now, and I will tell you and your readers now, what we are *not* going to do and that is sit there with an ideological thermometer and say, "Is that person a conservative. Is that person a liberal? We haven't had any liberals on in a long time. Don't we owe it to the liberals to put one on or don't we owe it to the conservatives to put one on?" That

is *not* how we book this program. And if and when we have a Democratic President with a Democratic Cabinet and a lot of liberals around him, the conservatives will find that they don't get much air time anymore, because we will be looking for the people who make news.

UNGER: *As a foreign correspondent, I guess sometimes as in the case of your book's hero, Darius, a decision has to be made whether to be true to your profession or true to the Government. Have you ever had to make that choice?*
KOPPEL: Well, it's a very tough choice. I mean this is a question that comes up with journalists all the time and that is one reason why we wove it into the book as a theme. How many times over the years has some member of government or another—some President or Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense confronted a journalist and said, as they said during the Vietnam war, "Why don't you get on the team? Why don't you guys play ball? Why don't you guys join us? Who are you working for anyway?" The suggestion has always been that when a journalist pursues the truth rather than what the official line is at any time, that he is being untrue to the principles of this nation and I would argue that in point of fact, that is the only way that a journalist can be true to the principles.

UNGER: *Has this sort of conflict come up in your experience at* Nightline*? Were you ever asked to withhold information or to withhold a program?*
KOPPEL: No, I can't say that it really has. First of all, it is rarely done in that crude a fashion. It's only when the nation is really involved in a massive national crisis as the Vietnam war was, that feelings get rubbed so raw that a President or a member of his Cabinet could be so indelicate as to suggest that the press is unpatriotic. It's a dangerous kind of thing to say now. Do Presidents, as President Reagan did, as candidate Bush did—do they blame the press for a lot of things that go wrong or for making things look a lot worse than they are? Of course, that will always be so. But I don't really anticipate anyone trying to change this program or try to get us not to carry something or to put something on the air. I don't really think that will happen in peacetime or in a time when there is not a major crisis underway.

UNGER: *During that period of shuttle diplomacy which you covered for ABC, did Kissinger ever ask you to withhold information?*
KOPPEL: No.

UNGER: *Let's say, were you privy to information that you didn't use?*
KOPPEL: I can't say that I was. About the only times—and I sometimes look back on this rather whimsically—there would be times when Kissinger would invite one or the other of us to come up and just sit with him privately for awhile and just talk off the record. Rarely, if ever,—certainly in my experience—was truly substantive information exchanged. It would be more of a flavor of the way things were. Whenever I was asked to engage in an off-the-record conversation, I always took that rather literally. "Off the record" meant off the record to me and I never used it. Then I would find after three or four days that information that Dr. Kissinger had sort of thrown my way—and as I say, it was never anything like really hard news—would appear in a reporter's notebook of one of my colleagues. It was clear to me that when he'd seen that I wasn't going to use it, he gave it to somebody else and therefore fully expected that it would be used.

UNGER: *So that very often "off the record" is a way of leaking information?*
KOPPEL: My reaction now that I am an older and I hope mature journalist is that if anyone says to me off the record, I tell them, "Don't tell me anything off the record because as I am concerned there is no such thing. You can tell it to me on background and I won't use your name. I won't attribute it to you, but if you tell me information, I'm a journalist—re-

member that I'm a journalist and don't tell it to me if you don't want me to use it. And I find most of the time, they want me to use it. I mean, the only reason most of the time that anyone in public life ever confides anything to a journalist is because he expects it to be used and he hopes it will be used in such a way that it will go down to his credit and benefit.

UNGER: *As a journalist, do you feel very often that you are being used?*
KOPPEL: All the time. *All* the time. It comes with the territory.

UNGER: *Have you ever been accused of being a member of the CIA?*
KOPPEL: I think it has been assumed on a few occasions when I used to work overseas, but assumed not because of anything in particular that I did or didn't do, but assumed because many foreign governments which used their own journalists as members of their Secret Service, just assume automatically that if you are an American journalist, you are working for the CIA.

UNGER: *You are not a member of the CIA?*
KOPPEL: No. (Laughter) And if I were, what do you think I would tell you?

UNGER: *What a ridiculous question for me to ask!*
KOPPEL: It is a ridiculous question. You'll never know the answer to your satisfaction or anybody else's.

UNGER: *Now that we're on government jobs, what constantly comes up is you as Secretary of State or as having a major government job within the State Department or in Foreign Affairs. Is that a story that you would like to kill or is that something you would like to keep in abeyance as a future possibility?*
KOPPEL: I think it's most unlikely. First of all, as I have said to a couple of people who have asked me about it, there is an aspect to what I have done that would serve a Secretary of State very well. A Secretary of State has to be able to communicate with the Congress, with the American public and clearly, my background in that respect would be useful. But I also happen to believe that the Secretary of State has to have had a lifetime of experience in—at the very least—government work, but preferably government work in which he has focused on foreign affairs.

UNGER: *Wouldn't your background especially suit you to be press spokesman for the State Department?*
KOPPEL: Oh, sure. Kissinger offered me that in 1974 and I didn't want it then and I surely don't want it now.

UNGER: *I think Nixon offered that to Mike Wallace at one point in his career . . . So, how about running for an elected office?*
KOPPEL: No danger of that happening.

UNGER: *Why?*
KOPPEL: Because I don't want it to happen. I have the greatest respect—I really do for men and women who put themselves on the line and who are prepared to expose themselves to the kinds of—not only searching inquiry—but also the parry-and-thrust of American political life which can be very, very bitter and very vicious. I admire their courage and I admire their determination and I admire their stamina. And I have absolutely no interest in trying to do that myself.

UNGER: *Do you think as a matter of principle that people involved in the media— especially in news—should not use that access to the public for political purposes?*
KOPPEL: No. I have no trouble with someone who has been a journalist for much of his or her life, then going into public life, be it as an elected official or be it as an appointed official. I don't even have any trouble with someone who has been in public life, then making their way into journalism and becoming a journalist. I *do* have trouble with people who go back and forth more than once. They can do it, but I would not.

UNGER: *You have said that the first question asked after the introduction is the most important question on* Nightline.
KOPPEL: I have?

UNGER: *Yes.*
KOPPEL: I don't recall saying it and I'm not sure why I said that.

UNGER: *I think you said that you didn't have the question prepared but you watch the intro yourself and then you react the way the guests react and that's the first question. . . .*
KOPPEL: I don't have any trouble with that. I just don't remember saying it.

UNGER: *If not for the* Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage *in 1979, do you think* Nightline *would exist today?*
KOPPEL: Yes.

UNGER: *You think it's a program whose time had come?*
KOPPEL: No, I think it's a program whose time Roone Arledge determined was going to come one way or another. What most people don't remember or never knew, was that Roone had tried previous experiments in late-night programming. In other words, he had decided and indeed had put out the word that anytime there was a major news story that had legs, that was going to last for more than a day or two, that he wanted to have special reports on it at 11:30 at night. His ambition—his goal—was that one day a story would come along that would last long enough that we would be able to use it to demonstrate to the affiliates that a newscast at 11:30 at night could work. And if it hadn't been *America Held Hostage*, it would have been something else. It might have been Achille Lauro; it might have been the hijacking of TWA 47.

UNGER: *It was the ABC coverage of the Black September Olympic massace when ABC stayed on the air for many days . . .*
KOPPEL: That was when Roone clearly showed what a keen appreciation he has not only for production and the art of keeping people's attention, but also a good news story.

UNGER: *What sort of an influence do you feel Roone has had on ABC News, and on television news in general?*
KOPPEL: Well, let's start with ABC television news. I think Roone Arledge has turned ABC television news in to the news network of the 1980s and now the 1990s coming up. I don't think that there is any question but if NBC reigned supreme during the heyday of Huntley/Brinkley and if CBS reigned supreme during the heyday of Walter Cronkite, then ABC reigns supreme today. I think if you look at it in terms of bench strength, in terms of the number of news programs that we have on the air, the quality and the success of the news program's that we have on the air, the tendency of viewers to turn to a network when there is a national crisis . . . In all those instances, ABC is now the network of record. And the network that the other two have been in different decades. If there is one person who deserves the credit for that, it is Roone Arledge. I think to a certain degree, he now gets that credit. He will get more as the years go on and as people look back on what he achieved.

UNGER: *Do you think there is a danger of that 11:30 p.m. hour becoming totally an entertainment hour again?*
KOPPEL: No. Arthur, if you were the president of ABC and you were looking at the 11:30 hour and what you had was a program that not only was regularly the #2 program and sometimes was the #1 program when the news is very hot; and is a program that is always fully sponsored and making a great deal of money for your network, why would you want to play around with that?

UNGER: *How about other borderline news shows? Sleaze TV. Tabloid news and trash talk shows. Do you feel that these are also temporary blips or do you think that they are a new wave of news shows that are dangerous to the future?*

KOPPEL: Nothing is terribly new. Thirty years ago, Joe Pine was doing the same kind of program that Morton Downey, Jr. is doing today. He used to tell his guests to go gargle with razor blades and threaten to punch people out. It was exactly the same shtick that Mort is doing now. It was very popular for awhile. It was in vogue for a couple of years and then it sort of died. I rather suspect that these other programs will too.

UNGER: *But the tabloid news shows are rather different than the trash talk shows. They blur the line between news and exploitation.*
KOPPEL: Oh, indeed, they are. They concern me much more because they are quite popular and just as tabloid newspapers have a place on the market, tabloid TV programs also do. But they worry me because the public has a very, very hard time distinguishing fact and fantasy; between news and "infotainment" and these programs don't make it any easier. I'm also not a great fan of docudramas. Don't like 'em. Because it is tough enough to try to get to fact without injecting in what is sometimes excellent writing that projects as having been the thought processes of the key player or what may have gone on behind closed doors.

UNGER: *Are the tabloid news shows a natural extension of docudramas? Docudramas blur the line between fact and fiction. The tabloid news shows have turned news into an entertainment—very often using reenactment as well . . .*
KOPPEL: I'm concerned with any program that confuses in the public mind what may have happened versus what did happen. Now, does TV journalism even when its practiced in its most scrupulous fashion, tell you what did happen? No. It only tells you what the best reporters available can infer or deduce from eyewitnesses or from their own observations what happened. But there is a certain discipline to journalism as practiced in the traditional way. It gives a viewer the confidence that what he or she is watching bears some semblance to reality. I found that discipline totally missing in these other progrms. They are clearly there to entertain and to titillate and to get as large an audience as they can.

UNGER: *Do you think they have a permanent place in television?*
KOPPEL: Well, I *fear* that they have a permanent place in TV. I would not like to see it. I prefer to see it as just an aberration that will pass. I had Mort Downey on my program. He was what he is, which is a very engaging and very intelligent man who is capable of speaking just as thoughtfully as any other intelligent man.

UNGER: *But on the air . . .*
KOPPEL: On the air, he has an act and he performs that act. I think he would be the first to tell you that it's an act. I get nervous if that is confused in some people's minds—if people *really* believe it is in the same class as the *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* and *Nightline*. If Mort Downey, Jr., and *A Current Affair* and all of these are somehow perceived to be part of the same genre or part of the same discipline, that's when I get nervous.

UNGER: *What do you think of Geraldo Rivera?*
KOPPEL: I think Geraldo is a brilliant performer. I think he is a very smart fella and I think he is a good reporter. Having said all of that, I think his great weakness is that he has no self-discipline and he lacks the discipline of a strong producer who can keep him from crossing the line. I understand that there is a certain fascination and the public still stand around for traffic accidents or someone teetering on the window sill of a 40th-story window. Those are the same kind of folks, I think, who tune in every day to see how far over the line Geraldo will go. That's always going to get in an audience of some sort. But he could be a first-rate journalist. And he is a won-

derful communicator. With those two skills and a little bit of discipline, he could be a far more important figure—perhaps not as well-known, but a far more important and useful figure than he is right now.

UNGER: *How about Maury Povich and* A Current Affair?
KOPPEL: Again, Maury Povich, I think, is another man with fine news potential. I used to enjoy appearing every once in a while as a guest on *Panorama* when Murray hosted the show here in Washington. He is a very able, intelligent interviewer and journalist. I hate to see him demean himself on a program like *A Current Affair*.

UNGER: *Is Morton Downey in the same category?*
KOPPEL: Morton Downey was never a journalist, never pretended to be. I don't think he has any aspirations to be a journalist. I don't think that if you handed him a form to be filled out that said 'occupation', that he would put journalist down.

UNGER: *What would he put down?*
KOPPEL: I think today, he would put down 'entertainer'.

UNGER: *What makes a good interview? What makes a good interviewee? And what makes a good interviewer?*
KOPPEL: Well, it helps if the public is already predisposed to want to hear what someone has to say. As the public was, for example, on the night when Gary Hart appeared on *Nightline*. As the public was on the night when Jim and Tammy Bakker appeared on the program. Then half your battle is already over with. You don't have to convince the audience that they want to stay with you. This is something they want to hear. They have already made that decision, that's why they're there. Then it becomes a function of eliciting information in such a way that you are as unintrusive as it is possible to be. If a guest is giving you everything you want, if the guest is telling you everything that you are trying to extract from your guests, there is no reason to interrupt. The interviewer then becomes kind of extraneous. The only time an interviewer really needs to get in there is if someone is telling you something that is clearly false, or clearly evasive, or clearly not responsive to the question that was asked and then you have to bring him back to it again.

So, a good guest is one who answers the questions the first time around and does it in an interesting fashion—one would hope in a relatively brief fashion. A good interviewer is one that knows the difference between a guest who is doing that and one who isn't and who knows how to remedy the situation.

UNGER: *Why do you insist upon having your guests talk to you through a monitor.*
KOPPEL: First of all, it is not something I insisted upon originally. That's the way this program began. What made *Nightline* a little bit different was—and in fact, I'll go back to the very origins to explain it to you. On *America Held Hostage* one night, there were no guests. We didn't have a crew in Iran. The White House wasn't saying anything. The State Department wasn't saying anything and the producer of the day called me and said, "Look, what do you think about calling up the chargé d'affaires at the Iranian Embassy?" And I said, "Sure." And he called back a few minutes later and said, "Well, he'll be happy to do it but he is afraid to leave the Embassy because he thinks the FBI will arrest him." So he said, "I'm going to send a remote truck over and we'll put up a chromakey screen and you can talk to him across town." So that's how it began. And Roone saw it and liked it and thought it looked particularly good. It gave the show a kind of a different look to it.

UNGER: *It makes it pure television.*
KOPPEL: Yeah. And so that's how and why we began. And having done that once, we realized, well, if you can do it across town, you can also do it cross

country and you can do it cross oceanic. In other words, you can talk to someone in Iran. You can talk to someone in Moscow. And then, where *Nightline* really made its breakthrough was because—others had done interviews before looking into a chromakey screen, Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer had done it and Ed Murrow had done it 20 years before any of us—what really made the breakthrough was when we decided that we could have more than one guest on at the same time and that an interview didn't always have to be interview Guest A; then stop that interview, then interview Guest B. You could actually provoke a discussion between two other people and that it worked best when they were two people who did not agree with them. In order to do that electronically no matter where anybody is, we decided that we would always have people interviewed in the chromakey screen, even when they were in Washington. If I have one guest in New York and one guest in Paris and one guest in Washington, it gives the guest in Washington an unfair advantage. Having once established that as our format, we didn't easily break it. However, over the past 2½ years, I've had people research it, since so much was made of the fact that I was trying to gain an advantage over the guests.

UNGER: *Well, you said at various times that you did it because you wanted to gain an advantage . . .*
KOPPEL: Oh, yeah. I mean I said that years ago, long before that fella who did an interview for *The New York Times Magazine* thought he had discovered something really extraordinary. I have been saying that about myself for years, that it gave me an edge. But that's not the reason we did it. The reason we did it was not to give me an edge. We did it was because it was a different format and it enabled us to talk to two and three people at the same time. And we didn't want to give the person who was in Washington an advantage over the person who was in Ipswich or in Edinburgh or in Teheran and so we always put people in a separate studio. Now, having said that, over the past two years, it turns out that I have done 80-some-odd interviews with people face to face. I really do not fear doing an interview face to face. It does not put me at a disadvantage to do an interview face to face. It is just the format of *Nightline* is one which has worked well for us.

UNGER: *How did Bush & Dukakis rate as interviewees.*
KOPPEL: Not very good.

UNGER: *Both of them?*
KOPPEL: Both of them. For some reason, now-President Bush was not on his best form. I don't think I have ever interviewed him before or since. That was the night he kept calling me Dan. He was so distracted, that was the night when I kept asking him about Iran Contra and kept asking him about Noriega and Panama and he didn't really have any good answers. He just didn't. And maybe that is simply because they were not very happy events in the Reagan/Bush Administration and there wasn't any clean way to come out and say, "Well, this is what happened and that's all there is to it."

And then Dukakis I just thought was a very disappointing interview. He had a chance to really present himself as "okay, we're now down into the final 13 days of this campaign. I'm tired of this nonsense of being punched around from pillar to post. I'm going to take the gloves off. What have I got to lose at this point? Nobody thinks I'm going to win this election anyway, here's what I stand for. This is what I believe in. Here's what I would do in this situation. Here's what I would do in that situation." Instead he gave nothing but canned responses that were essentially the same thing he had been saying for months that hadn't been doing anything for him.

UNGER: *You've been criticized for focusing on sexy guests like Jim and Tammi Bakker. They got very good ratings for you and you went back for 16 shows. Ac-*

cording to my records, there were 11 in '87 and five in '88. Now, do you feel you have to apologize for that or do you feel they warranted that sort of coverage?
KOPPEL: Let me do it the easy way. Go back to that same period and see how many times that same story appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* or on the front page of the *Washington Post* or on the front page of the *L.A. Times* or any other distinguished newspaper that you want to point to with the possible exception of your alma mater and look at the number of times the story was either on the cover of *Time* or *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report* or that it was prominently displayed inside the magazine. It was one of the hot stories of 1987. I think some of the pique that arose among those who criticize *Nightline* and me for doing that particular subject as often as we did, probably arises from the fact that we were the only ones in the country, newspapers, magazine, radio or television to get interviews with Jim and Tammy and then later with Jim Bakker at a time when everybody would have been only too thrilled to have them on. No, I don't have any apologies.

UNGER: *Are there some people that you would like to get on* Nightline *that you have not been able to get to? Name a few people who would make perfect guests.*
KOPPEL: I would love to talk to His Holiness, the Pope. I would like at some point to talk to Lee Iacocca. What happens is it's not always that a person is an ideal guest and remains an ideal guest for his or her entire life—there is, as the Bible says, a season for all things. The same is true for people in the news. There are times when you would give your eye teeth to have a certain person on as a guest, but three months later, you couldn't make room for them on the program.

UNGER: *In 1987, you said that your major regret in life—one of these things you're going to regret having said, I suspect—is that you have no time to think. Is that still true?*
KOPPEL: More than ever, I suppose.

UNGER: *Why? Is it because you are doing more professionally?*
KOPPEL: Yes. What happens is that this is a voracious industry. It rewards us enormously. It rewards us financially. It rewards us in terms of fame, even a certain degree of influence. But while you're hot in this industry, it eats you alive. It will take whatever you can give it. There is no question but that wisdom decrees that at some point or another, I've got to turn the burner down. How I will do that and when I will do that is something that my wife and I will discuss and decide over the course of the next couple of years.

UNGER: *But you just signed a new contract and you are working on a three-parter on leadership for WETA, the PBS Washington station.*
KOPPEL: Yes. But, we haven't signed a contract yet. All ideas must be submitted first to ABC.

UNGER: *And if ABC isn't interested, you can go to PBS but not to the other networks, is that so?*
KOPPEL: Well, I can go to PBS; I can go to HBO; I can go to Disney; I can put it into syndication; I can do anything with it except take it to NBC, CBS, CNN or FOX.

UNGER: *A recent newspaper story quoted your new contract as bringing you a $4 million-yearly income. And you said, that the figure was far off, either too low or too high.*
KOPPEL: That's true. (laughter).

UNGER: *Here we are at almost 8:30 p.m. and you've been sitting and talking to me for several hours. The show goes on at 11:30 p.m. and you have not been having conferences during this period of time. Is this unusual? I was here once before and we were constantly interrupted by telephone, staff conferences, etc.*
KOPPEL: Depends on what the show is.

I mean, I was in here this morning at 6:45 a.m. to tape an interview with Margaret Thatcher. The other interview is with Senator Al Gore. That I will be doing live. Al Gore and I spent about a half hour the other day at LaGuardia airport talking about this program. The thrust of the conversation was he was trying to interest me in this as a focus of *Nightline* and I know what the program is about. There is not a great deal more to be done on tonight's program. I've got to write the introduction to the opening piece and go over research for a half hour and that's essentially it. But much of this program is already done in the sense that all that's left is a relatively brief interview with Al Gore that will probably run about 7 minutes and that's not very tough.

UNGER: *In other programs, might you be much more actively involved?*
KOPPEL: There are nights where we just go from one meeting to another meeting to another meeting and one phone call to another phone call to another phone call. This is just an easy night.

UNGER: *Who are your heroes on television?*
KOPPEL: Clearly, Ed Morrow was a hero of mine. Howard K. Smith is a hero of mine. I think Howard is an extraordinary journalist.

UNGER: *Where is he now?*
KOPPEL: He's here in Washington. He still lectures and writes. Occasionally, I think he still does some broadcasting. To my shame, I must admit I have not talked to Howard in quite some time. But I think he is just a remarkable man. I think Eric Sevareid is a remarkable man. It's kind of frightening how quickly people are forgotten in our industry. There are people who dominated the industry and stood out as monuments at one time or another. You take them off the air for a few years and people forget.

UNGER: *Once when you were asked what your strengths are, you said: "I ask the right question. Then, I listen." Would you say that is too simple a description of your strengths?*
KOPPEL: I think those are my strengths. It sounds simple, but it's not. But listening is one thing; hearing is something else. I try to hear, too. If sometimes you can hear you're a good interviewer, Arthur. You know when to keep your mouth shut. You know when to let the person keep talking and you know when to interrupt. Sounds easy. But it's amazing how few people know how to do it.

UNGER: *How is it that very little of your sense of humor comes across in the program? You are often called humorless. But, I find that people are terribly amused by your imitations of Nixon and Kissinger and Buckley and Cary Grant and Adlai Stevenson. Have you ever considered doing one of them on the air?*
KOPPEL: No. What people have to understand is that most of the time *Nightline* is a news program that is being edited before their eyes. It's a program that's being edited while they watch it. We don't do one hour interview. This is a traditional method of doing an interview. You do the interview, then you take it home. You edit it, sort of move things around a little bit . . . When you have the luxury of being able to take your notes, your audiotape, your videotape, your film—whatever it is—somewhere else and cut out the boring stuff, perhaps move the interesting stuff around a little bit so that it flows even more cohesively or coherently than it did during the interview, you do it. I have to edit while I am on the air. I have to make those things happen while I am on the air and while I am getting time cues in my ear and while things may be happening in the studio and while I have to be conscious of the fact that Guest A has only had a minute on the air and Guest B has sort of been hogging the time. And so, doing these interviews especially when I have more than one guest and I'm doing it live, is a very, very intense thing. I'm not there to entertain. I'm there to make sure the information comes across in a clear fashion and that guests don't get

away with anything. When you get into this sort of jocular "So, where are you playing next week? It's so nice of you to come join us," I don't have time for that. I don't have time for it and I really don't have the inclination for it when I'm doing interviews on this program. It would seem out of place.

UNGER: *When you appeared on the David Letterman show recently, he tried to cajole you into doing imitations. You refused. Was that because of his condescending attitude?*

KOPPEL: No, no. I like David Letterman a lot and I'm a great fan of his and I think he's got an absolutely wonderful program. I didn't want to do it—and people again misunderstood and wondered why it was that I was willing to make a fool of myself by sticking a dog bone on my nose, but not to do an impersonation. I didn't want to humiliate the people that I would be impersonating. That's something I'll do for friends and I might even do it if I am giving a lecture or a speech somewhere. But to do that on national television, I think, is something else. And I didn't want to do that to any of the people I normally impersonate. I have no trouble making a fool of myself.

UNGER: *You have talked about being involved in the "Vanna factor." Do you really believe that you are part of it?*

KOPPEL: I gave a commencement speech at Duke in which I talked about the "Vanna-tizing of America" and what I meant by that is that I have tried long and hard to understand the roots of Vanna White's extraordinary popularity. It is not hard to understand why people find her pleasant to look at—she's a very lovely young woman—but she doesn't really do anything. There's no particular talent, one would assume, to turning the blocks on a quiz show, although she does it very nicely. It struck me that really the root cause of Vanna's popularity is that she is a cipher as far as the viewing public is concerned. They can project onto her whatever they want her to be.

She can be your sister, your mother, your daughter, your lover because we really know nothing about what she thinks, we can project onto her what we think. There seems to me to be a growing tendency in American public life today to reserve the greatest popularity for those about whom we really know the least. We may see them all the time, as we see our anchor people on television. But simply because we see them and hear them every day doesn't mean that we really know anything about them.

I mean people may make their assumptions about what they think Dan Rather stands for or doesn't stand for or Peter Jennings stands for or doesn't stand for or Ted Koppel stands for or doesn't stand for . . . but really, insofar as we enjoy any popularity whatsoever, that rests in large measure on the public's perception that we agree with them. And that doesn't mean that it's only going to be Republican conservatives who feel "Aha, Ted Koppel is one of ours" because on other occasions liberal Democrats may feel it. It just depends on a given program. Precisely the more the Vanna factor applies, the more the cipher you are, the more popular you become. That disturbs me in that it has also become a function of our political process, so that our national candidates now make a virtue out of being bland. They make a virtue of really *not* telling us what they stand for.

UNGER: *Do you think your viewers would be surprised if they knew what you personally believed? What political party you belonged to? Where your thoughts were on various major issues? Do you think there would be disappointment or surprise?*

KOPPEL: I think there would be all the possible emotions. I think some of them would feel vindicated and would say "That's exactly what I believe and I'm really glad that Ted is one of us" and I think others would feel absolutely violated: "How can that man be the anchor of a network news program if he believes something so fundamentally opposed to what I believe in?" The point

is, in order to be an effective news anchor, you have to maintain the appearance of objectivity. And that's why it can be very damaging to an anchor if an outfit like FAIR comes along and suggests that we are stacking the deck here and that what we are really doing is simply serving the conservative agenda. That's the only reason I resent it. I don't care—they can do all the studies they want, but if they are going to do studies, let them at least be wholesome.

UNGER: *Jeff Greenfield says that you have two basic flaws: you don't know anything about baseball and you have a decadent attitude toward rock and roll.*
KOPPEL: Jeff is too generous. I am sure that I have more flaws than that.

UNGER: *What are some of the flaws?*
KOPPEL: I'll tell you what: I'm going to start learning from my mistakes. One of the mistakes I have made in the past is years ago, someone said: "What do you think your flaws are?" and I said, "Well, I guess I'm kind of arrogant and pompous" and the next thing I know, I'm seeing it quoted and requoted and quoted again. I wouldn't mind it if someone would say, "Why, so many years ago, did you describe yourself as "arrogant and pompous'?" But what happens then is the words survive but the origin doesn't survive anymore, so that it is perceived as something that other people have been saying about me—which indeed they may—but that's not where it began. It began with me. I said it first. So, you'll have to find my flaws yourself.

UNGER: *Well, let's go over some of these. I have a list of negative adjectives and positive adjectives which I found in going over clippings. Some of the negatives: arrogant; pompous; overconfident; stodgy; condescending. A recent* New York Times *piece called you "tough and smooth"; "principled and self-effacing"; "restless"; and "content, successful and dissatisfied".*

Some of the positive adjectives I found were: confident; secure; dignified; non-condescending; brilliant, intellectual; smartest man on TV; TV's Secretary of State.

Let's go over them one by one.

Arrogant?
KOPPEL: Well, as I said, that was a self-description, so I'm not going to reject it.

UNGER: *But you don't think you're arrogant?*
KOPPEL: No, I do. When I first said it, I didn't intend it to be a description of myself of which I am particularly proud. Someone said, "Tell me something bad about you." And I said, "arrogant and pompous." If I thought it was good, I would have put it under one of the virtues or positive qualities. No, I don't think that that is a good thing to be and I try very hard not to be arrogant and pompous, but clearly, I fail more than I should.

UNGER: *How about condescending? I've got you on both sides there. One said condescending and one said non-condescending.*
KOPPEL: I guess they got me on different days. What can I say? I try not to be condescending to people who are not able to handle it. I may be condescending to people who are very full of themselves or who I'm trying to take down a peg or two. That's a device and I use it as such. I hope I'm not that way to just anyone who meets me or as I said the other day, to friends, members of my family, people I care about a lot. I don't mean to be condescending.

UNGER: *How about "the smartest man on TV"?*
KOPPEL: It's silliness. It's the sort of thing some headline writer put on the cover of *New York Magazine*. It's silliness. It's just nonsense. Again, I fall back as I so often do on what Mark Twain once said: "We're all ignorant. Just about different things." And I may be very smart on a couple of subjects and I'm clearly ignorant on a lot of others. When I look at people like my friend, Marvin Kalb or I look at a person like a Bill Moyers and any number of other people who have

appeared on television—many of them my colleagues here—Jeff Greenfield could quite clearly tuck me under his right arm and still have room left for the old Brooklyn Dodgers when it comes to domestic politics, he knows so much more about it than I do. And I know more about foreign policy than he does. There are certain things I know a lot about and a lot of things that I know very little about. I can fake it. But the "smartest man on television" is just silly.

UNGER: *The TV Secretary of State.*
KOPPEL: All that means is that they see me talking to a lot of foreign leaders. I don't know that it does anybody any good, Arthur, really to go over a lot of headlines that are used on the covers of magazines or to introduce a story.

UNGER: *When I spoke to you last time, you were negotiating with ABC—your old contract was expiring—and you said then that there were a lot of things in television that were happening that were disturbing to you and you hoped that you could somehow do some good in demanding that those things be changed. You were very disturbed about the erasing of historical tapes.*
KOPPEL: That was stopped.

UNGER: *And the cutting down a number of personnnel.*
KOPPEL: There are different ways of achieving things and one of the reasons I started up this independent company of mine because I recognize how changes can be made sometimes. An employee doesn't go into the president of the news division or to a network as a whole and say, "Look, I don't approve of the personnel cuts that you've made, please change them" as a condition of my new contract. You don't do things that way. ABC has been very helpful in getting me started with my new company.

That new company gives me a sense of independence that I didn't have before. My hope is—my expectation is that ABC and Koppel Communications will kind of sail side by side for many years to come, but if things ever got to a point where I really felt—you know, Roone Arledge might leave ABC News and the people who are running the network right now might not be running it two or three years from now. Someone else might come in whose vision of what television ought to be about differs totally from mine. In that case, I will be in a position to cut the umbilical cord and sail off on my own. And believe me, I will. And the fact that people know that I will and know that I just don't say things like that, can be very helpful. It gives me a little more influence than I've ever had if I were just an employee of that company.

UNGER: *One of the things you also said was that you might just decide that this was the time to do something else.*
KOPPEL: I might.

UNGER: *Is that still a possibility?*
KOPPEL: Sure. I don't really believe that the world rises and sets with TV.

UNGER: *Might that something else be politics?*
KOPPEL: No, no, no. Look, I might decide I want to teach. I might decide that I want to write a book. I might decide that I want to write more than one book. I might decide that I want to go sail around the world. Who knows? Life isn't over. There are a lot of things.

UNGER: *I hate to use more adjectives, but one of the adjectives that the* Times *piece used was "dissatisfied." Are you dissatisfied? Would you describe yourself as dissatisfied?*
KOPPEL: I think that all thinking people are dissatisfied. Not necessarily dissatisfied with my fate—I'm not dissatisfied with my lot, with my life. But dissatisfied? Good Lord, how can you not be dissatisfied as you look around you? With the world as it exists. There are things to be changed. There are things to be done. There are perceptions to be altered. I think a journalist has to be very, very careful about how he does that, if at all. But the one thing we can

always do is try to portray accurately an injustice when it exists; try to portray accurately a situation that must be changed. I mean, we're doing a program right now, my company, KCI, together with ABC, on the District of Columbia and on the extraordinary number of homicides that have occurred here.

Am I dissatisfied with that? You bet. If I had a different inclination, I would go into politics to try to change it. I happen to be a better than average communicator. I happen to be someone who can take complex situations and present them to a general public in such a way that they are moderately interested and that people stop and say. "Hummph! I hadn't thought about that before. Maybe I'll do something about it."

UNGER: *Would you say that's your greatest contribution?*

KOPPEL: I think it's the only contribution that a journalist makes. Everything else is just froth. The only thing we do that's really worth a damn is that we cast a little bit of light on injustice. Then the truly remarkable people come along and do something about it: the really good politicians, the great statesmen, the people who work for the benefit of mankind.

UNGER: *But don't you have to have an urge to be one of those?*

KOPPEL: Look, I'll tell you something. Back in—when Martin Luther King led the march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery—I was down there for ABC News and I was covering the story. I called my wife the second or third night out and I said, "You know, I think I am going to have to quit." And she said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I really don't feel that I can cover this objectively. I feel as though I ought to be marching." She said, "Come on. For as long as I have known you (which was only 5 years at that point), all you've ever wanted to do is be a journalist and report on things like this. And now here's your big chance to do it. It's really the first major story you've ever had a chance to cover, so go do it." I obviously wanted to be talked out of quitting, so I stayed with it. I walked and I marched with them and covered the story. And tried to do it as objectively as I could.

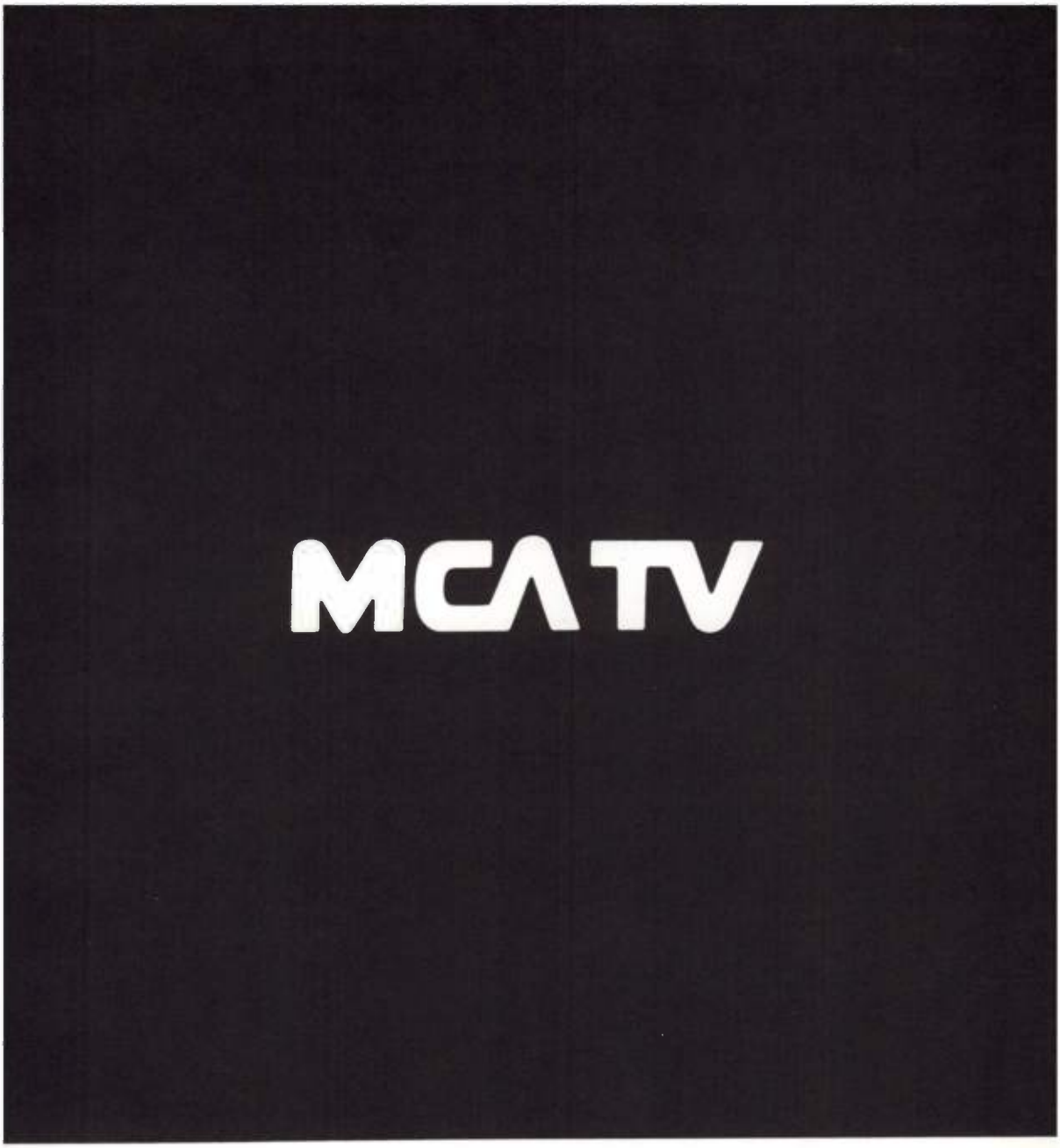
That's what I do. That's what I do well.

Maybe if I stopped doing that and tried to be a politician or maybe if I tried to be just a humanitarian and went out and tried to raise money, maybe I would only do a mediocre job at that. Who knows? I might yet try to do that. But as long as I see that there is some good coming out of what I do, then it's worth continuing, it's worth keeping up because you don't do this for the money. After awhile, you don't. Maybe you do it because the public attention is like a drug. I know a lot of people who can't quit because they can't really countenance the thought of not being recognized or not being in the action. That's possible. But when you have been paid as well as I have been paid over as long a period of years, I don't need anything anymore.

So I'm not doing this for the money. I really am doing it because every once in awhile, we do something terrific. Every once in awhile, we do a program which makes us all glow. The program in Israel with the Palestinians and the Israelis was an example of that. We *knew* that we had done a great show. It didn't make any difference, so alright, we knew it was going to win a lot of awards. But if it hadn't won any award, we didn't need the award. We knew that was an important program. That keeps you going for a long time. ■

In seventeen years of writing about television for *The Christian Science Monitor*, Arthur Unger has won national recognition as one of the medium's most influential critics. He is also known for his lively and revealing interviews with TV, stage and film personalities. He recently retired from the *Monitor* to devote his time to travel and writing, including a book he calls *Un-Monitored Interviews: The Adventures of a Discrete Interviewer Among The Industry*. *Television Quarterly* is privileged to have him write regularly for us, as Special Correspondent.

In this era of high technology, it is especially important to remember that talent comes from people.



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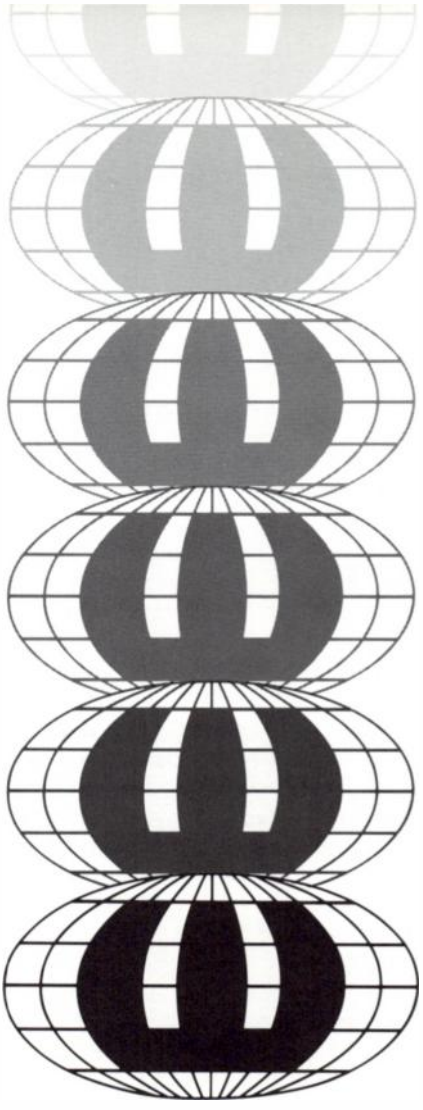

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SOVIET TELEVISION'S NEW LOOK

A veteran correspondent takes an inside look at broadcast news, Soviet style, and finds sweeping changes under *glasnost*.

BY BERNARD S. REDMONT

MOSCOW

The scene boggled the mind: Soviet citizens in central Siberia, complaining angrily to their powerful leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. And then, the nation seeing it all on *Vremya*, the evening news program, in living color and natural sound.

"Go into our stores, Mikhail Sergeyevich, there's nothing there," shouted a woman in Krasnoyarsk, as the cameras rolled. "Lines everywhere! For meat, for sausage, for everything," yelled a man. Others loudly grumbled about housing, medical care, public transportation and bureaucracy.

Then came a skeptic's challenge: "Will all this be shown on television, or will they cut out half of it? Tell us the truth!"

Gorbachev replied with an arch smile, "It's not my decision to make."

What was astonishing was not the heckling itself and the loud voicing of grievances, but that for several successive nights, it was all broadcast on national TV, to more than 150 million viewers.

Even in the era of *glasnost*, when taboos were falling every day, it represented an extraordinary event.

"There are no taboos," said Alexander Aksyonov, Chairman of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting (*Gosteleradio*). "In the conditions of *perestroika* (reconstruction or reform) and *glasnost* (openness), the Soviet media, including television and radio, have been reborn."

Propaganda levels have dropped, although the medium still carries the message. News reports, domestic and foreign, look livelier and more objective. Crime, disasters and investigative journalism have become routine. Criticism, dissent and round table arguments—some with Western participants—have become daily fare.

The changes on Soviet TV symbolize Gorbachev's efforts to open up and restructure the country and represent perhaps his greatest reform to date. Gorbachev has recognized the potential of television as a vehicle for revolutionizing the nation's consciousness, although he hasn't yet taken full advantage of it. If he ever succeeds in achieving the projected economic and social reforms, TV will have prepared the way.

Exemplifying the *glasnost* policy, *Gosteleradio* opened up its Ostankino headquarters and studios to this writer for an in-depth inquiry.

More than 270 TV and radio centers dot the USSR, stretching across 7,000 miles and 11 time zones, with a potential audience of 270 million. The USSR claims the world's largest system of TV satellite broadcasting. The television networks broadcast in 45 languages spoken in the Soviet Union. Moscow viewers have a choice of four

main channels, but not yet cable. Ostankino is the nerve center.

Aksyonov reported that cooperation between *Gosteleradio* and foreign broadcasting companies "grows in scope every year. Today we have close contacts with 173 TV organizations in 122 countries. We actively cooperate with ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS, and with TBS and Orbita and other companies in the U.S."

Turner Broadcasting's chummy ventures with Soviet TV began several years ago. Since Ted Turner gave the Soviets a satellite dish as a parting gift, *Gosteleradio* monitors CNN 24 hours a day, and uses a substantial amount of it.

Talking with a top executive of Soviet TV, I was startled to see him press a button on the console in his Ostankino office, and on came CNN, live from Atlanta. With the right technology, individual Soviet citizens can pick it up, too, and one day many may do so. CNN's international news channel comes over a special frequency into Moscow. Some who have foreign TV sets or late Soviet models can bring it in.

TV "space bridge" linkups between the two countries have dramatized what Soviet officials call the "rusting" of the Iron Curtain since 1986. Remarked *Gosteleradio* Deputy Chairman Vladimir Popov, with a twinkle in his eye, "We can jump the wall now."

Said a Muscovite, "I'm hearing things on TV that weeks ago would never have been whispered over the telephone."

When TV covered the Communist Party conference in the summer of 1988, showing delegates calling for the removal of party officials and attacking others as nasty bureaucrats or even criminals, people could hardly believe it. One woman said, "I sat in front of my television and cried. My brother disappeared under Stalin. One night they came and then he was gone. And to think that now people can talk so freely! It's a miracle, a true miracle!"

The Rev. William Sloane Coffin, visiting Moscow recently, asked a Soviet acquaintance what was new in the theater. The reply was, "Theater? We don't need the theater. We have it all on television and in the press!"

Gorbachev accurately commented that "the whole country has become a noisy debating society," and television is the stage on which the debate is sharpest.

At the same time, some dissidents question assertions that anything goes and argue that there are always limits, and that an all-powerful regime can also turn the clock back at any time.

Programming reflects the dramatic changes.

Vremya (Time), the flagship program and the Soviet Union's answer to Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings, had been comparatively slow to enter the *glasnost* age. Many viewers still consider *Vremya* a bit stodgy compared to other programs, but in the past three years it has transformed itself enormously. With three times the combined audience of CBS, NBC and ABC, a viewership of anywhere between 150 and 190 million, it is "the most popular telecast today," according to *Gosteleradio* chief Aksyonov.

Vremya's nightly half-hour newscast opens at 9 p.m. and stretches out to 40 or even 60 minutes, depending on the menu. It's repeated ten times a day for the Soviet Union's 11 time zones.

Not always as fascinating as newer programs, it still tends to feature rather uncharismatic anchors who, in the words of one observer, "plow through their copy like farmers trying to meet a quota." Usually without a Teleprompter.

But *Vremya* has changed, and for the better. One new approach you detect is more frankness and self-criticism, more aggressiveness and candor in covering domestic affairs and more tolerance and balance in covering for-

eign countries, including the United States.

In the past, *Vremya* used to dwell upon the negative aspects of America—the homeless, the unemployed, and even hurricane damage. Nowadays, you can see a news feature on the virtues of fast food like McDonalds hamburgers, clips about an efficient construction project in Seattle, good American highways and telephones, and the prosecution of polluters. Soviet TV correspondents spoke more admiringly about the U.S. national political conventions than did some Americans. A Soviet correspondent did a takeout on the sorry mess of automobile traffic in New York City, but at the same time praised the interstate highway system and the use of tolls for maintenance, a contrast to poor Soviet roads.

Bureaucrats are now being roasted with a newfound irreverance. The TV highlights official corruption and privilege, policy mistakes, shortages and alcoholism.

A Soviet journalist conceded that "biased reporting about the U.S. on Soviet television in the past was never taken seriously by Soviet viewers."

A leading correspondent for Soviet TV, Vladimir Dunaev, spoke at the 1988 conference of Investigative Reporters and Editors in Minneapolis and said that instead of being censored, Soviet journalists are now encouraged to help Gorbachev in his campaign to clean up shortcomings in the Soviet system.

Dunaev said the result is "small Watergates all over the place." Bureaucrats are now being roasted with a newfound irreverence. The TV highlights official corruption and privilege, policy mistakes, shortages, drugs and alcoholism.

Soviet TV official Valentin Lazutkin, who is head of the Foreign Relations Department, said that in the past the TV "had ignored the real facts of life in other countries. We gave a very negative picture of capitalist countries, emphasizing the homeless and the hungry. We realized it wasn't a true picture, especially those of us who traveled abroad. We felt discomfort about it, a distortion in our souls. With the new thinking, I'm more optimistic. There are no limits.

"We used to order stories from our correspondents like who is sleeping under the Brooklyn Bridge. Now we no longer order such stories. We're fed up with them, although we reserve the right to report anything, as you do. We're open to criticism. If any nation succeeds at doing something, why not look at it?

"All this is new for us. The main problem now is ourselves. You have to overcome the censor inside of yourself."

Vremya is not as parochial as it used to seem, and it usually carries more international news than any U.S. commercial network evening news—sometimes up to two-thirds of the program. It spends more time on issues, and less on personalities. When it does interview people, *Vremya* uses sound bites that can run to 45 or 60 seconds, while the average American sound bite usually is ten or fifteen seconds.

Gosteleradio Deputy Chief Popov said, "The character of our new programs has changed radically. There's practically nothing we can't talk about or show on TV. There's a spirit of discussion, of confronting various points of view. For us, this is a new approach, but it has become usual. And we have learned many things from your TV."

Millions of Americans learned something of Soviet TV during the last Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Moscow when the Discovery cable channel downlinked the Soviet satellite feed of *Vremya* for a full week.

Through the genius of Ken Schaffer

and his Orbita Technologies Corporation, about 50 American universities have been monitoring the programs daily for the past few years.

Even physically the look has changed. The pace has speeded. Computer graphics are being used more. Foreign correspondents have received more portable video equipment, which cuts the lead time on fast-breaking stories.

Overall, live programs have increased by more than 20 times, according to Soviet TV executives. Coverage of the Afghanistan war, once ignored, became habitual. Disasters, from earthquakes to plane crashes, which rarely saw air before, are now routine. News of the Chernobyl nuclear power accident, slow to emerge on the Soviet screen at first, later picked up with blanket coverage and daily comment.

Other programs apart from *Vremya* have taken the *glasnost* trend farther.

Once banned topics like Afghanistan, drug pushing, neo-Nazis in the USSR, official corruption, scandals of all sorts and even religious topics form the grist for the mill of the newest and perhaps most popular new program on Soviet TV, called *Vzglyad*, a title only Russian speakers can pronounce, but roughly meaning *Glance* (or Look or View).

Glance intersperses hot music with controversial and investigative stories, offering about ten to 15 items per show, airing late every Friday night for an hour and a half or even two hours. Some liken it to CBS' *60 Minutes* spiced with rock video.

Glance originated in the very hip Youth Department of Soviet TV. Its co-hosts, Alexander (Alex) Lyubimov, 26, and Dmitry (Dima) Zakharov, 30, play it cool, wearing T-shirts and jeans. They say the program is "about everything that people want to change in this country," and "about human kindness and caring."

They have looked into the underground Soviet Mafia, drug addiction, additives in foods, the clergy's concerns, Afghan vets fighting cops, and sometimes have interviewed American correspondents. They covered a scandal in Sochi in which the mayor illegally sought to crack down on private cooperatives and showed how he tried to get the KGB to stop the cameras. *Glance* put visiting actress Carol Burnett on the air to campaign against alcoholism. Roy Medvedev, a historian and an avowed non-conformist, has also been featured on *Glance*.

Typifying *glasnost* and *perestroika* as well as the more American look on Soviet TV is the viewers' newly developed dependence on a television fix the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night.

Alex and Dima have used the Soviet rock group Akvarium along with satirical lyrics against a background of old Stalin newsreels and images of a booted foot on a typewriter and a saxophone. They've also broadcast excerpts from the film *1984*, with music by the Eurythmics group.

A Soviet TV executive said, "These young people aren't afraid of anything, exploring, investigating, sometimes producing sensations. They sometimes make mistakes, too, and get their noses bloodied, but they do well."

Typifying *glasnost* and *perestroika*, as well as the more American look on Soviet TV is the viewers' newly developed dependence on a television fix the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night.

The screen lights up at 7 a.m. with a bright orange sun, the logo of a So-

viet version of *Good Morning America*, known as *120 Minutes*. This first breakfast show dreamed up at Ostankino, with its blend of information, weather, music and gymnastics, has made addicts of Soviet families. Some 69 percent of the watchers represent the ages of 30 to 49—not bad "demographics," even by American commercial standards.

First Deputy Editor-in-Chief Olvar Kakuchaia claimed 150 million viewers after only a year. He said, 'We never expected it to be so popular."

Soviet citizens of all ages find rolling out of bed easier when svelte Russian Jane Fonda types appear, leading aerobics to a rock beat, followed by cartoons, including Winnie the Pooh for the moppets, tips on cooking and housekeeping, guest interviews and fashion shows, plus domestic and international news, a digest of the morning papers and information on cultural events. What's more, *120 Minutes* is for the most part live and spontaneous, although tapes are repeated later for other time zones. The co-anchors, a man and a woman, usually appealing and young, are changed every week, to give others a chance at the burden of coming in to the studio at 3 a.m., and to discourage the star system.

The kids particularly adore Tatyana Vedeneyeva, known as Aunt Tanya, who is a real star, the permanent host of the *Good Night Kids* show in the early evening, but she also performs on the morning *120 Minutes*. The blonde and beautiful Tanya, one of the best-loved Soviet TV personalities, turns up everywhere on the tube.

In 1987, she visited the U.S. and appeared on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* after producer Fred Rogers saw her on a Sunday children's show, *The Alarm Clock*. Tanya, who is married and has a young son, gets huge amounts of fan mail from male admirers asking for a date and from women wanting to know how to make it on TV. She gets the tots off to bed at night with her program's catchy closing theme, "Even a Fairy Tale Goes to Bed Now."

Peaceful co-existence got a small boost from Mister Rogers' memorable visit to Moscow. Soviets gaped with some astonishment at a motorcade to Red Square that included Big Bird, Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy.

Another blockbuster with the public, this one only monthly so far, is a late Saturday night show called *Before and After Midnight*. It intersperses information and controversial issues with music video, a formula similar to that of *Glance* and *120 Minutes*. Taped oddities from around the world mix with rock stars like Sting and Michael Jackson, and sometimes serious-minded guests denouncing the Gulags.

Host Vladimir Molchanov, 37, a former print journalist, remarked to a *Time* reporter, "At the beginning, I had to take a gulp and realize that everything was possible when I went on live . . . Who would ever have thought three years ago that we would even have live broadcasts where tough and pointed questions could be asked?"

Many of Soviet TV's most innovative programs originate on the twelfth floor of the Ostankino headquarters, home of the Youth Department. Thus was born in 1986 a monthly program called *Twelfth Floor*, which looked at the world through teenagers' eyes.

Producer Eduard Sagalayev, head of the Youth Department, brought young people into the studio audience to ridicule bureaucrats, discuss subjects like ecology, draft evasion and what constitutes manhood. The questions are hard-hitting and rapid-fire. The young people, unlike many older TV hosts, are aggressive and impatient, even with cabinet ministers and party officials.

One show featured half a dozen youths whose parents or relatives had once been declared "enemies of the

state." A Komsomol (Communist Youth League) member cried, "It's your fault for keeping silent about it." Another said, "I would have been shot if I had protested."

Said a viewer, "We've never seen anything like that. It's different from anything we ever saw." Indeed, you can't quite believe it's all on Soviet TV.

The program's trade mark is its gathering of youths on a building stairway, symbolic of a backstairs discussion for young people with no place else to meet. The camera also travels live to other parts of the city and country, to young people hanging out on stoops of apartment houses or at youth clubs.

Said Youth Department Deputy Chief Alexander Ponomarev: "The very first program was an immediate shocker, youths questioning the Minister of Culture aggressively and asking for immediate answers, treating the official as their equal. We got some strong opposition, but it created a new tradition of direct communication. Now it's no longer a surprise. When other programs began doing it, it wasn't as effective as before. Anyhow, we can scream about there not being enough housing or food, but that won't change things overnight."

Twelfth Floor is seen less regularly now, and when it does, it tends to be less negative in tone, although the youthful flair is still there.

One of the most dramatic spark plugs of the new look on Soviet TV is Leningrad-born Lev Voznesensky, a veteran journalist who sometimes asserts unexpectedly, "I don't like television." He hosts a popular, hard-hitting program known as *Perestroika: Problems and Solutions*, previously called *Problems-Quests-Solutions*.

Voznesensky arrived at Soviet TV in 1974. His father, uncle and other family members had perished in the Stalin purges of the 1950s, and he himself was banished to a camp for political prisoners at the age of 24. Now 62, he anchors a live roundtable call-in show on prime time that grills ministers, statesmen, scholars and other public figures for 90 minutes every week. Nobody is spared, as questioners bring up shortages of food, consumer goods and services, social problems, housing, the environment, poor roads, cooperatives and women's problems. Subjects are often suggested by viewers.

"It took six years of struggle to get this on the air," he said. At last, in 1980, well before *glasnost*, it was launched, and "Soviet TV lost its virginity," he said. Despite attempts to kill it, the program went on and thrived.

Voznesensky originated the idea of forcing officials to answer the public directly on the air. Twenty pretty women operators, sitting in on-camera booths bearing a call-in phone number, handle the questions. The hotline formula became widespread, and Voznesensky is now one of the most popular figures on TV.

The reason why he doesn't like TV so much, he said, is "the superficiality of so many programs." But Gorbachev likes him and his programs so much that this ex-Gulag veteran recently was awarded an additional hat to wear, as head of the Information Department of the USSR Council of Ministers. No conflict of interest, apparently.

Another, similar news magazine program is *Spotlight on Perestroika*. This is only ten minutes long, and is tacked on to *Vremya* six nights a week. Officials cringe when the *Spotlight* crews swoop down for an investigative probe into corruption or shoddy performance—so much so that a pun in Russian familiarly nicknamed the program *"Victims of Perestroika."*

Gosteleradio chief Aksyonov said *Spotlight* is second in popularity only to *Vremya* itself. He declared, "The social significance of *Spotlight* lies in the fact that when a case of excessive bureaucratic arbitrariness or incompetence is corroborated, local government bodies must take steps to remedy the situation and to report it to *Spot-*

light—this has been made law. We keep watch over all this. Sometimes we take up the same subject again, if necessary."

Other noteworthy programs include *International Panorama*, *Today in the World*, *Resonance*, *Feedback*, *Getting to the Point*, and two additional phone-in shows, *Dialogue* and *Saturday Round Table for Parents*.

In the non-news magazine area, Russians watch *The Globe Trotters Club*, one of the longest running shows, which explores mountains, sea bottoms and exotic and remote places and interviews global celebrities like Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Gerald Durrell and Haroun Tazieff. Host Yuri Senkevich is a doctor and space medicine expert. He has traveled with Thor Heyerdahl on his papyrus and reed boats and has accompanied a Soviet team climbing Mount Everest. He told an interviewer with a smile that he'd like to film an episode on Mars.

The Youth Department also does *What? Where? When?* a quiz show that has been described as a cross between *Trivial Pursuit* and *College Bowl*.

Another long running show is *The Obvious and the Incredible*, hosted by Sergei Kapitsa, it deals with the riddles of science. Originally planned as an educational series, it soon was promoted to the main channel.

The Quick Wits Club, a satirical and funny program originating in the 60s with college students matching wits on topical questions, was recently revived with great success, injecting new elements of social satire into the current political ferment.

The Youth Department also does *What? Where? When?*, a quiz show and intellectual roulette game that has been described as a cross between *Trivial Pursuit* and *College Bowl*. Americans have appeared on it. Among the brain-teasers were "Do snakes have ears?" and "How was the zipper discovered?" *Under and Over 16* once featured a debate on teenage motorcycle gangs disturbing the peace. *You Can Make It* is a popular program about amateur inventors.

Let's Go, Girls, a somewhat sexist mixture of game show and beauty contest (about which I wrote in *Television Quarterly* eight years ago), died of attrition, but it has been reborn with a reverse twist in *Let's Go, Boys*, a male variation of the lowbrow sociodrama.

The Detective Game, featuring murder, robbery, kidnapping, blackmail and haunted houses is a popular solve-it-yourself series. At the end of each episode, viewers are asked questions about the crime, and those who answer correctly get prizes like whodunits by Agatha Christie and Georges Simenon and photos of the main characters with their fingerprints and autographs. The show is great fun.

Leningrad, Peter the Great's legendary "window on the West", exemplifies TV *glasnost* even more than Moscow. Leningrad and Seattle built the first major American-Soviet "telebridge" discussion, with Phil Donahue and Vladimir Pozner as co-hosts. Live and unedited, the frank debate proved to be a sensation, particularly among Soviet viewers, although one angry Leningrader wrote a protest letter to *Izvestia* calling it "an outrage, sacrilege and sabotage," and forwarded a copy to the KGB.

Leningrad claims to have been the first Soviet station to report in depth on the controversial and unpopular war in Afghanistan. Leningrad TV's investigative news magazine program, *Tele-Kurier*, resembles CBS's *60 Minutes*, but stands on its own, too. It uses three anchor journalists, two men and a women, and airs on Saturday night prime time.

One of them did an ambush inter-

view on an impromptu visit to a bread factory. Looking at the variety of breads, the reporter asked, "Developing any new kinds these days?" The manager replied, "No, just the same as always." Then the reporter whipped out a loaf of bread he had brought there, with a piece of metal imbedded in it. "Isn't this a new kind of bread you sold here?" The woman manager broke down in hysterics, cried and apologized.

Tele-Kurier also did a report on how local hooligans beat up a legless Afghan vet.

Not to be outdone, other Leningrad TV producers developed a fast-paced, offbeat and very American-style nightly news magazine called *600 Seconds*. To show the value of each second, a flashing digital countdown display appears on the screen throughout, indicated the time left on the 10-minute program. Commentator Alexander Nevzorov, looking relaxed in an open-necked sport shirt, tears through the day's events at breakneck speed, including crime, exposés and oddities in the news.

One program, reporting on the difficulty of getting liquor because of official restrictions to combat alcoholism, showed Russians drinking *eau de cologne*. Another sequence shows investigators opening scores of milk cartons on camera and finding only water inside. The director of the milk plant begged citizen's pardon on the air.

One single *600 Seconds* program I saw ran almost 20 items, ranging from motor vehicle pollution and dental clinic bureaucracy, to the hunt for the Abominable Snowman in the Pamir Mountains and a fire in the Academy of Sciences. An interview with a woman thief followed. The program then went on to show an emergency ambulance call that took an hour and a half to get to the scene. A street repair on the Nevsky Prospekt was measured with a straight ruler and was found to have developed a deep pothole minutes after the road crew left.

Much of this was reported with tongue-in-cheek irony. *600 Seconds* airs in Leningrad nightly except Sunday, right after the national news *Vremya*.

Public Opinion, another innovative Leningrad show, takes viewer polls on major issues, with questionnaires given out on upcoming laws. The three-hour show is broadcast live, and thousands phone in or send telegrams. A computer projects the results on screen, and experts comment. Reporters with open microphones do vox pop interviews in the streets.

A provocative series called *Fifth Wheel*, which began in the spring of 1988, represents another shift away from conventional themes. It was named after those who are ironically considered "superfluous people" in the cultural and intellectual world. This late-night show starts at 10 p.m. and sometimes runs on until 1 a.m. or later.

Reporter-producer Vadim Konovalev explained that the program got off the ground "almost clandestinely" when a group of Leningrad TV colleagues scripted and edited it at night and on weekends, in their spare time, and then persuaded management to let them do it regularly.

Trying to revive the old out-of-favor idea of private charity, Konovalev and his friends appealed for lonely people to come to the studio. Almost 300 showed up, some of them offering help. By the end of the program, many exchanged addresses and phone numbers and had made new friends. Another program followed on the poor and disabled. Later, 300 more came in, all offering assistance, and an informal organization was formed called *Help*.

Konovalev and his editor-in-chief Bella Kuricova did a long program rehabilitating the exiled Soviet poet and Nobel Prize winner Joseph Brodsky, a native of Leningrad, who had once been condemned as a "militant parasite" and banished to an Arctic camp.

Another show was produced about the problems of Afghan vets. Another program dealt with rebel artists, and one uncovered "the real story" of Marshal N.M. Tukhachevsky, executed by Stalin for "treason." Still another, was about the problems at a nuclear power station.

A film director who dreamed of making a pilot film on the victims of the Gulags appeared on *Fifth Wheel* to ask for help. The audience deluged him with so many contributions that he was able to finance the whole movie, thanks to the program. Some donations came in accompanied by notes like, "In memory of my father who died in the Stalin camps."

Said Konovalev, "People trust us." Each show is different, he remarked, "because we're all different, but we have the most favorable conditions for creative people to work in. With us, you can always discern the souls of the journalist, editor or producer."

He was asked doesn't Soviet TV have too many "talking heads"? Yurkov replied "We have to. We were silent too long."

When one of the superstars of American pop music, Billy Joel, gave performances in the Soviet Union, he appeared on *The Music Ring*, a popular Leningrad channel program that is now telecast nationally. *The Music Ring* brings audiences face to face with artists.

Alexander Yurkov, Leningrad TV's Deputy Chief, remarked that "our musicians look mainly to the West." Music from *Jesus Christ Superstar* is a constant feature on Leningrad and Soviet TV generally. Videos have been shown of Michael Jackson, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Diana Reeves and Dave Brubeck. Yurkov said somewhat ruefully, "We've fallen in to a sea of rock, and we sometimes feel we're sinking in it."

Yurkov asserted proudly that Leningrad pioneered, before Moscow, in deciding to "inject drama" into the news and to "personalize" the journalists, in bringing out more discussion programs, in invading formerly closed areas, and in introducing call-in programs with sharp questioning of officials and even covering meetings of "informal organizations" without official approval. "There's no subject we can't talk about," he claims."The only ban is on pornography and fascist propaganda. We cover prostitution and drugs quite a lot now."

But, he was asked, doesn't Soviet TV have too many "talking heads?" Yurkov replied, "We have to. We were silent—for so long."

In the Baltic states, Estonians long ago had become accustomed to Western ways, via the easily accessible channels of Finnish TV. Estonian TV has also been in the vanguard of *glasnost*'s new approach. In Tallinn, the capital, Estonian TV journalist Urmas Ott, 33, has given new meaning to the art of intimate interviewing. His hour and a half monthly show, *Television Acquaintance*, attracted so much attention that it has become nationally popular. Revelations of the private lives of celebrities were never a Soviet tradition, but Ott barreled in with indiscreet queries on family events, salaries, living styles and personal problems, and got answers.

He told *Time Magazine* he'd like to interview Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Leonard Bernstein and Mstislav Rostropovich, and one day he may. Said Ott, "We now read the papers and watch TV in a kind of ecstasy, as if something extraordinary has happened. But what is so extraordinary about it? We are simply beginning to live a normal life."

Hagi Sein, a sociologist and TV commentator in Tallinn, developed a

weekly Sunday show for senior citizens called *The Glasses Case*. One program zeroed in on swindlers soliciting money for lonely old people. Another publicized a senior citizens cooperative, set up by retired dressmakers, who got a bank loan and opened a shop with flexible hours, working for profit.

Documentaries are a popular feature on nationwide Soviet TV. One of the most startling, shown in the summer of 1988, equated Stalin with Hitler, a comparison that would have sent its producer straight to the Gulags a few years ago. The film, *Risk-2*, shows Stalin as a demented autocrat whose paranoia impelled him to order the execution of many military officers, intellectuals, Jews, political rivals and others. A Western diplomat who saw it said, "I was blown out of my chair."

About 90 million television sets are operating in the Soviet Union now, 65 million of them in color. Possibly outdated statistics, collected prior to the current wide-open era, indicated that the average set was on 2.8 hours a day, and 3.9 hours per day on weekends, compared to about 7 hours in the U.S. Soviet officials assert that viewing has now jumped tremendously, closer to the U.S. figure. But the USSR has fewer channels and a shorter broadcast day than the U.S.

Soviet-made sets often develop problems and frequently need repairs, which are not easily arrangeable. Explosions of sets have caused hundreds of fires and fatalities every year.

The video cassette recorder, now domestically produced as well as imported, has begun to invade the market. *Izvestia* reported that there are two million VCRs in the Soviet Union, although some Western experts doubt this. Moscow got its first video store in 1986, and there are also underground video parlors which are sometimes harassed by the KGB. Diplomats and other travelers have brought in VCRs and videocassettes, and they have found their way into the black market, introducing Russians to Rambo, James Bond and porn.

The VCR age raises the specter of home video becoming a kind of visual *samizdat*, the "self-publishing" unofficial or underground works that dissidents produce. But so far, under *glasnost*, that apparently hasn't worried officials much, any more than the advent of satellite dishes has. Privately owned dishes are still illegal, and antennas can't be hidden easily, but the day will come when large numbers of Soviet citizens may obtain or build them and tape foreign shows and distribute them. Already, border areas receive foreign programs. *Gosteleradio*'s Popov and others are convinced that "broadcasting across frontiers is unavoidable."

TV veteran Leonid Zolotarevsky recently hosted a satellite linkup between Washington and Moscow with ABC's Peter Jennings on the subject of human rights. Zolotarevsky has worked for *Gosteleradio* since 1956 as a journalist, producer and news executive, and he is a frank admirer of American television. His impressive resume shows a Ph.D. in philology and service as a correspondent in Afghanistan. He has won documentary awards at international festivals in Monte Carlo and Venice, authored books on TV journalism and hosted several TV space bridges with the U.S. as well as Britain.

He likes to screen for American visitors a program he made recently about the work of American journalists before, during and after the Reagan-Gorbachev summit conference, including actual clips of American TV news reporting. The program depicts the American style of journalism with unconcealed approbation.

Americans now get time on the tube in Moscow, even when they disagree with Soviet policies and practices. This includes not only journalists, but also top American officials, even some

speaking highly critically about Soviet involvement in Angola, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. One Soviet TV executive said to me, chuckling, "Secretary of State Shultz has appeared so often with us that he ought to get paid."

A report on changes in Soviet mass media prepared for the USIA in the summer of 1988 noted that *Vremya* was "more on the leading edge of *glasnost* and change than *Pravda*." The report found the biggest change was a dramatic increase in attention to foreign and international news. The USIA report confirmed that "the tone of U.S. coverage is far more positive than in *Pravda*, with over half the stories being positive."

Contrary to general impression, commercials have always had a small place on Soviet TV. They were more like public service announcements.

The Soviets are looking toward greater cooperation with Americans in programming. During a recent visit to Moscow with USIA Director Charles Wick, the Chairman and President of Fries Entertainment, Charles W. Fries, offered the Russians free of charge *The Winds of Kitty Hawk*, a work about the Wright Brothers; the *Life of Jack Dempsey*; a six-hour mini-series by Ray Bradbury; and *Bitter Harvest*, a show about the menace of chemicals in the food chain.

PBS is proposing joint projects like a TV documentary course describing a dozen significant policy decisions taken by the two countries, such as the Vietnam and the Afghanistan Wars, with experts on both sides giving their different views. PBS also proposed joint work on TV courses teaching English and Russian, and one on world geography.

Also on the U.S.-Soviet drawing board are plans for regular exchanges of TV producers, directors and journalists.

American-Soviet advertising collaboration is also in the wind. In the late 1940s, the Soviet Encyclopedia declared that "Advertising is a means of swindling the people by foisting upon them goods frequently useless and of dubious quality." No longer is this the attitude.

Contrary to general impression, commercials have always had a small place on Soviet TV. For some time, a periodic 10-minute cluster of shopping tips has urged citizens to buy items that happened to be in adequate supply. They were more like public service announcements. But now *glasnost* and *perestroika* have enabled the Soviets to agree to carry even U.S. programs with commercials, provided they're dubbed into Russian, and plug firms that do business with the USSR.

Said *Gosteleradio*'s foreign relations head Lazutkin: "Of course we need advertising. We're thinking about freer markets. Advertising plays an important role in guiding consumers. But we can't advertise goods that aren't present on our markets, as Pepsi-Cola is. But the road is open. I believe that in future years, we'll have more cooperation in advertising."

Already Michael Jackson has been seen on Soviet TV in a commercial for Pepsi. In fact, McDonalds got a free commercial in a documentary episode about the fast food chain, soon to come to Moscow.

Pepsi became the first American advertiser ever to buy commercial time on Soviet TV. The fee was $20,000 a minute. U.S. prime time advertisers can pay as much as $800,000 a minute at home. Two Michael Jackson numbers led the way on a joint U.S.-Soviet production undertaken by Global American Television, an independent Massachusetts production firm and *Gosteleradio*. Pepsi has 20 plants in the country, owned and operated by the Soviets, and Russians drink more

than a billion bottles of Pepsi annually. Global is based in Colrain, Massachusetts. Sony TV sets and Visa credit cards also enjoyed commercial shots although they aren't yet available to Soviet citizens.

Italian magnate Sylvio Berlusconi's empire known as Fininvest, through its ad agency *Publitalia 80 SpA* has signed a contract to provide European commercials to Soviet TV. Soviet commercials, however, are still only sporadic and are not very professionally produced.

Because Gorbachev has encouraged the formation of privately managed cooperatives with a profit motive, owners can now begin advertising their restaurants, repair shops and other small businesses on TV. A minute of air time on the local Moscow channel can cost as little as 78 rubles (about $130).

Vladmir Pozner, who was the host of the TV program that carried the Pepsi commercials, said, "When you deal with shortages, you don't need advertising. If anything half decent comes out, people grab it."

But in the hope that shortages aren't forever, Soviet trade and television officials are now studying Western marketing and advertising techniques. Who knows? One day, Moscow may have its own Madison Avenue.

The annual budget for Soviet TV and radio combined is over three billion dollars, of which two-thirds go to television. *Gosteleradio* gets an annual subsidy from the government budget and additional income comes from state-run advertising, a sales tax on new TV sets, the sale of radio and TV programs and public concert proceeds.

Soviet TV buys some programs from the West, mostly classical dramas, but it doesn't like to spend more than $15,000 a show or series. Eventually, the Soviet Union may become a significant market for foreign programs.

The future for Soviet TV looks bright, to judge from attitudes of both producers and consumers. But as Peter the Great said, "Russia is a place where things that just don't happen, happen."

The pendulum could swing again, and creative efforts could be suppressed once more. Many pre-*glasnost* bureaucratic stalwarts who don't like the new wave still serve time in the hallways of Ostankino and out around the country's networks. However remarkable the transformation in recent years, watching Soviet TV is still far from a Western experience. Professionals and the public in both countries will be watching with continued fascination what happens from here on.

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A postscript on how things have changed for American correspondents in Moscow:

They enjoy infinitely better working conditions under *glasnost* than they had a decade ago. Although Kremlin behavior and policies still provoke irritations and Americans work as hard as ever getting and putting out the news, the changes dazzle like daylight after darkness.

Some things don't change at all. Correspondents agree that Moscow is the most difficult assignment they've ever had.

A loosening up began when Nikita Khruschev abolished formal censorship almost three decades ago, and again when the networks were granted permission to maintain their own resident camera crews. When I came to Moscow for CBS News in 1976, I had to do my own filming or depend on often unreliable and inadequate crews from the official *Novosti* agency or *Gosteleradio*. All footage was usually air-freighted out to a Western satellite facility in London, Paris, Frankfurt or Helsinki, because *Gosteleradio* rarely

granted us satellite facilities except on special occasions like May Day parades or a visit by a U.S. Secretary of State.

Application had to be made in writing weeks in advance, with a description of the expected content. Even so, requests were often turned down, or simply ignored. Even when a bird was arrangeable, you ran the risk of having the plug pulled and the transmission washed out without explanation.

Now, correspondents routinely can rent satellite facilities for evening feeds, as long as they request them before dinner time—and sometimes get them twice in the same night.

When we shot material in the streets of Moscow, even of non-sensitive subjects, we would frequently be stopped by police, KGB agents or vigilante-minded Soviet citizens imagining we were American spies. Sometimes we were mobbed, slugged or detained and had film ripped out of our cameras.

Today, as CBS' correspondent Barry Peterson put it, "Whenever we point our cameras, people eagerly come up to us asking to be interviewed. They all want to tell their stories to us."

Correspondents still complain, however. Moscow is not New York or Paris. There are still incidents. Cops break up some demonstrations and push around correspondents trying to do their jobs. But the incidents are not as frequent as they used to be.

Access, the biggest obstacle, is far easier, and correspondents don't often have to go through channels. Reporters who could never get the time of day from officials in the past now can pick up the phone and get statements and interviews on the spur of the moment. Soviet spokesmen like Gennady Gerasimov talk frequently in English on camera, one-on-one, or at news conferences.

Correspondents still live in compounds watched by KGB guards. Their phones are tapped and their walls bugged, and half of the country is still off limits to foreigners. But even these restrictions are easing up, and some reporters have been able to get permission to travel to hitherto closed areas like Vladivostok. Soviet TV officials and journalists have several times floated trial balloons urging a mutual relaxation of travel restrictions by the two countries.

Some things don't change at all. Correspondents agree that Moscow is the most difficult assignment they've ever had, especially because of the time zone differences and the need for an understaffed bureau to feed TV and radio programs morning, noon and night. Hughes Rudd, one of the earliest CBS correspondents, was asked many decades ago, what was the most difficult thing about working in Moscow. He replied, "The home office." It's still true. ■

Bernard S. Redmont is a former CBS News Bureau Chief and Correspondent in Moscow and Paris. He recently returned to the Soviet Union after an absence of eight years to make this study of Soviet TV. Redmont is Dean Emeritus of Boston University's College of Communication and is a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly* and other publications.

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MISPLACING *FRANK'S PLACE*: DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO MISS NEW ORLEANS?

A challenging case history of a successful failure, and what it reveals about the economic and cultural limitations of primetime television. Was the audience or the network to blame?

BY JIMMIE L. REEVES AND RICHARD CAMPBELL

Critically acclaimed, winner of three Emmys, *Frank's Place* perished just as the show was set to produce 13 new episodes as a mid-season replacement during the 1988-89 TV season. Its official death notice was delivered by Kim LeMasters. The youthful executive who heads CBS's entertainment division summed up the decision to terminate the series in two sentences: "*Frank's Place* embodied every element of excellence that a programmer would want to see in a television show. Unfortunately, the viewing audience simply failed to respond to it."

In blaming the viewing audience, LeMasters engineered a variation on the old network excuse, "We give the

audience what they want." The audience, in this context, is a tasteless, heartless, mindless amalgamation of numbers that has taken on a monstrous life as *every one* and *no one* existing *everywhere* and *nowhere*. Although the viewing audience is the blacksheep of the family, its relatives are the silent and moral majorities. And like these kindred fictions, it is a powerful device for either manufacturing a mandate of achieving plausible deniability.

Of course, as in all fiction, there is an element of truth in the program's obit. Although *Frank's Place* premiered well in fall '87 (14.9 rating/25 share), its final airing on October 1, 1988, garnered dismal numbers that ranked it among the week's lowest rated network shows (5.6 rating/10 share). But *Frank's Place* descent into oblivion was infinitely more complicated than the viewing audience simply failing to respond to it. By the time the series was taken off life-support systems, it had suffered multiple contusions accumulated during a string of calamities. Some of the injuries were accidental; some self-inflicted; and others resulted from ineptitude and negligence.

Frank's Place Theme

"Do you know what it means
to miss New Orleans?
And miss it each night and day?
I know I'm not wrong,
The feeling's getting stronger
The longer I stay away."

Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?
Recorded by Louis Armstrong

However, our purpose for conducting this post mortem extends beyond the coroner's traditional mission; we are not primarily concerned with separating the superficial scrapes from the mortal wounds; nor are we satisfied with merely assigning blame. Instead, we see this critical autopsy as an opportunity to explore and discuss key issues confronting people who take popular American culture seriously. From our point of view, the short and troubled life of this extraordinary series is much more than a tale of network incompetence or audience indifference. Rather, we see the *Frank's Place* experience as a harsh lesson that speaks to the economic realities, the artistic possibilities, and the cultural limitations of prime-time American television.

A CRITICAL POST MORTEM

On one level, *Frank's Place* is about the tragicomical experiences of a professor of Italian Renaissance history named Frank Parrish (played by Tim Reid). Parrish is forced to give up his affluent life in Boston when his estranged father dies and Parrish inherits the Chez Louisianne, a restaurant in New Orleans. In Michael Pollan's clever phrasing, "The premise is basic fish-out-of-water. Frank Parrish plays the fish."

But on a deeper lever, *Frank's Place* is about work, community, identity, and history. The restaurant's bartenders, cooks, and assorted service people are portrayed as hard-working artisans. Connected to and dependent on each other, these workers live a harmonious collective life marked by mutual respect and the satisfaction of belonging. And this sense of connectedness and continuity extends beyond the confines of the restaurant to New Orlean's African American enclave. Treated as a cultural sector that has somehow escaped the destructive influences of modern society, the immediate black community is also invested with a sense of cohesion and identity. And in *Frank's Place*, unlike other television sitcoms, the belief systems governing this minority community become the standards for measuring the value of competing ways of

life at work in white society.

The central device for teaching the ethics of this African American community is the show's central character. Frank Parrish is continually caught up in a crucial tension between his former identity as a professor and present identity as restaurant owner. But unlike narration in literature, in series television this identity crisis must be revealed in terms that can be captured by camera or microphone. *Magnum, P.I.* and *The Wonder Years* routinely solve this problem through use of voice-over narration. However, *Frank's Place* uses a less intrusive technique associated with the artistic rendering of space in the restaurant.

In the public spaces of the restaurant—the dining room and the bar—we see Parrish project the newly-adopted professional persona of restaurant owner. The working spaces of the kitchen and the office represent off-stage space. In this space, we see Parrish struggle with his inadequacies and we occasionally catch a glimpse of the internal man. But the internal man is most apparent in the private spaces of his austere apartment. Located upstairs, over the restaurant, the apartment was home to Parrish's father until he suffered a fatal stroke. In this intimate space, we come to share the dreams and despair of the internal Parrish—and we are invited to take communion in his anguish: the anguish of a man held prisoner by his father's property who lives involuntarily in his father's place.

Because he is an outsider, Parrish often doesn't understand what is self evident to the restaurant staff or to the members of the surrounding neighborhood. And in *Frank's Place*, Parrish's failure to understand becomes a means for viewers to learn about the taken for granted values of black life in New Orleans. Through Parrish's not understanding, viewers discover the place of young and old, of food and drink, of music and sport, of labor and ownership, of school and family, and of religion and superstition in this vibrant community. And in this discovery, viewers are also encouraged to rediscover, re-think, and re-evaluate their own experience of contemporary society.

For example, in an early episode Parrish asks Tiger (the show's old and wise bartender), "Is this all the business we get around here at night?" In Tiger's answer, we learn along with Frank the basic temporal, economic and racial rules that organize this story world: "Uh-huh. Except on Saturday night and sometimes Friday. You see, these are all working people down here in our neighborhood. They don't go out to dinner on week nights. And white people are afraid to come down here after dark."

In recognizing the truth of Tiger's words, viewers are asked to reconsider the meaning of their own class positions and the consequences of their own attitudes regarding race and class.

But beyond being situated in a distinct African American community, the restaurant is also a place of social encounter. Many episodes of *Frank's Place* consider the lifestyles of people representing the values of white society. And in these episodes, the dominant culture is viewed through the screen of this black community instead of the other way around. In other words, *Frank's Place* succeeds in inverting the cultural orientation of TV comedies in the *Amos 'n' Andy* tradition. Wealthy tycoons from New York City, Southern Belles from Mississippi, obnoxious tourists, fast-talking booking agents, self-important restaurant consultants—all have stopped in at the restaurant to be measured against the values of this place on the road.

In these episodes, Parrish sometimes takes on a different role in the series. Assuming the position of one in-the-know, Parrish often acts as a mediator between the community and

the outside world. For example, when New Orleans is invaded by a horde of rival basketball recruiters who covet the talented son of a poverty stricken single mother, Parrish is drafted by this community to act as arbiter.

Ultimately, then, *Frank's Place* is about an assimilated black man who re-discovers his heritage. And Parrish's rediscovery becomes a vehicle for both exploring and celebrating African American culture. In many ways this is the show's greatest achievement. Although *Frank's Place* is certainly no separatist manifesto, the ethic of the series differs from the assimilation values of programs like *Julia* and *The Cosby Show*. Instead, the ministry of *Frank's Place* preaches an ongoing sermon of racial identity, of lively cultural independence, and of peaceful co-existence.

Thankfully, *Frank's Place* did succeed in gaining the attention, respect, and admiration of at least two groups operating outside the confines of the industry—professional critics and scholars. For example, Michael Pollan, writing for *Channels* magazine, declared *Frank's Place* "revolutionary," "a sitcom of uncommon freshness and a 'black' show of uncommon dignity." And Pollan's enthusiasm was shared by many other critics. In fact, *Electronic Media*'s semi-annual poll of newspaper reviewers rated *Frank's Place* among the top three shows of the '87-'88 season. Only *L.A. Law* and *The Wonder Years* ranked higher.

The academic community echoed this enthusiasm. Last November, for instance, we participated in a special day-long seminar devoted to discussing and analyzing *Frank's Place*. Held, fittingly enough, in New Orleans during the national meeting of the Speech Communication Association (SCA), the seminar included professors from, among others, Northwestern, Northeastern, Rutgers, Louisiana State University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Texas.

This special SCA seminar was unusual in a number of ways. First of all, it marked a "neutral" site where the academy and the industry—two institutions which only rarely connect—met and exchanged ideas and perspectives. Secondly, within the context of this meeting both the *creative* and *commodity* dimensions of television came under careful scrutiny.

In its history, television has generally been perceived by the academy as a "social problem" with its "effects" catalogued by social science researchers. It is only more recently that historical and humanities-based approaches have taken up the question of television. Unlike film, which after some initial resistance, was embraced early on as a humanities field, television fought a long battle for recognition. It was not until Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art* in 1974—almost 30 years after television's birth—that an academic scholar wrote a book-length treatment about TV's aesthetic dimensions.

However, while it may not play a central cultural role in the lives of most academics, television is the central cultural experience for a majority of working and middle class Americans. As Everette Dennis, director of the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University, argues, "Mass communication is central to the functioning of society, but I can't think of one university that acts as if it is."

This special SCA seminar represented one small step by the academy toward confronting the multiple ways in which television—the most ubiquitous mass medium—has stitched itself into the fabric of our individual and social identities. Although our choice of *Frank's Place* as the site to confront television appears microscopic, we hope to use this special program telescopically—to reveal the larger aesthetic and market vistas of American television.

And within academic circles, per-

haps the most significant scholarly endorsement of *Frank's Place* came from Alvin Poussant, the Harvard psychiatrist who serves as a consultant for *The Cosby Show*. In an interview with *Newsweek*, Poussant described *Frank's Place* as "the first black show since *Roots* to take black culture seriously. It's a breakthrough."

ANATOMY OF A BREAKTHROUGH

Ironically, many of the same factors that came together to make *Frank's Place* a breakthrough would, ultimately, contribute to its cancellation. And the most decisive of these factors were economic. Because CBS was not holding its own against the other networks, it was more willing to take a risk on innovative programming. However, because CBS suffered a disastrous '87-'88 season, it was also the network that could least afford to continue airing an expensive, prestigious, and low-rated series.

This risk-taking on the part of a struggling enterprise is, in fact, a well-established tradition in show business. In the early days of Hollywood, when Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company held a competitive advantage in the movie marketplace, independent producers like Adolph Zukor completely changed the way movies were made, distributed and marketed by introducing the feature length film and exploiting the star system. Later, it was not the major powers in Hollywood who first promoted the conversion to sound. For Paramount, Loew's, and First National, the silent movies were profitable enough. The Big Three simply had nothing to gain from adopting the expensive new technology. However, Warner Brothers, one of the smaller Hollywood studios in the 1920s, had plenty to gain if the gamble paid off. And pay off it did. Thanks to the competitive edge it earned by forcing the technological transformation of the movie industry, Warner Brothers ended up emerging as the largest company in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s.

It's also worth also remembering that, in the realm of storytelling, the legendary innovations of *Citizen Kane* were not sponsored by an industry giant like MGM or Paramount or Warner. Instead, *Citizen Kane* was produced by RKO—the weakest and most unstable of the major Hollywood studios.

So, both *Frank's Place* and *Citizen Kane* fit into a pattern of innovation connected to the desperation of inferior market positions. A desperate company is more likely to seek out new ideas and new talent, more likely to experiment, more likely to take risks—and less likely to obstruct the creative process. In the case of *Citizen Kane*, the financially troubled RKO lured Orson Welles away from his spectacular radio and stage career with an unprecedented six-film contract that gave the "boy genius" complete creative control over his projects. The result of RKO's risk and Welles' short-lived freedom is one of the most celebrated films of all time. With its deep-focus photography, its long takes, its intricate web of flashbacks, and its many innovations in editing, lighting and sound, *Citizen Kane* was a breakthrough. And, for various reasons, the film was also a commercial failure.

There are several interesting parallels in the case of *Frank's Place*. Hugh Wilson, the program's creator and executive co-producer, was also lured away from a lucrative career in another branch of the entertainment industry with the promise of creative control. But, whereas Welles took a short-cut to the promised land of creative freedom (making *Citizen Kane* before his 25th birthday), Wilson's path to artistic control took over two decades of wandering through some strange and rugged terrain.

On this path, Wilson would participate as an activist student in the Civil Rights Movement, earn a journalism

degree from the University of Florida, write linoleum brochures for the Armstrong Cork Company in Lancaster, Pa., receive national advertising awards for funny radio spots inspired by Stan Freeberg, run an ad agency in Atlanta, Ga., work as a MTM student trainee at age 32, write scripts for the original *Bob Newhart Show*, serve as a staff writer on a short-lived Tony Randall sitcom, produce a television series about working life in a rock-and-roll station, punch up film scripts for money and no screen credit, and direct disappointing feature length motion pictures.

Wilson agreed to come to the seminar in New Orleans last November and discuss the life and death of *Frank's Place*. Since the seminar took place about a month after the series was canceled, Wilson was still visibly hurting from the experience. On the sleeve where some people wear their religion, Wilson wears his humor and humanity. A southern raconteur in the time-honored tradition of Mark Twain and Will Rogers, Wilson quickly charmed the audience of TV researchers. By the end of the day, we were left with the feeling that Wilson genuinely relished this encounter with a live audience which appreciated the artistry of *Frank's Place*. As he puts it, "making a television show is like sending out a message in a bottle. You never know if anybody ever gets your message."

In the TV and film industries, Wilson is best known as the creative force behind two money-making projects. The first of the projects was *WKRP in Cincinnati*. It was on *WKRP* that Wilson first teamed up with Tim Reid, who played the role of dee-jay Venus Flytrap. Thanks to unfriendly scheduling by Harvey Shepherd who then headed CBS's entertainment division, *WKRP* was killed off after only four seasons. However, the series has been a big hit in afternoon and late-night syndication, grossing over $100 million for MTM.

Wilson is proud to have his name associated with *WKRP*. But this isn't the case with his other big money-making project: the original *Police Academy* film.

Frustrated and exhausted by the *WKRP* experience, Wilson decided to get involved in making movies. "I had the mistaken conception that you could do better work in movies—completely ludicrous," Wilson laments. "By this time [early '80s] the *Animal House* thing had taken over movie comedy, and the 16-year-old male was king in terms of the audience they were going for. I helped perpetuate this ugly trend. We shot *Police Academy* thinking it was a drive-in movie, which it was, for teenaged boys. We made it for three-and-a-half million dollars, what Hollywood considers cab fare. And after I cut this thing, I told my wife, 'I'm finished. I'm dying. We're moving back to Georgia.' But we took it out and tested it on a young audience, ages 15 to 23, with an emphasis on males—and they went crazy. Just crazy."

Police Academy went on to gross $132 million. And Wilson went on to direct other films—but none to his satisfaction. "I became very disappointed in myself for getting involved in the machine, in the packages and whatnot," Wilson remembers. "And I realized I could have more creative freedom and do more interesting work on television than I could in the movies—because I was the *Police Academy* guy. It was a coat I couldn't take off."

The first project of Wilson's second career in television was the *Easy Street* pilot for Loni Anderson. Tim Reid, then, talked Wilson into doing a pilot with him. Quoting Wilson, "William Morris, who represented both of us, saw PACKAGE, which is what their life is about. Packages. They went to CBS. And CBS had an idea. Reid and I had no idea about anything. We went in and sat down with two gentlemen, Kim LeMasters and a fellow by the name

of Gregg Maday [former CBS vice-president for comedy program development]. They said, 'We've always heard you'd like to do something about the South.' I've always been pretty vocal about Hollywood's inability to deal with the South in any sort of believable fashion. So they said, 'How about New Orleans? And how about Tim inherits a restaurant down there.' So, CBS had the bones of the idea. I liked that because I always felt—and I've been proven wrong here—that if they thought of it as their baby, they'd nurture it and look after it and take care of it."

Tim Reid's path to *Frank's Place* is as fascinating as Wilson's. From Virginia with a degree from Norfolk State University in marketing and economics, Reid entered a Dupont training program in industrial sales. His first market area was Chicago where he lived and worked for three years. Reid, who spoke to us in a phone interview, says the "culture shock" of moving from the Norfolk projects to a black college to the "2-car garage" scene in Chicago came too fast. After achieving everything he wanted, he grew bored. Then, for six years, he experimented in stand-up comedy and performed in commercials in and around Chicago.

In 1974, about the same time Wilson left Atlanta for L.A., Reid moved to California where he landed regular parts in *WKRP* and *Simon & Simon*. For the last seven years Reid has also run a small production company with his wife, Daphne Maxwell Reid, who played his love interest (mortician Hanna Griffin) on *Frank's Place*. One of their production company's current projects is to develop the first successful one-hour black dramatic series.

An outspoken critic inside the entertainment industry, Reid deplores the network's devotion to the "white yuppie market" and believes programmers ignore many "invisible cultures," including the black middle class. "Networks purposefully avoid black dramas because they don't understand how to develop them," Reid says. "In dramatic shows, blacks are either portrayed as oppressed or angry. But more black programming isn't just a racial pride issue for me. In just a few years, one third of the network audience will be black. It's going to be bad business to ignore this audience."

For Reid, who won a 1988 NAACP Image Award for his on-camera performance on *Frank's Place*, one of the problems with TV programming is that writers and producers "will not venture into history."

The willingness to "venture into history" is, in fact, at the very heart of what makes *Frank's Place* a breakthrough. In doing research for the show, Wilson and Reid became oral historians. Tape recorders in hand, Reid, Wilson and the show's writers made four trips to New Orleans. Reid says that as the show developed, the co-producers would occasionally send a writer back to New Orleans to get a detail exactly right.

This research was crucial to developing both the show's look and its sense of place. Hoping to cash in on the Cajun cooking phenomenon that was sweeping the nation, CBS initially wanted to locate the show in a French Quarter restaurant. However, Wilson reports that he and Reid had other plans: "CBS was thinking a straw hat, show boat type ambiance. But we decided it would be more interesting if we put it in a black community. So, when we went to New Orleans, we just skipped Bourbon Street. We went into the black community and we began to meet people and they were really awfully nice. One of them was Austin Leslie, who runs the Chez Helene."

Thanks to this research, the Chez Helene would be the inspiration for the Chez Louisianne, and Austin Leslie would be the model for Big Arthur, the head cook on the series. Leslie would even come to L.A. to talk to the writers

about cooking and running a restaurant.

Behind the camera, Reid shared executive producer duties with Wilson: Reid was responsible for actors and set; Wilson, for writing and editing. Besides himself, Wilson hired four writers for the show, and black playwright Samm-Art Williams soon emerged as lead writer. Wilson and Reid also hired a racially mixed crew—from directors to make-up artists to sound technicians. According to Reid's estimates, of the just over 100 members of the cast and crew, 45-50 percent were black—and of that percentage, half were black women. Reid speaks with pride when he talks about the show's two black women directors; that kind of hiring is "almost unheard of today in network television," Reid says.

Because there was no live audience, Wilson says crew members became the audience and their reactions to the script and set provided a crucial "read" on whether "we were getting it right." Reid agrees, and adds, "If the crew didn't get into it, we knew we were in trouble."

According to Wilson, the quest for authenticity—"getting it right"—also motivated the cinematic look of the show: "I went to CBS and said, 'You know, I'm one of the few guys working on television that has directed features. I could make this thing look like a feature. And I think that might be key, because I can't do this three-camera-live-audience, and capture what I want of New Orleans. I think I'm going to need steam, and smoke, and music, and food.' I got everybody really excited about that. And they forgot that these things cost money."

Which brings us back to creative control. Obviously, most television producers would not have been able to move the setting of *Frank's Place* from Bourbon Street to a black neighborhood. Nor would the garden-variety producer be able to receive clearance to shoot a new series using film style with one camera and lots of expensive post-production editing. But because Wilson wore the coat of the "Police Academy guy" and because CBS desperately wanted the Wilson/Reid package, Wilson was able to negotiate a "complete hands off deal" on *Frank's Place*.

Wilson readily acknowledges that the other networks would not have given him such creative freedom: "CBS, they were desperate. They were struggling. They weren't three—yet. Consequently, they were the best people to work for from a creative standpoint. NBC behaves just like ABC did when they were number one. They are sure they have it all figured out, and that it's not just dumb luck. But if Bill Cosby hadn't walked in there, they'd be in as much trouble as they were before. Since they are absolutely sure they have it all figured out, they want to get into your stuff. They think they can fix shows by changing scripts, by changing attitudes, by adding characters."

Unfortunately, as Welles discovered after *Citizen Kane* failed at the box office, hands off deals are ephemeral creatures that often perish in the heat of competition. But, interestingly, the cinematic look of *Frank's Place* enabled Wilson to sustain creative control throughout the season.

"The hands off agreement stuck," says Wilson, "because of the way we shot it. If you do a three-camera sitcom, you rehearse it much like a stage play. And the networks send people down to look at run-throughs. You turn around, and they've all got their scripts out saying, 'I feel like on page so-and-so . . .' And some of them have amazing nerve. But we started shooting film style as seven o'clock in the morning. Bing! The lights were on. We rehearse it, shoot it, and shoot it out of order. There was no run-through to see. Consequently, we were left totally free. CBS people would look at the dailies—but they didn't know how to look

at dailies because they weren't movie people. They'd just kind of look at them and say, 'O.K.?' Or they would call and say, 'Gee, that scene . . .' and I'd say, 'Well, when we cut it all together, it'll be good.' "

MAJOR INJURIES

The two most obvious reasons for the failure of *Frank's Place* were its production budget and its scheduling. As Wilson readily admits, "steam and smoke and music and food . . . costs a lot of money." While a typical episode of *Cosby* or *Family Ties* might costs between $500-550,000, a *Frank's Place*—with its cinematic style—cost between $600-630,000. According to Wilson, Viacom entered into *Frank's Place* as the "production entity" and picked up the $200,000 deficit for each show. Since CBS was only "renting" each episode from Wilson and Reid for $400,000, Viacom picked up the loss banking on the show to stay on the air long enough to build up episodes for future syndication. After 22 episodes and plummeting ratings, it became more difficult to continue to support the deficit, especially when CBS refused to pay more for each program to reduce some of the up-front production costs.

And any regular viewer of *Frank's Place* knows about its scheduling difficulties. Watching the show required devotion above and beyond the call of normal viewer duty. In twelve months, CBS moved the show into six different time slots on four different nights. According to Reid and Wilson, the network moved it so often that eventually their own mothers could no longer find the show on the network schedule. Consequently, despite Kim LeMaster's grim statement that the audience "failed to respond" to *Frank's Place*, a better explanation is that a large number of viewers either never found the program or lost it in the shuffle.

In fairness, it should be noted that LeMasters (who claimed to be one of the show's "biggest fans") has accepted some responsibility. He told TV critics last January that killing *Frank's Place* was his "toughest decision" and admitted that he was "very guilty" for having moved the program too much. To date, his tough decision has provoked 50,000-plus letters from the NAACP and the Viewers for Quality Television complaining about the cancellation.

Both Wilson and Reid agree now that working with CBS was a mixed blessing. While they had a lot of creative freedom, the network was in the midst of a tailspin. At the time, CBS had only two series regularly among the top 20—Sunday evening's *60 Minutes* and *Murder She Wrote*. Although it would have been a good fit, *Frank's Place* never landed on Sunday in its many travels across the CBS schedule.

Reid argues that during production of *Frank's Place* CBS displayed "self-destructive impulses" and had "poor promotional habits." Both Wilson and Reid say, as a new show, *Frank's Place* should never have aired at 8:00 leading off the Monday CBS line-up. "Kids run the eight o'clock Nielsens," Wilson says. Because *Frank's Place* was obviously not targeted at children, Wilson wanted the show in a 9:00 or 9:30 slot.

SUBTLE AFFLICTIONS

Reid contends that the CBS brass, even though they conceived of the original idea, "never understood our show." And CBS's basic failure to appreciate the novelty of *Frank's Place* points to less-obvious infirmities that, together with the budget deficit and inept scheduling, contributed to the demise of the show. Although these subtle afflictions appear as many different ailments, they are essentially symptoms of the same malignancy: the economics of popularity.

On the supply side of this economic

system, TV networks attempt to foster and sustain demand by playing a sophisticated game of peek-a-boo with the audience. In this game, networks lure audiences into taking a peek at a show and then provide just enough novelty so that audiences will peek in again next week. But, as in any game of peek-a-boo, there is a delicate dynamic at work in this network-audience interaction.

On the one hand, networks have to provide the audience with enough of a thrill so that they choose to continue the game. On the other hand, networks have to carefully package that thrill so that the audience is not "scared off" by the boo. Ultimately, the executives who succeed in this game are masters at juggling the comfort of familiarity with the surprise of novelty.

Of course, promotion is a central component of this ongoing game. In the context of the economy of popularity, promotion is meant to accomplish two related goals. First, a promotional campaign should entice the audience to risk that first peek; second, the campaign should prepare the audience for the delight of the boo. In more standard terms, a promotion should both whet audience interest and build anticipation that will be rewarded by the expected and unexpected pleasures of the viewing experience. It follows that promotions can fail in two ways: they can fail to build audience interest, or they can fail to build the right set of expectations.

In the case of *Frank's Place*, the promotions probably failed along the second front. And, here, *Frank's Place* was troubled by a quandary that is common in the marketing of all unconventional programming: Just how do you market something that is unique to a mass audience?

After all, one reason that Hollywood films and network series tend to be highly derivative is that it is much easier to promote a story-product that fits into some existing category. It's simply easier to promote the sequel of a conventional teen-pic like *Police Academy II* than it is to promote an off-beat psycho-drama like *Talk Radio*. Similarly, it is easier to promote a conventional black-cast sitcom like *Amen* or *227*, than it is to promote a breakthrough like *Frank's Place*.

The tried and true promotional cliche, "If you liked X, then you'll love Y," doesn't work with something as extraordinary as *Frank's Place*. Viewers tuning in to *Frank's Place* expecting the simple pleasures of the standard sitcom were not prepared for the challenges of the series. In the first place, many episodes dealing with serious issues like drunk driving or drug trafficking were—by Wilson's design—not at all funny. Secondly, *Frank's Place* demanded the rapt attention of a moviegoer, not the relaxed observance of a casual viewer.

Unlike most television fare, which is essentially radio with pictures, *Frank's Place* relied on the power of visual storytelling. Wilson's filmic approach required audience members to actually watch the show or lose track of the story line.

The cinematic look of *Frank's Place* would have other important consequences that contributed to both the show's artistry and its termination. According to Wilson, the decision to eliminate the laugh track was primarily informed by the look of the show. Where the laugh track is appropriate in comedies using three-camera, live-audience production techniques, it is extremely awkward using a one-camera, filmic approach.

"For some reason," says Wilson, "because of the sound track and everything, the [laugh-track] audience had to be in the room. But they couldn't be in the room because gradually we were shooting all the way around. You got a strong feeling of 'Where the hell are these [laughing] people?' "

Unfortunately, a new program category was invented by newspaper re-

viewers as a device for describing the appearance of several new shows that did not conform to the laugh-track or three-camera conventions of situation comedy. *Frank's Place, The 'Slap' Maxwell Story, The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd,* and *Hooperman*—all got tagged with the label of "dramedy." And Wilson believes that because this label became associated with low ratings, "guilt by association" with these shows helped doom *Frank's Place*. Like the *Police Academy* coat, the dramedy albatross was something Wilson couldn't shed.

Another bitter-sweet consequence of the show's cinematic style was the subject of one of Reid's most self-critical comments. According to Reid, *Frank's Place* should have done more "character-driven pieces" than "individual little movies." Reid believes that—in their passion to transcend the contrivances of the standard sitcom—the writing staff lost sight of the bottom line in series storytelling—that is, that an audience has to be lured back each week.

Although Reid's criticism can be chalked up to creative differences that inevitably surface between actors and writers, his distinction between character-driven and stand-alone stories is still very revealing. As the lasting power of media stardom demonstrates, compelling regular characters are the most potent agencies for encouraging loyalty to a continuing series. In large measure, many people watch *The Cosby Show* because of the power of Bill Cosby's performance; teenagers watch *Family Ties* because they identify with Michael J. Fox's portrayal of a budding yuppie; and the current success of *Roseanne* is linked to the popularity of the show's central couple played by Roseanne Barr and John Goodman.

Because most sitcoms are primarily vehicles for showcasing comedic star performances, the individual episodes often become highly predictable and painfully contrived variations on a well-established theme. This theme, in fact, is the very "situation" that gives the formula its name and it is embedded in the ongoing relationships between the regular characters. Wilson and his ink-stained comrades essentially tried to write the "situation" out of television comedy.

In Wilson's words: "People, myself included, would yell, 'No, that's *Laverne and Shirley*.' *Laverne and Shirley*, for some reason, became the shorthand for any kind of set-up, set-up, punch, set-up, set-up, punch. Our main thrust was story, story, story! What I was after was good stories."

This creative emphasis was, in fact, bolstered by Wilson's decision to shoot the series film style. "The look was beginning to dictate the writing," says Wilson. "And I had it in mind that we should try to—I mean, I would never say this to a network—but we should try to revive that great American dead art form, the short story, and think of ourselves as short story writers."

Although Reid-the-artist is quick to agree that part of the splendor of *Frank's Place* was bound up in Wilson's writing philosophy, Reid-the-producer now believes that the 11 regular characters on the program should have been more fully developed before doing "stand-alone" short stories featuring outsiders—the basketball recruiter, the homeless man, and the New York businessman episodes, for example. Reid especially regrets the timing of the early two-part drug story involving young bartender Cool Charles. While acknowledging that those episodes told compelling stories and developed strong anti-drug themes, Reid now wishes they had aired later in the season, after more of the central characters had evolved.

In the tragedy of errors that killed the series, Wilson accepts responsibility for driving the final nail in the coffin. As Wilson puts it, "We made a mistake in the Emmys." Wilson succeeded in winning the Emmy for Best

Writing with an episode called "The Bridge." A powerful drama, "The Bridge" is an "individual little movie" that relates the story of man who commits suicide by driving off a bridge so that his family can sue the Chez Louisianne for serving him his final drink. The episode paints a stark picture of life in the housing projects. And it features a magnificent performance by Beah Richards who won an Emmy for her portrayal of the dead man's wife.

However, Wilson did not submit "The Bridge" to the committee responsible for selecting the best comedy series. "I thought you got to send in three episodes for consideration," Wilson remembers. "But they only take one. And I can understand that because there's a lot of stuff. I should have sent in 'The Bridge', but I thought people would say, 'Wait a minute, We're judging comedies. This isn't funny.' "

Wilson entered another episode that featured a Rocky-like boxing match between the Big Arthur and a rival chef. Although the episode was funny in a conventional way, it certainly didn't represent the best of *Frank's Place*. And it didn't fare well against the best of *The Wonder Years*, which won the '88 Emmy as best comedy series.

This mistake haunts Wilson because he thinks "The Bridge" would have won the Emmy. "We would still be on the air," reasons Wilson, "because I don't think CBS would have had the guts to pull the plug on a show that won Best Comedy Series. The night we didn't get the Emmy for best sitcom, both Tim and I knew it was over."

EPITAPH AND PARABLE

Embedded in one of the funniest episodes of *Frank's Place* are two moments that comment on the death of the series. The episode deals with a failed attempt by Parrish to increase night business at the restaurant. After an arrogant business consultant advises Parrish to offer live entertainment at the restaurant, Parrish is approached by a fast-talking booking agent who bears a strong resemblance to Jack Nicholson at his seediest.

At first the agent promises Parrish the services of Bo Diddley. Parrish, a fan of the 1950s rock-and-roll star, is impressed with the agent's show business connections. However, before consummating the deal, the booking agent cons Parrish into agreeing on a "fall-back plan." Should Bo Diddley not work out, the booking agent would engage the services of Guitar Fat Brown.

When Parrish doesn't recognize the musician's name, the booking agent interjects, "Of course, the only problem with Guitar Fat is that very, very square white people have never heard of him." Parrish, not wanting to be lumped in with square white people, agrees to the contingency.

A paraphrase of the booking agent's comment serves as our epitaph for the series: "*Frank's Place*—very, very square white people never heard of it."

The second revealing moment appears about mid-way through the episode. The first—and last—night of live entertainment attracts a family of obnoxious white tourists (decked out in Bermuda shorts) to the restaurant. When Parrish greets them at the door, the sun-burnt father inquires, "Is this the real thing? A nervous Parrish responds, "Yes, sort of real." "Well, we want to see the real thing," declares the father as Parrish seats the family at a table.

Parrish then tries to give menus to the family, but the father declines: "Oh, we've already ate. We're just here for the entertainment." After Parrish explains that the entertainment won't begin for several hours, the father says, "That's O.K. We'll wait." The rest of the family whines and the father tries to appease them. He asks Parrish. "Do you have any snacks? Like maybe some tortilla chips and diet Cokes?"

We call this brief scene the Parable Of The Grumbling Tourists. The irony of tourists looking for "the real thing"

in New Orleans and yet declining the opportunity to eat authentic creole cuisine in favor of more familiar junk food speaks eloquently to the phenomenon of the grumbling white audience. This audience decries what appears on prime-time television, and claims to want the real thing, yet when given the opportunity to sample the authenticity of a series like *Frank's Place*, it opts, instead, for "tortilla-chip-and-diet-Coke" programs like *Alf*, *Cosby*, and *Growing Pains*.

Therefore, in a round about way, we find ourselves returning to LeMaster's obituary for *Frank's Place*. The viewing audience does, indeed, share some responsibility for the death of the show. But the viewing audience that we want to implicate is not every one and no one living everywhere and nowhere.

Clearly not enough middle-class, white folks watched or even knew about the program. Unlike *Cosby* which is essentially a show about class—a show supportive of both white and black middle-class values, and therefore safer and less threatening—*Frank's Place* is a show that was supremely about region and race. The show often filtered what it is to live in mainstream America through the viewpoints of folks who live in the margins—in a black working class section of New Orleans.

The middle ground allure of television is both its strength and weakness. As strength, television offers special moments—news, inaugurations, space conquests and disasters, football, assassinations, *Cosby*, *Roots*—that bring this large pluralistic nation together for shared triumphs and mourning, for shared time and experience. In this age of unbridled individualism and President Bush's perception of us as a "thousand points of light," there is a comforting unity and familiarity about television.

But as weakness, the middle ground of television often pushes "invisible cultures" into the background where they are either filtered by the prejudices and stereotypes of white society, or they provide the void for the "thousand points of light." It seems that *Frank's Place* got lost somewhere in this void. In the struggle over what constitutes that mainstream, the program was perhaps viewed as too marginal—too far afield from the security of Middle American tastes and values.

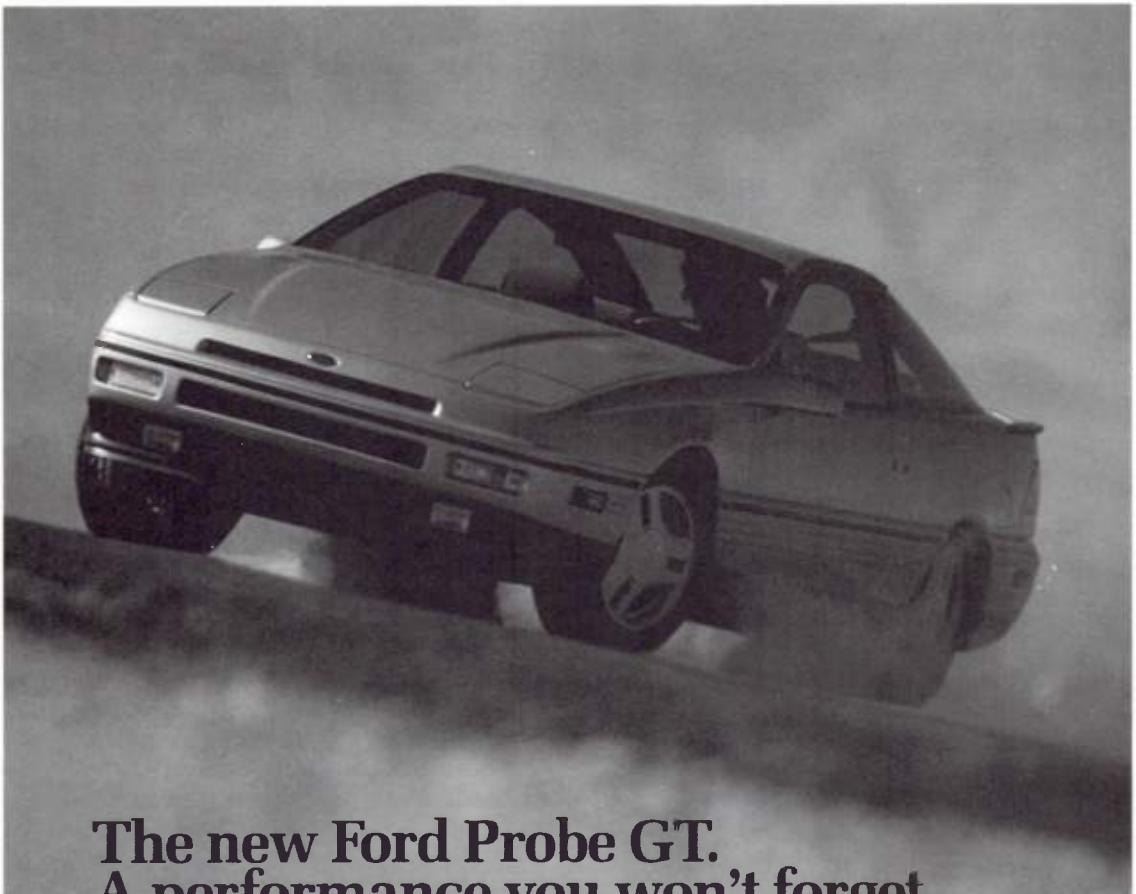
Both Wilson and Reid predict that the failure of *Frank's Place* will inhibit innovation and experiments in TV comedy.

"Most of the letters I got," reports Wilson, "were from people in the business saying, 'My God. How did you do this? How did you pull this off? How did you get the network to go along with this?' If *Frank's Place* had succeeded, it would have had enormous impact. As it turned out, the cancellation was a real blow. The day it got cancelled, every schlockmeister in town used *Frank's Place* as a prime example of what not to do: 'You see what happens when you do that?' When a bad show fails, nobody says, 'Let's learn our lesson.' But when a good show goes down, everybody goes, 'Ya see?' "

Reid is equally pessimistic. He says it will be at least five years—if ever—before the networks acknowledge the breakthroughs made on the program.

In the meantime, both Reid and Wilson plan to stay away from the kind of television *Frank's Place* attempted. Both are now involved in the development of more conventional projects. ■

Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell are assistant professors in the Department of Communication at the University of Michigan. **The authors are especially indebted to David Barker, Jackie Byars, Chris Campbell, Herman Gray, Horace Newcomb, Bernard Timberg, and Mimi White for their encouragement and input during the planning stages of the *Frank's Place* seminar. The authors also appreciate the following scholars who supported the seminar by presenting papers: Lawrance Bernabo, Chad Dell, Christy Green, Joe Moorehouse, Dan Pierce, Mark Poindexter, and Alan Stewart.**



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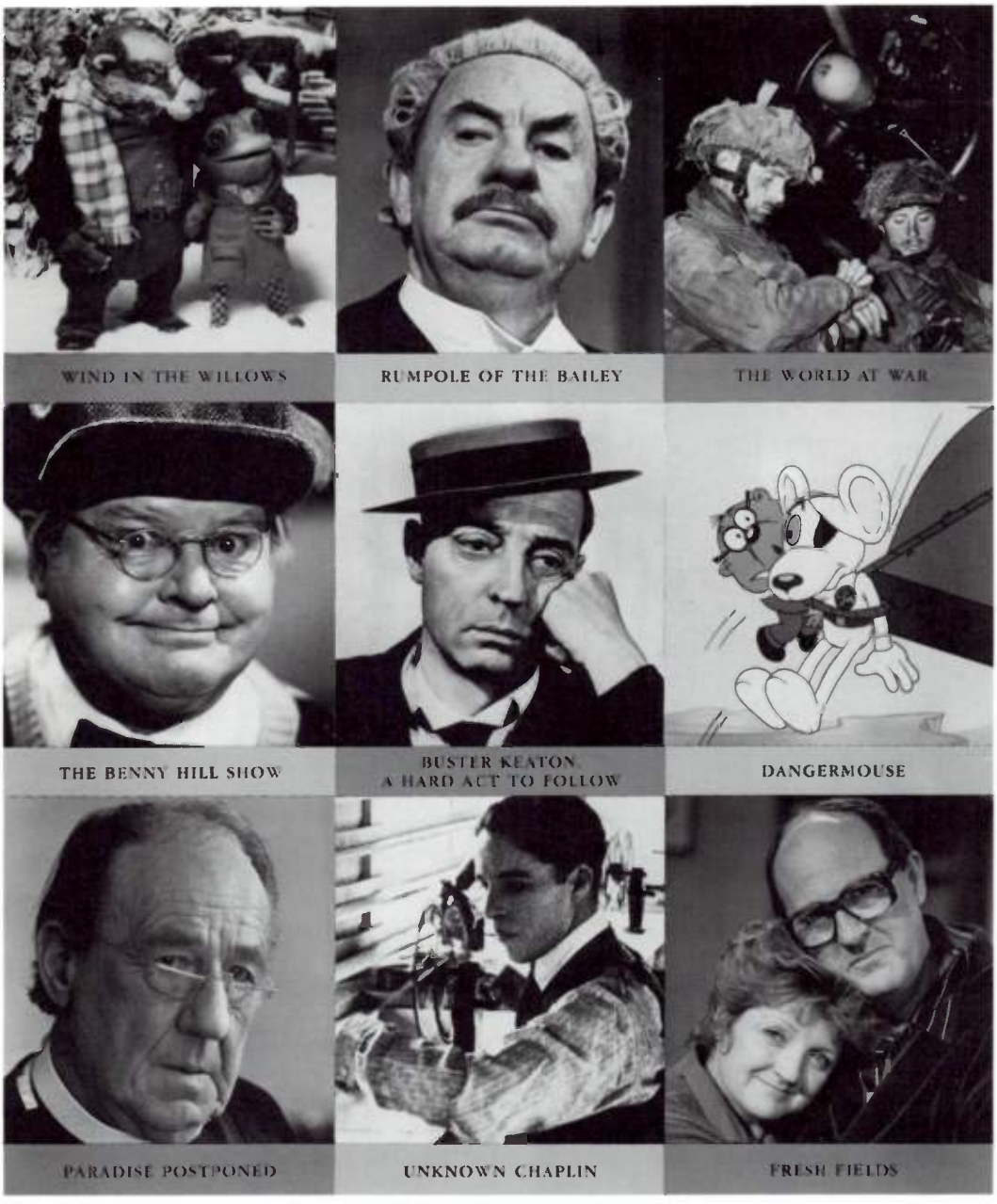

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THE LONDON TELEVISION SCENE

Is there a deregulation revolution going on in British television? How real is the threat to both BBC and the commercial programmers?

BY JOHN PUTNAM

LONDON.

The British, who never could stand prosperity as they are the first to admit, seem about to blow it yet again, this time by throwing away, or at least seriously compromising, the most admired and probably the best broadcasting system going.

Early last November, the Conservative government of premier Margaret Thatcher came out with plans for the biggest shakeup of the nation's electronic media since the advent of commercial television ended the monopoly of noncommercial BBC more than 30 years ago.

What the country basically has now in the way of a regulated system are four national TV chains—two BBC networks and two commercial, ITV and Channel Four. Two are mass-audience networks while the other two are anything but, and between them produce a remarkable range and variety of programs, much of which regularly wins prestige prizes galore. You can see the glitziest of this output via PBS, notably on *Masterpiece Theatre*.

What the administration proposes is a deregulated free-for-all that by the next decade (or just around the corner) could see the United Kingdom saturated with a host of new TV channels all joining the scramble for ad bucks and pay-per-view business. Up to 19 DBS (direct broadcast by satellite) channels are due this year alone, six of them under the aegis of multinational media mogul Rupert (tomorrow the world) Murdoch.

Another three DBS channels coming this year will be operated by British Satellite Broadcasting, an independent but government-blessed enterprise with its very own satellite, and which has been stockpiling Hollywood movies.

The government's game plan also envisions at least one new national terrestrial TV channel that would also be in hot pursuit of advertisers. At least one more national radio carrier also looms in addition to the four now going via BBC, plus a raft of low-power community TV stations and more local radio outlets on top of the 60–70 or so now operated by BBC or under independent license.

Earlier fears that BBC was on the verge of having some of its constituent parts privatized have been allayed, at least until its royal charter expires in 1996. Until then it continues intact and funded by the historic method of public taxation—the annual license fee fixed by the government and charged all set owners. But there have been persistent rumors, and some government hints too, that before then the TV division's idle overnight airlanes may be handed over to private specialist operators to deliver programming for time-shift video recording. Though such a move might not betoken a more dras-

tic assault on the national broadcaster, inevitably the prospect is causing disquiet among BBC hierarchs.

If BBC for now escapes really grievous bodily harm, not so the ITV network comprising such 15 regionally-licensed commercial stations as Granada, Yorkshire and Thames Television, which are tightly regulated under a public service ethos, unique in the world, that was inherited from British broadcasting's founding fathers.

If deregulation means ITV is about to lose its long-standing advertising monopoly (the stations also have the exclusivity on the regional sale of Channel Four airtime in exchange for funding C4), the promised really big blow comes in 1991 when the stations' franchises expire after eight years. Normally, they would be renewable—subject to challenge—within the testing framework of the regulating Independent Broadcasting Authority established long ago by an act of parliament. But the times are anything but normal, and two years hence those licenses instead will be up for grabs via auction (sic) to the highest bidders, whose acceptability otherwise will depend only on what's vaguely formulated so far as a "quality threshold" pertaining mainly to a news and public affairs commitment.

The omens for future program standards, and the basic public service commitment that goes back to crystal set radio are anything but promising.

Not even Ronald Reagan thought of that one.

Thereafter, anyway, the stations collectively will no longer be known familiarly as the ITV network but as Channel 3. They and other terrestrial commercial broadcasters will be regulated by a new Independent Television Commission scheduled to replace the IBA in due course. Unlike the old IBA, the new ITC will operate what the government is pleased to describe as "light touch," a euphemism meaning no more than minimal performance standards are likely to be imposed on the winning bidders for those former ITV licenses, which will then run for 10 years. To the more cynical, "light touch" can only mean ownership of the public's air in virtual perpetuity.

It doesn't follow from all this, of course, that the whole ITV system is about to be taken over by soulless new moneybag players for whom profits are the be-all and damn public interest, convenience, necessity and cultural tradition. Some of the franchises will no doubt continue under tradition-sensitive present managements. But the omens for future program standards, and the basic public service commitment that goes back to crystal set radio are anything but promising.

That's surely implicit in wholesale deregulation and unbridled competition, or what smacks very much of the *laissez-faire* American system. To Stuart Prebble, of a pressure group called the Campaign for Quality Television, the government's plan is no less than a "detailed epitaph for the television system which has been the envy of the world."

Years ago, in a highly regulated time, one of ITV's senior moguls could still refer to his station franchise as "a license to print money." If he thought so then he should only be around now.

The looming revolution and its explosion of competitive commercial carriers is, to be sure, sweet music for advertisers and their agencies who've long been at the monopolistic mercy of ITV ratecards and program scheduling. It's also a great prospect for devout believers in unfettered capitalism—the kind who would still have

voted for Hoover in 1932.

The government calls its big shakeup plan a framework for the "liberalization" of broadcasting, which is one way of looking at it—the government's. Ever since the Tories regained power a decade ago, Thatcherite rhetoric has been nothing if not seductively populist, which no doubt is one reason the Iron Lady has won three straight elections.

Deregulation was bound to appeal in a country so overloaded with regulations, some praiseworthy, many others eccentric or just plain nutty.

To the consternation and at the expense of the left, Thatcher has freely appropriated labels like "liberal" and "liberalism" (anathema, perhaps, in America but not here) to rally popular support for her free-market economic agenda. Early on, for instance, she proclaimed herself an economic liberal and promised the voters more freedom of choice with respect to things like home ownership, schools, medical care, public transport and so on, including, as we now see, more broadcast options too.

Such populism—and its broad appeal is undeniable—helped pave the way for a massive program of privatization and deregulation that's still ongoing. (Next on the agenda is the privatization of the nation's water supply—no kidding.)

Privatization and deregulation are Thatcher's totems, her holy of holies, the economic touchstones of a single-minded mission to wean a postwar nation raised on welfare and state ownership and create instead an "enterprise culture" subject only to "self-correcting" market forces. The *real* aim of which, as she herself has admitted, is to send socialism in the U.K. down for the final count. Not that Britain has ever known real socialism, mind you, but it's as good a scare word here as "liberal" has become in America.

Deregulation was bound to appeal in a country so overloaded for so long with regulations, some praiseworthy, many others eccentric or plain nutty. But deregulation can also turn out to be a mirage.

For instance, it was supposed to yield untold benefits for the American consumer, wasn't it? So now, with Ma Bell fractured into bewildering fragments, Americans at long last have the efficient and cheap phone service they were previously denied and always longed for, right? And it's now some deregulated blessing, isn't it, when you can fly north while your luggage travels south—assuming you both get off the ground at all, that is.

Ah, wonderful deregulation, as the laggard British are about to discover from the joys of multichannel choice with its cornucopia of gameshows, soaps, formula action and more gameshows. (Of which they've got sufficient even under a regulated system.)

A funny thing, this notion some people have that numbers ipso facto equal diversity and thus choice. The late A.J. Liebling, in his sometime *New Yorker* essays on the "Wayward Press," used to argue that choice and democracy were diminished every time a newspaper died. But how much real choice exists if, say, the values of two of a town's three papers are bounded by divorce court shenanigans, the police blotter and showbiz scandal? Who and what is really diminished by one less frivolous, scandalmongering tabloid in a town that had two? Put another way, was democracy enhanced when Murdoch took over the *New York Post*?

And by the same token, how much real programming choice, real viewer freedom, is there if half the available TV channels are going head to head with firstrun comedy and melodrama while the other half are going head to head with rerun ditto? Lots of options,

sure, but lots of choice, no. Only the illusion of choice—the numbers game.

Anyone with extended experience of TV both sides of the Atlantic has to conclude, it seems to me, that Britain's four channels now provide more genuine choice on average than "free" markets with four times or more that number. And that's thanks to a public service ethos like no other that could only flourish under a broadcasting *system* like no other, a tradition the Brits are now about to discard in the name of political dogma and, paradoxically, cultural philistinism.

But there's more to it than liberal economics and the fallacious issue of consumer freedom. There's also a distinct whiff of political paranoia, a chip-on-the-shoulder determination to settle old scores with pesky broadcasters for taking their unwritten constitutional liberties too much to heart.

For, say, having tried to objectively report the war with Argentina in the Falkland Islands instead of wholeheartedly supporting "our boys" and mindlessly toeing the official line. For not just quoting but also allowing Irish "terrorists" to have their spoken say as well. For snooping into the more recessive secrets of government including the intelligence community. For, in short, believing the public in a putative democracy really does have the right to know.

The administration has responded to such "abuses" of press freedom with muzzling legislation and executive orders, and in one case even by a police raid that confiscated cans of documentary film in the BBC's Glasgow offices. The voices of Irish "terrorists" can no longer be transmitted by British broadcasters. Pushing for a broadcasting revolution seems very much in the punitive and self-deluding spirit of those responses.

As part of the Tory drive to bring broadcasters to heel, they've also created a new Broadcasting Standards Council to censor sex and violence on the tube—another juicy populist issue, although it's far from clear yet how or whether the government will be able to impose its standards on DBS channels.

More recently, and far more ominous, was the appointment as deputy chairman of the IBA (and the Independent Television Commission to come) of Lord Chalfont, a politician whose deep rightfield positions make Thatcher by comparison seem almost suspiciously liberal. Commercial broadcasters have good reason to shudder.

As for the government's blueprint for broadcasting, the die hasn't been quite cast yet. Parts of the plan will require legislative action, and there's intensive industry lobbying to modify this or block that. The November government white paper outlining it's proposals omitted most of the fine print. But a huge government majority in parliament leaves no doubt that Thatcher & Co. will broadly have its way in due course.

A revolution is indeed in the making, amid deep concern for many over what's seen as the "Americanization" of British television and all that implies. Many a Yank import plays to big audiences here, but in something like a controlled environment that still enables the British to do their conscientious and often classy number with nominal resistance at best from accountants. And they still make handsome profits doing it.

Competition is usually held to be a fine and desirable thing, and often it is. But come the revolution, some of us have our doubts that primetime in Britain, as on a recent Sunday night, will have much time for shows like *Simply Mozart* in which pianist Mitsuko Uchida and conductor Jeffrey Tate discoursed on the genius of Wolfgang Amadeus; or,on another channel, how eastern anthropologists and computer programs are assisting the farmers of Bali to improve crop irrigation, amid views of some of the most stunning tropical landscapes the world has to

offer.

Dull stuff? For many, yes, for some, no. Whichever, those examples constituted genuine alternatives on a night when the pop fare included *Kane and Abel* reruns, an Agatha Christie mystery and a Hollywood movie.

How much real choice did you have on all those channels that same night, I wonder?

I wonder, too, what all of you devoted PBS fans back in the States will do if Thatcher & Co. Unlimited have their way with British television, and you eventually may no longer have such splendid imports from the UK's BBC, Thames, London Weekend, Central, Granada and others as *Jewel in the Crown, Brideshead Revisted, The Singing Detective, Upstairs, Downstairs, Elizabeth the Queen*, or, comedy delights like *Monty Python* and *Fawlty Towers*? Farewell, then, to *Masterpiece Theater*? ■

John Putnam, an American journalist, has been covering the television beat as a reporter and critic for many years. He now lives and works in London.

VIEWPOINT

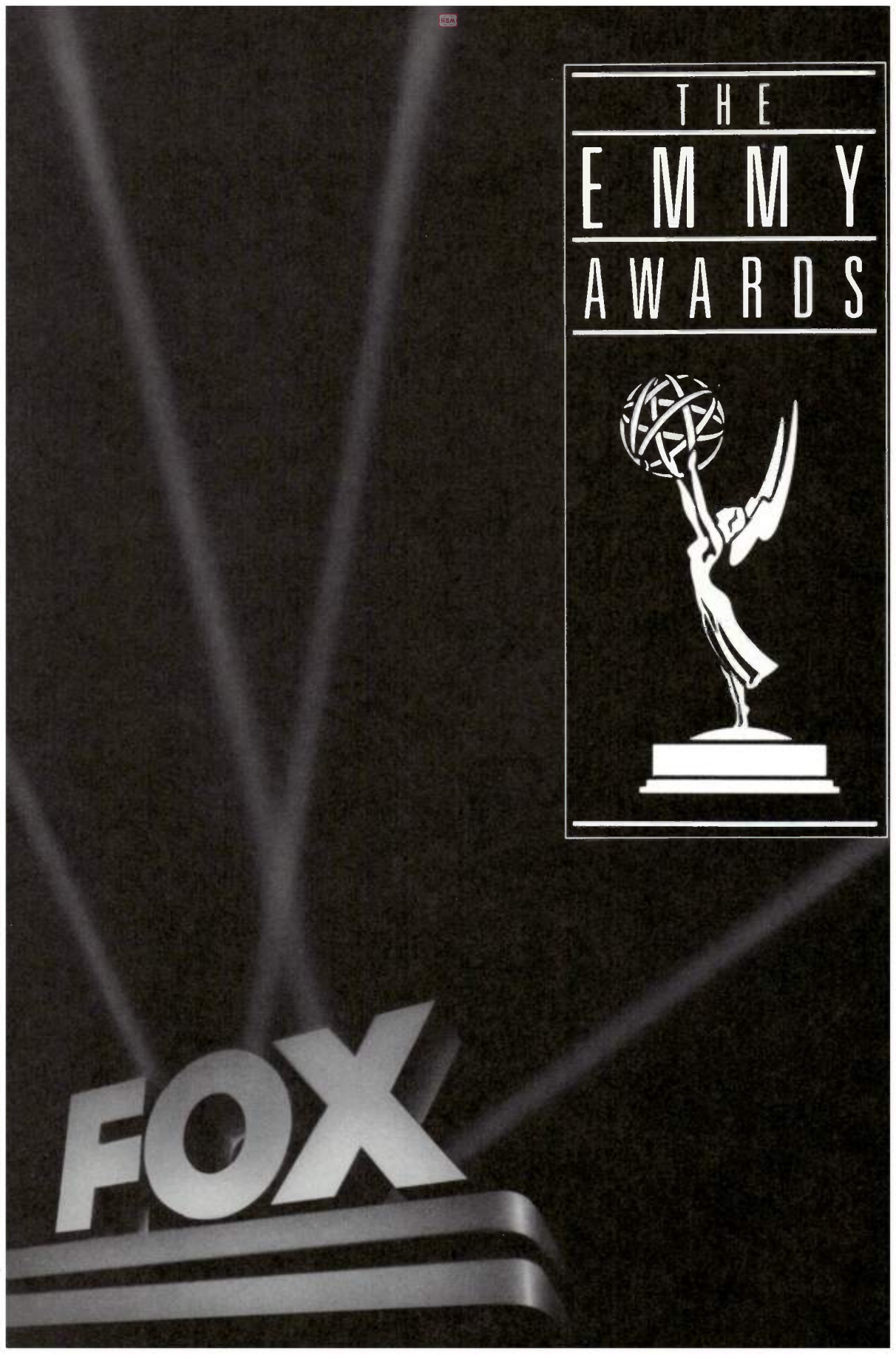
Getting a Perspective

". . . It is likely that, when the pendulum swings again, tabloid television will be less sensational while traditional television will be less staid. Meanwhile, though, there is the matter of tone and style.

"During the panels discussion, Mr. Donahue wondered dismissively whether the key issue wasn't simply a matter of 'decorum'. Well, why not? It does have something to do with what used to be called being civilized. I recently attended The Cooper Union in Manhattan/ for the investiture of its new president, John Jay Islin. . . There, away from angry voices and easy rationalizations, could be heard comments about wisdom and knowledge, ethics and principles, the very survival of the planet. Tabloid television, and the profits it is generating at the moment, easily fell into perspective.

"The key question remains: what kind of people do we want to be?"

—John J. O'Connor,
New York Times, commenting on a Columbia University PBS seminar on Entertainment News or Entertainment."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A NEW TELEVISION BATTLEGROUND

The boom in confrontational and reality programs cues a debate on journalism vs. showbusiness, ethics and responsibility.

BY BERT BRILLER

The big new programming trend is called "reality television," but it distorts reality and critics call it "tabloid" and "trash." Gutty, smutty and nutty shows have shaken up station program schedules, affected newsroom practices and raised questions about standards, taste and censorship.

The 1988–89 season saw an increase in confrontational talk programs (with chair-throwing and other assaults) and magazine shows that stress the sensational, the seamy and steamy. Next season will see even more—the major category in new syndicated programs is crime.

The expansion of sensational content is triggering debate in the industry. Some see a lowering of standards and the operation of Gresham's law—with "bad programming driving out the good." Others see the shows opening up new areas of discussion, bringing formerly taboo topics to the public's consciousness.

The development needs to be viewed in the context of what is happening in electronic media. Over-the-air television is facing increased competition from cable, both in terms of program fare (including more "mature" and violent material than network censors permitted) and advertising dollars (cable billing is nearing $2 billion a year). A fourth network is challenging the big three and the traditional networks' share of audience took a big drop this year.

Budgets are being cut and the "reality" programs offer lower price tags. "Cheapy stuff," complain critics. But others express admiration for the producers' ability to work lean, to win an audience and get a bang for fewer bucks.

Threat of Repression

Perhaps the most complex questions concern the threat of censorship. Cries of "shock and shlock" provide ammunition for those who wish to see television stay in a straight and narrow traditionalist groove. Others seeking a diversity of views feel that cracking down on the excesses of the sensational shows could be the opening wedge in a growing drive to "sanitize" all of television. Another point of view is that there has to be more responsibility, that "we have to draw the line somewhere, you can't let real garbage get on the air."

There are no simple answers to these issues. A few were examined at the Radio & TV News Directors Association's last convention, where the proliferation of sleazy journalism led the group to bash trash. The news chiefs

were especially disturbed by the new programs' mixing show business with journalism. "There's definitely more blurring of the line between news and entertainment—and there's going to be more," warned John Corporon, news head of WPIX-TV, New York.

The older news hands feel it's one thing to add some show biz razzmatazz to news, but it's another matter to put the trappings of news on a program that's essentially entertainment. The danger is that the viewer will be misled.

Jeffrey Marks, head of the RTNDA's ethics committee, says that the problem is not with any individual program. Marks, news director of WCSH-TV, Portland, Maine, said, "The problem is with the confusion created for the viewer. I'm afraid *Unsolved Mysteries*, although it's an entertainment program, has a documentary style that is indistinguishable from *CBS Reports* to 90% of the viewers." (*Mysteries* is on NBC in prime time, and successful.)

The Society of Newspaper Editors convention in April debated "trash TV" in a panel that ended up as a shouting match. The *Los Angeles Times'* man called Phil Donahue a showman, not a journalist. Morton Downey Jr. called the L.A. man a snob. Donahue argued that he, Downey and Geraldo Rivera are adding a healthy diversity to the medium: "Going too far occasionally is what journalists are supposed to do." The *Washington Post's* Tom Shales said, "It's not a question of what's journalism and what's not, as what's good taste and what's bad taste, what's good manners and what's bad. Television is now overrun with bad taste and bad manners."

It's understandable that the print media should agonize over the increased competition. Tabloid newspapers stigmatize the shows as "tabloid TV." The charge that television is invading someone's privacy is leveled by the very same journals that headlined a Presidential candidate's extramarital indiscretions.

'Front Page' Rivalry

Rivalry is strong and growing among the tabloid shows. It's in the old *Front Page* tradition, when most American cities had competing papers, fighting for the scoop and circulation. To counter Fox TV's *A Current Affair*, King-World launched *Inside Edition* with the British emcee/commentator David Frost.

The "Inside" strip premiered in January with a reportedly record-breaking $8,000,000 publicity/promotion barrage. The opener featured a story about James Richardson, who has been in prison for over 20 years, convicted of having murdered his seven children. Frost presented testimony that Richardson may be innocent and that the crime may have been committed by a woman (now suffering from Alzheimer's disease). He urged viewers to write the Governor of Florida to free the prisoner (he's now free).

The 15-minute segment had a lot of "grabbers"—elements of the whodunit, the horror of seven children murdered, the muckraking charge of small-town injustice, giving the viewer a chance to speak out and act. Unhappily, the day before Frost's premiere, the competing *A Current Affair* did a segment on the same story, including a report that a Florida court had agreed to reopen the 1967 case. People at the Frost show—several of whom had come over from *A Current Affair*—charged Maury Povich's staff were "taking down our satellite promos, trying to steal our exclusive stories by doing fast, cheap versions. And they're not getting to the principals. We are."

But over at *A Current Affair*, the producer of the Richardson piece cheerfully said he had just repeated a segment aired a month earlier.

Inside Edition didn't win critical plaudits, and fared none-too-well in initial ratings. Frost was replaced as

host by a friendlier, less cerebral Bill O'Reilly. The strip has been renewed by several major groups for 1989–90, despite low ratings in some cities. New York's Channel 4 exiled it to 2:30 AM and re-installed *Family Feud*, which it had bumped three months earlier.

However, the trend at local stations has been toward the tabloids. Programs being replaced in some markets include *Family Feud*, *Peoples Court*, *USA Today* and *Win, Lose or Draw*.

Pressure Tactics?

The turf war between the two series is producing antics almost as bizarre as their spicy stories. One *Current Affair* feature dealt with an electronics salesman who seduced a married woman, videotaped their love-making and, after he was jilted by her, left copies of the steamy videotape at the woman's doorstep and at the homes of their friends.

A crew from *A Current Affair* turned up at the woman's house threatening to name names and demanding cooperation. Eventually, the husband and wife agreed to an interview—after the program paid their lawyer an undisclosed sum and promised that their names would not be used and the program would be blacked out in their area.

Then the rival *Inside Edition* team tried to persuade the lawyer to sneak a hidden camera into the *Current Affair* interview, hoping to expose the "pressure tactics" used by their foes. Unhappily for *Inside Edition*, the lawyer stood firm for his original deal—and "The Case of the SeX-Rated Home Video Harrassment" was used to lead off *A Current Affair* on one of the evenings when it was against *Inside Edition's* interview with "The Man Who Killed Robert F. Kennedy."

Inside Edition devoted segments of three broadcasts to a David Frost interview with Sirhan Sirhan. The program was promoted heavily in newspapers as well as on the air. A tape of the interview was shown to reporters before the airing, which resulted in news coverage in the national press. Obviously, the range of pieces covered in the "reality shows" includes items acceptable to papers with stricter standards of what's "fit to print."

Stretched out over three days, the Sirhan interview and the eulogy of Bobby Kennedy were overdone. One did get a look into the mind of a killer—albeit an assassin who had more than 20 years to polish the apologia for his crime and who was using television in the hope of securing a parole.

The program also used a telephone 900-number phone-in poll on whether parole should be granted. Almost 200,000 viewers called (paying 50 cents per call), with 75 per cent opposing Sirhan's being freed. Such exploitive polls in which the respondents are self-selected aren't scientific—they attract extreme views and under-represent middle-grounders. However, size of response can indicate audience interest.

The portrait of Bobby Kennedy was highly favorable, although ironically just two weeks earlier the same program had revisited the mysterious circumstances around Marilyn Monroe's death. In that two-part report, suggestions that Marilyn was murdered and gossipy allegations linking her with Jack and Bobby Kennedy were aired. Included was a gratuitous "re-creation,"—a long shot of actors representing Bobby, Marilyn and a female friend romping in the buff on a nude beach.

'The Wave of the Future'

Reese Schonfeld, executive producer of *Crimewatch Tonight* and *People Magazine on TV*, doesn't see tabloid TV as a disease but rather as "the wave of the future." That's the same phrase Geraldo Rivera and Robert Pittman use.

Traditional television journalism concentrates on "page one" stories but neglects the kinds that newspapers use to fill their pages 3, 4, 5 and 6, Schonfeld contends. Producers are now finding that the gutsier stories and features can be done very well on the tube and attract audiences.

Tabloid journalism is far from new, he adds. Newspapers have been doing it for a century. He gets leads for *Crimewatch* from respected dailies. "The best crime newspapers in the country," he declares, "are *The Wall Street Journal* (although it deals mostly with white collar crime), *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Miami Herald* and *The Washington Post*." On the appeal of crime, he points out, the highest-rated edition of *Sixty Minutes* on CBS in 1988 was one which included three crime stories—an interview with a convicted spy's wife and pieces on a rapist and a woman charged with killing her nine children.

'Matter of Life and Death'

Reese produced a two-hour special for Orbis Communications which fits into the genre. *A Matter of Life and Death* dealt with the case of a Floridian on death row for 12 years. Two separate production teams were assigned—one reporting from the defense's point of view, the other from the prosecution's. Juxtaposing the two perspectives, Reese planned, would give viewer new insights into the judicial process and how investigations are done. "In the course of telling a good story," Reese contends, "you can raise real issues."

The two-hour report, dealing with the case of a store-owner convicted of killing his wife, her parents and an employee, maintained interest, but did justice a bit of injustice. Viewers were urged to telephone their votes on the convict's guilt and an interim tally was given by the first half-hour. They were invited to make judgments *before* they had heard all of the testimony and evidence. In a real court the judge cautions jurors to keep an open mind until they've heard the full case. Here, a vital point—testimony that the victim had told her husband she was leaving him—was not revealed until very late in the program.

Giving partial tallies not only spurs premature judging but may also influence the vote. Another flaw in presenting phone results was just giving percentages, not actual numbers.

Re-opening Controversial Cases

The show had the tried-and-true appeal of *True Detective Stories* and courtroom conflict. It provided plenty of material for argument: was the convicted man guilty of premeditated murders or the victim of unprofessional police work?

Such programs can focus national attention on controversial convictions, as the documentary film *The Thin Blue Line* helped gain a convict's release. The process calls for responsible research and meticulous presentation by the producers.

Reese is concerned about the use of re-enactments and re-creations in the tabloid programs. Having actors play the parts of police, victims or perpetrators is going too far, he says. Even running a supered "Re-enactment" caption for a few seconds is poor policy, he feels: "It's difficult for viewers to know what's real and what isn't, and soon the people are not going to believe the medium."

Credibility is Dropping

Television credibility is clearly at stake. The medium is already losing ground. For example, the Roper Organization every two years has been asking people which of the major mass media is the most believable. Since

the second study in 1961 television has been Number 1—and it still is—but in the poll conducted in November 1988 television's credibility dropped from 55% in 1986 to 49%, while newspapers' rose from 21% to 26%.

Of course, that decline reflects many factors beyond the growth of tabloidism, such as the 1988 "sound bites" election campaign and heavy use of negative political commercials. But the decline in credibility should cause all sectors of the medium (and the general public) to question some recent trends in TV news coverage and presentation.

Injecting 'Emotional Impact'

The tabloid virus has even attacked Group W's *Evening/PM Magazine* cooperative strip, which has been on the air for 12 years. Among the reasons for the Westinghouse show's susceptibility are declining audiences and general industry budget cuts. To breathe new life into the syndicated co-op, in January 1989 Group W premiered a new cross-the-board half-hour, *This Evening*. The strip packages some three stories each night, produced by stations in the co-op and by the national production staff in San Francisco.

Group W executives said they are working to give the new show a harder edge and more stories with emotional impact, "stories that touch the heart, people challenging their world, as well as stories from newspaper front pages." What came across in the early outings, however, was tabloid copycatism. Features dealt with gigolos, the blurring line between R and X movies, Elizabeth Taylor's weight and drug problems, and preacher Jimmy Swaggart's sex life (following up a spicy *Penthouse* piece).

Industry talk was that the racy content would cause the late Don McGannon, once the public-spirited head of Group W, "to spin in his grave." And not only for the sleaze. When McGannon submitted arguments to the FCC in favor of the prime time access rule—barring network and off-network shows between 7–8 PM in the top 50 markets—his pitch was that there would be not only greater diversity but programs of greater significance.

This Evening is covering only 40% of TV homes and its rating performance has been disappointing. In New York it is carried by WCBS-TV at 7 PM, where once Cronkite and Rather were dominant. Now the CBS flagship is in fifth place with *This Evening*—despite its advantage of being a half-hour earlier than *Current Affair*. [It's also interesting that the station had turned down for the slot Grant Tinker's *USA Today* program, which has disappointing ratings and has lost clearances despite much format tinkering.]

"Evening's" host is Nancy Glass, former co-anchor in Philadelphia. Journalistically competent, attractive and articulate, she remains hobbled by the material. A recent 15-minute segment dealt with obsessive-compulsive disorders—such as the need continually to wash one's hands or check the gas. Basically, it was scaled-down coverage of a problem Oprah had devoted an hour to in November.

Sampling the various tabloids as I did turns up a lot of trivia repeated. One night I caught four programs covering the same non-story—Sean Penn, Madonna's "ex," apparently found a new sweetie—a beauty salon receptionist—and though they were apart since first meeting he telephoned her several times. One expects this gossip on *Entertainment Tonight*, but it's a feeble excuse for showing Madonna clips.

Traditional News Affected

The practices (and actual footage) from the tabloid shows are permeating traditional news shows. *A Current Affair* obtained a home videotape of Robert Chambers cavorting with scan-

tily-clad girls at the time of his trial in the "rough sex" murder of Jennifer Levin. Clips were used on a great many newscasts. Joel Steinberg, convicted of killing his six-year-old daughter in a nationally publicized abuse case, did not take the stand during his trial. But he was interviewed on *The Reporters* and *Inside Edition* and clips were picked up by other programs.

The blowing up of the van owned by the captain of the U.S. warship which mistakenly downed an Iranian airbus was re-enacted for the cameras of *Crime Stoppers*. The re-enacted blast was shown on national newscasts and in spots. Re-enactment was approved in the hope that seeing it on TV might yield leads to the terrorists. *Crime Stoppers* has been aired for 13 years and claims a conviction rate of 97%.

The audience involvement that characterizes tabloid formulas is also making its way into standard newscasts. *Eyewitness News* on ABC's New York flagship WABC-TV included a call-in poll on Steinberg's sentence (Was it too lenient, too strict, or fair?). This gave home viewers a chance to voice an opinion, saving the station the cost of a public opinion poll and having viewers pay the tolls.

Monopoly Ending

Geraldo Rivera sees the passing of the days when "ABC, NBC and CBS enjoyed a virtual monopoly on televised news and issues." In their glory days, the network news departments would not permit a news or documentary show produced on the outside to be aired on their lines. They had the responsibility for the news that was carried, and they would not allow "outside product."

Another change Rivera cites was Frost's 1977 interview with former President Nixon, aired across the country by an ad hoc network of local stations. Rivera calls his 1986 coverage of the opening of mobster Al Capone's vaults a "fatal blow to the networks' news monopoly." Admitting that the vaults' contents were disappointing, Rivera says the surprisingly high ratings "helped spawn a new news industry—the non-network syndicated special."

His company has produced specials on the Mafia, children in crisis, drug abuse, AIDS and sex, murder with Charles Manson, and satanism. They've been attracting stations and audiences—although some advertisers have been staying away from the more sensational or controversial subjects on the various "reality" shows.

Rivera's most recent special was *On Trial: Lee Harvey Oswald*. Aired on some 150 stations on Nov. 22 and 23, it included a good deal of riveting material. Five hours of this was reprocessed from a 16-hour "trial" originally done for cable. Key eye-witnesses, ballistic experts, pathologists, witnesses and acquaintances of Lee Harvey and Marina Oswald were interrogated before a Texas judge and a Dallas jury.

The "prosecutor" was Vincent Bugliosi, who prosecuted mass murderer Charles Manson, and the "defense attorney" was Gerry Spence, lawyer in the Karen Silkwood vs. Kerr-McGee case. Both used dramatic courtroom strategies and in their questioning and cross-examination brought out points that are still interesting after 25 years. Some new live segments were added, including Rivera's interviews with former Governor and Mrs. John Connally. Home viewers were invited to call in with their vote—innocent, guilty acting alone, or guilty acting with others. The last verdict got the big numbers. Most of the material was a repackaging of someone else's product, but put together in this way *On Trial* was entertaining if not definitive.

As a cross-promotion for the Oswald special, Rivera devoted a couple of his daily talk programs to the assassination. One witness on the talk segment was a gun expert. When the

question of how many bullets were fired came up, Rivera brought out a rifle like Oswald's. Rivera and the ballistics expert kiddingly pointed the gun—irresponsibly. As professionals, they should know that clowning with a weapon, even if only momentarily, is not fit behavior on TV with its large audience of impressionable viewers.

Free Speech Issues

There are some real issues to be discussed about the program on which skin heads and neo-nazis were included. Should bigots be given a forum for their views? Don't they have the right of free speech? Who is to decide who is permitted access to the mass media?

On the broadcast Rivera pointed out that the skin heads had been invited on a previous broadcast, but had been prevented from entering the studio by a group vehemently opposed to them. At the taping session which resulted in the chair-throwing, a rabbi and Roy Ennis of the Congress on Racial Equality were also present to answer the neo-nazi spokesmen. It was Innis' and a neo-Nazi's confrontation which sparked the chair hurling. And Rivera should have been wary of Innis who last fall had shoved Tawana Brawley advisor Rev. Sharpton to the floor in a shouting match on the Downey show.

Rivera defended his invitation to those arguing for racial superiority by declaring that their prejudice should be exposed—that "bright light makes the cockroaches run for cover."

After the melee the neo-nazis were evicted from the studio and removed from the area by the police. Tape of the removal was included in the actual broadcast. In the discussion which followed the rabbi stated that he feels the inclusion of racial supremacists tends to give weight to their views and to spread the poison.

The broadcast did shed some light on some aspects of prejudice. On balance, it probably did a little more good than bad. The roots of prejudice are deep and diverse and need to be addressed often and in many ways. Television and the media generally have to deal with it in all kinds of formats—including the talk shows.

'Combat Talk' Shows

If audience involvement is essential in the tabloids, it's equally vital in talk shows. Phil Donahue has noted that his show took off when he realized the studio audience was asking better questions than he was.

The new ingredient is confrontation. Roots of the belligerent broadcasts go back to Los Angeles in the 1960's and Joe Pyne's radio and syndicated television shows. An ex-Marine who would tell callers he disagreed with "Go gargle with razor blades!," Pyne was especially hostile to those he considered left of center.

Mayhem has become so much a part of confrontalk that Len Berman, of New York's Channel 4, quipped, "You go to a hockey game and a talk show breaks out."

The most outrageous of the blabbers is Morton Downey Jr., followed by an argumentative Geraldo Rivera. Oprah Winfrey has a man-or-woman-in-the-street point of view and offers a sympathetic ear to confess to. Sally Jessy Raphael goes more deeply into her subjects. Donahue is the most intellectual. (Although he'll don a scarlet gown for a show on cross-dressing or wear a rubber scalp for a piece on baldness, Donahue still is most issue-oriented.)

There's a great deal of verbal aggression on Downey's show plus movement and body language signifying conflict. As the confrontational level increased, Downey was allegedly attacked by a New York artist while "Art vs. Garbage" was being taped in March. According to Downey's suit, the artist jokingly wrapped

a telephone cord around Downey's neck, but the joke "went too far" and ended in "assault." An ashtray was dumped on Downey while he lay on the floor and paint was thrown at him but hit a cameraperson. Downey had the last word, however, and footage of the artist was scissored.

Downey has been sued by a guest charging he called her "a hooker," "a man-hating bitch," a "fat-breasted mouth" and "she has diseases." On one show Downey and a guest acted out the strangling of Jennifer Levin by Robert Chambers, using a pair of pink panties. Robert W. Pittman, president of Quantum Media which owns the series, described Downey's re-enactment in *The Wall Street Journal*: "He pulls off the panties and strangles her. It was great. . . . Television works best when you get to be a voyeur." (Sic.)

Downey fans the prejudices and pugilistic predilections of the audience. John O'Connor, critic of *The New York Times*, commented about a recent Downey donnybrook on rock and roll, "Prodding his already uninhibited audience into a frenzy, the host proceeded to act like a referee in a barroom brawl."

O'Connor included a historic quotation: "If we are forced, at every hour, to watch or listen to horrible events, this constant stream of ghastly impressions will deprive even the most delicate among us of all respect for humanity."

The author was Cicero, writing around 80 B.C.

The impact of raucous Mort is such that he and his combative format are featured in a series of auto dealer commercials. One frantic spot spotlights Downey defying a customer to guess the price of a car. "You're not gonna burn me!" the customer declares, and Downey locks heads with him and shouts "You're burned!" to hammer home the car's low cost.

Downey's tone was sweeter in a letter sent to stations in March of this year. He promised to be less abusive to guests and to eliminate "excessively harsh language across the board," while still keeping his program confrontational. He added that he'll strive for a broader base in the studio audience. Probably inspiring the "kinder, gentler" attitude were a decline in Downey's ratings, new competition from other talk shows, criticism from station managers and resistance from advertisers.

The need for producer sensitivity to the effects of progran content was pointed up by Oprah's May 1 hour on the Mexican cult murders. A woman guest, identified only by pseudonym and described at the show's opening as being under longterm psychiatric treatment for multiple personality disorder, said she participated with Jews in ritual killings of children.

Hundreds of protest calls complained that Oprah didn't effectively challenge the woman. Rabbi David Saperstein critized the show's "insensitive manipulation of this woman, who is clearly mentally ill, in a manner which can only inflame the basest prejudices of ignorant people."

"Freedom has to be married to responsibility," declared Arthur Kropp, head of People for the American Way. While not attacking talk shows' probing controversal questions, he stressed, "When these programs get into these issues, they've got to be careful . . . [Oprah's producers] weren't prepared enough."

More than ever, producers have to be aware of the dangers of presenting unstable guests, distorted and unchallenged views of reality, in a medium which is subject to misinterpretation—if only because some viewers only see part of the program.

What They Talk About

To quantify the kinds of topics the talk shows cover, I looked at the subjects of four hosts—Geraldo, Downey, Oprah and Donahue—during the fourth

TALK SHOW SUBJECTS BY CATEGORY
(Percentage of Programs)

Category	Geraldo	Downey	Donahue	Oprah	All Four
Social Relations	25%	56%	41%	45%	41%
Sex	40%	4%	17%	16%	20%
Celebrity	14%	4%	18%	18%	14%
Politics	4%	15%	9%	6%	9%
Bizarre	13%	13%	2%	4%	7%
Health/Beauty	2%	4%	11%	12%	7%
Sports	2%	5%	2%	—	2%

(Based on 203 programs broadcast October–December, 1988)

quarter of 1988 and grouped them by category. Classification is never wholly satisfactory; nevertheless, the 200-odd (and many were really odd!) broadcasts could fit into seven groups.

The biggest—with 41% of the broadcasts—was social relations and problems. Donahue's discussion of black executives leaving white-led corporations was one of the more sociological. Sexual subjects were second, accounting for one-fifth of the broadcasts, such as Geraldo's hour on living out sexual fantasies, or Oprah's on flirtatious husbands.

On average, every seventh show featured a celebrity. Although the period covered included the election campaign, fewer than one in ten of the shows spotlighted politics. However, Michael and Kitty Dukakis were on two of Donahue's, and Downey devoted programs to the FBI, CIA and Nazi war criminals, among other political themes.

Bizarre subjects were featured on 7% of the shows, such as Geraldo's on Satanism, Downey's on Witches, Oprah's on Haunted Houses and Donahue's on Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling. Another 7% was devoted to health, beauty and fashion, although the topic often was offbeat, such as transsexuals who regretted having changed their sex. Sports was highlighted on just 2% of the broadcasts, reflecting the concentration of women in the Geraldo-Donahue-Oprah audience.

All in all, the subjects were esoteric enough to justify a recent satiric item in *TV Guide*: "Topic for Phil, Oprah, Sally, Regis, Geraldo and Downey Jr.—Resortwear for impotent satanic liposuction cultists who lost 100 pounds and found midlife careers as psychic vigilantes while molesting lousy, stupid, neo-Nazi transsexual evangelists."

Why People Watch

Renee Hobbs, a communications professor at Babson College, explains, "There are intimate things we often won't talk about face-to-face—our sexual lives, our problems with intimacy, our marital relationships. On television, one can satisfy the prurient interest without having the embarrassment of an actual interaction."

Viewers seem to like the expression of feelings and emotions. The shows give them the sense that, instead of being talked at, they are interacting with the medium. Confrontalk shows contrast with the often cool and abstruse crosstalk of many TV panel discussions. The danger of the boisterous Downey show, cautions Prof. Hobbs, is that people will imitate the shouting matches in real life: "That kind of show may suggest implicitly that that form of interaction is appropriate."

The brash arrogance of confrontalk programs seems to reflect a general decline in norms of behavior. *The New York Times* cited evidence with a front page story headlined "It Was a Year When Civility Really Took It on the Chin" and reported that nastiness had "come into its own and become a commodity."

Nastiness Index Rising

Some of the boorishness cited was in the political arena, including the "Read my lips" line of President Bush, negative TV spots and Home Rulette, a Washington board game insulting women, blacks, homosexuals and the homeless.

Rudeness seems on the rise. The increase in society's hostility is noted in the book *The Rage Within*, by Dr. Willard Gaylin, a psychoanalyst who describes "a rise of rampant individualism." In part he blames the media. Dr. Gaylin mentions the FCC's deregulation of radio which fostered "shock radio," and the free-for-all scramble for television ratings.

Todd Gitlin, a sociologist at the University of California, suggests that television serves as a "funhouse mirror" which exaggerates still further whatever is already extreme in the culture. Whether coarseness in the media causes or reflects societal coarseness, or whether they mutually influence each other, currently there's a bull market for nastiness.

Feeding Time at Colosseum

"Trash" was a hot topic at the National Assn. of Television Program Executives convention this year. Not only were record numbers of squawk programs offered for sale, but a panel including Downey, Povich, Sally Jessy's producer and others explored the issues raised by confrontational shows. At the session's end, a voice vote on whether the attendees consider them boon or bane produced an even split.

Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney studios, devoted a major part of his NATPE keynote speech to the shows. He sees the phenomenon as part of the American character and quoted de Tocqueville on our newspapers of 150 years ago which were vehement, bold and stirred passions. But he cautioned, "Unless this trend is stopped, it will resemble feeding time at the Colosseum. Shock demands more shock, but ultimately the viewers will lose interest, because how far can you go?"

The crop of new syndicated shows presented at NATPE was criticized as the worst in television history by a leading station representative. Not only the worst, but in some ways "the most offensive," reported program reviewers from the HRP rep firm, claiming that national advertisers would spend little on the tabloid shows. National advertisers are more sensitive than local sponsors to the pressures of special interest groups.

Call it what you will, the "reality" genre is still growing—'89–90's new talk shows include Joan Rivers' and Joan Lunden's; and new tabloids include *Crimewatch Tonight, Tabloid* and *Inside Story*. But due to the backlash against "trash" from advertisers and critics, MCA scratched its *$Reward$*.

The trend to trash poses serious problems. We professionals voice concern over lapses of taste, but also question recent boycott threats by some viewers and cancellations by advertisers. Although the tabloid and talk shows are mainly syndicated programs, they have contributed to the protests that the medium overall is getting too dirty and gritty. So far the visible targets have been network entertainment shows like *Married . . . with Children, Saturday Night Live* and (now cancelled) *HeartBeat*. But the protesters will soon aim at news and opinion programs.

I'm revolted by Downey's telling a

guest "Suck my armpit!" and evicting him from the show. I understand the dismay of those who object to Rivera's allowing neo-Nazis a forum. But the antidote to repellent speech should be *more speech*—viewers are smart enough to judge for themselves, if they've been exposed to the facts and a broad range of opinion.

Admittedly, the tabloid shows have aired trash, invaded privacy, pandered to the lure of the lurid. Yet, in their search for emotional impact, they have sometimes exposed corruption.

In any case, it is more important than ever before for all broadcasters to exercise responsibility and to maintain standards. As Barbara Grizzuti Harrison warned in a recent article in *The New York Times Magazine*, "Since the proliferation of trash-television programs, there has been an undertone of hysteria, an edge of danger, to daytime talk-TV; the potential for mischief is realized."

Some Actions Are Needed

Trash and the brouhaha over it pose dangers to television's long-range welfare, and I feel several things are needed:

- More industry forums where peers can both speak out against lapses of taste and recognize service to the public.
- Recognition that ethics is a vital part of the broadcaster's responsibiltiy to the audience and important to the medium's health.
- Exploring ways for TV to bring more meaningful news to the public, and present it more interestingly.
- Network standards and practices departments should be strengthened. There should be more outreach by broadcasters to viewer and advocacy groups, on an interactive basis, so viewers understand the complexity of demands made on broadcasters, and the creative community is made more sensitive to the range of viewer concerns.
- At local stations, the function of the community affairs director should be raised to a higher and more responsive level.
- Education is needed, by the public within the industry, on the full meaning of the First Amendment. Freedom of speech and of the press is, unfortunately, being taken for granted. People fail to realize that without those freedoms they might not know of oil spills, official corruption, or other threats to our health and welfare.

Viewers should learn the dangers of censorship coming from zealots who would squeeze television's horizons to their own narrow conception of what's fit for us to see and hear.

In a pluralistic society, freedom of speech always involves thorny questions. The trash programs have at least raised questions, issues, debate—and, hopefully, re-thinking that may eventually lead to a medium with more diversity, a broader range of subjects, access to more points of view. And, most importantly, a heightened sense of responsibility by producers, writers and performers. ■

Bert Briller, media consultant, was vice-president for sales development at ABC, executive editor of the Television Information Office and reporter/critic for *Variety*. Currently he is writing and speaking on communications and society. He is completing a book on the charismatic characters he has worked with in radio, television, newspapers and advertising.

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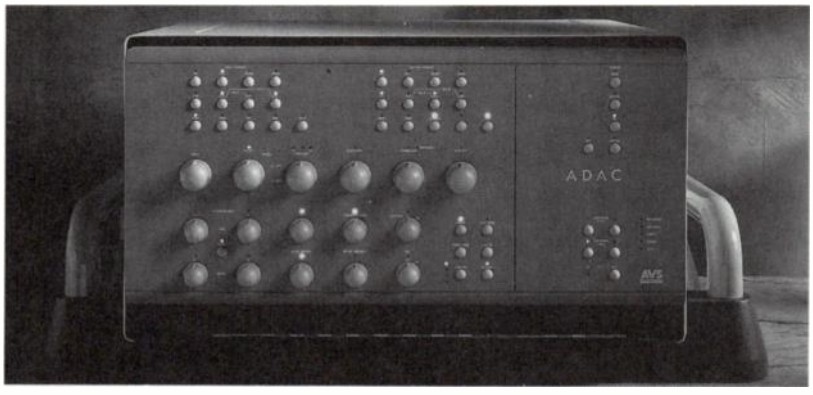

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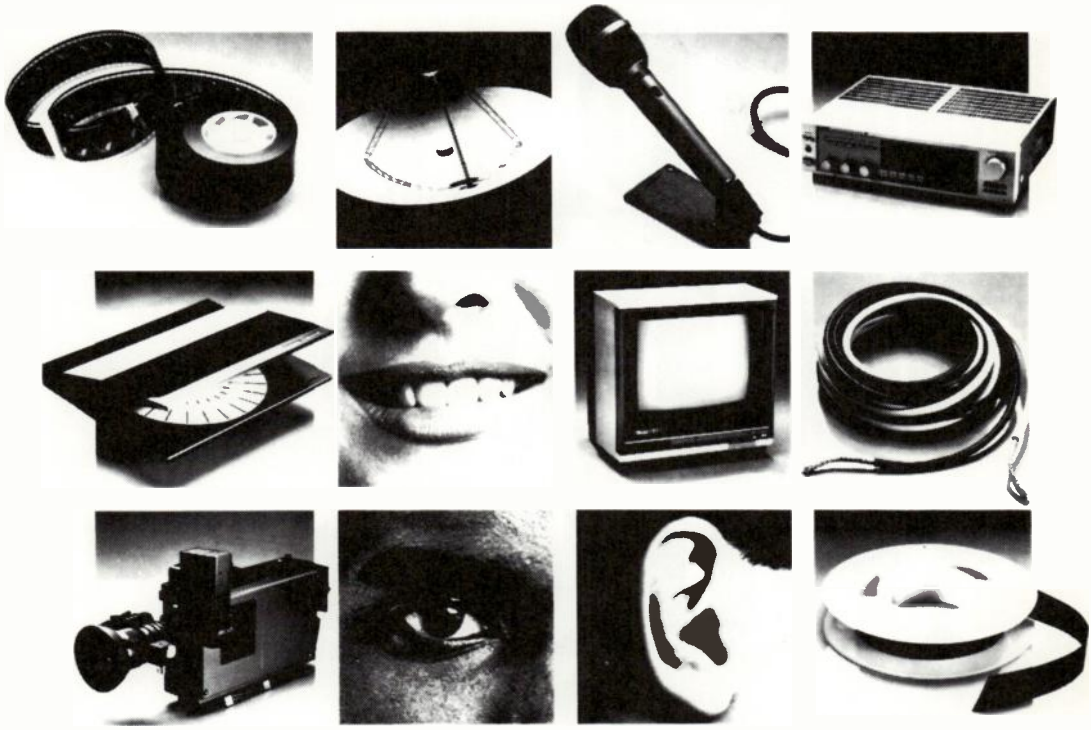

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THE OZ EFFECT

A journalist who has covered national compaigns since Eisenhower and Stevenson reports critically on the influence media wizards and timid broadcasters are having on the democratic process. He has some ideas for change.

BY JERRY M. LANDAY

We may not be totally sure yet whether George Bush knows how to govern—indeed, who George Bush really is or what he thinks. We do know that when it comes to making Americans see the world through Bush-colored glasses, harnessing the hidden tides of mass mind, manipulating the symbols and images that made "big mo" go, our new President is a virtuoso in the art of conjuring consent.

Reflecting on reality and appearance in the Bush campaign, and the abject capituation of Evening Newism to it, I recalled a vivid image.

It was of the climactic scene in the movie classic *Wizard of Oz*. After a frightful pilgrimage, Dorothy and her companions are ushered into the emerald audience chamber of Oz. Thoroughly subdued by their surroundings, they petition the unseen Wizard for a real heart, a brain, courage, and a free ride home to Kansas. They cower before a multi-image spectacle evocative of de Mille in the desert making mighty symbols like the Old Testament of God—great gouts of flame, towering pillars of smoke, a phantasmagoric visage, ostensibly Oz himself, vanishing and reappearing amid the audio-visual hullaballoo.

Suddenly, the scraggly terrier Toto follows his nose, whips aside some drapes, and, there, the fraud is revealed. The *son et lumiere* spectacle is not the work of a mighty wizard at all, but a charlatan—a lovable rogue of a home-remedy salesman, played by Frank Morgan, whose manipulable wheels, levers, and buttons—hot buttons, if you will—conceal his quintessential wimphood and make his petitioners quiver and quake.

Increasingly, over the past three decades, the Oz Effect has become the way many of those who would be President try to persuade glitz-besotted Americans to make them the Chosen.

In its most recent and vivid expression, a man some had once perceived as a wimp exploited psuedo-issues and manipulated showy symbols involving the furlough of a black murderer, the right to bear arms and have abortions, flag-pledges, ACLU membership and lurking extremism to evoke American tribal fears about race, communism and failure. It was a campaign of nattering negativism that was wildly off the rails. But it somehow convinced a majority of those who voted that here was *no* wimp. Behind the smoke and mirrors, the shimmering images and shadowy illusions was George Bush, the media Wizard—the Hercules of political hype, the Samson of the presidential "sell."

It was the culmination of the Rosser Reeves approach to presidential campaigning. Reeves, a president of the Ted Bates Agency who convinced Dwight Eisenhower to be the first to make his presidential pitches in hard-

sell television spots, had likened the voter to a consumer. Reeves said, "I think of a man in a voting both who hesitates between two levers as if he were pausing between competing tubes of tooth paste in a drugstore. The brand that has made the highest penetration on his brain will win his choice."

The successful national politician is a theatrical impressario. His inner councils are no longer staffed by men and women of ideas but media illusionists.

In Reeves' cynical view, the candidate was no less a dehumanized blob than the voter—a piece of packaged goods on a supermarket shelf. What was inside the can mattered less than the fizzy glitz on the label.

The Reeves School has now blossomed into full maturity. The voter is perceived not as a freethinking citizen but an object of manipulation. A significant segment of the voting public has embraced the role. And television news has become a co-conspirator.

We are become an electorate of cowardly lions, rusty woodsmen and spineless scarecrows who increasingly yearn to "let George do it." Well, we have finally got us George.

The national candidates, advised by media illusionists who traffic in behavior modification, tracking polls, focus groups, on-line physiological testing of pulses, sweat glands and pupil dilation, have, in the words of communications scholar James Carey of the University of Illinois, fed "back to us whatever their advisors tell them we want to hear." The tube no longer reports on the political show. The tube *is* the political show—electric theatre on the air.

Out on the old campaign stump, the voter and politician could catch the sight and scent of each other, press real flesh, and decide whether they might yet abide one another. Now, the process is remote, impersonal.

The successful national politician is a theatrical impressario. He no longer deals in the politics of leadership and vision but the politics of marketing. His inner councils, his brain trust, are no longer staffed by men and women of ideas, but media illusionists. The media consultant has not only become the most highly visible player. He has been institutionalized within the apparatus of politics and governance and made a member of the praetorian guard.

It was the "Bob Dole straddles" television campaign which won the New Hampshire primary for George Bush. It was the "Mike Dukakis is a softy and a commsymp" campaign which won him the presidency.

Dan Quayle was a media marketing creation, the political product of the Bush consultants, Robert Teeter and Roger Ailes. They drew up a set of packaging criteria, based solely on age, looks, geography, and ideological hue. Politics, competence, the ability to govern had nothing to do with it.

There was nothing secretive about it. The consultants were brazen and shameless in proclaiming the advent of mediacratic politics. They even publicly forecast on television and in print the kind of George Bush you were going to see in the next television debate or the next phase of the campaign. He would be an agreeable Bush, or a fighting Bush, a tough Bush or a likeable Bush. And Bush would comply.

The "spin" seemed to be that the principal client was obediently playing the roles in which his media men had cast him. In retrospect, it seems clear that they were being paid, in part, to take the rap. In most cases, the client

was not dancing to the consultants' tunes. It was George Bush himself who was making the music.

This is not the first time, of course, that the Munchkins of America have been lured down the Yellow Brick Road by the wizardy of opinion-molding.

Opponents labeled John Adams a lover of the English crown and an enemy of liberty. Thomas Jefferson was dubbed an atheist and coward. Abraham Lincoln was ridiculed as an awkward "rail-splitting buffoon." Opposition newspapers jubilantly circulated disclosures that Grover Cleveland had fathererd a son out of wedlock. Interestingly, the steam went out of the issue when Cleveland admitted it was so.

Media manipulation of press and the electorate on a large scale—as a formal fixture of presidential promotability and power—began during the Eisenhower years. The battery of communications specialists serving Ike was spearheaded by his brilliant, indefatiguable press secretary Jim Hagerty. I recall it was Hagerty who, in the role of acting President, staged such a revel of official comings and goings while Ike was recoving from a serious heart attack in Denver that the clear implication of the stories we reporters there filed was not only that Ike was fit to run for a second term, but that the massive coronary had in some miraculous way made him even fitter.

Armed by Lou Harris with private polling stats showing that he would safely win the crucial West Virginia Primary in 1960, John F. Kennedy tried to convince us that he expected to lose big, the better to magnify the victory over Hubert Humphrey when the votes were counted.

What is troubling in our time is how far the mediacritizing process has come, the degree to which television has detached politics from reality and become the main stage, the extent to which the camera as *recorder* of the events has replaced television journalist as the *reporter* of events, the degree to which those events are now "visualized," staged for recording purposes by the producers of the generic evening news, and the multiplier-effect which television adds to all this.

The mediacritizing of politics has dehumanized the system. It has detached the citizen from the political process. The underwhelmed voter has either permitted himself to undergo the mind-bending manipulation of the mediacrats or opt out in disgust. And critical journalism, which might provide an alternative eye for citizens in search of the truth, has become complictious in the process.

The 1988 campaign saw a precipitous decline in the vigor of television news, characterized by the willingness of most news mangers and practitioners to cede their editorial prerogatives to the mediacrats.

What James Carey has labelled the "degradation of political discourse" has dangerously undermined the delicate citizen-driven, if establishment-guided, political system by which we choose our leaders.

As Kenneth Boulding, former president of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, has said, "A world of unseen dictatorship is conceivable, still using the forms of democratic government."

The fact that only half of those eligible to vote did so in 1988 has placed a leader in the White House who is the choice of a minority of a near-minority. Boulding's concern is not so wild a nightmare as it might seem.

The tube is where it is happening. And the tube is where mediacratic degradation can be reversed. That's

why the responsibility of television journalism to penetrate and dispel the Oz Effect has never been greater, or its exercise more urgent.

But the 1988 campaign saw a precipitous decline in the vigor of television news, characterized by the willingness of most news managers and practitioners to cede their editorial prerogatives to the mediacrats; most particularly, the Bush team. Commercial electronic journalism is now an art of easy virtue. Television, like the exponents of the oldest profession, has become an all-too-willing accomplice of those who would have their way with it.

By his own later admission, Roger Ailes, the consultant who managed George Bush's television strategy, made attack, and the emphasis on visual elements and settings the two centerpieces of his strategy. That, he said, is what the television producers wanted.

"If the media want to cut down on negativism, they should stop putting it on the top of the television news every night," Ailes was quoted as saying. "I can't tell you how many calls I got from reporters egging me on."

One doubts that Ailes required much "egging." As he suggests, at the heart of the problem is the extent to which journalistic institutions consciously allowed themselves to be manipulated by the President's media team.

Under the pretext of "objective" reporting, television journalism in particular has forsworn aggressive reportage. Objectivity has all too often become a trade buzz word among media managers and their corporate bosses; it really means controversy-avoidance.

But, as *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker complains, journalism has put itself in "paper chains" by eschewing the rightful work of reportage—solid inquiry, interpretation and investigation.

Reportage all too often produces discomfitting revelation and insight, not hokey pictures for evening news producers. It removes power over the news product from the media consultant and restores it to the responsible journalist. It labels false claims for what they are. But revelatory and interpretative subject matter makes politicians angry, which in turn tends to give stomach aches to broadcasting tycoons and corporate sponsors, and the advertising industries which absorb the complaints of the political managers who cry foul.

The difference between covering and reporting is a vital one. Reportage is active, not passive. It does not relay raw, unevaluated propaganda. It examines content, investigates claims, questions excesses, labels innuendo for what it is, and without any ideological axes to grind, exposes falsehood and deceit. While it does not call a knave a knave, the job of journalism is to give its audience the opportunity to do so by simply informing voters of what is really going on. In the arena of accountability, shame imposes discipline and restraint upon rascals.

In the absence of vigorous reportage, we are left with the superficial trappings of a journalistic coverage: sound bites, visuals, polls.

But what television now does is crypto-reporting. Former CBS News correspondent Marvin Kalb complains of a press that "has become so preoccupied with polls that it has neglected the virtues of old-fashioned legwork." Polling has become the surrogate for aggressive political reportage; it's the "safe sex" of electronic journalism.

Polling results may upset those on the downside of the numbers, but they get no one angry at the messenger.

That's why the commercial television industry clings obsessively to its polling excesses. It can be seen to be "covering" the story, feeling safe rather than sorry.

By simply yanking reporters out of their seats on the candidates press plane and assigning them to engage in shirtsleeves journalism, the producers and their administrators could reinvigorate the profession, and the democratic process. The camera crews and the producers could continue jethopping with the candidates, remaining at their station on "assassination watch" and shooting the visual circuses staged by the consultants, while the reporters air the news.

As it was, the medium was ripe for exploitation in 1988. In the absence of vigorous reportage, we were left with rampant mediacracy, and the superficial trappings of a journalistic coverage: sound bites, visuals, polls. The strategy of the media men was simple—overwhelm the camera with visuals, while keeping the candidate out of range of the captive press gallery to avoid stepping on his own message. Bush, of course, was the adept in this art.

In a post-election issue of the *New Yorker*, one of the most competent of political reporters, Elizabeth Drew, summarized the overall campaign performance of the broadcast press, concluding that its coverage "slipped some notches. The sound bites were shorter than before, and even greater emphasis was placed on the visual impact of what the candidate was doing and the setting in which he was doing it, and even less on what he was saying."

Drew commented on the superficiality of the coverage, the fascination of the broadcast press for the gaffes, attacks, and photo ops.

She quoted an aide to one of the campaigns as saying that if an event "didn't have a good visual the television people covering it would consider that bad campaigning, or even wouldn't cover it." Some television reporters and producers took it upon themselves to suggest better lighting or a different setting; with a speech laying out a program, they would demand that the program be boiled down to four points with four bullets, and say that otherwise they wouldn't be able to put it on the air. A good sound bite was required—to be pointed out to the reporters and producers in advance" to ensure its airing.

Four weeks before the election, the problem was noted by some politicians themselves—Congressmen Charles E. Schumer of New York, George Miller of California, Marty Russo of Illinois and Leon E. Panetta of California.

In a letter to the networks, they wrote: "Traditionally, journalists have been able to pursue their work and create a public dialogue with candidates, thereby forcing an honest give-and-take on important issues. Recently, however, substantive, thoughtful interaction between candidate and the public, including the media, has become an endangered species. It is only the assurance that the networks will provide daily coverage of campaign events, no matter how superficial or lacking in news content, that allows current campaign practices to continue."

The congressmen should note that networks do not alone bear the onus. Television station news operations are lured by the "glamour" of a candidate's brief availability at airport stops. Their superficial candid-camera coverage, the meatball questions so often lobbed by local reporters and anchors, the certainty of local air play regardless of news value, comprise one of the cynical jokes of the political trade.

Michael Dukakis aided and abetted the Oz Effect, less as an exploiter than as a willing victim. After a Democratic convention doomed by its docility and

with the foregone nomination safely in hand, Dukakis abandoned Emerald City to his opponent. He was a seeker after the presidency who clearly didn't want the job.

"The succession of American presidents from George Washington to George Bush," James Carey writes, "hardly gives one confidence in the law of evolution."

Negative campaigning, the smear, the loaded symbol have been exploited to a degree and with an intensity never before seen in national politics. The game of power-pursuit has become the endgame—without vision or purpose. And the networks remain "petrified," as William Boot writes in *The Columbia Journalism Review*, "at the idea of using their maximum power to improve electioneering."

The consequences are not insignificant. Our political life has been inexorably affected. Popular trust in the presidency, in the press, in television—most disturbingly, in ourselves—has been further eroded.

If the 1988 campaign was the end of the beginning, the new spin could, if we permit it, signal the beginning of the end.

To fully understand the chilling consequences of ceding media control to politicians who understand the power of media, we can benefit from an intensive review of Hitler's and Goebbels' approach to the engineering of consent. They were masters of innuendo, of the catch-phrase, of exploiting the hateful thought too repugnant to be uttered. As William Shirer notes in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, the media—with particular emphasis on radio and movies—"were quickly harnessed to service" their propaganda machine. There was no accountability. The answers were supplied along with the questions.

Of his experience as a correspondent in pre-war Germany, Shirer wrote, "it was surprising and sometimes consternating to find that notwithstanding the opportunities I had to learn the facts . . . a steady diet . . . of falisifications and distortions made a certain impression on one's mind and often misled it . . . The facts of life had become what Hitler and Goebbels, with their cynical regard for the truth, said they were."

There is reason for concern here—now. Many suggestions have been offered about ways of reversing the "degradation of democratic discourse" in the United States. They range from extending broadcast debates in frequency and length to free air time to curtailing polls, primaries and the campaign season itself. These ideas have merit.

A number of energetic things must be done. One is the underwriting and encouragement of a more vigorous electronic press, courageous enough to embrace its role as a pillar of the democratic process.

But they do not deal with the underlying issue, what Drew terms this "era of declining standards," together with the new and looming television presence in our political life, and the politician's runaway hunger for power and control without vision, which now seems to justify any and all means of media abuse.

Kevin Phillips, the Republican political observer, touches on the solution when he calls for "a stricter approach to candidate debates and campaign ethics, and maybe some new regulations on political advertising."

A number of energetic things need to be done. One is the underwriting and encouragement of a more vigorous electronic press courageous enough to embrace its role as a pillar of the democratic process. By *report-*

ing on politics rather than merely covering the media circuses the politicians stage, journalists can keep candidates accountable and responsible.

If commercial broadcasting is unwilling to patronize this kind of journalism, communications entrepreneurs who combine admiration of profit with a sense of social purpose ought to consider creating a new system of electronic news and information distribution, such as a subscriber-based pay-cable or DBS service freed from advertising and corporate pressures as well as the feebleness of an unprogressive and "petrified" broadcasting industry.

Serious thought ought to be given to the re-establishment of the old nonpartisan, nonpolitical National News Council once headed by former CBS News president Richard Salant. It was he who authored and implemented the codes which governed the practices of the news organization he led so competently. A major role for the council in its new dress would be that of campaign watchdog.

It would establish news standards for national media campaigns. It would issue running, critical evaluations during the course of the campaigns on adherence to those standards, the behavior of the candidates, their media praetors, and on journalistic coverage of the campaign.

These reports would be published prominently by the news media, with full attribution to the Council as the source, reports which would carry their own built-in compulsions and incentives for sensible, ethical, responsible conduct. The media could bravely give the reports wide public play, without fear of alienating the power constituencies to which they defer.

The old council was doomed by the refusal of such powerful papers as *The New York Times* to publish its findings. The excesses of '88 might well have convinced the newspaper industry to rectify the errors of its own indulgent ways, and to contribute to a healthier brand of American politics, instead of simply carping about it.

The advertising industry would be wise to consider setting up a counterpart panel of watchdogs to monitor campaign excesses in political spot ads and in print.

Exposure would reveal slander, distortion, innuendo and untruth for what they are, diminishing their power, and embarrassing politicians into compliance with accepted moral and ethical norms, reluctant though they and the praetors might be to behave. If we can now market the products we ingest under the rubric of truth-in-packaging—listing ingredients with no artificial anything, eliminating harmful additives and adulterants,—it is not unreasonable to expect the marketers of politics to embrace similar standards.

The Oz Effect was wonderful as movie amusement. But it is hardly wonderful in advancing the art of politics or governance in this democracy. If low voter-participation and collapsing public esteem for our once-admired political information systems are not seen as both a grave problem and great opportunity for revitalization, then we are without shame, and will deserve what we get.

As Dorothy told Toto, "We're not in Kansas any more." ■

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POLITICAL ACCESS IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES

The American way is not the only way, according to this survey of how fourteen different nations use the broadcast media in election campaigns.

BY PAUL B. COMSTOCK

American presidential campaigns have been plagued by spots that do not inform, "debates" that do not enlighten, and sound bites that do not clarify. As a result many thoughtful people—broadcasters, journalists, political scientists and others—felt a touch of civic malaise in 1988. Occasionally one reads that "other democratic countries" mandate free broadcast time and prohibit political advertising. The fact is that some do and some do not.

Can the United States learn from the experience of other countries? Can any of their institutions serve as guidelines to improve American broadcasting? An informed electorate is of the essence of self government and access to television is a vital ingredient. Subsidiary issues like equal time, free time, advertising rates, spending limits, campaign length, number of spots, "debates," and "blackouts," all go to the main issue of access.

This article summarizes the results of a survey of political broadcasting practices in fourteen democratic countries in North America, Asia, and Europe. Authoritarian countries were not included. Some conclusions are drawn and possible avenues for improvement are suggested.

In contrast with social institutions in some other countries political broadcasting in the United States has developed in a free enterprise environment under a constitutional guarantee of free speech. A major restraint has been the equal opportunities provision of the communications law, first enacted in 1927. The statute was long believed to require equal time for even minor candidates in all formats. Enactment by Congress in 1959 of exemptions for bona fide "news events" and news interviews, coupled with the Aspen Institute ruling by the FCC in 1975, has essentially freed joint appearances and interviews of seriously contending candidates from the requirement.

Expenditures for political broadcasting in the United States have risen greatly as television has become the most important means of communicating with voters. The Bush and Dukakis campaigns are reported to have spent more than $100 million each. Broadcasting was probably the largest single item. Demands were heard again for compulsory free broadcast time. Several congressional candidates from both major parties proposed legislation in 1988 to require

broadcasters to sell non-preemptible time at preemptible rates under the "lowest unit rate" provision of the law. No action was taken by Congress on the proposals.

Over the years many American broadcasters with a strong commitment to public service have offered their facilities for debates and other programs for discussion of the issues. In vain some television pioneers sought to induce candidates to forego short political spots in favor of longer personal appearances. The opposite has been the trend.

A study conducted in 1988 for the Twentieth Century Fund by former member of Congress and presidential candidate John Anderson, recommended, among other things, a plan to virtually guarantee that debates between major presidential candidates would take place. With at least some payment for the broadcast time all networks would be required to carry the debates simultaneously. Candidates would be obliged to participate or lose federal campaign funding. The plan would be administered by a "National Endowment for Presidential Debates" which might, if implemented, help eliminate the kind of impasse over control which led to withdrawal by the League of Women Voters from sponsorship in the midst of the 1988 debates.

While the result of the Twentieth Century Fund plan appears to be desirable, its constraints upon candidates, broadcasters, and viewing public appear to be more in keeping with Plato's philosopher kings than contemporary American politicians.

CANADA

Political broadcasting on stations served by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation-Radio Canada (CBC-RC), the government-sponsored system, as well as on the commercial stations, is governed by the Broadcasting Act of 1967-1968, the Television Broadcasting Regulations of 1987, and the Canada Elections Act. The laws, regulations, and various policy pronouncements were clarified in a major statement issued by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission in 1988.

Broadcast licensees are required during the election campaign to allocate time at normal rates for programs, advertisements, and announcements of a partisan political character on an "equitable basis" to all accredited parties and candidates. Political advertising is confined to the 28 days preceding the election. The licensee is vested by the Commission with the "widest possible responsibility" for achieving fair treatment of candidates, parties, and issues.

The Elections Act specifically requires all stations to make available for candidates and parties six and one-half hours of prime time at normal rates during the 28-day campaign period and sets out the factors to be applied in allocating paid and free time to registered parties in federal elections. These are the percentage of the seats in parliament held by each of the parties, the percentage of the vote received at the previous general election, and the percentage of the candidates endorsed by each of the parties at the previous election.

The law also requires all licensees to provide some free time, but it does not specify the amount. The Commission has ruled that, once a licensee chooses to give free time, it must allocate some free time to all of the contending parties.

"Equitable Treatment" applies to all aspects of political broadcasting, including the charges for paid time. The term has been interpreted to mean that all candidates for an office should be allocated a reasonable, although not necessarily an equal, amount of time. A blackout is imposed on political advertising in elections for members of the legislatures of the provinces and

the councils of the municipalities on the day before the election and on election day. The Commission has recommended that the law be amended to exempt news and public affairs programs from the blackout.

If a broadcaster chooses to air a so-called debate, all parties and candidates contending for the office must be accommodated even if more than one program must be broadcast. Broadcasters have no obligation to compensate candidates who announce later for the time previously afforded to the other candidates.

During the election period the licensee must remove on-air personalities if they are candidates for public office. Beginning in 1988 an offer of similar on-air opportunities to the candidate's opponents is no longer an option.

When television broadcasting began in Canada, parties and candidates were not allowed to purchase time at all. Gradually the prohibition eroded in response to popular demand. Today the parties and candidates have the option of buying time. For several years registered parties were reimbursed by the federal treasury for one-half of the cost of their commercial broadcasts.

The practice of reimbursement was abandoned in 1963 because it encouraged the parties to spend "fifty-cent dollars" on broadcast advertising in contrast with unreimbursed expenditures for other purposes. Canada has sought to limit campaign expenditures by prohibiting political action committees from purchasing media time, but the constitutionality of the prohibition has been challenged.

Canada also has a fairness doctrine which is grounded in the Broadcasting Act. In various policy statements the Commission has ruled that broadcasters have an obligation to devote a reasonable amount of air time to the coverage of controversial issues and should provide an opportunity for the presentation of differing points of view.

In the 1988 Canadian election broadcasters made time available for debates among the leaders of the three major parties: Prime Minister Brian Mulroney for the Progressive Conservatives, former prime minister John Turner for the Liberal Party, and Edward Broadbent for the New Democrats. The most dramatic encounter took place in a three-hour broadcast on October 26, 1988 in an Ottawa studio; the confrontation was so heated that the two candidates almost came to blows.

In contrast with the United States ground rules for the Bush-Dukakis debates, the Canadian rules permitted participants to argue directly with each other and did not set limits on the length of response. The main issue and indeed the basis for the election itself was the free trade agreement with the United States.

At one point Mr. Turner charged that Mr. Mulroney had "sold us out." Angrily pointing his finger at his opponent, Mr. Mulroney interrupted, "you do not have a monopoly on patriotism, and I resent the fact that you imply that only you are a Canadian . . ."

Subsequent opinion polls showed that the challenger, Mr. Turner, had "won" the debate as well as the support of additional voters. These joint appearances are deemed to be very important for the outcome of Canadian elections. In the previous election in 1984 when the roles were reversed, Mr. Mulroney had used the debates in a sharp encounter with Mr. Turner to help defeat him in the ensuing election. Unlike the earlier election, however, the incumbent Mr. Mulroney won reelection in 1988.

Whether the Canadian format made the debates more meaningful in addressing important matters is questionable. The free trade agreement was already in contention. In addition the two challenging parties had squared off between themselves on the issue of participation in NATO. Some observers have suggested that the contest between the two both on the NATO

question and on the contest for the number two position in Parliament possibly weakened their attack on the incumbent party.

Although temporarily overshadowed by the dramatic 1988 debates, the trend in Canadian campaigns appears to be towards greater centralization, less use of free broadcast time, more paid advertising, television spots, sophisticated use of news reports, and larger campaign expenditures.

MEXICO

Political parties are guaranteed a permanent right of access by the Mexican Constitution to both the commercial and non-commercial stations.

Broadcasting stations are required by both the broadcasting law and the tax law to give time to the federal government as follows: thirty minutes per day for government public service announcements, network facilities as needed for delivery of messages deemed important by the Office of the President (in addition to emergency bulletins), and 12½% of total daily time for purposes of government programming. Stations may either offer the time, known as "fiscal time," or pay a 25% tax on gross revenues. It need not be prime time and cannot be accumulated. Fortunately for both broadcasters and viewing public the government uses less than half of the potential three and one-half hours per day.

The Federal Law Concerning Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (LFOPPE), the codes, statutes and regulations are taken together to achieve the following results: Throughout the year all political parties enjoy the use of at least fifteen minutes per month of network television time and additional regional time of not more than half the amount of national time—all free of charge. The Federal Election Commission as well as the Federal Radio Broadcasting Commission can request an increase in the amount of free time as well as the frequency of transmissions. The Federal Electoral Code also provides that the political parties have the right, in addition to their regular monthly time, to participate in a special program twice each month to be coordinated by the Radio Broadcasting Commission.

After the first of March of an election year, the Federal Election Commission, which is the highest authority in the matter, is required to order the Radio Broadcasting Commission to increase the frequency of political broadcasts. In recent years as many as eight parties have been certified to be on the ballot.

Representatives designated by each party meet with the Federal Election Commission and the Radio Broadcasting Commission and these agencies and party representatives work out the dates, channels, stations, and times for campaign broadcasts. The Federal Election Commission has the final say. Time is allocated to parties rather than to individual candidates and is distributed on an equal basis with the order of appearance determined by a weekly drawing.

During campaigns the parties have been matched in broadcast panels or round tables, two to four at a time, or in half hour programs in which each party spokesperson has been allowed a few minutes for direct presentation. Nothing in the law or regulations prohibits parties from buying additional time on commercial stations.

The turbulent presidential campaign and close popular vote in 1988 suggests that this political broadcasting system, which has been carefully designed for fair play and maximum opportunity to inform the public, may be severely tested in future contests.

AUSTRALIA

The Australian broadcasting system may be described in four sectors. Two

of these, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), are funded by the federal government. ABC supports a wide range of programming. SBS has supported primarily foreign language programs, telecasting to minority groups in as many as 30 languages. Before enactment of the Australian Broadcasting Act of 1983, ABC looked like a government agency. Roughly, it was as if the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in the U.S. controlled the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Since 1983, however, ABC's governing board has had greater flexibility.

"Public" broadcasting stations licensed to serve various special interest groups and commercial stations compose the two private sectors. Licensees in the private sectors are under the regulatory authority of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT). The two federally funded sectors are not. The Minister of Communications has a basic role regarding communications policy.

The board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is empowered to determine to what extent and in what manner political or other controversial material may be aired on its system. The nearest provision that Australia has to an equal opportunities rule or a fairness doctrine is a law that requires a licensee who broadcasts election material for one political party to afford reasonable opportunities to the opposing parties. While the rule applies to other broadcast sectors it does not bind ABC. The Corporation has, however, traditionally allocated free time in proportion to the vote each party received at the previous election.

Nothing in the law requires a licensee to broadcast any political matter at all and nothing requires a licensee to provide time free of charge. As a matter of standing practice, however, broadcasters allocate enough time to all of the political parties represented in the Federal Parliament to present their candidates and platforms.

"Reasonable opportunities" in the Australian law is not the same as equal opportunities. The word "reasonable" connotes only the absence of unreasonableness. Patent discrimination is prohibited. Subtle forms of favoritism might not be.

The law imposes a blackout on all political advertising from midnight on Wednesday before election day, usually a Saturday, until the close of the polls. The blackout applies to candidates for the Senate and House of Representatives and to any house of the parliament of any state or territory. In 1988 the Broadcast Tribunal ruled that bona fide news events, current affairs programs, and unscripted interviews containing election campaign matter are exempt from the blackout. An amendment to the law enacted in 1986 repealed a long-standing prohibition against political dramatizations.

Legislation proposed in recent years by some of the regulatory authorities to require licensees to provide free time and to prohibit paid political spots of less than five minutes duration has been rejected. As the law stands it imposes no limitation on the length of spots or on the number of announcements that a candidate or party may buy. The only real limitation on political advertising arises by operation of the government-imposed advertising time standards. Although there had been past waivers during campaigns, continuing provision was made in 1986 for additional advertising time in the Television Advertising Conditions during the period before elections. With the noted exceptions Australia imposes few limitations on political broadcasting. Some of the parties are sharply critical of this *laissez faire* regime.

JAPAN

With an excellent two-network public television system, Nippon Hoso

Kyokai (NHK), a commercial system with a large number of stations, a developing cable industry, and authorized direct satellite broadcasting, Japan is media rich. Although there are five commercial television networks, they are devoted primarily to news services. Growth of full scale commercial networks similar to those in the United States is inhibited by legal limitations on single program sources.

The Public Officers Election Act guarantees all candidates for public office access to radio and television free of charge to express their political views for the benefit of the public. Both NHK and the commercial systems must transmit the audio and television tapes submitted to them by the candidates.

All candidates for the same office must be allowed equal time. Dates, frequencies, and length of time for the broadcast of these materials is decided jointly by the Minister of Home Affairs and representatives of all broadcast systems and networks.

Political candidates are legally responsible for their broadcast programs; they must refrain from slander and libel; and they may not endorse any product or service for profit during the programs.

NHK is required to broadcast each candidate's name, party affiliation, and his or her major accomplishments. The number of broadcasts of such biographic information depends upon the office. Candidates for a seat in the national legislative body, the Diet, are allowed one television announcement and ten on radio. For all other candidates the numbers are one and five, respectively.

NHK is obligated to try to increase the number of such announcements when possible. In addition both public and commercial broadcasters are required to give biographic information whenever a candidate's political views are broadcast. No political broadcasts will be made in an uncontested election. If unavoidable circumstances prevent a broadcast, there is no obligation on the part of the station to broadcast the material later.

The Broadcast Law guarantees broadcast licensees freedom of expression and freedom of programming but it requires "balance" in programming and maintenance by the licensee of program acceptability standards. The rules in the Public Officers Election Act which govern the political campaign, its reporting and editorials, are not intended to interfere with the broadcasters' rights of freedom of expression and programming; nevertheless, broadcasters are enjoined not to confuse or alter facts or to report falsehoods under the pretense of journalistic freedom.

Beginning with the new election law in 1982, NHK restructured its election broadcasts somewhat along the lines used by the BBC, which favor party broadcasts rather than appearances by individual candidates. NHK gives each party a series of televsion time slots, the number depending upon the number of its candidates.

It has been the practice of the Home Office to reimburse both public and commercial broadcasters for the production costs of candidates' appearances on their facilities. It has also reimbursed the commercial stations for the time used by candidates.

INDIA

Radio and television are governmental institutions under the direction of the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Proposals have been made to grant autonomy to All Indian Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan, (Pictures from Afar), as well as to begin licensing commercial stations, but the government has declined. The present Prime Minister has rationalized governmental control of the broadcast media as a counter weight to an "irresponsible" press.

Political campaign use was not al-

lowed on Indian radio and television until 1977 even though proposals had been made by officials of the government as early as 1935. Unable to agree on terms and conditions, the parties themselves were an obstacle for a long time. In 1951 the Indian Broadcasting Service, the state system, was permitted to carry materials reflecting the policies of the parties, but it was still prohibited from broadcasting campaign messages.

Finally in 1977 the Government decided to grant all national and regional parties equal access free of charge. Faced with an accomplished fact, the major parties agreed to arrangements. In the next elections there was one round of television appearances of fifteen minutes per party. Dates for the appearances were fixed by the Election Commission and dates were matched to the individual parties by drawing lots. There were no plans for debates or joint appearances. The Chief Election Commissioner serves as the arbiter of disputes. The broadcast media also cover the campaigns in news programs.

The custom of members of the cabinet is to refrain from appearing on television during the six weeks before election day unless there is some governmental emergency, and speeches by the prime minister, as leader of his party, are not broadcast during that period. Although its broadcasts are popular, the state system has been subject to sharp criticism by opposition parties and individuals who charge that governmental control of programming is too rigid.

BRITAIN

Political broadcasting in the United Kingdom rests upon the premise of free broadcast time and the absence of paid political advertising on both the commercial and non-commercial systems, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Independent Television (ITV), respectively. The amount and scheduling of political time is determined each year and before each general election by a Committee on Party Political Broadcasting composed of representatives of all parties whose members hold seats in Parliament and representatives of BBC and ITV. Only the three largest parties—Conservative, Labour, and the SDP-Liberal Alliance—receive time on a year-round basis.

The ratio in recent years among the three has been 5:5:4. Time is alloted to parties rather than to individual candidates. In recent campaigns the leading parties have received five or six 10-minute segments and two of 5-minute length. Smaller parties like Ecology, the National Front, and the British National Party with at least fifty candidates for parliamentary seats on a nationwide basis received one 5-minute segment each. The party's time is usually scheduled to run simultaneously on all networks.

The allocations of time do not apply to appearances of candidates on news and public affairs programs. Under rather complex rules the Representation of the People Act of 1969 mandates that all candidates for the same office appearing within their own voting districts must participate if a debate is broadcast between or among any of the contending candidates.

Although almost every major newspaper in the U.K. supports one of the parties—some in very partisan fashion—broadcast stations and networks are scrupulously impartial. Even news programs tend to reflect the ratio of time allocated for direct party use. During campaigns extra time is made available on news broadcasts even if the matter is not very newsworthy. Seen from American experience, British political broadcasting looks like overkill.

Television in the United Kingdom is in a dynamic state of growth and development. The Government white paper, issued in November, 1988,

proposes both a high degree of deregulation and a dramatic increase in the number of channels. The pattern of political broadcasting might be affected by implementation of these proposals.

THE NETHERLANDS

Like the United States The Netherlands has an equal time rule. The similarity ends there. Dutch broadcasting is truly unique. It is said to be "pillarized"—that is, made up of independent "pillars" like the separatist religious and social organizations that arose in the 19th century. Although broadcasting is a state-sponsored, nonprofit system, the channels are controlled by voluntary associations represented on the basis of their numerical strength. Of the larger broadcasting associations, three are religious—Catholic, Protestant, and fundamentalist; one is political—Socialist; three are neutral. Time on the national system is allocated in ratio to the number of members of the association.

Each association receives a government grant of funds, but it must also pay part of its own expenses. The law requires the associations to allocate time for the broadcast of religious services and to any organization whose needs are not being met by the broadcasts of the associations. American analogies might be the Red Cross, labor unions, Green Peace, etc. The associations themselves decide who should appear on the air. Political parties are allocated time on all channels.

In the period preceding an election the government minister may allot extra time to political parties and groups which have submitted a list of candidates in a minimum number of electoral districts. Party broadcasts are all of equal length and are broadcast in rotation.

Numerous small parties such as the Christian Historical, the Anti-Revolutionary, and the Communist, as well as groups varying from liberal to religious fundamentalist can receive as much exposure as the larger Socialist, Catholic, and Liberal (conservative) parties.

The mind of the outside observer boggles a bit, but democracy appears to be alive and well in Holland. The sophisticated Dutch themselves joke about their political system with variations of the adage, "two are a company and three are a political party."

Under pertinent government regulations the parties must be capable of making their political programs "of reasonable interest to viewers," but the regulations do not suggest how this remarkable feat may be accomplished.

A revision of the law in 1987 increased the number of networks from two to three which are, in the case of each, controlled by several cooperating associations. One channel, operated by non-ideological associations, is to be commercial if the associations involved in its management can agree on the terms and conditions of operation. At present, advertising time is sold in three blocks adjacent to newscasts but, under a set of "semi-legal" rules, television may not carry any political advertising at all.

SWEDEN

All television companies in Sweden are subsidiaries of the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, a state-sponsored organization. The stock of the Corporation is apportioned among private industry (20%), the press (20%), and the national popular movements (60%). The shareholders have no control over program content. There is no commercial advertising. The Corporation is financed by viewer and listener fees.

Political parties are awarded free time in proportion to their voter strength. Only parties represented in Parliament are given equal time. No

time is sold for political purposes.

DENMARK

Danish parties which collect signatures equal to 1/175th of the votes cast in the most recent election are granted equal access and equal air time free of charge. In the 3-week period before the election each party is assigned 10 to 15 minutes of television time for its leaders to present the party's positions and then to respond to questions asked by journalists.

Each party is entitled to choose the day for its broadcast, with preference given by numerical strength of the party. The larger parties usually choose their days as close to the election day as possible. As a sort of consolation, radio time is granted in reverse order, with preference given to the smallest qualified party.

Broadcast time is made available in an additional amount near election day for a joint appearance by representatives of all of the contending parties.

NORWAY

The state-sponsored Norwegian broadcasting organization has the authority to decide how much time is to be given to each party and in what manner. It strives to be fair. Each party is given free time equal to the other contending parties if it has been represented in Parliament in one of the two most recent elections, has a national party structure, and offers candidates for parliamentary seats in more than half of the electoral districts.

Active parties, including minor parties, are invited to take part in a joint television appearance shortly before the election. The custom for the party representatives on the panel has been to respond to questions posed by journalists but time has not been scheduled for any direct preliminary presentation of the parties' views.

SCANDINAVIAN TRENDS

To preserve competitive print media, newspapers in the Scandinavian countries reviewed here have received governmental financial subsidies. Apparently the subsidy came too late in Denmark to save some of the failing Danish newspapers. How this institution will fare in the future and how it might affect competing electronic media is unpredictable.

In Norway and Denmark it is now possible for political parties to buy some local time but many of the stations apparently give the time free of charge. In the three Scandinavian countries reviewed there is agitation by conservatives for the authorization of channels to be supported by advertising.

While the governments have carefully guarded their broadcasting monopolies, these demands and the growth of new technologies, although slow at the start, may in the future bring about changes in broadcasting patterns.

FRANCE

All French parties are given equal free time on the state broadcasting system, if they are seriously contending for the election of deputies to the parliament. Free time is also made available for panel discussions and debates. Paid political advertising has not been permitted in the past.

A law enacted in 1986 may change all this. An agency similar to the FCC was created and given authority to appoint the heads of the public networks who in the past were appointed by the coalition in power. This agency is also empowered to license privately owned radio and television stations, regulate advertising, and determine the amount of broadcast time to be given to each political party.

Under the law the state monopoly

advertising agency, the *Régie Française de Publicité*, is to be phased out and political advertising is to be permitted on the broadcast media. The new regulatory agency, CNCL (*la Commission Nationale de la Communication et des Libertés*), is authorized to determine how much broadcast time each party may have.

GERMANY

Under the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany the states rather than the federal government have primary regulatory authority over broadcasting. The two public law broadcasting organizations were formed and operate under treaties among the *Laender*. Nine of the *Laender* have broadcasting corporations. The older federal organization, ARD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlichrechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*), functions under a system in which each executive who is appointed from one political party is balanced by one from one of the opposing parties. Using a complex formula for continuing negotiations, ARD's network schedules are developed twice each year. The member states take annual turns in charge of central administration in Frankfurt.

ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*), was also formed by agreement of the states but it has a less complex central administration. While ARD has its own transmitters, ZDF uses the facilities of the federal postal administration. ZDF is required to pay part of its expenses by the sale of advertising time. Under governmental guidelines no paid advertising may be presented for political purposes. Both broadcasting organizations are required to observe political neutrality.

During the "hot" phase of a political campaign, which begins about six weeks before the election, both ARD and ZDF must, under federal law and regulations, place time at the disposal of the parties free of charge. In practice the stations and networks cooperate voluntarily. While the regional stations of ARD also provide free time for spots in campaigns for seats in the state legislatures, ZDF provides time only for candidates for federal office.

Political parties are recognized in the basic law of the Federal Republic. The regulatory pattern flows from that premise. Of particular importance is Paragraph 58 of the "Statute Concerning Political Parties" in the February 15, 1984 publication and Section 8 of the "Statute Concerning 'West German Broadcasting, Köln,'" of March 19, 1985. Parties are guaranteed equal opportunities in relation to their size and organization. The smaller parties which are represented in parliament must be given at least half as much television time as the larger parties.

The experience of ZDF in a recent national election is illuminating. In the campaign each of the two larger parties represented in the *Bundestag*, the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, received time for seven spots and the three smaller parties, the Christian Social Union, the Free Democrats, and the Greens, received time for four each.

Party campaign spots may not be longer than two and one-half minutes. An announcement is made at the beginning and end of each that it is a party "commercial." The smallest parties are assured at least five minutes of television each during the campaign.

The parties produce their own campaign broadcasts, but legal responsibility for content rests with the network. Materials supplied by the parties are examined by the network editor and, if anything in them appears patently illegal, or if the material supplied clearly does not relate to the campaign, the editor will refuse to permit the broadcast. In the rare instances where this has happened the party has re-worked and re-submitted the material.

There are also political news and public affairs programs and, three days before the election there is a big joint appearance of the leading candidates of the five parties represented in the *Bundestag*. This Jumbo panel (*Elephantenrunde*) is carried live by both ARD and ZDF simultaneously. The interviewers are prominent journalists from the two networks. In the recent national election the program was scheduled for a duration of 90 minutes but it ran more than 30 minutes overtime.

The first commercial stations supported only by advertising revenue began broadcasting in 1984. Since that year there has been an experiment in which four "pilot" projects have permitted the broadcast of paid political advertising. In 1987 a new broadcasting treaty was concluded under which the states will continue to have jurisdiction over programming matters, but the federal government will regulate economic issues. Among other things, the new legal provisions will permit licensing of 175 low-power television stations. This may permit effective use of Germany's television satellite and could provide the basis for a commercial network. There will probably be more commercial advertising, and possibly more experimentation with political advertising.

ITALY

RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana, the state system, operates three national networks. Commercial broadcasters operate four. Commercial stations went on the air in large numbers following constitutional decisions in the 1970's. The audience is about equally divided between the two systems.

RAI has a legal monopoly on live national broadcasting. The commercial stations, particularly those in the three organizations controlled by business entrepreneur Selvio Berlusconi, achieve nationwide coverage by delivery of recorded programs for simultaneous broadcast.

Parties represented in Parliament are entitled to equal free time on the state system. The right is embraced in the "Tribune" concept. There are tribunes for political, electoral, regional, European, referendum, and so on. Labor organizations are granted similar rights. The schedule of party appearances is determined by RAI and transmitted to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission which oversees broadcasting. Candidates are given time only as participants in party broadcasts, not as individuals.

Candidates as well as parties may buy time on the commercial stations. Because of the legal limitations of commercial networks, national political advertising is not broadcast live. With free time available on the noncommercial networks, there is no great incentive to buy time on the commercial stations. There is a potential for a large number of Italian broadcast satellite channels which could affect political broadcasting in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Patterns of political access in democratic countries are similar but not uniform. They are stable but not static. Developing technologies, especially in cable, direct satellite broadcasting and low power television, will increase the number of outlets. Demands by business for more advertising time, and the reception of more signals across national borders, will also change patterns of broadcasting.

Full implementation of the European Common Market in 1992 will affect broadcasting in the member countries. National restrictions on broadcast content are already colliding with international agreements on freedom of information. This is seen not only in the laws of the several countries and in international judicial

decisions, but in restrictive expressions in the European Commission, representing the twelve member states and in the Council of Europe, representing twenty-two states, as well. A common market in media could affect political broadcasting in unforeseen ways.

There is no perceived trend in other democratic countries towards more or less free time for campaigns. There may be a trend, however, towards more use of paid political advertising, and perhaps of more political spot announcements. The quest for the ideal scheme of access to the electronic media for the democratic process will probably continue for a long time.

Although conditions differ it may well be that the United States could profit from the experience of other nations. Discussion of important issues on radio and television could have been far more meaningful in the American election of 1988 and voters could have gone to the polls better informed. A voter turnout of just over fifty percent is a worrisome shortfall in any democracy.

Means should be sought to encourage unfettered joint appearances of major candidates and, perhaps of equal importance, to foster individual candidate appearances rather than saturation of shortform political advertisements. More favorable treatment of expenditures for those purposes as suggested by the Twentieth Century Fund might encourage such changes.

Modification of the equal opportunities provision along the lines of the Australian example might also be effective. One hopes that the hour-long political speech is gone forever, but the 2 or 3 minute interview featuring the candidate has appeal. The *"Elephantenrunde"* of candidates and journalists in Germany, and the televised panels in Mexico and several other countries, are also worth further exploration.

Bear in mind, however, that debates and speeches by candidates do not of themselves guarantee meaningful discussions. If the candidates do not raise the issues the burden falls to journalists to probe without prodding, to be objective without becoming cynical—a tough assignment indeed.

Consideration of change should not lose sight of values that are as vital as an informed electorate. Institutions of free speech, free choice, and freedom of the marketplace are of special importance in the United States. They also serve to inform the public. Measures to capture the audience, or to force media to air programs or to take time without compensation, could do more harm than good. In the end, each country must resolve these problems on its own terms. Like all institutions broadcasting, including United States broadcasting, can be better but not perfect. ■

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer sincerely thanks the diplomatic and consular officers in the United States of the countries surveyed and specifically the following persons and organizations for their indispensable help in obtaining data; however, he assumes full responsibility for this article: Jeff Atkins, Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission; Enrique Berruga, Press Secretary, Mexican Embassy; J.H. Brouwers, Consul of the Netherlands, Los Angeles, CA; Ian Greenshields, Australian Department of Transport and Communications; Floris P. Hartog, Atherton, CA; Diane Hockridge, Australian Electoral Commission; Professor Kenneth Jones, Department of Telecommunications and Film, San Diego State University; Albino Longhi, RAI, Rome, Italy; Yoko Makita, San Diego, CA; Dr. Sebastiano Musini, RAI, New York; Sanae Nakata, TV Asahi, Tokyo, Japan; Messrs. Pieper and Michelfelder, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Köln, Germany; Helmut Schimanski, ZDF, Mainz, Germany; Eberhart von Schubert, First Sec-

retary of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany; Daina Zaidi, Second Secretary of the Swedish Embassy; and Joanne Comstock, San Marcos, CA. Among the many publications reviewed, the following were especially useful: Indian Broadcasting *by H.R. Luthra, Delhi, 1986;* International Handbook of Broadcasting Systems *edited by Philip T. Rosen, Westport, Conn., 1988;* Legislative Studies Quarterly, *Aug. 1987, articles by J.G. Blumler, Frederick J. Fletcher, Klaus Schoenbach, Holli A. Smetko, and Karen Siune; and* World Broadcasting Systems *by Sydney W. Head, Belmont, CA, 1985.*

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IBA, *Airwaves* magazine, London.

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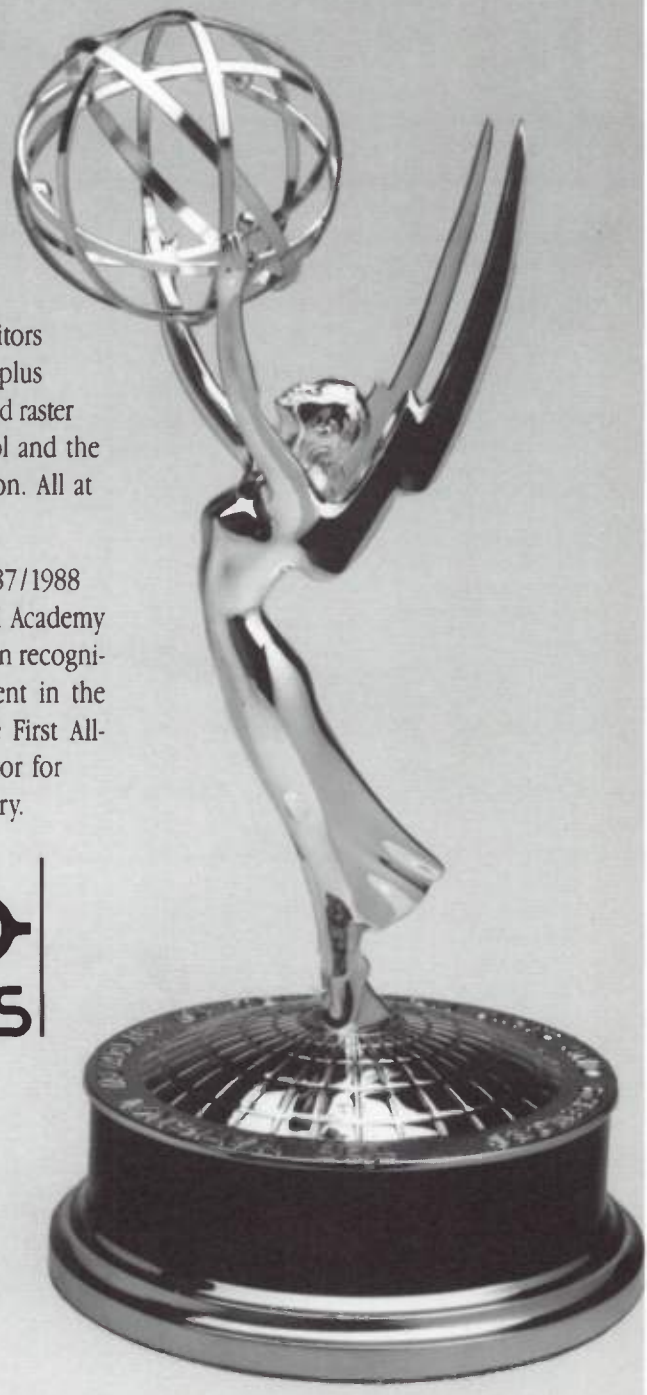

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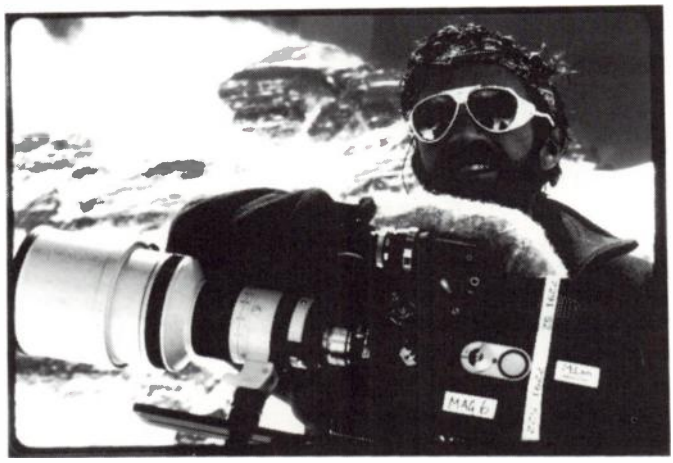

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Review and Comment

NTIA TELECOM 2000: Charting the Course for a New Century

NTIA Special Publication 88-21. Available from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402

BY DAVE BERKMAN

Let loose a gaggle of free market-crazed technocrats to predict what the future of communications technologies should be, and how best to realize that future—and what you get is *NTIA Telecom 2000*.

NTIA, the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications & Information Administration, is the Reaganized, Department of Commerce agency with overall, Federal policy and planning responsibilities for communications. The task it set for itself in promulgating this policy plan, was to "identify national communications and information priorities, both for today as well as the balance of the century." And the overriding priority which it identified was realization of its version of late 19th century, robber-baron philosophy—which, were it phrased in the utterances most appropriate to its primordial temper and tone, would read, 'unimpeded corporate will and weal good; government care, concern and resultant regulation bad.'

As can be seen from the following representative recommendations with which this 672 page document leads off, I'm not exaggerating:

> Effectively competitive, unregulated communications and information markets . . . are the best guarantee that the public will have the communications and information facilities and services they [sic] want and need.
>
> . . .[M]ultiple policy authorities may hobble procompetitive growth. The active, ad hoc involvement of the courts and Congress may heighten uncertainties and impede otherwise desirable developments.

Of more focused concern with television and related technologies:

> Congress and the FCC should immediately take steps to . . . foster maximum competition by, among other things, providing for indeterminate radio licenses, and ten-year licenses for television.
>
> The Executive branch should have the authority to *establish* policy, while the FCC should remain the agency for *implementation* of policy. [Original emphases]

All of which, what with an FCC, as envisaged by NTIA, now no longer an *independent* regulatory agency, but

rather one reduced to slavishly implementing policy laid down by Administration fiat, *would* bring us back to around 1880—that is, the era before the establishment of the first independent, regulatory agency [i.e., the Interstate Commerce Commission]. It was a time when unregulated competition held sway, leading to that most *non*-competitive era in the history of American business in which monstrous monopolies in the basic, capital goods and transportation industries ran rampant.

Such, of course, is what we're close to in telecommunications today: For much of the NTIA scenario, given the virtual lack of concern with increased media concentration by a now only *nominally* independent regulatory agency, the FCC, and an equally quiescent Justice Department Anti-Trust Division, is already well on its way to realization. Soon these basic, electronics-based information industries of the late 20th century will be evolving if not into monopolies, then into oligopolies of magnitudes which a Morgan, Duke, Carnegie, or Rockefeller never would have dared dream.

The danger in reading as relentless a polemic as *Telecom 2000*, is the glaze which inevitably develops in one's eyes, and the resulting loss of critical detachment. One can encounter such endlessly reiterated messages as "Business Good, Government Bad," only so many times before resistance breaks down. Fortunately, in the course of my reading, I was jolted back to reality by two newspaper stories which appeared within days of each other in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times*, which raised at least some cautionary doubts as to the NTIA-posited inevitability of the bountiful beneficences to which a deregulated telecommunications marketplace must lead.

In Chicago and its environs, it seems that cable behemoth TCI, Inc., "has been under fire for months for failing to provide adequate and consistent customer service, repairs, installation and maintenance." (Concurrent with this story were day-by-day reports of the trials and travails of a *Tribune* broadcast beat reporter first in getting cable installed in his home, and then having it deliver a viewable picture.)

But when the ability of local government to monitor local cable system performance effectively and to regulate cable rates was all but eliminated by the '87 cable deregulation amendments to the Federal Communications Act, such cavalierisms became inevitable. For it is only free marketplace ideologues who can lay logic on its head by contending that only when commercial interests don't fear they'll be required to offer an honest service at a fair price, that they'll then be willing to do so. It's like arguing that the way to cut down on bank robberies is to repeal the statutes that make holdups a crime. But then we're also talking here of the same free market logic which insists that by preventing local governments from having the power to set fair cable subscription rates, then those rates must go down. To which I'd ask, "so how come since rate deregulation, mine has doubled?"

According to the *New York Times*, free marketplace logic must also bother those New York Knicks and Ranger fans who, in this age of deregulated cable, are wired by Cablevision. Their problem, the *Times* story reported, is that Cablevision also owns Sportschannel, which carries the Islander and New Jersey Nets and Devils games, while the Knicks' and Rangers' pay cable rights are the property of MSG, a sports channel with which Cablevision found itself in a bidding war over rights to carry NY Yankee telecasts.

As the *Times* pointed out, in the past when cable viewers could find themselves the victims of this kind of spite war, and "[t]owns used to regulate cable fees . . . a citizen [who was] . . . mad about no Rangers . . . could go to

his town council which could pressure the cable company." But, as the story went on to quote the head of the NY State cable commission, when Congress deregulated cable fees, "[i]t emasculated the ability of local governments for leverage. Everything is dereg, dereg."

However, as bad as may be the cavalier treatment of the various publics increasingly dependent on a smaller and smaller number of media conglomerates to serve their needs, it still is, according to NTIA, a situation infinately preferable to any government 'intrusion' to rectify such wrongs. For the result would be "[m]arket solutions crowded out by nonmarket alternatives . . . [which] has potential to lessen predictability with consequent adverse effect on capital markets." And what, in the eyes of a Reganite free market, supply-sider, could cast a more ghastly image than an adverse-effect-hanging-over-a-capital-market???

Do folks who write stuff like this *really* buy it? Are these ideologues so blind to reality that they actually *believe*, for example, that "[in] a market characterized by dynamic technology, rapidly proliferating demand, and global contraction, the public interest will best be served by affording the private sector discretion to determine optimal company size and scale?"

Can't you just hear those TCI cable folks saying, "Golly gee, those problems we're hearing about in Chicago must mean we're growing too big. Guess we'll stop expanding, and maybe even scale back a bit." (Ahh, but then might not the solution be to let the regional Bell companies have unrestricted access into cable—as this report recommends? Can't you just feel it in your bones how one day an old chip off the old Telco trust like NYNEX, is just going to know when it's reached optimal size.)

Monopoly, or trust-like oligopoly, is, of course, the goal of all major business enterprises. Something which *Telecom 2000* itself (inadvertently?) concedes when, later on, it quotes, with seeming acceptance, "[o]ne [industry] analyst [who] believes 'there's going to be a major consolidation. . . . By 1995 it wouldn't surprise me to see three major enterprises embracing 80% of the broadcast and entertainment business." By which is meant broadcast TV, radio, cable, and theatrical film production and exhibition.

Perhaps I'm being too hard on the *Telecom 2000* authors. For they do admit at least the *possibility* of wrongs or abuses on the part of that most holy of holies, corporate America. To which their solution [surprise, surprise!] is "greater self-regulation . . . as an alternative to government regulation." (By which token, extending my bank-robber analogy, I guess we should take felony law enactment out of the hands of our legislatures and give it to the inhabitants of Attica, Folsom, *et al.*)

In its discussion of broadcasting per se, NTIA repeats all the Mark Fowler-like cliches we've become familiar with over the eight years of Reagan reign. You know: all that business about how with cable networks, local access channels, the number of AM & FM stations, etc., broadcast scarcity no longer prevails—so the arguments for requiring broadcasters to program in the public interest, which may have once had validity when scarcity reigned, "are increasingly hard to square with today's market realities."

The problem with this contention is that it rests on what is a sliver of truth. While there are, as the deregulation fetishists never fail to stress, more communities served by radio stations than by daily papers, in the print realm we are served by a far larger number of outlets than just the daily press. And while I can always launch another town weekly, environmental newsletter, church or union local bulletin, I damn sure can't just go out and start up a TV or radio station.

How does NTIA hope to achieve its

total deregulation of broadcasting, cable, data networks and related entertainment and information technologies? By combining all Federal policy-making and policy-implementation functions into one deregulation commited agency responsible to the administration in power, or at least by making any other agencies which may be charged in law with such responsibilities subservient to that agency. (And guess what that agency should be?)

With a continuation of a Fowler-like FCC, things shouldn't be much different as far as TV broadcasting and cable are concerned than they have been since the Reagan appointees gained majority control of the Commission. Thus—and assuming a second Bush term—by 1997 when a new administration assumes power, the all-but-total deregulation of broadcasting and cable envisioned by NTIA will long have been an accepted *fait acompli*.

It should be noted that only about one-quarter of *Telecom 2000*—albeit the important quarter—is concerned with policy matters. Moreover, only a third or so of the book is about video in its broadcast and non-broadcast forms. Telephone, data networking, and non-broadcast uses of spectrum get far more space. The non-policy section consists of what might be described as a series of 'primers' or summaries of where various electronic technologies find themselves today, and what the best forecasts are as to how they will develop. In all fairness, it should be noted that this other three-quarters of the report does have value as a fairly good reference source for both current data and future trend prediction.

In fact, those responsible for this bulk of the book should be commended since, unlike virtually every other such look at the telecommunications future I've encountered, it doesn't (with a few exceptions) fall into the usual 'gee-whiz' trap of predicting a total computer/video future in which all human functions and endeavors will be performed by microchips acting on the command of other chips. (Among those few exceptions: there is *no* possibility that the three networks will ever bypass their affiliates and go exclusively with DBS, as *Telecom 2000* suggests.)

So, if you're a conservative Republican, free marketeer, buy the book for its policy pronouncements. The converted can always use a little more preaching to. If not, you might also want to consider obtaining it for the data and the realistic trend predictions.

* * *

(*Hint*: If you want a copy but don't want to pay for it, call your district Congressional office. It's how I got mine. That is, unless you're a free enterpriser—in which case you'd never accept a government handout.) ■

Dave Berkman is Professor of Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

ON BENDED KNEE: The Press and the Reagan Presidency

by Mark Hertsgaard
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York

BY ALBERT AUSTER

The Reagan era is over! While many of the personnel and policies of his administration will remain with us into the Bush presidency the sea change in American politics he presided over is behind us. Thus, in the wake of his aides who either jumped or were pushed overboard, and then wrote six figure memoirs, will come the historian and the social scientist. Whether they make better sense of the Reagan years than the Stockmans, Speakes, and Regans is problematic; at least they will have the last word.

One of the puzzles they will have to unravel is the mysterious alchemy that was the "teflon presidency." Why criticism of the 40th president never seemed to stick? Why despite gaffes and scandals that might have scuttled any other presidency, he emerged virtually unscathed, and left office as one of the most popular of modern presidents? One challenging answer is supplied by journalist Mark Hertsgaard in his recent book *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*..

Hertsgaard's thesis is that the press went easy on Reagan; first and foremost because the considerable skill of his handlers kept him well insulated from reporters. What's more, Reagan benefited from their self censorship—a self censorship that had both an historical and ideological basis. The media did not want to be held responsible, as it had with Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, for another failed presidency. Another reason, according to Hertsgaard's leftist analysis, is that the media are part and parcel of corporate capitalist America and therefore incapable of the kind of sustained inquiry that might truly endanger that system.

Although Hertsgaard pursues his argument doggedly through practically every phase, policy and major incident of the Reagan years, one comes away less than convinced. The primary reason is that so many of the examples of media pusillanimity he cites first came to light in the columns of liberal establishment journalists like Tom Wicker, Anthony Lewis and others. Indeed so much of the criticism of Reagan's economic policies, or the stimulus for so much of the cynicism about the "Star Wars" missile defense can be traced to the very same articles, editorials and TV news reports that Hertsgaard attacks so fiercely for their failures of nerve. As a matter of fact, the image of the Reagan years that's most likely to linger in the public imagination is of the reporters like ABC-TV's Sam Donaldson shouting tough questions at a president who either ignores them or pretends he can't hear.

What's best about Hertsgaard's book, is that it reminds us how Reagan's media experts were able to control the media's agenda and keep the president out of serious trouble. Having interviewed over one hundred and fifty leading reporters, editors, and TV anchors—plus extensive research into the news stories and programs themselves—Hertsgaard spells out in vivid detail how Regan's experts were able to bring it off.

In this endeavor no one gets higher marks than Reagan's first term Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver. Reading Hertsgaard's chapter on the White House media strategy we get the sense that by trading on his almost surrogate son relationship with the Reagan's, he directed what might be called the Deaverization of the American presidency.

This was based upon his understanding that the key to todays media is television. And that the key to controlling television, particularly television news, is to feed its insatiable appetite for exiciting visuals with dramatic sound bites. This he accomplished by providing them with an almost unlimited diet of well-staged speeches and photo opportunities which displayed the president in almost ideal circumstances. At the same time, he curtailed real access to the president by forbidding questions at these events and by reducing the number of presidential press conferences.

No matter how significant Deaver may have been in the teflon equation, Hertsgaard, unfortunately, leaves out one very important element—Ronald Reagan. Of course, this might have something to do with the fact that Hertsgaard could never get an interview with Reagan and get his side of the story. Perhaps he should have studied Reagan's autobiography,

Where's the Rest of Me? or Gary Wills' brilliant *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home*. Indeed, both of these books would have made him realize that before there was a Michael Deaver there was a Ronald Reagan.

To some extent, to give Hertsgaard his due, he seems to acknowledge this when he explains that all of Reagan's media handler's techniques and strategies were available to and had been used by previous presidents, but that none was a Ronald Reagan. However, even this passing recognition of the "Great Communicator" really doesn't do justice to his role and significance in the teflon formula.

Take for instance the famous gaffes. One of Reagan's favorite anecdotes gives us a better understanding of these. While he was making films for the Army Signal Corps during World War II, he was asked by the Army brass to compile a film of Hollywood bloopers for their Christmas party. Reagan, unable or unwilling to get the studios cooperation in providing some real examples of stars going up in their lines, invented some of his own. That is, he faked the gaffes and bloopers for the Army chiefs party film. (So successfully that some still show up in films about the studios).

This story isn't just another illustration of Reagan's well-known preference for illusion over reality, but of his awareness that bloopers aren't always the dangerous things that politicians and the media suppose them to be. First of all, they make you appear very human, and secondly you might be saying exactly what other people have on their minds.

The "goodguy" factor was the most important element in the teflon chemistry. As a matter of fact from the moment Mr. Reagan skewered Jimmy Carter with his "there you go again," and reminded the American public that he had played good guy heroes like George Gipp, Brass Bancroft, and Drake McHugh, and wasn't just some rightwing fanatic, he injected the "good guy" factor permanently into American presidential politics. The American people now want their presidents to be "good guys".

His essential "good guy" image persuaded Americans that Mr. Reagan's lack of knowledge and seeming indifference to the facts were merely charming eccentricities. Consequently, the "jelly bean journalism" that Hertsgaard and others have railed against may have had less to do with the inadequacies of the media than the fact that the American public just tuned them out. The media sensing this apathy neglected opportunities to focus on the shortcomings, corruption, and scandals of the Reagan years.

The public penchant for regarding President Reagan's faux pas and failures so benevolently makes Hertsgaard's major points that much harder to accept. He's probably right that the greater and greater concentration of control of the media in fewer and fewer hands constitutes a definite danger to democracy; or that the inflated salaries and celebrity of broadcast journalists, and newspaper stars and their oftimes cozy relations with government officials may impose limits on their inquisitiveness and willingness to buck the system.

However, any interpretation of the media's role in the Reagan years that doesn't include greater respect for the place of chance, the personal integrity, sense of responsibility and professionalism of many reporters and media institutions and what one famous historian once referred to as the cunning of history, doesn't do justice to our understanding of the terrain that the media had to function on in the last eight years. Consequently, Hertsgaard's portrait of journalists in the Reagan presidency as cowed by the magic of his media wizzards may be as illusory as some of the "well-known" facts, figures, and stories that President Reagan used to cite so fondly. ■

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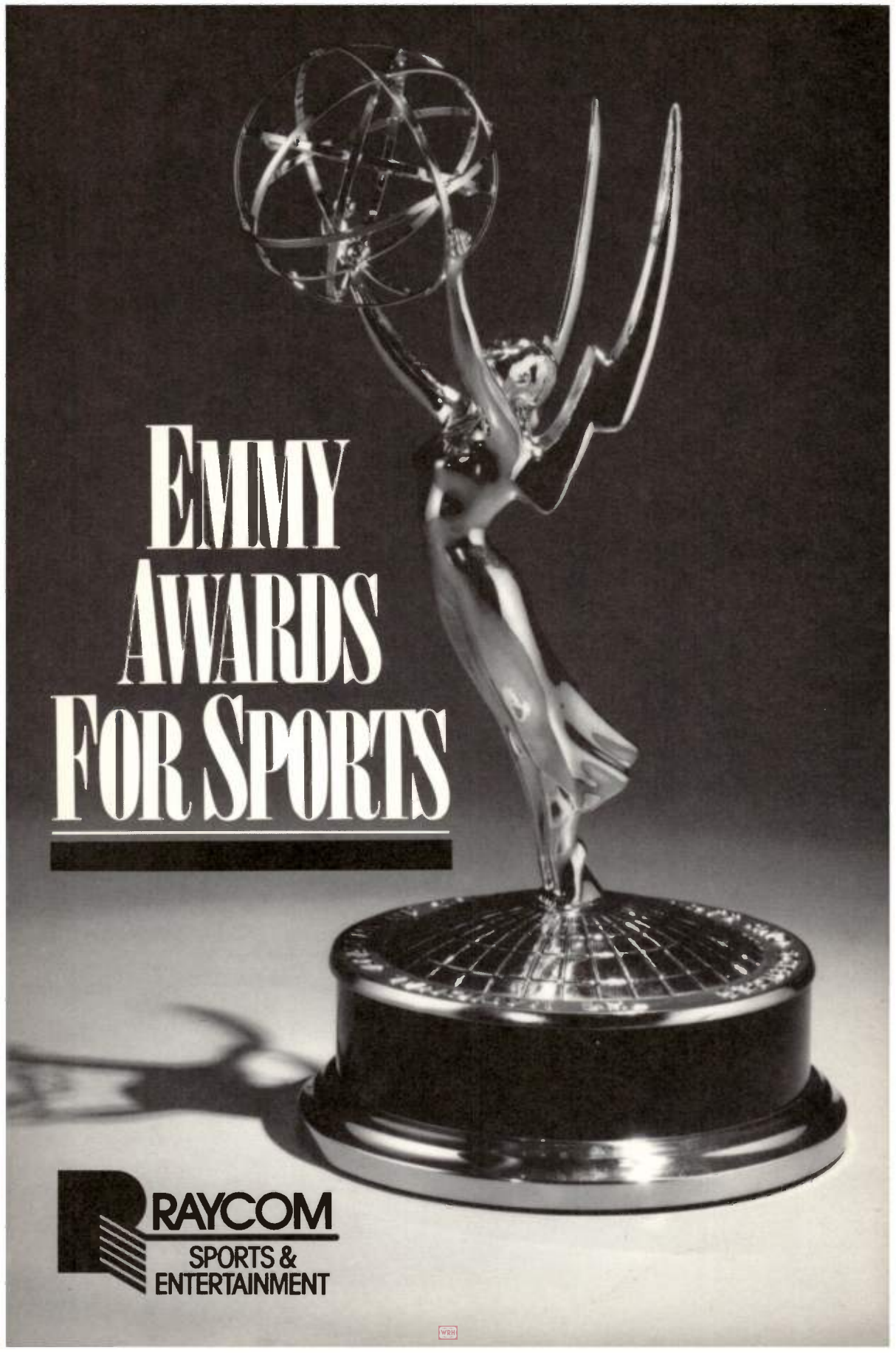
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