

# TELEVISION

VOLUME VIII    NUMBER 3

SUMMER 1969

# QUARTERLY

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THE JOURNAL OF  
THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
TELEVISION ARTS  
AND SCIENCES

Published by The National Academy  
of Television Arts and Sciences in  
cooperation with the School of Public  
Communication, Boston University

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**“Write the  
shortest possible  
imperative sentence  
embracing  
adventure, drama,  
comedy, sports,  
song and dance,  
news and  
public affairs.”**

**“Watch CBS<sup>®</sup>.”**

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## TELEVISION QUARTERLY

VOLUME VIII No. 3 SUMMER 1969

is published quarterly by The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in cooperation with the School of Public Communication, Boston University.

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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 New York office of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

The subscription rates for non-members, libraries and others is \$7.50 a year and \$2.00 a copy in the United States and Canada; \$8.00 a year and \$2.50 a copy in all other countries, postage paid.

*The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily represent those of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the members of the Editorial Board of Television Quarterly or the School of Public Communication, Boston University.*

Second Class postage paid at Syracuse, New York 13210. Re-entered at Geneva, N. Y. 14456.

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

Printed by  
W. F. HUMPHREY PRESS, INC.  
Geneva, New York 14456

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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

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SUMMER 1969 VOL. VIII NO. 3

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## CONTENTS

### ARTICLES

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Is Taste Obsolete? <i>Richard W. Jencks</i>	7
Will Bureaucracy Finally Kill Art? <i>John R. Barrett</i>	16
Television in Argentina: An Interview with Sr. Goar Mestre <i>David Manning White</i>	23
Violence in the Mass Media <i>Leo Bogart</i>	36
The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting: What Is It? <i>Robert L. Coe</i>	48
The Distant Scene: Foreign News on Television <i>John Whale</i>	56
Parental Influence on Children's Television Viewing <i>F. Earle Barcus</i>	63

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### DEPARTMENTS

---

Books in Review	74
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**We'd rather see them fight it out  
in your living room than in the streets.**

Last year we made a television program that gave them their chance. "One Nation, Indivisible."

At a time when there really was fighting in the streets, we put seventeen blacks and whites into one room. And got them to talk to each other about their hates and fears and frustrations.

They proved there is an alternative to fighting.

And for 3½ hours of prime time, Americans in over 65 cities listened to what they said.

In at least one way that program was a success. It won a George Foster Peabody

Award as outstanding television public service during 1968.

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We propose to fulfill that commitment.



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TASTE, reflecting and molding modern society via television, the most powerful of the mass media. TASTE, a tone guide to the way television presents and endorses all manner of life-styles, the way it relates to politics and fashion, violence and sex. . . .

We all have a nodding acquaintance with the interesting contradictions in Webster's definitions. TASTE: "The power of discerning and appreciating *fitness*, beauty, order, or whatever constitutes excellence. . . critical judgment, discernment, or appreciation.

"Quality, as judged by persons with such qualifications; as. . . good taste or bad taste." Then, Webster's New Collegiate leads us out on a limb with "Individual aesthetic preference of liking; as, there is no accounting for *tastes*."

TELEVISION QUARTERLY here presents two articulate spokesmen on this elusive subject: TASTE in television. For Richard Jencks, president of the CBS/Broadcast Group, title suggests viewpoint: *Is Taste Obsolete?* Speaking for the controversialists is John Barrett, who brings a background in network broadcasting to his present post as manager of the Smothers Brothers companies.

Their articles raise a number of important questions; directly or by implication, the two authors share a number of concerns. And the manner by which they phrase these questions common to both is in itself highly revealing of the current conflict concerning television and taste. To the reader of these two articles, the primary question seems to be as follows: Whose truth (or fantasy) shall prevail on the public airwaves: the advocate of the past? or the impatient sponsor of the future?

Although Messrs. Jencks and Barrett mention the Smothers Brothers crisis merely in passing, it is important that both regard the incident as symbolic of the great divisiveness within the television industry. The two men represent, each with intelligence and conviction, these divisions.

*If it's really  
"Special,"  
it's on NBC*

*In September:*

*Arthur Rubinstein (September 5)*

*The Battle for the Battle of Britain (September 7)*

*Jack Paar and His Lions (September 8)*

*Monsanto Night Presents Lena Horne (September 10)*

*The Male of the Species (September 11)*

*Who Killed Lake Erie? (September 12)*

*Chrysler Presents the Bob Hope Special (September 22)*

*Flip Wilson and His Friends (September 22)*

*National Broadcasting Company*



# IS TASTE OBSOLETE?

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RICHARD W. JENCKS

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Our Smothers Brothers crisis reminds me of a story that Lincoln told to explain his dismissal of General McClellan as Commander of the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln said his relationship to McClellan reminded him of a man whose horse reared back and caught its hoof in the stirrup. The man said to the horse: "If you are going to get *on* I am going to get *off*."

I must say that I appreciate the support which the public gave to our decision to dismount.

It is not my purpose to reopen the recent controversy or argue any of its particulars. I have long ago gotten used to the idea that Goliath is at some public relations disadvantage as compared to David. The recent controversy, however, has raised underlying issues as to our responsibility to the public—and to you—with respect to broadcast material.

In connection with those issues, we at CBS have been the recipient of much warm support as well as the target of all sorts of charges. Few comments were as incisive as those of one viewer. He referred us to the directions given to the Players in Act III, scene ii of *Hamlet*. Turning to those, we found the following:

"And let those who play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. (To use the occasion otherwise) that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it."

Our critics are equally wide-ranging. To hear some of them, you might think that one had never heard a presentation of dissident

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This article is based on remarks by Mr. Jencks, President of the CBS/Broadcast Group, before the General Conference of CBS Television Network Affiliates in New York City on May 20.

or anti-establishment viewpoints on television except on a single comedy variety show. Another critic, while dismissing the show as "sophomoric grammar school humor . . . and jejeune *double entendre* half witticisms . . . passed off as significant comment," attacked us for making it difficult to get "even this pabulum past the network censors."

An FCC Commissioner moved himself to say "that the stifling weight of censorship is to be found, not in the hearing rooms of the Federal Communications Commission, but in the conference rooms of this nation's larger television networks." Elaborate theories were worked out to demonstrate that we had acted in our economic self interest due to the show's alleged declining ratings.

Others claimed that our action had been the result of a desire to protect Senator John O. Pastore—a tough hombre who needs no protection from this quarter—from the barbed criticism of the humorists. Few people, friend or foe, seemed to credit our explanation for the cancellation, namely, that necessary standards with respect to taste in broadcast programming cannot be met unless those who work with us are willing to observe certain reasonable procedures.

When all is said and done, the recent controversy raised a fundamental question: In today's society is taste obsolete? Has society become so permissive that we should open our microphones and uncap our cameras to whatever a performer, however gifted, chooses to say or do? Should we then furnish that performance to you without any further intervention on our part? Certainly I think it entirely fair to say that our antagonist in the recent controversy acknowledges that the issue is that basic.

As we can see all around us today, American standards in taste and expression are indeed undergoing a vast change. With a frankness of language and detail that would have been unthinkable three or four years ago, our movies, books and magazines now delve into everything from lesbianism and drug addiction to the psychology of racial hatred. Some of our theater and dance companies romp around in the nude. Feminine fashions have gone from peek-a-boo to "quick-call-a-cop." Wine ads ask us "if we have had any lately" and shaving commercials tell us "to take it all off." The result is what sociologist-columnist Max Lerner describes as a sort of "Babylonian society," where almost anything goes.

Overlying this change is the notion that shock treatment—through the expression of the outrageous—has an affirmative social value. It is the verbal and dramatic equivalent of the Molotov cocktail. With performers who hold these beliefs, it is an article of faith that people should be “shaken up.” One performer, close to the center of the controversy, was recently quoted by a prominent newspaper as saying, “What television needs is a little pornography.” No one who knew him considered that his remark was in jest.

The irony of this revolution in moral standards is that it does not necessarily look toward a more liberated attitude. The distinguished critic Walter Kerr says, indeed, that it may mean a new “Puritanism.” Speaking of the Broadway theater, he observes: “In virtually all our uninhibited plays, sex and nudity are associated with dirt, disease, bloodshed and death.” Four-letter words, says Kerr, are “reverse euphemisms” designed to make natural activity “uglier than it is, to show contempt for it. . . . There is neither joy nor casual acceptance in four letterdom. There is something closer to resentment, even hatred.”

Whatever the ultimate direction of these changes in popular culture, however, we cannot forget that motion pictures, magazines and books—while mass media in general terms—differ from television in both degree and kind. Each of them reaches, compared to a television network, a tiny fragment of the population. Their audience is primarily adult. They have no obligation to serve the larger public interest. And they require payment as a condition of access by the public.

Unfortunately, many such media find that the exploitation of the new moral permissiveness is thoroughly in line with their economic self interest. As the *Los Angeles Times* recently observed: “The plain fact is that, under the cry of freedom from repression and hypocrisy, a great deal is happening in entertainment and the arts that is cynically exploitative and sick.”

Television clearly has a responsibility in matters of taste different from that of any other medium. That difference is perhaps best described in the Television Code of the National Association of Broadcasters. “Television,” reads the preamble to the Code, “is seen and heard in every type of American home. These homes include adults and children of all ages, embrace all races and all varieties of religious faith, and reach those of every educational background.

It is the responsibility of television to bear constantly in mind that the audience is primarily a home audience and, consequently, that television's relationship to the viewers is that between guest and host."

This almost ubiquitous presence of our medium is television's great strength, yet also its greatest problem when it comes to taste and what we show our audience.

The mail we receive from the public lends a good deal of support to the concerns expressed by the Television Code. A small fraction of it, to be sure, is from the killjoy and bluenose. But the bulk consists of sensible letters. They are sprightly and vigorous and they obviously come from a sort of elite—an elite of all levels of society—that is concerned enough to care.

They recognize the desirability—even the necessity—of having a fair share of entertainment programs which appeal in the broadest sense to youth. At the same time they see no necessity for having their five-year-olds or 10-year-olds or 15-year-olds, for that matter, confronted gratuitously with language of the gutter—*or* with leering references to sexual excesses—*or* with barely disguised invitations to participate in the unlawful use of drugs.

A recent editorial in a major newspaper said: "One suspects that much of the public's tolerance and patronage of garbage-pile entertainment may stem less from critical appreciation of what is being offered than from a fearful desire to be with it, to avoid being thought square." The bulk of our audience may or may not have up-to-date standards of taste but they are not slaves to fashion. In the opinion of many, it seems, there are worse things than being thought square.

Television, to be sure, must cope with changing standards of taste. We must do everything we can to expand creative freedom and encourage artistic expression. Above all, we must reach out to the young, and attempt to understand and reflect their tastes—as much for our good as theirs. Our critics are simply wrong in interpreting the recent controversy to mean that we are putting an embargo on topical satire, parody, or other similar programming that pokes fun at contemporary figures and events.

To achieve the objective of expanding creative freedom, we rely on a spirit of understanding and active cooperation in dealing with our artists. *We* must be as interested as *they* in exploring legitimate cultural frontiers. *They* must be as interested as *we* in avoiding unnecessary offense to the pious, the immature, and the innocent.

Our relationship cannot, to be successful, be one where our Program Practices Department obtains access to a program only after it has been finally produced.

What we strive for is a healthy give and take. We must realize that many television performers come to us from a milieu in which almost anything *does* go. Most of our performers realize that television is not the easy, vulgar, permissive world of nightclubs and bars. They recognize, in the words of the Code, that they "are guests in the home." And they recognize that there is no legitimate entertainment, however trenchant, that is frustrated by a reasonable insistence on some standards.

There are those who express an honest concern that the application of our standards gets in the way of the expression of views on controversial issues. They argue that entertainment programs should be regarded as a legitimate forum for the expression of such views. If they mean that we should not reject entertainment material because it has topical comment of a controversial nature, then we agree wholeheartedly. If, on the other hand, they mean that we should allow any performer who by his talent has earned exposure to a microphone or camera to voice his own personal political views at any opportunity he chooses, then we disagree.

Someone has to be the judge of the difference between entertainment and propaganda. Someone has to be the judge, that is, unless entertainment programs are to be brought under the full sanction of the Commission's Fairness Doctrine, and entertainers are to be chosen, not on their merits, but because of the diversity of their politics.

We make ample time available on news and informational broadcasts for the presentation and discussion of the vital issues of the day. No medium has done more than has CBS in exposing to the public all shades of opinion on the subject of the war in Vietnam, the crisis in our cities, the racial revolution, and unrest on the campuses. This has been done in broadcasts that offered maximum opportunity for discussion of the issues in depth, with fairness and balance and with access by those of dissident views. Purely and simply, it is calumny for our critics to pretend, as some of them have, that our presentation of such viewpoints was dependent upon any entertainment program series.

The idea that we should not be concerned about matters of taste and should not exercise control over them has been recently associated with another idea: that the theory of free speech not only

permits, but compels, the dissemination of antisocial material. This thesis was fully developed in Commissioner Nicholas Johnson's concurring opinion in the WBAI case.

In that case, as you recall, the station's license had been called into question because it had permitted its microphones to be used for outright anti-Semitic utterances. The traditional First Amendment view is that society tolerates irresponsible, vicious, or antisocial utterances not because they are affirmatively desirable, but because they can be curbed only at the expense of restraining other speech that advances society as a whole. As our Chief Justice Marshall said, odious speech is "a shoot which cannot be stripped from the stalk without wounding vitally the plant from which it is torn."

I would, therefore, have expected Commissioner Johnson to support the station's First Amendment rights. Commissioner Johnson, however, does more than support the station's legal right to broadcast odious speech. He says, in effect, that to permit people to express odious opinions is a therapeutic exposure of the "sources of prejudice and hatred." Stations, he believes, "which turn over their microphones to residents of large city ghettos perform an inestimable service." "If," the Commissioner says, "anti-Semitic sentiments exist among portions of New York's population, then no valid social purpose can be served by suppression of this important fact."

But this begs the question. No one is suggesting that the fact of the existence of anti-Semitic sentiments be suppressed. Although the fact of such sentiments is rarely news, there are contexts in which it becomes significant and deserves to be reported. But to say that a station performs an "inestimable service" in permitting a gratuitous slander of a religious minority is even more unsupportable than to encourage slanderous personal attacks on individuals.

No medium of communication should be regarded as especially virtuous because it provides a forum for the expression of hateful views. Hate begets hate; it does not exorcise it. The concept of free speech means that everyone has a right to speak to whatever audience he can command. It does not, however, mean that he has a right to an audience.

If there are enough persons who wish to express virulent anti-Semitic viewpoints, their desires will be reflected in the marketplace by the ability to found an organ of public opinion that will advance those views. Such organs do exist on the lunatic fringe of American journalism. But that is a far cry from saying that they

should be able to compel access to broadcast media, or that a station irresponsibly broadcasting such views should be praised for performing a public service.

Not long ago, historian Barbara Tuchman, author of *THE GUNS OF AUGUST*, observed that "standards of taste, like the liberties guaranteed in our Constitution, need continual reaffirmation if they are to remain alive." "To recognize and to proclaim," she said, "the difference between right and wrong, or what we believe at a given time to be right and wrong, is the obligation of persons who presume to lead or are thrust into leadership or hold positions of authority."

It has always been a recognized function of the publisher of any newspaper or magazine—as it must also be the function of their counterparts in the broadcast press—to exercise editorial judgment according to standards of some sort. A medium of information that operated without the exercise of this editorial function would, as Judge Learned Hand once observed, "be immeasurably wearisome and utterly fatuous."

The exercise of that function does not involve censorship in any First Amendment sense and those who apply that word merely confuse the issue. To abdicate editorial responsibility and to convert a medium of communication into little more than a bulletin board for the expression of hateful or immature views is to disserve the public interest.

I cannot close a consideration of the subject of taste without some reference to a closely related and very vital subject—the problem of violence in television programming. Some critics, of course, claim that we should summarily ban all violence on television. Most thoughtful persons, however, recognize that all media of communication—including most great literature and art—have through the ages emphasized violence as a theme.

A recent Senate staff report prepared by the Library of Congress suggests the reason for this emphasis by pointing out that "violence in literature, if it is good literature, serves to place the human condition in perspective, to comment in some way upon the aggressive side of man's nature which is never far from the surface of human activity." One has only to look at the history of drama, from Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides through the Elizabethans and down to our own modern playwrights like Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and Arthur Miller to recognize the reflection of that fact. Even our nursery rhymes and fairy tales are fraught with it.

The CBS Television Network has always believed that the so-called action-and-adventure programs embodying violence should not occupy a disproportionate part of the television schedule. Following the tragic assassinations last year of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and the creation by President Johnson of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, we immediately undertook further to reduce the depiction of violence in our programming.

We did this not because we were persuaded that there is any demonstrated connection between the depiction of violence in television entertainment and the occurrence of violence in everyday life. We did it because—in the absence of any authoritative data concerning that connection—we considered it our duty to give to that proposition the benefit of the doubt. We have, therefore, renewed our efforts to guard against those instances where violence creeps into a script for the sake of violence and not because it is called for by considerations of dramatic value.

We must also seek to see to it that violence, when presented, is meaningful and engages the viewer's concern and sympathy. It has been well said that "Violence, when presented as the cause of human behavior *to be followed by consequences*, can be used to reflect constructively upon the nature of man." A noted psychologist, Dr. Robert Coles, has observed that "the issue is not the presence of violence. The issue is what is done with it. . . ." Dr. Otto Larsen, a consultant to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, underscored this thought by testifying before the Commission that "we must be more creative in our presentation of violence."

It would be foolish of me to suggest that television drama can invariably emulate great literature in its treatment of violent themes. We acknowledge, however, that we must demonstrate a moral responsibility in the presentation of violence; we must give to the viewer a heightened sense of its reality and a keener awareness of the pain it causes both to those who commit it and to those on whom it is committed.

In closing, let me observe that no mass medium has ever been so buffeted by criticism as television is at the present time. We are attacked by those who think us libertine and irresponsible as well as by those who think us repressive, unimaginative, and stodgy. In the final analysis, however, we have no choice but to exercise our responsibility as we see it.



This means resisting those on the left who tell us that our proper role is to grant license to whoever wishes to say or do anything. It means resisting those on the right who would have us turn our backs on the revolution in mores and morals that modern life has brought about. Ours is a difficult course. We cannot expect to be free from criticism, but we hope to be able to say that we have done our very best not to deserve it.

# WILL BUREAUCRACY FINALLY KILL ART?

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JOHN R. BARRETT

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We often refer to the television system of the United States as art. To our misfortune, it falls dismally short of art. In our attempt to construct a system that would provide for creative expression, we have succeeded only in building a clumsy bureaucracy that has proved incapable of managing anything so volatile as the process of communication.

As *the* basic social process, communication enabled man to form his first tentative societies. It is man's oldest art...although this offers no insurance that is a well-disciplined art. If it was capable of binding man together, it has also proved capable of exploding and dissolving these man-made societies.

Pre-twentieth century communication situations were tame—person-to-person or person-to-people—compared to the mind-boggling meld of art and electronics we have unleashed in television. When electronic communication was introduced, its mentors recognized the frightening potential of the new media: "The power of the press will not be comparable to that of broadcasting when the industry is fully developed."<sup>1</sup>

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**JOHN R. BARRETT** is manager of the Smothers Brothers companies under the heading of SmoBro Productions. Formerly a writer and producer of numerous network television shows, he has headed several radio and television stations during his career in broadcasting and has lectured at a number of universities on mass communication.

The following article is based on his major address before the National Conference of Christian Broadcasters in New York City on June 12.

They began a search for the possible method of controlling and directing the effects of the new media. As Peter Drucker comments: "Rarely has there been a more torrid political love affair than that between the government and the generations that reached manhood between 1918 and 1960. Anything that anyone felt needed doing during this period was to be turned over to government—and this, everyone seemed to believe, made sure that the job was already done."<sup>2</sup>

That love affair tied the broadcast system to the federal government via a system of licenses. We justified this on the premise that the public airwaves were being used and somebody ought to represent the public in looking after the broadcaster. The men who brainstormed these nuptials did not foresee linking franchises, eventually to be worth multi-millions of dollars to the federal government.

They did not create an art, they created a lobby. As Drucker continues, "Every beneficiary of a government program immediately becomes a 'constituent.' He immediately organizes himself for effective political action and for pressure on the decision maker."<sup>3</sup> The slightest threat to these licenses sends broadcasters flocking to Washington.

Within the larger bureaucracy of government, we have built a mini-broadcast bureaucracy. While television plays with the ingredients of art, and uses (inaccurately) the language of art, it is not an art. We have created a system of television that has all of the creative drive, the imagination, and the innovative capability...of the Internal Revenue Service.

Each of these personalities—the artist and the bureaucrat—has a function to perform in society. The innovator is a person of constant curiosity whose desire to create leads him to develop new ideas. His interest lies in the present, and his purpose is to give his fellow man a glimpse of the future.

As the young poet, Bob Dylan, sings, "She's got everything she needs, she's an artist, she don't look back."<sup>4</sup> The Chinese translate "art": "To make new." Yoko Ono, the filmmaker wife of Beatle John Lennon, says, "The future is what we (the artists) create. If not totally accurate, at least the artist's creations can give man alternatives for his future, and in offering the choice, the artist does assist in creating the future."

The bureaucrat, on the other hand, does not share the artist's interest in the future. He is deeply rooted in the past. Like the

tribal elder, it is his job to place a brake upon the culture and preserve tradition.

In a college commencement address to the graduating class of General Beadle State College in Madison, South Dakota, President Nixon said, "On every hand, we find old standards violated, old values discarded, old precepts ignored. A vocal minority is optioned out of the process by which civilization maintains its continuity; the passing on of values from one generation to the next...." This is the bureaucrat's view of society; unchanging, inalterable, immutable. The press termed the campus "safe."

The thought of a changeless universe is comforting but hardly an accurate assessment of man's erratic path through history. As man increases his knowledge, he changes. Every new bit of knowledge alters society slightly. A rapid advance in knowledge creates the need for more rapid social change. British biologist Gordon Taylor says, "It takes time to adjust to new social conditions, and when the rate of innovation is rapid, the disruption caused can destroy a culture, as has often been seen when western culture has impinged on technologically primitive societies."<sup>5</sup>

Consider then, that in the first half of this century, man amassed more knowledge than he had been able to compile in his entire previous history on earth. Consider further that between 1960 and 1969, this accumulated store of knowledge doubled. Finally, consider the staggering projection that it will double again in the next three years. Taylor writes, "It seems quite probable that the rate of innovation may be so high as to destroy western civilization, perhaps even world culture, from within...."<sup>6</sup>

This knowledge and its accompanying technology has placed man on the moon when, only a few years ago, the railroad was remaking his planet. It has changed our society from rural to urban in less than a lifetime. It has placed the female on a sexual equivalent with the male...or, as the commercial says, "You've come a long way, baby!" But the bureaucrat, with his eyes fixed upon "old standards, old values, and old precepts," continues to rationalize the unchanging world about him. (Who but the bureaucrat would study the vast numbers of troubled campuses in the nation and select a momentarily calm college in the middle of South Dakota as representative of our young people?)

*It is this same refusal to face the problems of the present that guts television of its artistic capability. Whenever he is confronted with the present, the bureaucrat begins to slip his gears. He escapes*

the unpleasant prospect of change...by fantasizing. Critics have complained about television's fantasy trips for years. Yet, in the face of this continuing criticism, look at the medium today: *Gunsmoke*, *The Virginian*, *Wild Wild West*...an exciting era in American history but harmlessly irrelevant to the present. *Mayberry*, *Petticoat Junction*, *Green Acres*, *Beverly Hillbillies*, *Gentle Ben*... people, towns (and bears) that do not exist. *Star Trek*, *Land of the Giants*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *The Prisoner*...whole worlds that do not exist.

Television is no more relevant today than when it began, nor will it be as long as the bureaucrat holds it at a "safe" distance from the problems of our society. (It must be noted that both sides of the bureaucracy—industry and government—laud the documentary function of television. In some instances, justifiably so. But this is still a "safe" relevance because the documentary, while assuming the form of art, draws its facts from existing institutions, *i.e.*: the past. Even at this, praise is doled out only so long as the documentary remains "safe." The events outside the Hilton Hotel at the 1968 Democratic Convention were amply documented by television. Neither the industry nor the government handed out any special awards for the coverage.)

The bureaucracy often invokes the language of art...with little apparent recognition of the semantic blunders they make. CBS Network President Robert Wood writes the *New York Times* in defense of his network's cancellation of the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*: "The central issue involved here is whether a broadcast organization has some responsibility to the public with respect to questions of taste, and if so, whether it is entitled to establish reasonable procedures in order to exercise that responsibility."

"Taste" is subjective: an individual's esthetic preference. It is governed by, and obviously limited to, an individual's set of values. True, it is possible to form a composite of individual "tastes," and for the sake of argument, let us presume that Mr. Wood did not mean that he wished to impose *his* values upon the viewing audience. But then there are other questions which would logically arise. How representative is this composite? How many black people are allowed to influence that "broadcast organization"? Are the values of the young people considered part of "the public"? How many Mexican-Americans...and so on to the absurd.

We are aware from years of viewing the daily product that "anyone who did anything of importance was white. Generally of

English descent. Almost always Protestant. The blacks and browns were clowns. The yellow insidious or invidious; at least sinister and inscrutable. Vamps and sirens might be the stars, but it was the wholesome girl next door who would make the best wife. Wealth was happiness; the richer the better. In the eternal game of cops and robbers, the cops always won. In the spy game, foreign agents were sinister and nefarious; ours were patriotic.”<sup>7</sup>

Television’s value system, in short, is white, Anglo-Saxon middle class, suburban-dwelling (even here we find out from the movies that they have been missing some of the goodies), over-30 and Protestant...hardly reflective of the values of a changing and troubled nation. While invoking artistic terms, the bureaucracy only establishes as “the central issue” its right to impose a limited system of values upon the “public airwaves.”

“Taste” thus sanctifies hour upon hour of soap-opera vapidty but, in the case of the Smothers Brothers Show, denies Joan Baez a 15-second explanation of her husband’s draft-resistance arrest. “Responsibility” allows the *Flying Nun* to save Kansas from a communist take-over but denies the disaffected black man a platform from which to air his grievances. Censorship, as practiced by the bureaucracy, is the subtle art of not watching what is said... but *who* is saying it...with the continuing rationalization that we keep society “safe” by enforcing “old standards, old values, old precepts.”

Do we?

By retreating to the apparent “safety” of fantasy, the bureaucrat has only succeeded in transporting *himself* to this fairy-land sanctuary. The problems remain real. The people remain real. As we enter an era where the artist’s product...ideas which might enable man to meet the challenge of his exploding knowledge... is so desperately needed, the bureaucrat has created a personal hideout of the nation’s most powerful medium.

The thesis proposes a solution which will be disagreeable to those who “reached manhood between 1918 and 1960.” That is, that the government has proved itself an inept regulator of the industry and that we should somehow dissolve the alliance. Even the most bureaucratic of our present leadership is willing to admit that the simplest of communication tasks—delivering a letter from one point to another—has been hopelessly bogged by the bureaucracy.

It would not require an over-zealous imagination in order to raise doubts about the government’s aptitude in the dangerously

complex field of electronic communication. But the solution does not lie in divorce. Romances made in heaven are much more easily dissolved than those made in Washington. As Drucker observes, "Indeed the typical response to (bureaucratic) failure... is to double the budget and staff."<sup>8</sup>

The solution I propose is much humbler. It is that we establish a missionary group to approach the leaders of both sides of the bureaucracy. It would be this group's task to acquaint both the industry and the government with the potential peril of a mis-managed system of communication.

This "Head Start" program would attempt to teach some basic social and philosophical concepts, and in so doing would demonstrate the role of the artist in society. The artistic missionaries would demonstrate that art...ideas...portend change and will evoke protest from the more resistant of our population. But they will also show that change is inevitable and without ideas, chaotic. They might demonstrate that two hundred letters of protest is an infinitesimal percentage of our nation's population.

Finally, this group could calmly, but firmly explain that letters of protest do not reduce the need for ideas...or the rate of change in a society. And that the alternative is another type of protest. One that is all too familiar in our streets, our ghettos, and our campuses...all too frequently written in blood.

#### NOTES

1. Congressman Johnson. Debates on Federal Radio Act. U.S. House of Representatives, 1927.
2. Peter Drucker. "The Sickness of Government," *Public Interest Quarterly*, Winter 1969.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Bob Dylan. "She Belongs to Me," M. Witmark & Sons, 1963.
5. Gordon Rattray Taylor. *The Biological Time Bomb*, Thames and Hudson, 1968.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Robert A. Heinlein. *Stranger in a Strange Land*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961.
8. Peter Drucker, *op. cit.*

Recently Goar Mestre became chairman of the International Council of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Señor Mestre brings to this post a wealth of experience as a telecaster in Havana, and since 1960 as President of PROARTEL in Buenos Aires.

Because of our interest in how Señor Mestre feels the International Council could make progress, we queried him about expressing his views in this journal. In turn, Señor Mestre invited the Editor to Buenos Aires and agreed to a lengthy interview, which would encompass not only the plans of the International Council but an inquiry into the state of television in Argentina today.

The information in the following interview, we feel, will prove as enlightening to most of the QUARTERLY's readers as it was to the Editor. Our ignorance of the technical and programming sophistication in South America's television industry, as represented by a highly successful operation such as PROARTEL, may be somewhat diminished through such meetings.

When we were in South America, during the first 10 days of July, we learned how eagerly the people throughout the hemisphere were anticipating the mission of Apollo 11, how along with their *norteamericano* neighbors they would share the anxious moments when Neil Armstrong first stepped on the moon. It was indeed an event to be shared and cherished by viewers throughout the world.

We perceive this interview, then, as the first in a series examining the role television plays in different countries.

D. M. W.



# TELEVISION IN ARGENTINA

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An interview with SR. GOAR MESTRE

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Dr. David Manning White—*Sr. Mestre, critics of television often claim that the medium is not achieving its potential from the point of view of its responsibilities to its viewers. You may recall, some years ago, that FCC Commissioner Newton Minow referred to television as the "wasteland." Do you agree with this in part or fully, and moreover how would you define television's responsibilities to its viewers?*

**MESTRE—**

I think that in our system of privately-owned competitive television, the viewer has a choice of programs, in other words what we term even throughout South America "the American system of broadcasting" as compared to the European system of broadcasting, which is generally a state-owned and controlled monopoly. I think that the principal aim of television is to entertain, secondly to inform, and only after that can we talk about educating the people and providing the viewers with entertainment of a high cultural level.

I think that it is so easy for an FCC Commissioner to criticize television. But as I tell our government people (and our government people are not unlike your government people or any country's government people), they indeed have a responsibility

and they are discharging that responsibility when they ask for better television, and they never cease to ask for more or for better television.

I also tell them we could turn right around and say: "I think we should have better government. I think we should have better municipal services." Here in Buenos Aires we could say: "We should have better paved streets; we should have better paved sidewalks. Our garbage collection could be improved tremendously. Our schools leave a great deal to be desired. Our police service leaves a great deal to be desired." I think that just as it is proper for us to make that kind of demand, and we do, it is equally proper for government authorities to ask more of television.

But I think that we have to keep in mind that the viewer is sole master in his home, and that he is going to look *when* he wants to and *at what* he wants to look. If we raise our sights a little too high, they simply go over to another channel, if they are fortunate, as we are, to have a choice of channels. In the case of government monopolies what they do, and the figures confirm this, is simply turn the set off. Now, I have a wonderful illustration of what can happen and it took place right here three nights ago. We do a number of "spectaculars" a year, and this year among them we chose to do *Othello*. In the nine years that we have been producing programs here at PROARTEL [Producciones Argentinas de Televisión] never have we tackled a more ambitious job and never have we done a better job, and never have we spent so much money as we did on *Othello*. We are very proud of what we have done, and already we have closed a deal to have it shown in Mexico. We have no doubt that we will show it in Spain, and we are hopeful that we will show it in other Spanish-speaking markets.

All right, this show, wonderful quality, ambitious production, was widely advertised, widely promoted. Our competition—and I will offer no other comment—chose to do a take-off of *Othello* and on the same night, same hour, with very good comedians. They called it something or other "from Venice," and the amazing thing is that if we look at these figures here, you will notice that on Friday *Othello* brought in an audience of 21 rating points and the competition that did this take-off on *Othello* came in with 24. They beat us. I think that this is the most eloquent reply that we can have on the question that you have put to me.

*—Are there, in your estimation, Sr. Mestre, essential differences between what television does or tries to do in the United States and here in South America, or more specifically in Argentina, and if so, what are these differences?*

**MESTRE—**

Curiously enough—and I think that this is somewhat of an extension of the previous question, because I don't think that I finished replying to it—I think that we are discharging our responsibility pretty well. At least we are very conscientious, we are very sincere, we are very earnest. Our competence may be questioned but our intentions cannot be. I don't think that, in general, television differs in Argentina from television in the United States. I think that our program fare is essentially, basically, the same. What you have in U.S. television falls in line with what I said before: your most popular programs are comedy shows—situation comedy or straight comedy. People, when they come home from work, basically want to laugh. They want to forget their problems. We have quite a bit of comedy and it is just as popular in Argentina as it is in the States.

As for drama, we have exactly as much as you do in the States. Take that very famous American invention, the so-called soap opera. Well, in Argentine television today, on the four channels in Buenos Aires, we have a total of 17 "soap operas" per day. Channel 13, which is one of eleven stations that PROARTEL programs in Argentina, is carrying six at the present moment. So there is no difference from the States.

Insofar as news is concerned, today we are doing four hours per day. We start at seven in the morning, with a newscast of half an hour, which we repeat at seven-thirty and again at eight. And we have one hour of news at the lunch hour. Perhaps there is a slight difference, because there are more people who go home for lunch in Buenos Aires than in the States. We have news from one to two, then again at eight o'clock and 11:30 at night.

When we talk of sports, well, we don't have the variety that you have in the States. Basically, on a professional basis, or popular appeal basis, this is a one-sport country. This country is mad about soccer, and when you carry a soccer game on television you get the audience. It does not matter at what time this happens. There

are two good clubs and when they are up in a high position in the race, then the audience can be tremendous.

So, I would say that basically, what appeals to the American audience appeals to the Argentine audience. Now, within those program classifications there are certain differences but perhaps we can talk about that a little more.

*—How much of the programming on Channel 13 here in Buenos Aires, and on the 11 stations you service in PROARTEL, consists of programs produced either in New York or Hollywood? Along the same line, what have been the most popular American programs and why? I recall that Mission Impossible was one that your station apparently has had some success with. Perhaps you can discuss this.*

#### **MESTRE—**

This has been a very curious development here. Privately-owned television did not take off in Argentina until very late—it was in 1960. From 1951 until 1960 there was only one station, government-owned, and it was not until after the Revolution of Liberation in 1955 that the government decided that television was going to follow the pattern that it has in America.

In the beginning the U.S.-imported series shows, dubbed in Spanish, took the country by storm. They became extremely popular and the battle among the channels was waged principally with regard to U.S.-imported shows. Now in the nine years that have elapsed, and this is very curious (I have some personal views on this but in this business one can never be sure of any view), the interest in U.S. programs, of course always dubbed in Spanish, has waned to a point that they don't count very much in our programming.

We have here, for instance, the top 30 programs for the month of May, and we find that shows ranked one to five are live or live-on-tape shows locally produced. The sixth show is a feature show. The seventh is again local live. The highest rating U.S. series is an old U.S. show produced by Disney many years ago. It is *El Zorro (Mark of Zorro)*. Then we have locally produced shows all the way down the list until we come to *Hollywood in Spanish*, a Hollywood feature dubbed in Spanish, which is ranked number 23. Then we go on with live productions until number 28, *The Three Stooges*, dubbed in Spanish. The one that you mentioned a little while ago, *Mission Impossible*, is the 30th ranking show of the top thirty.

Take Channel 13 here in Buenos Aires. In 1960, we were about 30 per cent live-on-tape, and the balance was film. In that film classification there were a great number of U.S. series. Today, out of 18½ hours, 14 hours and 10 minutes are made up of what we term live or live-on-tape locally produced Argentine shows. Rather than classifying the rest as films, let's refer to them as "imported shows," although in that classification we also have Argentine features. We carry quite a few of those because they are the most popular features—the Argentine features.

—*These are moving pictures? You have something comparable to Saturday Night at the Movies?*

**MESTRE—**

That's right. Exactly.

—*And these are Argentine?*

**MESTRE—**

They are Argentine and they are the most recent ones, maybe a couple of years old.

—*...and the American movies have no appeal?*

**MESTRE—**

The American movies are gradually taking hold but much more slowly. The acceptance of U.S. motion pictures dubbed in Spanish has not been quite as good as the acceptance of U.S. series dubbed in Spanish. But I think it is a matter of time before they also accept the U.S. movies dubbed in Spanish.

—*In essence, then, the largest segment of your programming is produced here in Buenos Aires. You said 14 hours and 10 minutes of your daily 18½ hours.*

**MESTRE—**

That is the daily average.

—*All right, let's talk about a specific program, if I may, that I was watching in rehearsal yesterday. This is La Tuerca (the "Nuts"), I guess that is what you call it.*

MESTRE—

That's right.

*—Apparently it is a satiric review. The closest thing that would be comparable in my country would be Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In or that type of show. Have you ever found the problem of good taste entering into the picture? For example, have you had any situations similar to the Smothers Brothers incident, in which you had to drop a highly-rated show because it was too controversial? Does this problem ever come up?*

MESTRE—

Well, not like what has happened in the States. In this type of show we always have problems but we have most of these internally within our shop. These are shows that have a tendency to get out of hand. You have to watch them carefully and you have to argue and battle with the producers to keep them from putting on the air things that are definitely in bad taste. Now and then, some things on the borderline do get by, but these are shows that we watch very carefully and that we try to keep, as much as possible, as clean as possible and in good taste. We have never had a situation like the one you described because the producers of these shows have never taken the position that was taken by the Smothers Brothers. They recognize our right and our authority to delete from these programs the things that we don't believe should be aired. Does that answer the question?

*—Yes, but I would like to elaborate on this a little bit more. As I have talked with you the last couple of days, I have had the feeling that if a show like this one wanted to satirize the government, it could do so as long as it did not go too far or was in bad taste. Is that the type of thing that you have to watch closely, or are you more concerned about the things that could offend an average family?*

MESTRE—

No, I am referring to things that might offend a family, not anything that might offend the government. We make a little fun at government red tape, for instance. There is a sketch in that program that has been carried for years, and it has never ceased to be funny. It has to do with a man who wants a municipal

authorization to plant a tree in a given place. This man has been bounced from government office to government office for the last several years and he has already a pile of permits and papers that reach more than a foot high and he still hasn't got the final permission to plant this tree!

*—You have already given me some information on this, but again I would like to elaborate. In a country such as Argentina (and I think that this might apply to other countries in South America) how does a relatively young industry develop its own indigenous programming, a programming that is meaningful to the people of this country? As you have pointed out, of the top-rated 30 programs, American programs are not pulling much weight. Do you get many letters, do you have other kinds of feedback, do you conduct public opinion polls? Of course, you have your rating system, which is perhaps the best kind of feedback. Are there any other kind of market research tools that enable you to meet what you perceive to be what the public wishes. In particular, at the beginning as you were playing it by ear, how did you develop what you felt to be Argentine programming?*

#### **MESTRE—**

In the first place, Argentina is in a unique position insofar as Latin America is concerned. This country has a richer supply of talent than any other Spanish-speaking nation. For instance, never will you find in Buenos Aires less than 26 theaters in any season carrying legitimate plays, so there has been a long tradition of theater here. We have perhaps one of the great opera houses in the world, the Colon Theater, which has enjoyed the advantage that our seasons here are reversed. When it is summer in Milan and San Francisco or New York, it is winter here and the best performers in the world travel south in June, July and appear in the Colon Theater. We also have the finest ballet in South America.

Argentina for many years had a very thriving motion picture industry and it was a leader in Latin America. That suffered heavily during the years of the Peron dictatorship, when many of the artists were persecuted and had to flee from the country, and the Argentine motion picture industry is just beginning to bounce back. So, with all this wealth of talent it hasn't been difficult to make this transition from imported shows to more locally produced live, or live-on-tape shows.

Now, insofar as determining the popularity of the audience acceptance of these shows, here we use exactly the same tools that you use in the States, and it has been much easier for us to copy the tools that you have developed in the States than to develop our own. We are guided, naturally, by audience surveys.

We are as equally enslaved by ratings as the industry in the States. We have two rating services. We are using two different techniques in Argentina and they coincide pretty well; at least, they detect the trends very clearly. Now, to judge the popularity of a given artist—if it is a singer, we can follow his sales of records very closely, as you do in the States, and we also make surveys. We go out and interview maybe 500 or a thousand people, put a few questions to them, and get the reactions. We don't do any more nor any less than you do in the States in this connection.

*—In Buenos Aires I understand that your station and the other channels have to compete with a station (Channel 7) that is completely government-owned. Yet that station, as I understand it, is programming sponsored programs. Isn't this unusual, and how well does this station do? I don't know of any other countries—perhaps there are some—where you have this situation.*

#### MESTRE—

Well, it is not only unique but it is most regrettable. This is a carry-over from many years back. As I told you a little while ago, the first television station was government-owned and it went commercial from the very beginning. Every government that has followed the Revolutionary Government of Liberation—that is the way it is referred to—since 1955 has talked about doing something different with Channel 7. But for one reason or another this has been postponed and nothing has been done about it.

The present government has done so much to restore confidence in the Argentine economy and has performed a miracle of stabilization in stopping inflation. (You know, for seven of the nine years that I have been here, we have had galloping inflation, and the peso in relation to the dollar went from 82 pesos to the dollar in 1960 to the present figure of 350 pesos to the dollar.) But the present government, which has done such a wonderful job of really fostering private enterprise, has not been consistent to the point of applying this philosophy and this policy to the government television station.



Not only do they carry commercials—and it is the only case that I know of a government-owned and -operated station competing with private industry—but for the past several months they have been incurring an abuse of power. They have thrown their weight—their official weight—around on behalf of the government-owned station.

However, I am happy to report that the man responsible for this inexplicable policy has left the government a few days ago. He was the Secretary for Information and Tourism, and I guess in his little heart he developed quite a liking for the television business and decided that he was going to participate in it.

This also explains why the government station has the sole right on all soccer games. The government has intervened in the Soccer League for many well-founded reasons for the past several years, and they have used their influence and they have used their pocketbook. Nevertheless, the Channel 7 operation has lost millions and millions of dollars and the only comforting thing from this experience, and this is very important in our countries, is that once again it has been eloquently proven that private enterprise can do things better than government.

*—And what about their ratings?*

**MESTRE—**

Despite their unlimited resources and unlimited influence, they have not been able to do well. Of course this makes us very happy. We are still hopeful and confident that when the government has time to take a good, close look—they have had more important things to do heretofore—I am confident that this situation will be corrected, and that the government-owned station—I hope they keep it—will be dedicated to other needs. We need an educational television station in Argentina and the logical thing is for the government to provide this service.

*—Sr. Mestre, I know that you have been active over the past several years in the Interamerican Broadcasting Association. Can you tell me in what way the various countries in Latin America are working together to improve television or broadcasting in general?*

**MESTRE—**

The Interamerican Association of Broadcasters was founded in Mexico City in 1946 by a group of radio broadcasters, and I was

among them. It has worked incessantly over the years, first of all to further what we again must refer to as the American system of broadcasting. The principal objective of the Interamerican Association of Broadcasters was to do everything in its power to have radio in the Americas operated by private industry, by private hands.

—*Radio, and television as well?*

**MESTRE—**

That's right. First radio and then television. It has done a great deal to guarantee freedom of expression over the airwaves. If we really believe in the democratic form of government we must do everything we can to provide freedom of information through these media, and that has been another important task of the Association. Last, but not least, it has worked hard to give broadcasting a sense of responsibility, reminding our members that we must always operate in the public interest.

—*How many members are there altogether?*

**MESTRE—**

Well, the Interamerican Association is an "association of associations." For example, the National Association of Broadcasters is the United States representative. If you take in all the members of all the associations that are members of the Interamerican Association of Broadcasters, I think that the number of radio and television stations exceeds seven thousand. I was President for two consecutive periods, from 1948 to 1952, and I was a Director until 1961, when I resigned. I was greatly honored by the Association because they made me an Honorary President and that's what I am today, but I am no longer active in it.

—*Do you attend their meetings?*

**MESTRE—**

No, I don't attend their meetings any more but I have their work very close to my heart.

—*Now, this is the last question that I would like to ask you. What about the International Council of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. As its new Chairman, what kind of activities do you envision it can and should foster? What are the common*

*problems that television broadcasters share, whether they operate in Buenos Aires, or in Los Angeles or Cleveland or New York. Have you given much thought to this?*

**MESTRE—**

Yes, I have and I feel greatly honored by my appointment to the Chairmanship of the International Council. I have attended only one meeting, since, as you know, this is a rather new endeavor of the Academy. There has only been one meeting that was held last May and there will be a second meeting sometime next November when I believe we will get down to specifics.

Now, I think that the work of the Council has no limit to what it can do. It opens up many new avenues of endeavor that have implications for the whole world. Here in Argentina, for instance, we are on the threshold of a new era. We expect to have our ground satellite station by the end of this month, and we are rather hopeful and fairly confident that we will be able to offer to our audience, in Argentina, the Apollo 11 moon landing, two weeks from now. This will be quite an event. I think it is the most important thing that will take place since television came to this country.

After that, the World Championship Soccer Games in Mexico next year will be the event of all time insofar as the Argentine television audience is concerned. Naturally, I think that this opens up unlimited possibilities. We have been talking to our colleagues in other countries about certain shows that we want to do on a reciprocal basis. I think that Mexico can produce perhaps a few "spectaculars" that we would like to carry here and that we can turn around and produce as many "spectaculars" and have Mexico then carry them. I refer to Mexico and Argentina because in those two countries you will find the principal television production centers. And I am not limiting my remarks to what we do here in PROARTEL. I am talking about the whole Argentine industry and the whole Mexican industry.

The Council has been talking about exchanging not only talent, but writers, technicians. The world is getting smaller every day. We hear that said and said again, but, aside from repeating these high-sounding phrases, I think that the men responsible for the industry in the various countries really have to sit down and take advantage of the tremendous opportunities that lie ahead of us.

Television can do a great deal to bring us closer together. These things have been said before many times but I think that it is up

to us to really accomplish at least some of these projects. Now, to me perhaps the most valuable thing about the Council is that it will afford an opportunity to many of us who eat, drink, sleep television, an opportunity to come in contact with other people who are doing exactly the same thing, with other problems in other lands, but with the same basic objectives.

I can tell you that it was most stimulating, gratifying, and interesting for me just to attend this lunch in New York and meet the people who were there. The project—I forget what they call it—of circulating among the various countries (I think it is “the television workshop” or something like that) and distributing to all interested countries the International Television Showcases is so valuable. Japan has done a wonderful presentation of its television industry, which has been shown to the members of the Academy in the United States. I understand that England has also done a presentation to this type and other countries will follow, and what we are talking about is not to limit the exhibition of these presentations to members of the Academy in the States but to exhibit them widely.

When I told my people here that we would be able to show them a two-hour program explaining all about Japanese television, British television or eventually American television, Canadian television and so forth, they became extremely excited with the idea. We don't know enough about one another and I think that this is the basic objective of the Council. We have got to know each other better. We have got to know what we are trying to do, each one of us, and we can learn tremendously from one another, I have no doubt.

*—Thank you very much, Sr. Mestre, for letting me come to Buenos Aires and talk with you.*

DR. DAVID MANNING WHITE  
Editor, Television Quarterly  
Buenos Aires, July 2, 1969

A noted social psychologist concerned with audiences and institutions, **LEO BOGART** is executive vice-president and general manager of the Bureau of Advertising, American Newspaper Publishers Association. His many publications of pioneer stature include **THE AGE OF TELEVISION**.

This article is based on the author's statement before the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in Washington, D. C. on October 17 of last year. Notes Dr. Bogart, "These observations are submitted as expressions of personal judgment. They have been cleared with no one, and in no way reflect any considered or official views of my organization or of any other newspaper industry group."

# VIOLENCE IN THE MASS MEDIA

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LEO BOGART

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An advanced industrial society is inconceivable without a system of mass communication. Our society's complexity and specialization of function require a constant flow of information to keep the moving parts intermeshed. Our institutions are too large and the people who constitute them too widely scattered for information to move by face-to-face contacts as it did in an earlier era of mankind.

The subject of violence in the mass media opens up larger questions of taste, values, and politics. When we think of the influence of the mass media in any of these areas, we are concerned with the cumulative effect of many individual small decisions by media operators in response to specific situations. These decisions may be based on considerations that appear to be highly idiosyncratic at the time, yet in their similarity to decisions by others, add up to a pattern.

In a society where political authority does not direct or fix the character of media content, the relationship between content and public taste or opinion resembles that of the chicken and egg; each is the creature of the other. To the extent that all media are economic institutions dependent on public favor (either directly or indirectly) for financial support, their content and direction must reflect public expectations, values, and beliefs. But these are also shaped and governed by those which prevail in the mass media to which the public is exposed. If media content is wanting, whether in its level of violence, level of taste, level of political enlightenment, or level of intellectual expression, the defects must to some degree reflect public appetites freely expressed in the marketplace.

The single term "the media" embraces a wide variety of sources of information and experience. They differ enormously in their character, organization, and social function. It is very difficult to find any common denominator by which the various media can be compared across the board, except in terms of their success as economic entities.

The size of audience for a medium is no sure indicator of its influence or impact. As a measure, it may have no relationship at all to the intensity of the communications experience that takes place as the result of exposure. Nor does intensity in any sense relate to the amount of time people spend with different media, since the rate and volume of information flow is quite different in broadcast, time-bound media than it is in print, which readers absorb selectively and at their own pace.

The circulation of a newspaper or magazine and the number of viewers or listeners for a broadcast offer no sure criteria of meaningful communication. But neither do they necessarily measure the success of the medium as a business venture. Publications of identical circulation often vary widely in their volumes of advertising and in profits to their owners.

In all media, exposure is self-selective to some degree. People turn to publications or programs that support their tastes and values rather than to those that threaten them by their strangeness. Below the level of conscious choice, people are self-selective in the content to which they pay attention and remember. The eye and ear avoid the irrelevant; people focus on what is meaningful to them. Those who seek after sensation can find it, whether in the form of violence, sex, or scatology.

Undoubtedly, some of what is wrong in the mass media reflects sinister manipulation. A comparative handful of clever individuals sets out to pander to low instincts by producing pornographic motion pictures, sadistic books, sensational newspaper headlines, or brutal TV episodes. Similarly, in defiance of the American tradition that separates editorial commentary from objective reporting, both at the chief and Indian levels of the news media, there are individuals who consciously slant political content by words or pictures, by commission, omission, or emphasis.

But it is hard to argue that such instances of distortion characterize the media on the whole, and, given a diversity of information sources, it is generally understood that the dangers of censorship outweigh the evils of bias. Critics of the media generally fault those features that reflect the autonomous workings of the media system rather than the deliberate policies of media management.

The rationale for introducing violence into the media resembles the rationale for giving substantial media attention to unsavory figures from the political fringes. The media decision-maker feels he must respond to what the public wants, and he senses that the public wants drama, excitement, titillation, wants its curiosity piqued. The editor or program producer must somehow satisfy these interests, not merely because the economics of his job require the satisfaction of his audience, but because in human terms he needs their approving response as much as does the actor on the stage.

It is essential to distinguish among various types of violence that may be depicted in the media. The most crucial distinction is that between the real and the imaginary. The news media deal in real violence. The entertainment media deal in imaginary or fantasy violence. The real violence depicted in news media is frequently gratuitous, essentially inexplicable, whereas entertainment media normally deal with violence as a manifestation of character. Violence in the news is apt to be episodic in nature, since news reports must often describe events divorced from their known origins or consequences. Drama uses violence as a revelation of human frailties, motives, and conflicts rather than for its own sake.

Suspense and uncertainty are the very essence of drama, and dramatic violence in the entertainment media is used to build and heighten the excitement of the inevitable crisis and denouement. The essence of dramatic tragedy, as Aristotle has told us, is that the hero's downfall arises from a flaw in his character, or as the retribu-



tion for some earlier transgression on his part. The *deus ex machina* represents fate, an impersonal force that executes the purposes of the drama when human characters are inadequate to do so. On rare occasions, the violence of the real world fulfills the requirements of high drama when it strikes at real heroes with whom the public feels intimate, the Kennedys or Martin Luther King, known to have defied the gods and tempted fate.

For news to have an intense dramatic effect it is essential that there be a high degree of audience identity, either with the actor or with the victim; perhaps with both. The greater the number of participants the harder it is for any to achieve this kind of individual identity, and the lower the dramatic charge.

For violence to be dramatic and to create audience involvement, individual skill or individual motives must be apparent. The depiction of organized, impersonal violence, as in syndicate crime or in military affairs, no longer meets these criteria when it is presented in general terms. Violence abstracted, as in the case of casualty statistics in a news report, provides a quite different phenomenon from violence depicted in a human interest feature story that focuses on individual incidents of pathos or glory.

For this very reason, violence wrought by nature, as in the case of accidents and disasters, does not arouse the same feelings as violence between man and man, unless nature's hostility reinforces man's own. (Acts of nature that afflict one's wartime enemies are perceived as retributive.) The victims of an earthquake, though they may number in the hundreds of thousands, are not themselves dramatic characters, unless their individuality is brought to life through the portrayal of individual acts of heroism, sacrifice, or personal suffering.

In a relationship between equals, violence carries meanings different from one between unequals. Where there is a decided underdog, violence serves no dramatic purpose unless the opportunity remains for the underdog to rebel and assert himself, or unless in the eyes of the spectators his spiritual triumph outweighs his worldly failure. Massacres and atrocities pack no particular wallop in the news media, but they often provide the background for drama by justifying the hero's vengeful nature.

Violence in drama creates a different type of audience excitation when it is socially sanctioned from when it is socially disapproved. The depiction of a criminal act arouses a different response from an act of violence performed by a police officer discharging his duties.

Drama is heightened when ambiguity is introduced into the conflict, when the criminal is presented sympathetically, when the legitimacy of the defenders of the law is in question, or when their own private impulses are seen to be at variance with their official duties.

The anticipation or threat of a violent act may provoke more anxiety than the actual depiction of the act itself. In fact, dramatic violence in the mass media characteristically deals with threats and the evasive actions taken to overcome them rather than with violent acts, expected or not. Any transgression of norms carries with it a potential for violence. There is a continuum from shoplifting to theft and armed robbery.

It is not really possible to generalize intelligently about the kind of anxieties aroused by such familiar dramatic devices as the search, the chase, or the confrontation. For any such situation the response will depend on (1) the seriousness of the consequences, should the expected crisis occur, (2) the plausibility of the events for each individual spectator or reader, and (3) the degree to which the spectator can identify with the potential victims of violence. (When victim becomes pursuer, his role as an assailant is legitimized by the violence that he himself has previously undergone.)

In the old motion picture serials of the 1930's, each episode ended with the expectation of imminent and horrendous violence for the hero or some other innocent victim. Although the juvenile audience was left in agonizing suspense, no horrendous events ever occurred. Between the end of one episode and the beginning of the other, succor always arrived on the scene, and the apparently inevitable fate of the victim was diverted.

Today we find this episodic technique only in an occasional comic strip, but the method still prevails in most popular entertainments that use violence for dramatic effect. Style and form provide more than decorations for the inherent substance of a communication—they transform it. (A picture of the human figure becomes erotic not because it is nude rather than clothed, but because of the suggestiveness with which full or partial nudity is depicted.)

The emotional response to violence in the media is not merely a matter of substance and subject matter but of technique. In the handling of words and visual images technique can transform the depiction of the same event from one that produces horror or revulsion to one that creates fascination and empathy, with feelings of pity or triumph. Cinematic montage and musical accompaniment applied to dull ingredients can build tension to a high pitch.

Technique can also reduce the unspeakable to the cold boredom of routine statistics.

Conflict makes news and arouses public attention and concern. Any demagogue has the potential to become a celebrity if he stirs up enough activity, and this activity characteristically involves the threat of violence or incitement to violence. Publicity is a commodity that can be exchanged for power, which is why it is very often paid for.

Should mass media show a sense of responsibility by not reporting the angry words of would-be leaders in search of publicity? Should they show restraint by ignoring incidents of stress and turmoil? Should they avoid inflaming a broad audience with reports of events that might otherwise represent the firsthand experience of a limited few participants? Such policies would collide not only with the professional imperatives of the newsman, but his acute awareness of his own competition.

In the tradition of the free press, the professional judgment of the newsman determines what is important and what is unimportant, what is essential and what transgresses the bounds of common decency or good taste. Normally, all media censor out of content the morbid consequences of violence. Battlefield reporting does not normally include descriptions in word or film of the grisly consequences of combat. Photographs of the dead are customarily selected or retouched to avoid the presentation of mangled limbs or frightful disfigurement. Systematized violence is rarely treated by the news media in colorful depth. Crimes become interesting only when they involve an element of mystery, passion, ingenuity, or unusual complications. A mugging in an alley is not news unless it is made so by the identity of the victim or by the drama of its aftermath. Death on the battlefield, on the highway, or in a natural disaster is an even more routine matter.

The newsman must make his decision as to whether or how to report the violent, the base, and the politically eccentric in the light of his responsibility to present a full picture of the significant events of the day. He suffers from an overabundance of choices. He can cover only a fraction of the potential stories. His input from wire or picture services represents many times more material than he has space or time for. His choices of what to use and how to emphasize it must be made in great haste and often under great pressure.

These conditions are the very opposite of those faced by the producer of mass entertainment, who suffers from a chronic shortage

of material adequate to his highest aims. The entertainment impresario's activities are more purposeful in nature and more thoughtfully planned. He works against deadlines not nearly as tight as those faced by the producer of the daily newspaper or the daily newscast. And, he usually has a much more involved procedure for acquiring collective judgments on the script, casting, and direction.

TV entertainment follows the formulas established much earlier in motion pictures and radio. Violence is part of the technical apparatus used to produce the illusion of drama and excitement; crime followed by the chase, and leading to the inevitable punishment. This hackneyed scheme is a staple feature of Western drama. It flourished on the 19th century stage in America long before it became embodied in the popular mass media of the 20th century. The use of formulas begets tastes that demand the continued use of the same formulas.

An act of violence portrayed on a huge screen in a darkened motion picture theater represents a far more overwhelming experience for its viewers than the same scene replayed on the 16-inch TV picture tube, where people watch it in a familiar and secure setting, with the inevitable domestic distractions. To gauge the effects of a message on a given individual, we must not only understand its content, but what it means in a particular situation.

The experimental evidence regarding the effects of media violence on children's subsequent behavior is to me entirely convincing so far as it goes. However, a great deal of experience in the measurement of media effects indicates that it is far easier to trace them in the pure experimental conditions of the laboratory than in the natural conditions of the field. Attention to the message is not heightened and focused in the field, as it can be in the laboratory, and the pressure of competitive messages and activities comes into play. Although communications effects are more attenuated when studied under natural field conditions, I know of no instance where laboratory effects are *reversed* in the field.

From this it can be inferred that if exposure to violence increases the subsequent display of aggressive behavior among experimental subjects, under normal exposure it tends to move people in the same direction. But there is no way that I know of to infer just what the level or intensity of that effect will be, relative to the laboratory effect. We know that it is apt to be different for different kinds of people, so one variable to be considered is the composition of the

sample of subjects, compared with that of the true population. Just as children may react with greater intensity than adults to the same media content, so slum children may react very differently from middle class children.

The effect of a communication can never be gauged except with reference to the susceptibilities of the audience. Advertisers expose their message to vast numbers of people, knowing well that only a small handful are potential buyers. The individual who is looking for kicks of any kind can find them in the media by going out of his way. A small minority of disturbed or angry individuals may find stimulation in media depictions of violence, but if the media did not furnish them with models of violent behavior, it seems farfetched to suggest that no other models would be available.

It seems to me that in the discussion of media violence, a disproportionate amount of attention has been given to the matter of direct imitation, in which the child learns specific aggressive techniques that he sees portrayed by media personalities, or learns the broader lesson that aggressive behavior represents a widely accepted form of social expression. The learning experience reflected in much of the experimental evidence represents a specific response to a specific message: I see a man shoot; I reach for a gun myself.

But there is another kind of learning that may be much more important and has had, I think, less of a place in the discussion. I refer to learning the lesson that the world is a wicked and hostile place in which one must aggressively protect oneself. This kind of learning effect is much harder to measure, either in the laboratory or in the field, because it arises not out of exposure to any one communication—however provocative it might be of anger or anxiety—but out of cumulative exposure to many, many communications, each of which may leave only the most modest and unmeasurable residual trace.

The really great impact of media violence on our culture may arise mainly from this diffuse raising of the general public level of anxiety, rather than from individual acts of behavior in response to individual media episodes or instances. This broader range of effects is at the very least difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to measure. (It might be possible to make cross-cultural comparisons of the prevailing anxiety levels of different countries with varying degrees of violence prevalent in their mass media, but how would we weigh other features that make national character distinctive?)

Our areas of ignorance lie in our understanding of the compara-

tive orders of magnitude. What proportion of the emotional charge produced by a motion picture in a psychological laboratory is produced under normal conditions in the cinema and on television? How do the tension-producing effects of fictionalized violence experienced through the mass media compare with the tensions aroused by reports of actual news events, or with the frustrations and irritations that people experience personally in the daily strain of coping with life in our crowded society?

The answers to these rhetorical questions are not independent of each other. The fantasy of fictional violence is a solace and a release for those who have no direct means of coping with the demands of the boss or with the threat of racial strife or nuclear war. On the other hand, drama, even in the attenuated form it takes within the popular culture, is designed to produce an emotional effect, and dramatic violence may therefore arouse greater levels of tension than real but episodically presented scenes of war, rioting, or disaster as they occur in the news.

There is a long-standing debate between those who argue that the mass media provide this kind of vicarious relief from real-life anger and those who believe that they exacerbate its effects. It may well be that they can arouse both types of reaction from the same individuals at different times. But to keep matters in perspective, we must remember that people go to the media in large measure to pass the time, and not because they are driven either by a conscious drive for emotional catharsis or a lust for fierce sensation. For a normal individual, adult or child, mass entertainment is a low-key form of play, and the expectation of a conventional happy ending sets the mood within which he experiences the battles of cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians.

In its selection of media experiences, as with other commodities, the public always works from a limited range of options. Accessibility is the first condition. One cannot watch a TV program on UHF, however good it may be, if one's receiver is equipped only to get VHF. But when UHF becomes standard equipment on new sets, the audiences suddenly appear. Even then, with a given number of choices, the audiences will be smaller for the same program when the channel has to be tuned in deliberately than when it can be had with a single click of the knob, as in VHF. Most media-exposure decisions are trivial decisions. People prefer to take what comes easy.

If violent content is available in movies, broadcasts, books, or publications, someone will watch or read it, simply because it is

there, and many or most in the audience would not otherwise be impelled to seek it out if access to it were less convenient.

The matter of availability assumes particular importance if we assume, as we have every right to do, that media violence produces more harmful effects among children than among adults. The motion picture that attracts adult audiences in the theater is seen by the whole family when it is broadcast on TV.

Media content is not merely a reflection of public taste exercised freely with unlimited choice. It also represents deliberate decisions made by media operators competing for audiences of maximum size and competing for them by the same ground rules.

Violence and sensation are devices that may be consciously used to boost audience interest and not for their own sake. In the heyday of yellow journalism, the big headlines were the ammunition of the circulation wars, and the few occasional echoes of that era are to be found today only in highly competitive newspaper markets.

The violence reported in newspaper and magazine articles and photographs is (however filtered through editorial judgment) an account of actual events. My impression is that *fictional* violence in print today is confined to a handful of men's magazines and comic books whose circulation is a small part of the total magazine field, and to the paperback books whose rapid growth, paralleling the growth of television, has virtually driven fiction out of the mass-circulation magazines.

The success of paperbacks with lurid covers and murderous plots obviously suggests that they meet a demand that the more sedate commercial media do not satisfy. But that success also arises from the effective system of distribution that makes these books readily accessible not only to those who actively thirst for vicarious excitement, but to far larger numbers of people who simply have time on their hands and are looking for something to read.

The primary source of entertainment for the American people is not print but television. I am not sure that the level of violence in TV is really out of line with the rest of our culture, but there are many broadcasters who would agree that a permanent and uniform reduction in the level of violence is desirable. Fashions in TV program popularity vary widely from season to season, and at the moment the blood and guts school is definitely out. But the inevitable cycle is bound to revive public interest in "robust" entertainment.

Movies provide a growing proportion of TV programming con-

tent, particularly that part characterized by violence. Moreover, movies have exerted a strong influence on the format and content of original TV drama. Violence in American motion pictures was a strongly established feature long before the days of TV, and its incidence has probably not diminished in the subsequent years, even though moviemaking style and subject matter have undergone many transformations. If violence has continued to rage in many motion pictures, it is because violence makes for excitement and thus for good "box office," and not because it is valued by producers for its own sake.

When these same movies are broadcast on television it is also for the simple reason that they may be counted on to yield substantial audiences, and thus to provide the advertisers who support the medium with maximum cost efficiency in diffusing their messages.

To the degree that their basic assumptions affect broadcasters' programming decisions, advertisers and their agencies bear a great responsibility for TV content. The size of the total TV audience at any given time of day is comparatively inelastic. What people watch on TV arises not merely from the broadcast's own inherent merits but from its timing and from the nature of its competition at that hour.

Most of the TV time devoted to movies is not under the control of the networks, whose own codes and program clearance procedures are far more stringent than the informal standards set by individual stations. There is obviously wide leeway for interpretation even within the framework of the NAB code (to which not all TV stations subscribe).

If the level of TV violence were reduced across the board, no one would be disadvantaged, but as long as each program decision is made individually, program line-ups would find a place for the so-called "action" shows that attract the male viewers whom advertisers particularly covet. Restrictions on violent content can, in my opinion, be maintained voluntarily for only a limited period of time before they are broken down by competitive pressures.

The only force which can change this, I believe, is the advertisers, who continue to wield great influence, although they have relinquished direct control over most network programming in favor of "scatter plans" that give their commercials maximum dispersion. General Foods has expressed a strong company policy position against sponsorship of violent shows, and if other big advertisers



follow suit and maintain such a policy over a long haul, this is bound to have a major impact on program producers.

A relatively small number of network, agency, and advertiser executives exercise critical influence over the evening broadcasts that represent the major share of viewing time for dramatic programs. The 100 biggest advertisers spend 72 per cent of all the TV dollars, the ten biggest agencies spend 46 per cent.

In my opinion change will take place only if top corporate managements and top managements of the big advertising agencies are persuaded that change is required. I believe they can be persuaded by adequate evidence.

In pursuing its objectives, the strongest asset of this Commission is the moral sense and professional pride of the people who operate our media. If cupidity or stupidity sometimes prevail over their good judgment, there is still among them an overwhelming acceptance of the need to do what is right, and it is to this ethos that this Commission must in the final analysis appeal. This imperative is even more critical in the area of news and public affairs than in the field of mass entertainment.

If the presence of reporters and of TV cameramen provokes an unruly mob, if the reportage of a riot attracts new participants to the scene, more research on the subject will guide responsible newsmen in their handling of tense situations. But they cannot be told what to do. Regardless of the consequences, how can we afford any infringement of the right to report and even to emphasize violence as newsmen honestly observe it in the life of our time?

# THE NATIONAL CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR BROADCASTING: WHAT IS IT?

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ROBERT L. COE

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The National Citizens Committee for Public Television was organized in 1967 with the announced objective of developing nationwide support for a strong and independent system of public television in the United States. The idea of a truly representative citizens committee "to act as a permanent critic of both commercial and non-commercial radio and television," had merit and surely warranted consideration.

But has this National Citizens Committee made any progress toward its objective? Is it truly representative of the citizens of the United States? Or, for that matter, do its recent pronouncements even represent the committee itself? The answers, I regret to say, are far from encouraging.

The chairman of this committee since its inception, Thomas P. Hoving, is certainly well known in the New York area. First as director of the New York City parks, later as director of the Metropolitan Museum, his contributions and innovations have been

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outstanding. And I believe that Mr. Hoving intended, initially at least, to make an equally substantial contribution in the field of Public Television.

Since the fall of 1968, however, statements and proclamations have issued forth from the committee's headquarters to raise one's doubts. They appear to describe a deliberate collision course with broadcasters, commercial and non-commercial, and in fact with Public Television itself. They purport to represent the views of the committee, yet raise grave doubts as to whose views they really do represent.

In October 1968, the name of the National Citizens Committee for Public Television was changed to National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, to "reflect the committee's decision to act as a permanent critic of both commercial and non-commercial radio and television, rather than to serve only as a promotional arm of educational TV."

This announcement obviously gives limitless scope to the committee's activities, adding new goals that seem shadowy. It is not this change that is alarming, however, so much as other statements issued in the month preceding it under the name of Mr. Hoving.

A release dated September 18, 1967 identified the founders of the committee. They are Thomas P. Hoving, Chairman; Ralph Ellison, author, New York City; Devereux C. Josephs, Chairman of the Board of WNDT, New York City; Ralph Lowell, Chairman, Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company and President, WGBH Educational Foundation; and Newton N. Minow, attorney of Chicago and former chairman, Federal Communications Commission.

Forty-seven listed members served to represent the arts, educations and educational broadcasting, labor unions, etc. Listed as backers were: The Danforth Foundation; W. K. Kellogg Foundation; The Ford Foundation; Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

This Sept. 18, 1967 release identified the committee as "organized to gain popular support for a strong and independent system of Public Television in the United States," and added that another fifty members were to be named shortly.

In July of 1968, the committee, still operating under its original name, published a "Report to the American People—The State of Public Broadcasting." The report listed six major goals:

"To point out the potential Public Broadcasting has for serving this nation.

"To request that the full authorization for the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 be appropriated immediately.

"To affirm that the money levels for Public Broadcasting be raised quickly to those recommended by the Carnegie Commission.

"To press for maximum professional competence and technical capability for existing and new Public Broadcasting stations so that they may compete for audiences.

"To work toward a definitive plan for Public Broadcasting's long-range financing which can include a combination of proposals already made and still to come; stressing that whatever federal monies be given Public Broadcasting, be free of annual appropriation review.

"To call for the fullest possible means of advertising and promotion for Public Broadcasting so that what it has to offer may become more widely watched and supported."

The report closed with the statement: "As a nonprofit, tax-exempt educational corporation, the Committee receives no governmental moneys."

Mr. Hoving endorsed a copy of this report in a letter to me dated July 19, 1968, that invited me to become a member of the National Committee for Public Television. As a supporter of the originally announced objectives of the committee, I immediately replied to Mr. Hoving that I was delighted to join the committee and looked forward to full participation in its work.

Perhaps it was simply the spirit of the times, or the unrest on some university campuses. Perhaps the presidential campaign was not proceeding according to Mr. Hoving's fancy, or unidentified influences were at work within the committee headquarters. In any event, on September 30, Mr. Hoving launched an all-out attack on the commercial television networks and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. He charged that they were in "collusion" to dominate technical facilities for the coast-to-coast relay of video "trivia." They were doing this, he said, when they should be presenting programs of serious substance in an election year.<sup>1</sup>

This outburst achieved front page coverage in the *New York Times*. Mr. Hoving followed it up the next day with an interview in which he stated that a Washington lawyer was going to be hired and that the board of trustees was going to be expanded with young blood un beholden to government, industry or educational TV.<sup>2</sup>

That these were outbursts and not premeditated is indicated by the tone of a carefully prepared press release that followed on October 2. In it Mr. Hoving announced that "the membership of the National Citizens Committee for Public Broadcasting has risen to 159 distinguished Americans with the addition of 42 members.

"These men and women, active in public life, the arts, business, education and broadcasting, are firmly committed to the cause of establishing a free, wide-ranging, spirited Public Broadcasting system in this country. They are keenly interested in the future of all broadcasting, not only for themselves, but also for their children and their children's children." Nothing in the release even hinted at the attack launched by Mr. Hoving two days earlier.

The following day, October 3, Mr. Hoving sent me a Western Union night letter, which I assume went to all committee members: "The board of trustees is agreed that the National Citizens Committee enter into a broad constructive criticism of the directions of broadcasting in America. The policy of the committee in this regard *will be relayed for your approval* [Coe's italics] as soon as necessary restructuring by the board is completed. There is no question but that we will continue support for a most vibrant, well-financed public broadcasting system in this nation, but it will also mean bringing to public attention abuses that exist anywhere in broadcasting and praise for those qualities that truly point up the potential broadcasting possesses. We need you and the country needs all of us to speak out on broadcasting which too long has existed without an independent voice."

This telegram, obviously an afterthought, was never followed up by any request for my approval or even my comments. I can assume only that all other members of the committee, perhaps excepting a select few, had a similar experience, and like myself, were embarrassed repeatedly in the following months by statements, charges and announced plans issued in the name of the full committee.

The committee headquarters issued a release for October 21 announcing that the board had been expanded to 25 members "as the committee directions take a new course." Announcement was also made of the change in name to the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting.

On October 29, Mr. Hoving did send to the committee members what he termed a statement in the nature of an interim report: "The

Committee, as you know by now, has been renamed in line with the new directions determined by the board. There is still much to be done in establishing the principles and priorities under which the committee will operate. In the coming months, the executive committee of the board with Ben Kubasik and his staff will be preparing documents outlining these principles for the board's consideration at its next meeting on January 8."

During the following month, the committee headquarters announced the opening of a Washington office and the appointment of Robert Squier, Director of Television for the Democratic National Committee during the 1968 presidential campaign, as consultant for the committee. "Bob Squier's broad knowledge of both broadcasting and the political scene makes him an ideal liaison for the Committee in its expanded operations in the areas of broadcast policies and practices," the announcement added.

Also announced was the appointment of Tinka Nobbe as Director of Research for the committee, to work on long-range research projects in the field of broadcasting practices and policies. Mrs. Nobbe, formerly a researcher for CBS News' election and special events units, had been with P.B.L. before joining the committee. She was also credited with the research for Fred W. Friendly's book, *DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND OUR CONTROL*.

Late in November, the committee headquarters mailed to all members (I assume) a copy of Robert Montgomery's paperback *OPEN LETTER FROM A TELEVISION VIEWER*. Mr. Montgomery, in his foreword, calls it an "ill-tempered book," inspired by anger. His anger was over the big, bad networks, and he proceeded to elaborate on Mr. Hoving's frenzied attack of the previous September. One cannot help wondering: was it Mr. Montgomery's anger that inspired or directed Mr. Hoving's unplanned and unauthorized outburst of September 30.

The first and only copy I ever received of a printed *Newsletter*, issued by the committee headquarters and dated December 1968, repeated all the charges and accusations of the previous three months. At the top of page one of the newsletter was the following in italics: "The National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting is a group of citizens from across the country striving to upgrade all of broadcasting in the nation. Supported by foundations, the committee is an ongoing commission for studying, reporting and reacting to broadcasting policies and practices."

On page three of the same newsletter was an item worthy of note here: "Committee: Some Out, Sum Up—Following the furor over the charges of TV—A T & T trivia, several committee members and trustees, in addition to Minow, resigned. They include chairman or members of boards of educational television stations. That same week, the committee announced that 42 additional citizens had accepted membership. As letters poured into the committee's offices praising its stand, the committee moved in a number of different directions."

If my own experience is typical, none of those 42 additional citizens had prior knowledge of the attacks mounted so hurriedly. I assume they did not, then or later, receive any request for their approval or opinion of the attacks and charges issued in the name of the committee. My own invitation to membership, as noted earlier, was dated July 19.

Then, on December 19, another letter from headquarters was sent to the committee members. It enclosed a compendium of press clippings covering the committee's (?) attack on commercial broadcasters, A T & T, etc. The letter's closing paragraph is of interest because it again points up that even at this date, the committee membership had not been polled for their reactions and their approval:

"The executive committee of the trustees has completed its work on the committee's credo and operating principles, which will be considered by the full board at its early January meeting. *At that point, you will receive the material for your ratification.*" [Coe's italics.] This proved to be the last time any mention was made of submitting any of the board's actions to the entire committee membership for ratification—or even for comment.

Last January the entire 25-man Board of Trustees held a meeting in New York, and also with the press there, for a presentation by Mr. Hoving, Dr. Charles Siepmann, Mr. Robert Montgomery and Miss Marya Mannes. A press release was issued on the same day. All of this material was forwarded to the individual committee members.

The press release was headlined with the following in italics: "We intend to bring a balance to the greatest communication innovation since printing. The sorry trend that began with the start of broadcasting in this country almost 50 years ago must be reversed. This cannot happen without the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting acting as a free, powerful, continuing counterforce

capable of competing with the broadcast-political pressures that have established improper precedents in the public domain."

The release also disclosed that the committee had embarked on a five-year, five million dollar funding campaign to carry out its program.

Not surprisingly, the funding campaign had difficulty even getting off the ground. The original funding organizations apparently wanted nothing further to do with the NCCB. An appeal from Mr. Hoving to all members on February 19 enclosed a memorandum to the trustees written two days earlier. This memorandum broke the news that the bank account was running dry and that unless money was received, the committee could not continue. Key members of the staff were already being released and arrangements were being made to sublet the office space.

This memorandum went on to detail all of the rosy developments and plans in the offing...if they could just get some more money: "...We can be cheered by (the) WHDH-TV license revocation in Boston... There is a move afoot to take away the license of KNBC, the NBC-owned Los Angeles television station... The National Citizens Committee has been cooperating with a local Chicago group to wrest away... WMFT, from the Chicago *Tribune's* holdings... The National Citizens Committee has been making plans to work toward holding up and ultimately halting certain license renewals in New York and in the Washington and Maryland-Virginia areas, actions discussed at last week's executive committee meeting."

About a week later, the committee, or rather the trustees acting in the name of the committee, did file a complaint against the New York *Daily News* ownership of WPIX-TV and the New York *Times* ownership of WQXR-AM and WQXR-FM.

Perhaps it was this activity on the part of the committee that won it some badly needed financial support. In a memorandum to members dated June 3, Mr. Hoving reported: "In addition to Charles Benton's generous \$100,000 grant from the Benton Foundation for this year (and another \$100,000 next year), I can now mention some additional \$37,000 either in or pledged from various areas, including committee members. Monies have come from such diverse sources as Consumers Union, the AFL-CIO, proceeds from Bob Montgomery's book royalties, and an article by me that will appear shortly in *This Week*, the national Sunday newspaper magazine supplement. Also, I am contracting with McGraw-Hill to



publish a work I have been writing on the relation of broadcasting to total society. All royalties (the advance is \$18,000) are going to the committee."

Seemingly therefore, this self-selected few, this self-appointed police group, operating under the name of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, will continue to claim representation of all citizens and use funds, unwisely provided them, to attempt to destroy all broadcasting that has incurred their displeasure. But the question remains: Who really directs these few, and why?

#### NOTES

1. Jack Gould, *New York Times*, September 30, 1968.
2. Jack Gould, *New York Times*, October 1, 1968.

# THE DISTANT SCENE: FOREIGN NEWS ON TELEVISION

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JOHN WHALE

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Any apologia for television has always included the argument that it strengthens the viewer's grasp of what is going on in other lands than his own, to his own good and theirs. This thesis was much heard during the Intelsat Conference, which met at Washington in February and March, 1969, and put off its final deliberations until November. Plug in to the only working international system of television satellites, uncommitted countries were told, and see your country better reported round the world.

See it better liked, too, since affection grows with understanding—that is the second stage of the argument. The third stage holds that the cause of world peace is advanced.

The second and third stages seem weak when one observes that in the last 20 years America has sent millions of feet of television newsfilm overseas, compared with little by Russia and virtually

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none by China; yet this has not reduced the likelihood of world war and has had scant influence on the comparative ranking of the three great powers as international villains.

But this weakness should not permit the first stage of the argument to suffer. Clearly, television all over the world has published a vastly greater footage of moving news pictures from countries outside the country of origination than was possible when the job was left solely to cinema newsreels.

It is still worthwhile to ask, however, whether any country covers this foreign news as rapidly, reliably, or comprehensively as people outside the television news industry might suppose.

In March 1969, British troops invaded the small, flat Caribbean island of Anguilla with the stated aim of freeing it from the influence of bad men. The invasion was a matter of legitimate international interest. It raised again the questions of the responsibilities remaining to former colonial powers, the economic viability of small tropical islands, and the usefulness of force in settling complicated political disputes.

To cover the landing was my last job as a television reporter. As if to mark this, the malignity of events was for a while suspended.

I got onto the island on the last available charter plane before the troops were due. My camera crew (who came from Miami) woke up at the right time for dawn operations. The bay that had been indicated to me as the likeliest invasion point proved to be the one chosen. Most of the small invasion force came ashore when there was already just enough light to film by. There was no firing.

Abandoning the troops once they were ashore, we reached the house of the islanders' leader just at the moment when he had decided to talk. Air drops of supplies were in camera range as we returned. We arrived at the island airstrip in time to see the first British plane land in a cloud of red dust and to interview the official who alighted from it.

More than all this, we found a Piper Aztec, chartered by CBS, just leaving for San Juan, Puerto Rico. We managed to unload our film in time and scramble it on board.

Later our film also caught the New York plane from San Juan. Considerable CBS effort saw it collected at Kennedy, carried by motorcycle into Manhattan, processed, and sent out again by landline to the satellite ground station in Maine. As a result of all this, my employers in London, Independent Television News, were

just able to show the first four minutes of the film in the last four minutes of their main news show—more than twelve hours after the invasion itself.

After that the malignity of events supervened again. The rest of the film, the main part of it, was to have been sent to London by air that night for showing the following day. Through a misunderstanding it was left behind. It reached London the day after that, and was never shown.

In other words, even from so frequented a part of the world as the Caribbean, pictures of a major news event could not reach a European capital, or even monitor sets in New York, within less than twelve hours—and then not without unusual luck, effort, and a little skill. Further, despite the long series of hurdles placed in the way of the foreign correspondent for television, the pressure for topicality in television news offices permits no piece of film to bear up against the stigma of delay. Better never than late.

Satellites are not infallible world-shrinkers. It is only true of the most foreseeable and controllable and therefore banal of news events, like a princely investiture or a presidential inauguration, that the conjunction of camera and happening means instant world-wide transmission.

For most major news events a long and costly sequence of steps must still be gone through, even if pictures exist. The satellite itself must be reserved in advance of the time of use. Most of the semi-governmental agencies that control access to it in any country—in Britain the General Post Office, in America the telephone and cable companies—demand at least three hours' notice.

The pictures must be got to a television station where technicians command the skill and equipment to relay them to the satellite ground station. In practice this means New York, London, Paris or a comparable communications capital. Under present dispensations, great areas of the world, and especially Africa, have no access to television satellites at all.

In almost every case the pictures will be on film, since electronic cameras can be deployed only in the most controlled conditions. If the pictures are sent to the chosen television station as air cargo, they have to be developed and cut when they get there. If they are sent by landline, they have to be developed first. Landline charges per mile are not insignificant. Further landline charges are due for the journey to the satellite ground station, in Maine, Newfoundland, Cornwall, or Finistère.

There is a ten-minute minimum charge for the use of the satellite itself. Return sound feeds, telephone calls, and control-room crewing costs at both ends all help to drive the cost up to a figure as high as \$15,000 for an item that lasts three minutes on the screen.

Even if all these obstacles are surmounted, the complexity of communications satellites makes human or mechanical failing a very real hazard. In the experience of a single reporter, satellite dispatches to London from abroad have at various times been rendered useless—after all the other steps had been laboriously completed—by ice on the cables of the ground station, the pre-emption of the satellite for telephone conversations, the break-up of the picture in the satellite itself, and the ill-preparedness of amateur labor at the receiving station during a strike. Even if it were complete, an international satellite system would not by itself make the global village a reality.

In any case, the great mass of news film is sent across the sea not by satellite but as air cargo aboard jet airliners. This method works well. Done up in a colored onion-bag, several hundred feet of news film can be ferried direct between scores of American cities and cities overseas for little more than \$20. Commercial jets are fast, and may get faster. It is an essential part of the business of a television reporter in a foreign city, and a part he can master without much trouble, to know where the cargo sheds are at the airport and when the planes go.

Yet, here too, there are delays and hazards. To meet customs rules, the reporter must often get his film to the airport two hours before the flight is to leave, and he must allow for the same expense of time at the other end. Heavy air traffic can delay departures. Bad weather can cancel them altogether. So can bad business, though the airlines hotly deny it; the passengers on an almost empty flight can be transferred to another machine, but the freight will be left in it till the next day. Flights that involve connections are of little use; film is often as good as lost unless it is dispatched on a direct flight, either to its destination or to an agent who will trans-ship it.

Flight times are not arranged with the convenience of television news organizations in mind. A breakfast-time news event in favored parts of western Europe can be flown to New York by American television reporters just in time for their evening news shows, because the time lag is in their favor. The sun moves scarcely faster than the film. But film of a breakfast-time news event in the eastern United States cannot conceivably arrive by air in a

European capital before the following day. Since regular daytime television is a blessing still largely unvouchsafed to Europe, this means that the news film will not be shown until the evening of the next day, 36 hours after the event. With an event in the western United States the lag would ordinarily be 60 hours, a powerful discouragement to television news editors. The California grape strike would have been much more fully reported on European television screens if it had happened in Florida.

These may seem low-grade considerations for a member of what was once the glamorous profession of foreign correspondent to have to bear in mind; but if he is a television correspondent, he must come to terms with them or see his work go in the bin. It is the vagaries of shipping-clerks and air-schedules, not of public opinion or the national economy, that are the stuff of his life. And this is not a simple, trivial mechanical point, since the frame of his work will affect its content. If his preoccupations are technical, his understanding of the country he reports can only with great difficulty be properly political.

Mechanical considerations eat not merely into his working time, but into his broadcasting time. It is impossible, or impossibly expensive, for a television news organization to blanket the world with camera crews. The correspondent will sometimes have to cover an event—it may be a major natural disaster in some outlying corner of his area—with a simple voice report to which his office will fit still pictures. The incongruity of this technique in a news show otherwise made up of moving pictures means that the item cannot be allowed to last much more than a minute. Some information or explanation has to be left out.

Alternatively, the reporter's office may have been sent film of the incident that he himself has not seen shot. The film will come from a newsfilm agency or from the syndication service of some large television news organization. It will, accordingly, have been cut fairly short to make reproduction easier, and it will have lost some sound and picture quality in the reproduction process. The resulting screen copy is bound to be brief, if only to conceal its weaknesses. The brevity of the film increases the problem of the reporter, who must prepare a voice report without knowing in detail what is on the film.

The short point, however, is this. A difference exists between the instant dissemination of news and its instant collection; yet the tendency persists to believe that because television can manage

the first it can also manage the second. All the influences here listed—the inflexibility and fallibility of satellite systems, the clumsiness and vulnerability of air transport, the difficulty of reporting the news without one's own moving pictures of it—constitute the unpublicized problems that make foreign news the most testing of the television reporter's fields of work, and more testing for him than for the newspaper reporter.

Newspaper reporters have their problems. There are many parts of the world where their basic needs, the means of travel and a telephone, are not to be had. In huge areas of South America and Africa and Asia, physical conditions, to say nothing of political conditions, make it hard for them to work. Yet even there they endure far fewer frustrations than their television colleagues, burdened with mounds of fragile and unbiddable equipment.

In effect, then, in an area where television's importance has been much vaunted, namely the reporting and explaining of conditions and events in other countries than the viewer's own, the medium is likely to offer an account that is not merely slower than a newspaper's but also—and this is the key point—less well informed.

A television reporter covering an African unity conference in Addis Ababa has to choose between mastering the political or the technical situation. Both are endlessly complicated and demand the bulk of his attention; yet, because of the interdependence of word and picture, he cannot delegate either responsibility to other people.

It is professionally right that he should make sure of the technical situation first; otherwise nothing at all gets on the air. This, however, poses two risks. There is the danger that the words he sends with the pictures—on magnetic tape, or by voice circuit, or on the film—will have been written without full access to the best available knowledge.

There is also the danger that the picture-gathering operation will have been put in hand on a basis of imperfect understanding. The camera will have pounced on a foreign minister whose delegation carries no weight in the central argument of the conference. The placards filmed outside the conference hall will not be the ones that reflect the demonstrators' most telling grievances. The reporter may also be under a strong temptation to work the Emperor's lions in somehow, for no better reason than that they live across the road.

A newspaperman is a good deal freer to concentrate on what to report, not how to report it. And with all their faults, newspaper reporters try as a rule to get their facts from first-hand sources.

Television reporters are driven more often than not to get their facts from newspapers. It is an observable truth that in an efficient television station, one of the most active and centrally placed departments is the newspaper clippings library. In an efficient newspaper office, the same department is a dusty archive placed far away from where the main work is done.

Generalized counter-arguments are available, of course, that television supplies a kind of visual evidence about foreign affairs that no other carrier of news can offer. This it would be foolish to dispute. Television has borne an honorable part in showing the extent of famine in Biafra. Over against this, television is limited to setting out only those situations susceptible of illustration. The causes of the Biafran war itself were less well expounded on the screen.

It might also be argued that the tendency of television to simplify and personify the news it presents is even more marked when it treats of foreign news, which must surmount higher barriers of boredom in the viewer.

This article has aimed to advance reasons for believing that in the very area where television's technical progress has roused hopes of a spectacular contribution to the common good, namely in the coverage of foreign news, its continuing technical needs and limitations are likely to make its performance disappointing.

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The first thing man did on the moon was make a television show.

—Anon.

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# PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING

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F. EARLE BARCUS

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As long as violence and sex, regardless of what their effect on children may be, continue to flourish on television—no appreciable abatement is apparent—so will networks and stations, networks especially, be pressurized to do something about it. To date, little has been done. Discussions of what to do too often end in the deliverance of what has become a veteran cliché about audience reaction: "If they don't like it, they can turn off the set."

This simplistic notion makes two invalid assumptions: 1. The individual is aware that he will be subjected to programming that is distasteful, and 2. If he should be aware, he will exercise the responsibility to turn it off—or see that it is not turned on.

The TV industry resists any attempt at control or censorship by government or law. And any attempts at semi-formal control, through self-regulation and codes of conduct, lack the enforcement machinery to cope with advertising-audience pressure. As a result, if any control over the TV viewing habits of children is to be exercised, it has to come not from the outside but from the in-home influence of the parents.

The argument for the placing of responsibility with the parents is, naturally, one the TV industry embraces, and it goes like this: Television sets are privately owned instruments, integrated into family life patterns. Therefore, responsibility for controlling the viewing habits of the children rests with the parents.

Proponents of family censorship would find small support or

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encouragement, however, from several extensive studies that have been made of the control exercised by mothers (mothers are regarded as the major source of control). These studies show that less than half of the mothers exercise any control, and this concerns itself with the appointed time or total time allowed the children for viewing, rather than specific types of TV content.

The samplings also revealed that families of highly educated and professional groups tended to experience more control than lower middle classifications, and the more selective the parents in their choice of programs, the more control they exercised over the children's viewing.

An early study in Ohio showed that 60 per cent of grade-school children and 30 per cent of high-school children reported parental rules for watching TV. But only one fourth of the grade schoolers and hardly any of the high schoolers said that parents restricted their viewing of certain kinds of programs. Rather, the rules covered the appointed time or total time of viewing.

A later sampling in England of teachers who were also parents revealed that only about one eighth forbade their children to view unsuitable programs. And the parents who did were motivated more by unwillingness to have the children's routine disrupted—meals, play, homework, bedtime—than by worry over the adverse effects of the programming.

These surveys themselves suggest that estimates made by mothers may not reflect accurately their degree of control. Those who exercise little control may frequently overestimate its regulatory force. Those who exercise none at all may think and report that they do. The responses of some mothers divulged a defensive stance. They did not admit to a need to control the amount or content of what a child viewed. It sounded almost as if the mothers felt a vested interest in the television medium.

All of these early analyses of parental control omitted such seemingly relevant parental variables as personality, attitudes on child rearing, attitudes toward television, and TV viewing habits.

To provide a pilot study that would include such factors, interviews were conducted in August, 1967 with 44 mothers in the Greater Boston area. (This study was supported by a small grant from the Office of Social Research, CBS-TV, Inc., which is gratefully acknowledged. The complete report may be obtained from the Communication Research Center, School of Public Communication, Boston University.)

The Boston pilot study supported the finding of earlier analyses that the mother was the important agent of control. A correlation analysis of 11 questionnaire items dealing with various types of parental control yielded seven that were significantly intercorrelated to form an eight-point scale for measuring degree of control. Then, each mother was assigned a control score of 0 to 8. On this control scale, one third of the mothers scored high, and exercised more control over younger than older children—often by insisting that the children follow family routine.

A greater proportion of mothers in this study claimed control over programming. Their answers referred often to “adult themes” and “violence.” This may be simply the artifact of a small pilot sampling, or it may trace to greater awareness among mothers because of more sex and violence programming, and the increased promotion that accompanies it.

Responses showed also that mothers exerted informal influence not only by suggesting programs to the children, but by viewing and discussing the programs with them.

From the Boston pilot study, a more comprehensive model was developed for analyzing parental influence. The model includes four basic dimensions:

1. Time influence is exercised
  - a. Prior to viewing (by prohibition or selection)
  - b. During viewing (by discussion, explanation)
  - c. After viewing (by future prohibition, explaining, or scolding)
2. Positive and negative controls
  - a. Positive (selecting, screening, praising for things learned)
  - b. Negative (restrictions, shutting off set, scolding)
3. Formal and informal controls
  - a. Formal (*de jure* controls—rules, regulations)
  - b. Informal (*de facto* controls—discussions, viewing with children, etc.)
4. Time and content controls
  - a. Total time allowed to view
  - b. Certain hours allowed or prohibited
  - c. Stories, programs, recommended or prohibited.

The interrelationship of these influences can better be seen in the following figure:

FIGURE I  
Theoretical Model of Types of Parental Controls over Children's TV Viewing

		Control Prior to Viewing	Control During Viewing	Control After Viewing
Positive Forms of Control	Formal	Screening Selecting Suggesting program for child	Discussion Interpretations Changing channel to another program	Answering questions Discussion of things viewed
	Informal	<i>De facto:</i> adult selection & viewing	Viewing with children, explaining	Praising things learned
Negative or Restrictive Forms of Control	Formal	Restrictions on: 1. content, programs 2. time a) # hours permitted b) certain hours 3. until completion of other activities	Shutting off set  Switching channels	Forbidding future viewing
	Informal	<i>De facto:</i> adult selection & viewing	Scolding child while viewing	Scolding child for things learned

Many of these theoretical types are illustrated by responses of mothers interviewed in the pilot study.

### *Formal-Negative Controls*

The most frequent types of controls appear to be negative, and exercised after viewing has begun. That is, the parent sees or hears of something that she does not approve of and either turns the set off or changes channels. This is an absolute censorship over program content. Mothers who exercised it commented:

"If I don't like what program is on, I turn it off."

"I tell them the show isn't for children, and I shut it off."

"I send them out of the room if I don't approve of their viewing a certain show."

"If I see something I don't care for because I think that it might frighten them, I just tune to another station."

Almost in the same category are those mothers who censor after the program has begun, but attempt to substitute another activity or divert the child's attention:

"I will tell them to turn it off or I will, and give them a book to read or tell them of games that they own and can play."

"I tell them that certain things are not for them and then turn it off. I try to divert their attention."

Several mothers indicated that they forbid certain programs *prior to* the viewing:

"No *Twilight Zone* or anything that keeps their imagination going strongly."

"If I think something will upset them at bedtime, I don't let them watch."

Only two mothers said they had general regulations concerning television viewing, as opposed to restricting specific programs:

"We feel that by limiting them to one hour a day they themselves limit and select what they watch."

But most of the Boston mothers exercised control *after* the viewing had begun. Forty four were asked, "If you see one of your children watching a program that you don't think he should, what do you usually do?" Twenty six responded that they turned off the set or switched channels. Their explanations for their actions were terse:

"I shut it off. They do as I say."

"I say, 'let's change the station' or 'let's see what else is on'."

"I yell at her and shut off the TV. She sulks a little."

Some mothers indicated that prior to shutting off the set, explanations to the child were in order:

"I tell them that I don't feel this is the type of show that young children should watch—that it was only meant for grown-ups—and to change the channel or shut it off."

However, this does not always work:

"I guess all I do is try to talk them out of it, but I have to admit that if they insist, I don't make an issue out of it. They continue watching."

"I yell like the devil and try to shut it off."

Why do they shut off the set? Often, it is because of bedtime, meals, or homework, or because the program available during children's viewing periods is for adults. During the study, one Boston station was carrying re-runs of the *Dr. Kildare* program at 5 p.m. This was cited as the program most often turned off. Other comments by mothers:

"The *James Bond Special* showed too much sex so I shut it off. It showed him with a dozen girls."

"I shut off a program on premarital sex that (son) asked about. It endorsed premarital relations which I think is wrong."

"Love scenes."

"A screaming woman with little men chasing her."

Mothers also feared that violence may frighten the child, and cited any "extreme horror movie," "Hitchcock murder stories," *The Invaders*, and *Twilight Zone*.

Some mothers impose formal, negative controls *after* the child has viewed television. *The Three Stooges* program was restricted for several children because they insisted on imitating the stooges. One youngster broke an egg over his sister's head. This was too much for the mother, who forbade him to watch from then on.

### *Informal-Negative Controls*

This category is probably best illustrated by the parent who comes to the set and chooses the program he wishes to see with little or no thought for the child who may also be viewing. In such a case, the

behavior of the parent may set a pattern of permissive selection of programs for children. When there is actual dispute over the program, the dispute is often settled in multiple-set households by simply watching different programs on different sets. In the single-set household, however, the child often watches what the parent watches. When asked how disputes were settled, "Who wins out?"—some mothers were frank in their answers:

"I win out. I tell her I'm tired and I want to relax and this is what I want to see."

"I don't want to watch a particular show that often, so I watch what I want."

"I (win out). They go up to bed if they don't want to watch what I want to see."

Although we collected little data on the role of the father, there were reports that when he is home, he often exercises *de facto* control over program selection. While he may not be important in enforcing formal rules for children's viewing, he may be extremely important in the less formal areas of influence.

Not all of the selection by parents during viewing is necessarily negative, of course. There are believed to be positive advantages as well in the parent-child viewing situation. The parent is on hand to explain or answer questions.

Informal negative controls may be exercised even after the child has viewed TV. Some mothers reported that they had to reprimand their children for vocabulary or imitations of behavior picked up from television. Although they did not formally forbid the children to watch the program (as with the boy who imitated *The Three Stooges*), the mothers frowned on daughters who teased their hair or children who used slang or other unsuitable vocabulary, as the result of watching a TV program.

#### *Formal-Positive Controls*

The parent can exert positive influence prior to viewing by screening, selecting, or suggesting programs. Although there is no data on the frequency with which it occurs, nevertheless 40 of 44 mothers indicated they do suggest certain programs for the child to watch. There is probably not a great deal of effort spent by most mothers in such prior selection, however. Newspaper and *TV Guide* listings were the most important sources of information,

followed by advertising or announcements on TV itself of upcoming programs. Only one mother, for example, mentioned reviews of programs by critics, and only a few got ideas from other mothers, friends, or the child's teacher.

When mothers do derive program ideas from such sources, they generally fall in the "entertainment for children" category—either weekly series (*Walt Disney* or *Lassie*), specials (*Wizard of Oz*, *Cinderella*) or family-type programs (*Family Affair*, *Leave It to Beaver*). They believe that such programs are "true to life," showing "real family situations." Values of teaching children "how to get along" or "how to participate" seemed also to be important. *Romper Room* and *Captain Kangaroo* were both seen as aids to socializing the child. *Misterogers* came in for special mention:

"...he is a lovely person who likes children. He is kind and gentle. He teaches them to like people and he is entertaining at the children's level."

During or after viewing, purposeful discussions of program material can be classified as positive formal influence. We asked, for example, whether mothers "made a special point of viewing with their children." Although almost all mothers had reported viewing with children, only about one-half said they made a special point of it as opposed to just "being there" at the same time.

#### *Informal-Positive Influences*

Whether purposeful or not, informal positive influences may occur in discussions with the child during or after viewing. Some mothers related the innocent questions of the young child:

"She wanted to know why there is a bad Dubie or a good Dubie and I told her there were children who behaved badly and some who minded their mothers and were good."

"It was during the *Wizard of Oz*. When the teacher took the dog away from Dorothy, (my daughter) wanted to know if she was a naughty lady. I tried to explain that Dorothy was sort of dreaming about it."

Viewing with the child opens up many unanticipated opportunities for discussion or explanation. Sometimes it will be simply the chance to clarify what's happening in the story. Other times, however, it will involve moral and behavioral questions, such as "why Beaver told a white lie," or the friendship relation between "Fatty" and "Skinny" in one episode of the *Children's Film Festival*.



For older children, the viewing situation may offer the opportunity to discuss or explain such adult topics as sex, illegitimacy, or dope addiction. All were specifically mentioned by mothers of teenagers.

Children were also reported to have asked about monsters, war (as shown on *Combat*), planetary exploration, the Kennedy assassination, a dance, why commercials give things away, and "whether Flipper could really do all those tricks."

Whether the parent is prepared to answer such questions intelligently, it is the child's television viewing that stimulates him to ask them. And it is at such times that the parent may provide important interpretations and orientation.

This study implies that perhaps parents exercise greater influence on children's viewing of TV than has been demonstrated in previous research. Although it may not always be conscious and purposeful, there is evidence of both positive and negative controls on both formal and informal levels. On the formal level, regulations govern time and amount of viewing, the prohibition of certain programs, or the selection of others. On the informal level, influence is exercised through *de facto* adult viewing with children, settlement of disputes over which programs to watch, and discussing program content or answering children's questions about the programs.

Reasons for control seem to fall into two basic categories: 1. Fear that the child may be adversely affected by premature exposure to the adult world, and 2. A general belief that TV viewing is less important for a child than other activities.

Fears about premature exposure to sexual themes are often expressed by mothers: "sometimes the clothing on the woman is too revealing," "scenes where they are lying down and kissing away," or "...deviates, prostitutes—why must this be put on TV?" They also deplore "too much fighting between husband and wife (on soap operas)."

Mothers are also fearful that children might imitate the behavior in themes of violence:

"It gives teenagers ideas—that they may do what they see on TV. The little one really thinks that Superman can fly."

"...they might try some of the crimes and things they see."

"If they watch shooting, killing, and stealing, it might rub off. You never know what goes through their minds. They might try all of this."

Two less obvious but related reasons for control also were expressed by mothers: they are often embarrassed in front of children by television, and they fear they will lose some of their role control as parents.

"I don't like to have to explain things that are too old for her."

"Sometimes love scenes come on during a movie and I get very embarrassed."

"I feel her tastes are being formed and I want to help form them."

"My mother was fussy about what we saw...I want her (my daughter) to see and do the right things."

"Sex is not bad, but I believe in telling them about sex the way I want to tell them."

If parental control over television is not as great as one would wish, there are at least two plausible explanations.

First, parents generally have positive attitudes toward TV and its influence on their children. Mothers believe that their children derive more good than bad from TV, especially in social interaction and ethics, and this is as true of mothers who exercise considerable control as of those who exert little. The following comments illustrate this:

"It has helped improve her imagination. It has helped her to think. She is spoiled, but I find I can reason with her more somehow. I don't feel she is as shy as she was. She'll dance and sing now—she'll brush her teeth and take medication because commercials have said this will be good for her."

"Enlarged vocabulary, learned about the world, learned to enjoy humor, sharing, concentration."

"They learn about animals, and some programs teach them respect, sharing...*Davey and Goliath*, Sunday—they teach Christianity."

"She learned the Pledge to the flag when she was two from *Romper Room*. She learns manners from Miss Jean. The quiz shows have taught her quite a few facts."

"...these family programs—they learn what I have tried to teach them in getting along and being well-behaved."

"...how to make various things that will amuse them when they spend time in the house. I feel something like *Lassie* teaches them to respect animals and be kind to them."

Another reason why parents do not exercise more control is suggested by Bruno Bettelheim, who contends that issues of disci-

pline fall into two categories. In the first, when the parent feels sure that it is truly necessary for the good of the child, he will insist that the child comply. In the second, he may believe that it is good for the child, but is not absolutely sure. Many issues concerning TV and children belong in the second category, Bettelheim states.

In other words, Bettelheim suggests that only when research has more positively established the nature of the effect of TV violence on children will their parents know more surely how to exercise control over their own children's viewing habits.

To demonstrate that sex and violence may have no ill effect is not enough. A more positive approach would be to demonstrate to parents that all children's television programming lives up to what they believe their children should see.

Finally, is it reasonable to expect that ordinary parents will have the training necessary to judge, select, and interpret television program content? As the artist needs experience and formal training in the recognition of fine works of art, so may the parent need education to select and interpret programs for the child.

With proper interpretation, even *Peyton Place* might offer the parent an opportunity to discuss "real life" topics that could help bridge the generation gap.

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If God isn't like Walter Cronkite, many people will be disappointed.

—Anon.

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## BOOKS IN REVIEW

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Sidney Finkelstein. **SENSE AND NONSENSE OF McLUHAN.** New York: International Publishers, 1969.

In this little book, Sidney Finkelstein has written an anti-McLuhan polemic which is perhaps the most sustained attack on McLuhan in print. This essay will, no doubt, be heralded by many as a long overdue death-blow. For those who understand McLuhan, this mini-book will serve as a frustrating reminder of how difficult it is for the ordinary man to get the hang of the media guru. (Despite the jokes, McLuhan is not as easy as he would seem. Where the idle or hostile reader may feel that he is being glib or factitious, he may actually be paraphrasing Heisenberg or Shannon and Weaver or Georg von Bekesy.)

Reading Mr. Finkelstein's splenetic treatise gives one the impression that *Understanding Media* is *Mein Kampf* and *Das Kapital* rolled into one overwhelmingly insidious manifesto, for Finkelstein accuses McLuhan of being at once like the Nazis and like Marx. But in these instances Finkelstein is only toying with McLuhan. His real worry is that McLuhan is an advocate of electronic totalitarianism.

Whatever one feels about McLuhan's ideas, he never said or meant most of the things attributed to him in this 122-page essay. It's like trying to reconcile a Ptolemaic review of Copernicus. But beyond this, one finds Finkelstein using tawdry techniques against McLuhan—wilfully false assumptions and damaging innuendo. While it is admittedly difficult to establish communication with a man bent on murder, it is still necessary to hold him responsible for his act.

A curious paradox is in evidence throughout Mr. Finkelstein's book. While he rails constantly against McLuhan's subjective play with the "facts," the counterfactuals which he throws against *Understanding Media* are frequently wrong. In places Finkelstein's righteous anger seems so intense that it paralyzes both his sense of intellectual honesty and the openness of mind that one expects of the bona fide intellectual.

Perhaps the most important deficiency of *Sense and Nonsense* is its lack of understanding of the complex of ideas represented by the slogan "The medium is the message." Finkelstein seems deeply worried because he believes that "To McLuhan there is no longer any need for knowledge and study, or for any rational thinking at all." This allegation is nonsense. McLuhan is talking about the variations of meaning in information patterns through different media. The kind of thinking that does for the print medium does not do for electronic media—especially television. These new information patterns change our lives. It does no good simply to *repudiate* McLuhan's *kind* of knowledge and study as though it were nothing but mad babble.

Finkelstein quotes McLuhan on the "mosaic" quality of the TV picture. The quote is doctored, a page of print deleted between the first and last parts.

The TV image offers some three million dots per second to the receiver. From these he accepts only a few dozen each instant, from which to make an image. . . . The TV image requires each instant that we 'close' the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile, because tactility is the interplay of the senses.

Finkelstein counters in strange fashion:

The argument is absurd, when analyzed. For a Rembrandt drawing, with its sparse strokes, does not involve the observer more than a Rembrandt painting. And when one looks closely at a painting by Titian or Rembrandt, one sees thousands of little brush-strokes and spots of color that, at a greater distance, coalesce into evocation of textures and light.

Apparently Mr. Finkelstein has not understood at all what McLuhan has plainly said. McLuhan is talking about an act of perception that is changing every second, an act that is profoundly kinetic and in no way like the studied static perception of a man standing at length before a picture in a gallery. But how could Finkelstein miss the point? Four lines before this quoted passage from *Understanding Media*, McLuhan has made himself as clear as is humanly possible. "The TV image is not a *still* shot. It is not photographic in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning finger."

After attempting to cloud over McLuhan's observation that the kinetic stream of mosaic images on a TV screen is deeply involving at a sensory level, Finkelstein launches directly into an attack on McLuhan's competence with the scientific data relating to television. "However, whether this special bodily impact of the television picture tube 'mosaic' is really scientifically so, does not interest McLuhan." But if Finkelstein had taken the trouble to look into McLuhan's "impressive" bibliography, he would have seen that McLuhan has excellent authorities for his scientific theory. And of particular interest is the cogent study *On Human Communication* by Colin Cherry, Professor of Telecommunications, University of London.

If we remain stupidly narcotized by the electrotechnical environment (and we may), Mr. Finkelstein's fears of elitist totalitarianism are eminently justified. But we can survive such a ravage of human values by beginning to understand the changes being brought into our lives. If only McLuhan could twitch the Finkelsteins of the world into counterstrategies beyond helpless academic petulance, we shall survive even in a cyberneticized environment in which every civilized value has to be restructured to meet with the demands of an electric culture.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Frank Zingrone

Harry M. Clor. **OBSCENITY AND PUBLIC MORALITY: CENSORSHIP IN A LIBERAL SOCIETY.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

In this book Professor Harry M. Clor, who teaches political science at Kenyon College, has put together a compelling argument in favor of controlling obscenity in a liberal society. That in itself is sufficient to bring libertarian wrath down on his head.

But Clor does not ask society for a quick swing to the right; the bluenose will find no champion here. Rather he strives for a viable, workable, *democratic* system of protecting worthy artistic creations while placing a bridle on what is unworthy and base.

Clor readily admits that the problems inherent in the basic issues of obscenity and its control are as varied as they are controversial. But after examining the issues in historical perspective—the confusion and contradictions of major court decisions up to the present—he offers first a concise definition of obscenity, and then a system of guidelines by which it can be controlled.

He has much to say about pornography and the huckstering of sex and sexual perversion. But unlike other studies, he also moves obscenity out of the strictly sex-oriented sphere to include other private functions, *e.g.*, human suffering and death.

*Private* is a key word, for Clor views intrusion into the private functions of human beings as a basis of obscenity's appeal: "Obscenity consists in making public that which is private; it consists in an intrusion upon intimate physical processes and acts or physical-emotional states. . . ."

So, while obscenity can be sex-oriented, it can also deal with other human activities such as death, birth, illness, even eating and defecation.

"Obscenity makes a public exhibition of these phenomena and does so in such a way that their larger human context is lost or depreciated," the author says. Thus the intimate portrayal of death—say on television news or drama—death in the form of a mangled corpse, a dismembered body, is obscene if calculated to have the viewer dwell primarily on the *details* of human suffering and death. "In these portrayals," as Clor states, "not only are the most intimate aspects of human life revealed, but their human dimensions are reduced to their physical dimensions."

But portrayals of sex and other human experiences need not be obscene, Clor is quick to point out. He clearly distinguishes between "erotic realism" and pornography. In his terms, authors of the former "are concerned with telling the truth as they understand it," while those of the latter "are concerned with arousing and indulging the sexual fantasies of readers. . . ."

Obscene material, then, according to the author's yardstick, is that "which presents, graphically and in detail, a degrading picture of human life and invites the reader or viewer, not to contemplate that picture, but to wallow in it."

Clor also explores such legal-social snares as "prurient interests," "community standards," and the effects of obscenity on children and adults, the normal and the abnormal, along with other factors influenced by or catering to the problems of obscenity.

Through it all he calls for a sane, workable means of elevating man and his society via exposure to artistic works of merit—whether they contain sex portrayals or not—while curbing those which seek to debase man and thus weaken his society. In this pursuit he offers a four-point obscenity "test" which is at least as realistic as that with which we must now struggle.

Professor Clor has put together here a thoughtful, scholarly work, which treats all the major controversies and considerations dealing with obscenity in its many forms. There are weaknesses, as he readily admits, but weaknesses that reflect the confusion befogging our legal and social notions of what is and what is not obscene and the authority of citizens to control

it or leave it alone. The book is required reading for anyone—liberal, conservative, moderate—who has been touched by the issues involved.

Without doubt Clor will have his critics, especially those who view censorship in any form as an unlikely companion for free expression in a democratic society. Nonetheless, the book provides an excellent synthesis of a social problem that will be with us for a long time to come.

*Boston University*

Maurice R. Cullen, Jr.

John Whale. **THE HALF-SHUT EYE; TELEVISION AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN AND AMERICA.** New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969.

In politics, television sees dimly, informs sparsely, and sells candidates indifferently well. This text John Whale illustrates and elaborates with wit, urbanity, and sophistication. His vantage points are personal experiences with the English radio section of ORTF, the political staff of the *Sunday Times*, and the political section of Independent Television News. And though he can be faulted for pressing his thesis too hard and underplaying contrary information, I confess that I was more than half persuaded.

As depicted, television's political limitations are neither accidental nor superficial but existential. They arise from basic technological and institutional constraints. For example, television is wedded to pictures—interesting pictures—while most political issues are multi-dimensional, replete with nuances and too arcane for the camera's eye.

In reporting the Vietnam War, for example, television is constrained by the American commanders in the field, the cumbersomeness of film gear, and common prudence. At times it gets searing pictures of the horrors of war. But if the battlefield is indeed the hearts and minds of men, as the phrase runs, no film can be brought back from it. Of the two wars, Americans saw much less of the one they stood in much more need of winning.

Besides its visual dependence, television is easily hampered by physical obstacles, such as its need for adequate lighting. Other significant limitations are that it alters or accelerates the events it records, as when it moves into a student or race disturbance; and it is hobbled by its delicate and yet unbreakable links with authority.

Whale enumerates its other weaknesses: television news focuses more on the abnormal than the normal, on people more than issues, on idiosyncrasy more than character, and on conflict more than synthesis. He makes much of the point that television is barred from the inner councils and from the other loci of decision making and is limited to ceremonial activities, such as the speechmaking and the delegate waving at conventions and the goodwill journeys of presidents, prime ministers, and popes. In these faults, however, television is not unique: the daily press is no stranger to the same accusations. But Whale would contend that television is significantly more guilty, if only because the camera's eye is popularly believed to be open and all-seeing, when in fact it is half-shut.

In the theology of progress, mass literacy promises an advance toward an educated electorate which would take reasonably well-based decisions. "That advance," Whale concludes dourly, "will not be sustained by an electorate which looks principally to television for its news." A troublesome conclusion for our times!

I am less pessimistic than Whale. Television news frequently may be only an index to the front page of the *New York Times*, but for the *Times* reader television is not an alternative. In the interstices of its pictures the tube presents persons who talk sense, with and without illustrations. Although deficient in detail, television sharpens and focuses the citizen's perception of national and international issues. Television news—especially network news—is less parochial and more worldly, and contains biases different from those the public absorbs from its favorite daily newspaper. Although the evidence is not indisputable, television's contribution to the sum of the public's understanding is positive.

In his treatment of television in elections, Whale is less analytical. He tussles overly long with a straw man: the mythic danger that some computer-primed and wealthy nonentity will be put over by commercials as a national savior. He attributes politicians' use of television to their prudent policy of leaving no millstone unturned. This explanation might be more convincing were it not for the central role television plays in statewide and national elections. Television does not exclude the use of other devices but neither is it merely one among many. If it is not the doomsday weapon neither is it a popgun; and Whale, it seems to me, has failed properly to classify it.

The charm of the book is in the personal anecdotes. One I especially enjoyed was the following:

"If the television interview is a means to the discovery of truth, its usefulness is limited. There have been few examples of men who have treated it with respect as such; and they have not been politicians. Perhaps it is no surprise that the one who comes most readily to mind is Edward R. Murrow, who once practiced the form himself. As director of the United States Information Agency in the Kennedy Administration, he passed through London in January 1962 on his way to Paris. In the Nissen hut which still served part of the airport at that time as a press conference room, he gave one or two broadcast interviews; mainly about Berlin, which was in the news at the time. Every two minutes a plane roared past a few hundred feet away as it took off. When it was my turn to put the questions, Mr. Murrow paid grave and close attention to a beginner in the profession he had founded. In his replies he seemed to concentrate on answering the questions as put and explaining what was in his own mind as clearly as he could. He made a deep impression: no one there had heard it done before. But Mr. Murrow was only a politician by adoption."

*Boston University*

Hyman H. Goldin

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Television makes us selectively inattentive.

—Anon.







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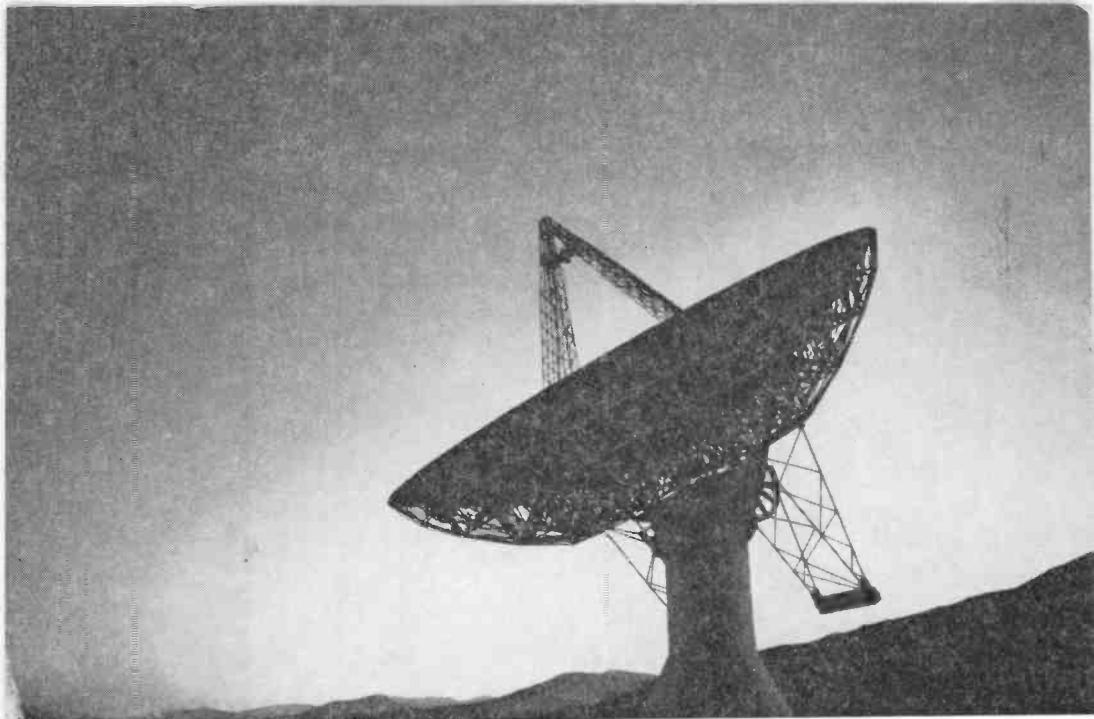
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