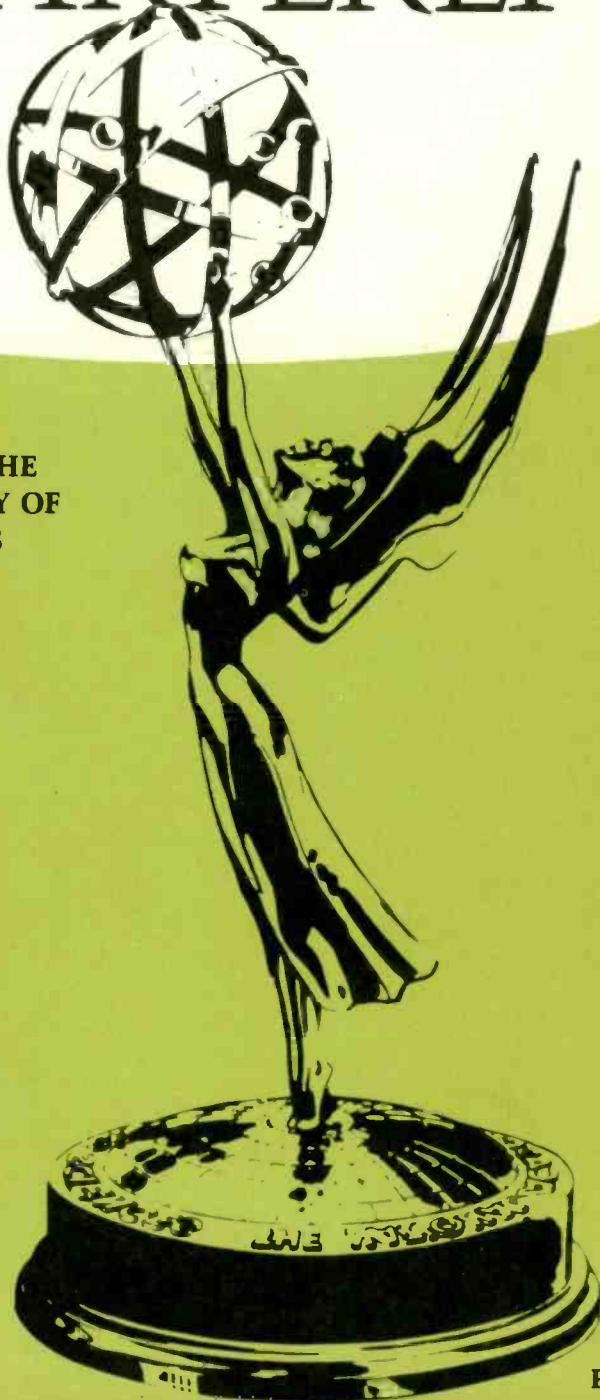


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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

THE JOURNAL OF THE  
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
TELEVISION ARTS  
AND SCIENCES

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# The Great TV Degree Hoax

---

By NAT SHOEHALTER

Educators have been fighting a constantly losing battle. It's the battle over whether courses given via television and radio are worthwhile.

As one who has been associated with educational broadcasting for more than 25 years, *I cannot justify the use of TV—that magnificent method of communication—for the presentation of courses for college credit.* It is heretical to admit this after having participated in the planning, production and execution of literally thousands of programs, some for college or extension credit, originating from a respected university campus and broadcast over commercial facilities.

The course content is not at fault, nor is the method or "production" of the presentation (heaven knows we used every kind of visual gimmick in the book to get an audience's attention). Our programs have been broadcast over every flagship station in New York, the largest metropolitan area of the country, and some have been on national networks. But even that great opportunity has not justified the presentation of college-level courses for the mass audience.

Why?

Elitist as it may sound, television is not a substitute for classroom participation. A television presentation, at least one that is prepared for a video audience, depends on visual "excitement;" the words or ideas are sublimated and the pictures do the talking. It isn't that way in a classroom where a teacher depends on an exchange of words and thoughts to make a point. A student presumably works in a classroom; a viewer is just that—a passive participant involved emotionally by pictorial rather than intellectual content. Surely, a well-produced program and a well-rehearsed and affable instructor are ingredients that make for "a good show." And an audience will be available for the presentation whether it is a history course or one which deals with the abstractions of mathematics.

People will watch, but the numbers who will be watching will be miniscule in relation to the total available audience. Is it worth spending months of preparation time for a course in Italian literature, gathering visual materials to enhance the lecture, clearing literary and pictorial rights with publishers, releasing teachers from normal classroom and committee assignments, making arrangements with local television outlets who will reluctantly assign an early morning hour, to reach only those relatively few motivated students interested in that subject? Once the program is broadcast, it is rare that a course or subject matter will be repeated.

Management is reluctant to repeat programs—"it's been done before," is the way one program producer turned down a proposal when we wanted to present a course on the politics of Southeast Asia. This happened during the height of the Viet Nam conflict and would have "featured" a prominent professor of political science, whose scholarly pursuits are devoted to the politics and problems of that area of the world.

One station, however, presented a course we produced four times. They did it because it was cheaper to rerun the series than to produce a new, different course. It also gave the station those F.C.C. credentials that fulfilled its education requirement. Estimates on television studio costs, per hour of taping and rehearsal, range from \$2,000 to \$5,000, depending on the kind of production involved. These figures are for minimal use. (In our case, it was usually one professor, perhaps a guest or two and some visuals and props.)

Although stations deny any censorship, they are most reluctant to present contemporary history programs. Management is quite frightened about programs ("courses") that might cause controversy. A course we produced on the Eisenhower Presidency was closely monitored by the station. Although there was no censorship, the professor was asked how and why he would want to use the Nixon "Checkers" speech in his lecture on the 1952 campaign.

A series which we proposed, that was to be a critical look at the United Nations as a "dangerous place" for World Peace, was also turned down as "too controversial."

In some geographical areas of the United States, educational materials are offered on TV and there are paying student bodies who enroll for credit. The University of California at San Diego has an aggressive and bright leadership who markets educational programs selling everything from texts, workbooks, and teacher aids, to entire courses on videotape in any format for use on local television, or in public libraries, business or schools, at any level of instruction from elementary to college. Business is good, they report.

There is also the University of Mid-America, which publishes an enormous catalogue of courses on videotape and film. These, too, are readily available for educational institutions and others at a price.

Broadcasters argue that formal courses are "audience chasers." They are aware, however, of their obligation to present programs in the public interest, convenience and necessity; and, therefore, to meet those requirements, they relegate "educational" programs to hours that are not readily sold to commercial advertisers. The broadcasters meet the F.C.C. standards, but they are not making courses available at convenient hours for the largest possible viewing audience. A student has to be highly motivated to get up at 5:55 a.m. to watch and participate in a college-level course.

The recent announcement that Walter Annenberg, President of Triangle Publications, planned to fund a *University of the Air* through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, sounded like a proposal coming out of the early 1950's, when television was still in its infancy. Program directors experimented in those days. Courses for credit were tried in the East. As late as 1957, New York University's *Sunrise Semester*, on the local CBS outlet (at 6 a.m.—live) made headlines and some sort of television history. The announcements at the time offered a college degree via television viewing. In 1960, the NBC Television Network inaugurated *Continental Classroom*, a massive program production costing hundreds of thousands of dollars and featuring scholars, teachers and Nobel Prize winners giving courses in college physics and economics. Relatively few of the affiliates carried the programs, again presented in the early morning hours, and the great effort to provide a college education for the mass audience died.

There were many reasons for its collapse. Colleges and universities found it administratively awkward to award credit. In the first place, an instructor had to be assigned to oversee the programs; that meant he couldn't meet his departmental assignment. The schools had to determine whether the materials broadcast fit their own curriculum: how much credit should be awarded? on what basis? contact hours in front of the set? examinations at home or on campus? how much should a student pay for a television course? does he or she have to be matriculated at a particular institution? are the credits "transferable" from one educational institution to another?

Another reason for the collapse was the fact that there were insufficient viewers to support the stations' efforts. Ratings are important in attracting advertisers and the numbers weren't there—not at those hours, anyway.

The failure on the part of the audience to support the programs was another reason for the demise of the network educational efforts. The television schedule being rigid, it could not always be met by the student. If one missed a presentation, it was gone and there was no way that it could be repeated. Missing lectures and demonstrations is demoralizing and leads to course failure.

There is an immense storehouse of educational materials on tape and film that have been on the air—and in many instances, they will never be seen again. One of our professors did a long series of programs, for WCBS-TV in New York some years ago, on art history, in color: a series that would have supplemented any art course at any major college or university—but the University could not get copies of the programs. Union restrictions and a contract with the station that said they had the rights to the materials "worldwide and in perpetuity" were some of the reasons, along with the clincher for a University strapped for funds: that,



even if they did let us use the tapes on our campus alone, the cost of the tape duplication would be in excess of \$50,000. At those prices, the University could have hired three assistant professors.

The good news is that the Annenberg proposal might work since it provides not only for airing course work on cable stations and public television, but also for making the tapes available in cassette form or, indeed, any format that a student wishes to have for individual study at his own pace. Workbooks, texts, a place to meet with a tutor and other viewers or students, will also be funded under the plan. This seems to be a sensible way for a *University of the Air* to operate. Access channels on cable facilities are not yet being used to their maximum potential and many cable operators would jump at the chance to offer yet another diverse kind of program fare, other than sports and movies, to entice an audience to hook up. And cable can repeat programs almost any time.

All in all, the prospect of vast infusions of money to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, for undergraduate and continuing education, somehow sends shivers down my back. I envision planning projects, endless discussions on how materials will be presented and by whom, pre-testing of programs (course lectures) and analyses of data on prospective audiences.

And after all this, it will be up to the stations themselves to decide whether to program a course or "go with a winner" like *Masterpiece Theater* or *Monty Python*. It is unfortunate but true that public stations also have to show good ratings; for how can legislative appropriations and other funding groups be asked to contribute large amounts of money for a handful of viewers?

The Public Broadcasting Service, according to reports, is to be restructured, providing three different network services. One of them will be exclusively devoted to instructional materials.

With such a facility available for education, particularly on a college undergraduate level, it will be interesting to note how the public broadcasters will respond and how educators, weary and shy of the promises of educational television, will cooperate in this project. Somewhere, sometime, an answer will be available to the questions which teachers have been asking for so long. How and why can't television be used more efficiently in the business of educating the non-traditional student?

---

*Dr. Nathan Shoehalter is professor of communications at Rutgers State College of Arts and Sciences at Newark, N.J. He has been a producer, director and consultant to educational stations in New York and New Jersey.*



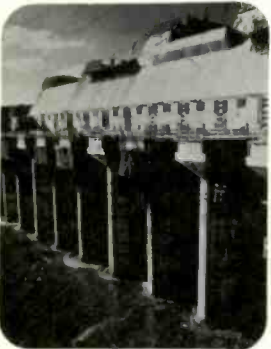
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a couple of important  
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# Above All, Involve the Audience

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By ROBERT GELLER

**W**e were in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. early in the winter of 1978 to film one of the most admired stories in American literature, Willa Cather's *Paul's Case*. The locale was right. It offered buildings erected in the story's period. Nearby, an entire neighborhood had been preserved—circa 1905. Not least important, the town was far enough north to offer a good chance of snow, which is a critical element in the story's climax.

As the production moved irrevocably toward the snow scene, we waited. No snow. Lamont Johnson, the gifted director, finally reminded me that he would need snow within 48 hours. We were, as always, on a tight budget; renting of snow machines was a formidable alternative. Any revision in the story's conclusion was out of the question. Snow was implicit to Cather's story.

Lamont Johnson did what a director should. He presented the problem to the executive producer, and we discussed the alternatives.

"What do you think we should do?" he asked.

"It will snow tomorrow," I said.

It did.

I accepted the cheerful congratulations of the company, but all of us knew the truth: The executive producer's powers are distinctly mortal, limited by the realities of funding sources, broadcast systems and audience preferences. The executive producer is not, alone, going to expand quality television beyond its presently narrow base. Neither will underwriters or sponsors, networks or stations, teleplay writers, directors, performers, editors or technical specialists. If it is to happen, we will all have to make it happen together.

To me, the word quality—by which I mean high quality—has a rather simple meaning when applied to theater, film or television. It means that the presentation does not just divert the audience; it also *involves* the audience. It demands an act of commitment, an acceptance of the consequences of concern, even (heaven help us!) a willingness to think. It stretches and refines our perceptions, expands our awareness of ourselves and others. Ultimately, it changes us, at least in a small way.

Quality television, theater or film cannot, of course, do any of these things unless the audience wants them to. Television viewers must be motivated to select a channel and to stay with it. In a free society, the



most powerful motivation to watch a given program is the promise of entertainment.

To me, violence isn't the issue, nor is sex. Both have been present in what all of us recognize as some of the finest drama our culture has produced. If our heads and hearts have responded to such great material so have our adrenal glands. What is the issue is mindlessness: violence or sex for its own sake; vapid material; television to do the chores by.

To no one's surprise, therefore, the *sine qua non* of better television is better writing. In this respect, I have been unusually fortunate. As executive producer for *The American Short Story*, I have dealt with materials originated by seventeen great American authors such as Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Flannery O'Connor, Richard Wright and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the same capacity for *Too Far to Go* (a two-hour film for NBC), I worked with a splendid script developed from seventeen stories by John Updike. Virtually everyone accepts these people as immensely talented writers; yet all too few in our industry recognize them also as some of the finest *entertainers* of our time. And they are not alone. There are countless men and women, less widely known, writing superbly and entertainingly today.

I do not suggest that we must be slavish to the author. Television has its own requirements and they must be accommodated, even when a story approaches perfection on the printed page. When the late Jan Kadar was directing Stephen Crane's *The Blue Hotel*, all the instincts of a great director told him the final scene of the story would not work on screen. It introduced three new characters in the final, climactic moments of the film. I remember his poring over the notes in his script, pencilled in Hungarian, torn between his love of the Crane story and his certainty as a director.

We made the change, folding the final moments of the film into the story that had evolved to that point. By doing so, we preserved the impact of Crane's conclusion, which would have been diluted or entirely lost by a decision to adhere to the text at all costs.

This decision, and others we have made in *The American Short Story* series, was a difficult one, a matter of fine balances. Our intent was to present not adaptations but the short stories, themselves, on film. We were determined to transmit the characters, events and textures of the stories as the authors perceived them. Critical response throughout the country suggests that we succeeded.

As we were not slavish, we were not disrespectful. Too many television dramas have made use of fine stories by established authors for respectability, while retaining little of the original material.

Let me turn to another subject involving respect on the part of the executive producer. I refer to respect for the viewer's time. There are those in our industry who see one hour as too short a span to accomplish



an important dramatic purpose. To them, the 90-minute special is the threshold of important drama, and the mini-series is truly suitable. Yet consider: One hour is one-eighth of the time most people work for a living. It is an even larger fraction of the time people have for recreation. And, equally important, it is a long enough time to tell a story which involves and illuminates. One of the most telling of our short stories, Updike's *The Music School*, was presented in 31 minutes.

Determination to involve the audience. Excellent professionals in every phase of filmmaking. Respect for fine writing. Respect for the viewer's time. Now, to these must be added another vital element: money.

Patronage of the arts has been a resource and a problem—both, in dynamic tension—as long as there have been arts. I can almost hear the cave painter saying: "If you will let me use the charcoal from your fire, I'll paint you among the antelope hunters. I will make you immortal."

And I can hear the cave painter's benefactor saying, "If I can make just a few suggestions about those antelope . . ."

What should concern us is the motivation of the patron—that is, the underwriter or sponsor. Is the institution or company or individual interested in selling a product or service . . . establishing a public image . . . or simply supporting an artistic endeavor that deserves it? Is the sponsor interested in the viewer or just the viewer's money or opinion?

The motivation makes all the difference. If you are a large manufacturer of consumer products and if it is your commercial that most concerns you, you will collect the largest audience you can. Football. Hit movies. Least-common-denominator sitcoms. Jiggles. Superstar specials.

If you are also concerned with public opinion, you may even undertake something better. You might even risk high-quality material.

If you have a sense of genuine institutional or corporate responsibility, you might go even further. You might make specific contributions to projects with the certain knowledge that your identification with the presentation will be straightforward and simple, and you will be given no time to sell—as in the case of public broadcasting. The underwriters of *The American Short Story* were, happily, in this mold.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, as an agency of the Federal government, has funded many, many projects which have enhanced the cultural life of our country. We are proud of its support. The NEH has been painstaking in its respect for the independence of an independent producer, always expressing its concern for quality but never attempting to influence artistic decisions. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has also been supportive.

The Xerox Corporation, our corporate underwriter, consistently demonstrates its responsibility through its television programming. And no one from Xerox has ever said, "Bob, if I can just make a few suggestions about the pictures . . ."

Quality television does not refer to sets or studios or transmission systems. It comes from fortuitous combinations of people—the underwriters, sponsors and network officials on the one hand; the writers, directors, actors and actresses, musicians, cutters and other artists/technicians on the other. Between them stands the executive producer, wishing he or she truly had the kind of power that could make it snow.

---

*Robert Geller is president of Learning in Focus, Inc., and executive producer of The American Short Story, a series of seventeen dramas shown over PBS during the past two seasons. A graduate of Cornell University, Mr. Geller was formerly director of education for the American Film Institute.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"My lips have been kind of buttoned for almost 20 years. I'd like to be able to speak out on a few important issues without feeling that I was in any way impinging upon the independence and integrity of the 'Evening News'. I can't even be as hard-hitting as I want in my radio spot (five minutes, five days a week). They're called 'commentaries' but CBS News doesn't really believe in commentary."

—Walter Cronkite in *Parade Magazine*

\* \* \*

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"Technically, Chinese TV is still embryonic. Programs seldom start on time, and there are often long moments between items when the screen bears only a scenic view or the station logo. Programs are frequently changed at the last minute.

"News announcers sit stiffly under harsh lights and read tensely from sheets of paper. To a viewer accustomed to foreign television, one of the most disconcerting aspects of the newscasts is the staleness of the news. Last month's events are interspersed with yesterday's happenings and film clips of advances in production."

—*Hong Kong Monsoon*  
(Quoted in *World Press Review*)

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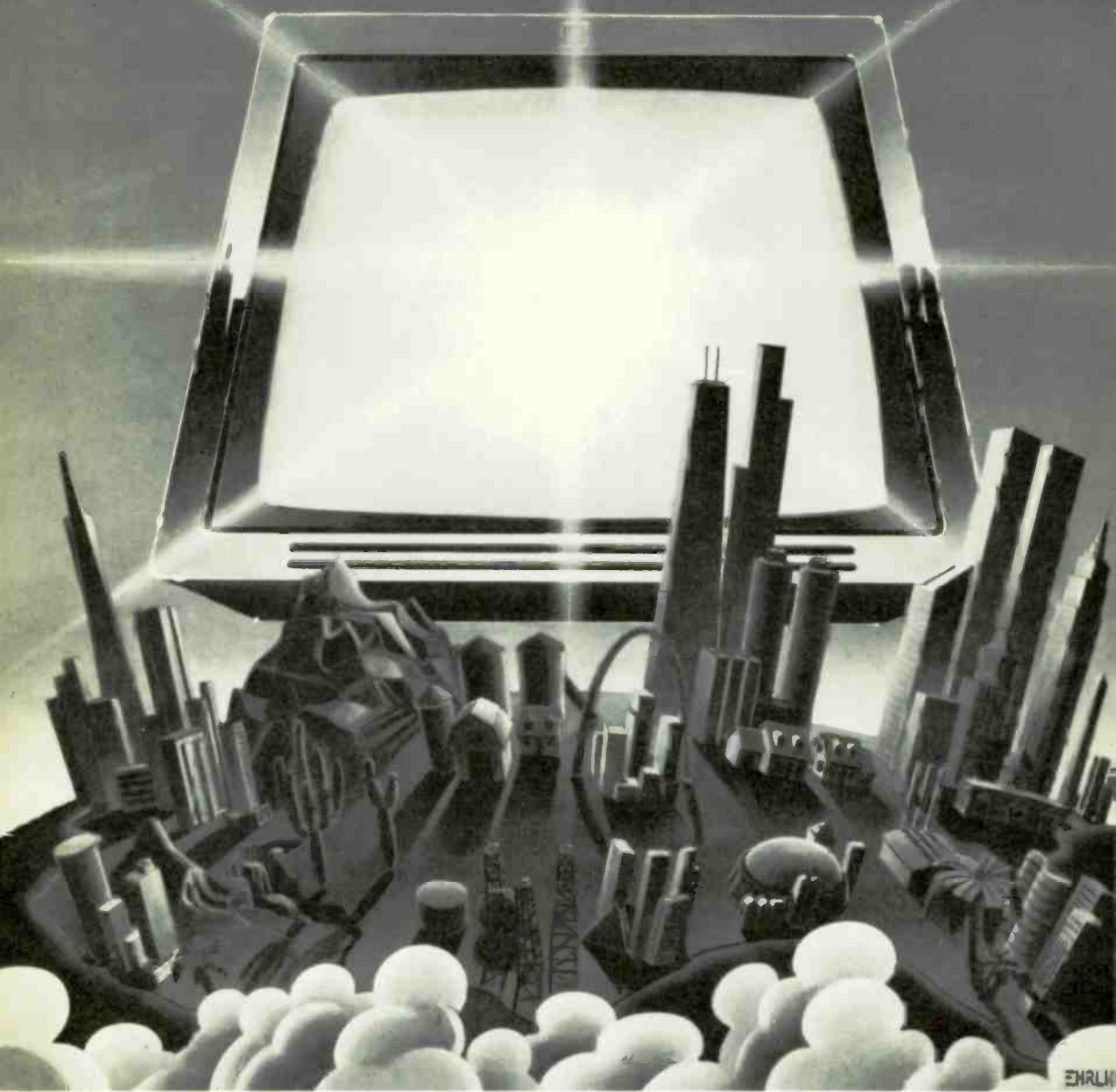
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# TV's \$100 Million Program Hunt

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By STEVE DITLEA

**T**o a viewer at home, surely one of the biggest mysteries in television isn't a *whodunit* but *howdunit*—the process by which new programs are conceived and developed.

This year the three commercial networks will spend over \$100 million for 500 scripts and 75 pilot episodes for new prime-time series. Of this crop perhaps two dozen new series will find places in the schedule over the course of a year. Only a handful are expected to survive more than a full season.

With the high mortality rate for new shows, it's a wonder anyone would want to participate in the torturous process of creating a series for television. Then again, just about every viewer, at some time, has come up with an idea for a program as good as anything on the air—or so he might think. Naturally, the pot of gold at the end of the TV development rainbow—i.e., profit participation in a long-running hit series—is hard to ignore.

The commercial networks don't keep count of the unsolicited program ideas sent in by viewers. It is the networks' policy to return such submissions unread, pending the signing of a release form to shield them from possible litigation over program concepts.

Even if an idea from a viewer has real merit, without backing from someone with a successful track record in television, its chances of becoming a network series are virtually nil.

"Ideas are the trash of the business," says Perry Lafferty, senior vice-president for programs and talent at NBC. "What we're interested in is the execution of a concept. We want to know you can sustain your idea for twenty-six episodes a year and do it well. As it is, we get over 3,000 series ideas a year from bone fide sources like agents, producers, writers, and actors."

From these, only one idea in thirty will be chosen for development as a pilot script—the initial step a network takes in investing in a new show.

Occasionally, beginner's luck may overcome such odds. As a free-lance journalist, this writer had often come across interesting premises for TV shows, but had never done anything with them until a joking conversation with an old college friend now turned producer. Within a matter

of months, as co-producers, we had two development deals with one of the networks. Though they never went beyond the script stage, these projects offered an invaluable education in the mysteries of TV development.

One thing you learn quickly: yes, it's true that a two-line blurb like the ones in TV Guide can actually sell a network on a program—provided you can back it up with acceptable characters and some plots for episodes. A title alone may be enough to sell a TV movie; as much effort can go into a title as composing haiku.

Television development has developed its own jargon, which to the uninitiated might sound like something out of a hardware dealers' convention. A *tent-pole* actually refers to the central character who supports a series. Whether a shingle or a badge, the *franchise* is what justifies that character's involvement in plots from week to week. The *arena*, where a series takes place, can be as big as the great outdoors or as small as Archie Bunker's bar.

Paul Klein, former head of NBC programming, is credited with formulating the theory of "least-objectionable programming," which holds that good ratings will accrue to programs that have nothing to annoy viewers enough to want to change the channel. This kind of double-negative thinking pervades programming considerations. One independent producer, when asked point blank by a network development executive why his show should be piloted, replied "because there's no reason not to do it." He got his pilot.

Among the reasons for not doing a particular show are informal network guidelines that shift as fast as the Nielsen ratings. Of late, network developers have been shying away from westerns (too traditional), science-fiction (too expensive), show business characters (not universal enough), and rich people ("like morticians, they're hard to relate to", according to one exec). All of this is subject to change, so stay tuned.

Timing is crucial in the successful development of a series. Its theme should be novel, yet familiar, its situations timely yet timeless. In addition, a show must beat the clock of screening deadlines. Though development is essentially a year-round activity, most pilots are still made for consideration for the fall schedule. These pilot shows are completed and screened by April, from scripts usually approved by the first of the year. The actual writing of a pilot script may take a month or six weeks, but many more months are consumed in story meetings, rewriting, clearance by program standards censors, a polish and final readings. As in the Army, everything is a question of hurry up and wait, adding to the anxiety of producers and writers.

When a network contracts for a pilot script, it pays a production company to have a script written by an agreed-upon member of the Writer's Guild (few outside writers get development deals). It is network policy that only writers are to be paid for work up to this point; in return for

the network's investment, a producer is expected to foot the bill for shepherding the project, paying out of pocket for presentations, legal fees, typing costs, lunches, interminable phone calls, and all the rest.

Even if a pilot is filmed, the licensing fee the network pays for two showings probably won't cover the cost of shooting; a producer must be able to guarantee deficit financing amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars. If a series actually gets onto the prime-time schedule, it won't make its costs back unless it can also be sold abroad (a hard sell for situation comedies) or sold to syndication (virtually impossible unless a show has been on for five seasons).

"It's not in our interest to put producers out of business," insists Allen Wagner, a CBS programming Vice President, whose New York office is developing thirty scripts and three pilots for the fall season. "There's no reason for anyone to go broke."

Despite his efforts to lure new suppliers and talent to television (Wagner recently developed scripts by playwrights Arthur Kopitt and Jack Heiffner), economic realities dictate that only studios, producers with successful shows, and financially secure newcomers can afford to work with the networks on new series.

The only guaranteed winners in the development sweepstakes are scriptwriters. For a seasoned television writer, it may mean \$30,000 to \$40,000 for a one-hour pilot script and a royalty on future shows instead of the \$8,500 plus scale for episodes. For a writer from outside the medium, it can be a well-paid opportunity to work with television's conventions. It can also mean headaches in the watering-down process pilot scripts are prone to.

Popular novelist Donald Westlake writes several pilot scripts a year, yet none has made it to the screen intact. Only a TV insider like Larry Gelbart (creator of *M\*A\*S\*H* for CBS) could obtain the creative control he had as producer-writer of the experimental domestic comedy, *United States*, on NBC.

"For most producers, series development is like playing roulette," explains one independent producer. "You have to be willing to lose a lot of money and time before your number finally comes up. If your number comes up enough times, they'll let you into the back room, where the odds are better."

The credits on prime-time series attest to the ranks of successful producers being a rather select club. At the top are names like Aaron Spelling and Gary Marshall, with exclusive network development deals that virtually assure them of going to pilot and series with their new shows. Also appreciated are producers of existing shows for the ability to spin-off new series with already established characters. Below these are studios and producers who get "3-for-1" development deals—i.e., the network gives its assurance that for three scripts that are developed, one will actually be made into a pilot.

The vast majority of development money flows from the networks to these established suppliers. According to one programming executive, only twenty percent of a network's development projects are considered "high risk", including those of producers outside the charmed circle. Producers can work their way up from the minor leagues of TV movies, late-night, and children's specials, but in general each crop of new series has a sameness of style, reflecting the limited number of producers involved.

Perhaps the most grueling task in the development process is the screening of a season's worth of pilots. Development executives, scheduling pros, and network heads screen three or four pilots a day for several weeks. The pilot by its very nature is an odd hybrid: it must establish its characters yet be representative of a series episode. It must be experimental yet typical. The result is often like packing a suitcase with far more or far less clothing than it can hold.

By screening all pilots and approving the ones that will inspire new series, NBC's Fred Silverman, CBS' William Paley, and ABC's Tony Thomopoulos become the final arbiters of the development process. Still, their decisions are hedged with research in the conceptual stage and the screening of finished pilots for sample audiences, that gauge their reactions on special hand-held dials. According to Seymour Amlen, the ABC Vice President who oversees program planning, "sample audiences react more favorably than viewers at home, but they allow us to measure reactions to program elements."

Compared to the \$1 billion and more a year the networks spend on prime-time series episodes, the money spent on development for new shows is rather insignificant. On the other hand, \$100 million should buy the networks more in the way of innovation than what they're getting now. Like Detroit automakers, the networks preserve their investment in current inventory by slowly introducing changes in their new models, but conditions beyond their control are going to require a totally new product.

The coming of age of alternate program sources—cable, cassette, and disk—will oblige the networks to experiment to find the forms of programming they can best deliver. Series, certainly, since these are what build up habitual viewing, but series that have more to offer to a more fickle audience. Live broadcasting may make a well-deserved comeback. With the addition of the latest in portable video equipment, the horizons for new prime-time series will be truly unlimited.

In the meantime, to get their money's worth in development, the networks should try to make it less onerous for outside producers to create shows. Ultimately these suppliers represent the fresh blood network television will need to survive the coming upheaval. Moreover, network development executives should nurture the original, the quirky, and the unpredictable in new programming. The greatest paradox in series development is that so many well-intentioned, intelligent people, both pro-



ducers and network executives, labor so mightily to come up with more of the same old stuff. Admits one exasperated programming executive: "There's something about the development process that manages to keep good shows from getting on the air."

As for this writer, no more television deals for a while. The first two were an expensive lesson; having to pawn one's TV set to help pay for them was quite enough, thank you. Then again, if Fred Silverman were to offer a deal that would pay for a new television set, I would probably take his call.

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*Steve Ditlea is television columnist for L'Officiel USA.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"A sizeable group of young men who are blue collar workers watches sport events on television less often than most groups of female viewers.

"Adolescent boys tend to favor situation comedies that poke fun at male authority figures . . . Blue collar workers [show] relatively little interest in soap opera."

—*Psychology Today*

\* \* \*

"The FCC is right to keep an eye on a medium that, like it or not, influences young minds. Too much violence and other anti-social excesses are clearly objectionable. But programming 'standards' tend to be arbitrary and ineffectual. Who is to say how much education is enough. And what are broadcasters to do if children still prefer 'Scooby-Do' and 'The Schmoo'?"

"If Government wants to improve the quality of children's programming, it would be wiser to help those who want to provide better material than to burden those who don't with new rules. More Federal support could be given to public television; the pace of deregulating cable could be quickened.

"The larger problem is how much television children watch overall. . . . In the end, the best control over the quality of children's programs will be found in the marketplace of the home."

—*Editorial, New York Times*

**Adding new dimensions to TV programming**



**WOR·TV** New York  
**KHJ·TV** Los Angeles  
**WNAC·TV** Boston  
**WHBQ·TV** Memphis

**RKOG**  
**TELEVISION**  
DIVISION OF RKO GENERAL, INC.

# In Praise of Sweet Silent Thought

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By EDWIN NEWMAN

I'd like to put in a good word for good words. And a good word for silence.

Silence sounds like this. (Hold five seconds). It is soothing, it gives people the opportunity to consider what has been said, which is useful when something has been said that is *worth* considering, and it may enhance the picture it accompanies by permitting that picture to speak for itself. Silence can be especially valuable during special event broadcasts. Also, during sports broadcasts, from which it is, unfortunately, entirely absent.

Silence serves another purpose. It gives the words that are spoken greater value because the silence suggests that the speaker has thought about what those words are to be.

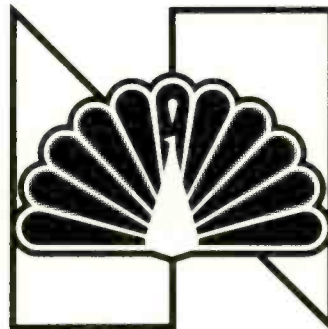
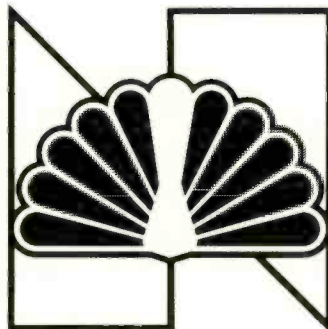
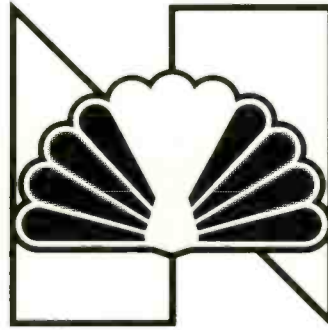
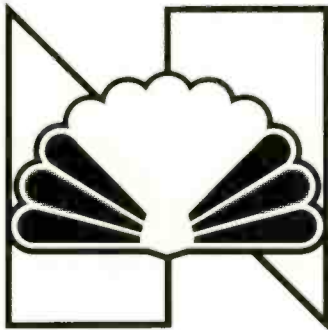
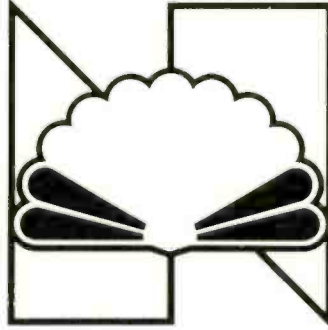
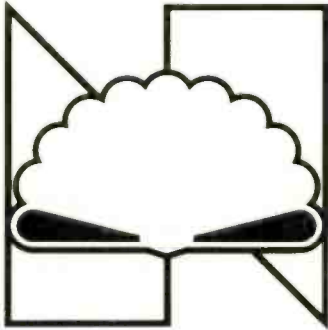
What are they to be? What ought they to be? Broadcasters, I believe, have a primary obligation to use the language well, and to help to keep it in a healthy state. First, because it is the principal instrument we broadcasters have; it is our greatest asset. Second, because the state of our country and our society depends to some extent on the state of the language. If words lose their value, if public discussions are nothing more than exchanges of slogans, catch phrases, and cliches, the country suffers. It loses touch with reality. This is dangerous. We cannot afford to permit it to happen.

So, let's all watch our language. And a reminder about silence. In the ordinary course of broadcasting, it isn't easy to come by. So here is a little more of it. (Hold five seconds.)

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*The foregoing essay was spoken by Edwin Newman of NBC News at the annual DuPont-Columbia Broadcast Awards ceremony in New York.*

*Mr. Newman is the author of *Strictly Speaking* and other books on language.*



NDC PROUD AS A PEACOCK



# Behind the Great Wall— Color TV!

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By JAMES ARONSON

**R**adio Peking, the nerve center of China's radio-television service, sits on the capital's broad Changan Boulevard, a few minutes' drive from Tienanmen Square. This stolid Soviet-style building looks like a wedding cake without the Russian bridegroom on top.

A visitor doesn't just barge in: there's considerable security around the place. But my entry that day in late July of last year, toward the end of my tenure in China, was made easier because I was surrounded by seventeen loyal Chinese students whom I was escorting on a day-long inspection-and-discussion tour of the facilities.

Among those greeting us at the gate was an 18th student (an auditor, really, whom I treated as a regular) who was a reporter in the English-language sector of Radio Peking. He was Chao Hsueh-jen, an earnest young man determined to get the utmost out of his training in journalism in English. At one point in our visit he brought me to a small sound booth to tape an interview with me as the class watched through a glass partition. He was nervous and made a few false starts, then sailed through in good style. Afterward he said: "I learned a new lesson today: never interview your professor." The other students roared.

"Never mind," I said comfortingly. One day soon one of you will be coming to the U.S. and you'll be interviewing all kinds of people.

The visit to the Central People's Broadcasting Station—Radio Peking's official title—yielded some fascinating information. The service was begun in 1945 in an ancient temple in Yen-an, the revolutionary base where the Communist Party's Central Committee was located. The first transmitter, 0.5 kw, had been captured from the Japanese. The service moved to Peking after the final defeat of Chiang Kai-shek in October 1949.

The service has expanded in the 30 years of the People's Republic to the point where there are now 86 regional radio stations and 38 television stations (eight in color) throughout China. A vast broadcasting network covers the nation's rural areas (80 per cent of the population) with 120 million loudspeakers servicing 94 per cent of the communal production brigades and 67 per cent of the rural households. It is estimated that in all 160,000 persons are engaged in broadcasting, 13,000 of them at Peking headquarters.

There are five sets of programs for the home radio service—two general, one for Taiwan, one for national minorities, and one for overseas

Chinese. The service also offers programs in five local dialects for the southern provinces.

Program content roughly is 20 per cent news and commentary, 25 per cent social/topical, and more than 50 per cent artistic and cultural. Total broadcast time is about 90 hours daily. A foreign service was undertaken in 1950 in seven languages. Today Radio Peking broadcasts 90 hours daily in 39 languages, with much of the staff trained in the station's Broadcasting Institute, co-sponsored by the Peking municipality.

The English sector, with a staff of 70, has a transmission of 19 hours daily in three shifts. Aside from news and commentary, it presents dramatic features and musical programs, and a popular "Learn to Speak Chinese" program.

A course in English on television is watched by more than a million people daily. The teachers, Wu Ching and Chen Li, both former actors, are household names. They are on for 40 minutes twice a day, with a review session on Sunday. In the last four years, the Peking Publishing House has distributed 7 million textbooks to accompany the TV and radio language courses. You can learn French and Japanese too.

The Central TV Station was inaugurated in 1958, the year of the so-called Great Leap Forward. Color TV made its first appearance 15 years later. Today there are only about 2 million TV sets in a nation of 950 million. People have the money to buy sets and the desire for them is great; but production, largely because of unavailable parts, has lagged. New contracts with Japanese firms are expected to increase production of cathode tubes considerably and the number of set owners will rise accordingly in the next couple of years.

Meanwhile people gather in the common rooms of neighborhood committees, communes or work places where TV programs are projected on large screens. Last summer we watched a performance of the Peking Opera on TV at night in an open-air patio at the lovely seaside resort of Petaiho on the Gulf of Bohai, northeast of Tienstin.

There are only about 25,000 color TV sets in China now but the number will soon rise sharply with the introduction of satellite transmission being worked out with the U.S. technicians as a result of Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping's visit to the U.S. By means of a satellite transmitting to small antennas in 3,800 communities, color TV will be available to almost all of China. And what will China be watching?

- An evening news broadcast of about 15 minutes, with some pretty stale news pictures—commentary supplied by a pleasant-voiced invisible woman "anchor" and almost no live voice pickup from the action.

- First-run Chinese movies, often before they are shown in the jam-packed film houses.

- Dramatic presentations based on the classics and—new since the Cultural Revolution years—plays drawn from the new literature, much of it critical of the bleak years under Mao's widow Jiang Qing and the "Gang of Four."

- Marvellous acrobatic and dance companies, and brave young musicians becoming familiar again with once proscribed composers like Chopin, Beethoven and Mozart.

They will be seeing also live performances by such groups as the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Lyons Symphony; sports events with visiting international teams; sessions of the People's Consultative Congress, and visits by foreign dignitaries. These live shows, done with admirable expertise, are very popular. Also on the programs are films from abroad, some new, some old. We saw Olivier's *Hamlet* both on TV and in a movie house, with Chinese dubbed in (all except Ophelia's songs), Chaplin in *City Lights*, films from Hong Kong and even some made in Taiwan (which all Chinese regard as part of China).

The film producers are complaining that the practice of showing new films immediately on TV is hurtful to their boxoffice; but long lines outside the film house would seem to belittle their apprehension—at least for the present. The film industry is coming in for its own share of rough criticism for clinging to the "heroic mold" of plot and presentation.

For example, as an exercise in critical writing, I asked my journalism class to see (on TV) and review a film titled "Silver Flower." It is the story of a much-abused Mongolian slave girl who eventually becomes a brigade leader of the People's Liberation Army, and is depicted dismounting her pony after a hard day's ride across the plains under a burning sun, immaculate in uniform and makeup, and with enough get-up-and-go to dispose of the evil landlord with the snap of the riding crop. Of the 17 reviews turned in, 17 were negative. The students, and most of China, are tired of the cliché; they want films that are fresh and pertinent to their lives. This is a sentiment the TV producers are beginning to absorb also.

Why is the TV news—in contrast with the innovative practices being adopted by the *People's Daily* (circ. 6.2 million)—so late and dull? Because almost every item has to go "upstairs" to be cleared before broadcast by a bureaucrat who most likely is out to lunch with a visiting foreign delegation and may not get around to giving his approval for a day or so—or sometimes a week. The final decision more often depends on the availability of the official than on policy.

A discussion with the Central Broadcasting staff elicited expressions of frustration and despair from many about bureaucracy and denial of departmental autonomy. Yet the seemingly impenetrable bureaucracy persists—as elsewhere in Chinese life—although there were perceptible signs, before I left Peking late last summer, that the walls were beginning to crack under pressure.

There are of course dangers, if American packagers will forgive my use of that word, in the appearance of foreign imports on Chinese TV. A friend in Peking wrote in February 1980 that the biggest hit on TV there was "The Man from Atlantis," then in its fifth of 17 installments. She said that during her stay at a commune outside Peking, on Atlantis night



the family—from grandmother on down to the kids—were glued to the TV screen as Mike (Mi-Keh in Chinese) foiled the scheme of a mad professor to raise the level of the oceans and drown the world. Obviously the Chinese like the action and the escape after a cuultural diet that began and ended with five operas approved by Jiang Qing. The big joke in Peking, my correspondent said, was that Saturday night was a good night to get a seat in the movie houses because everyone was following Mi-keh. Mothers lately have been heard commplaining that the kids were indoors watching the cartoons rather than outdoors playing. Sound familiar?

There are other interesting things on TV. I was present in the courtroom during the last stages of a trial of a young man charged with attempted murder of a shopmate who rejected a proposal that she become his girlfriend. The trial was televised because the crime was a not-infrequent occurrence in a China still plagued with the vestiges of feudalism. The authorities were seeking to make a sharp point to the nation, both on TV and in news stories and editorials in the press.

Programs of general interest are still limited to four or five evening hours beginning about 7 p.m. Educational TV takes over during some of the day hours. When the satellite system is in place, there will be a significant increase in educational and cultural programming. This is a must for China because, as a result of the chaos that existed in the educational system from 1966 to 1975, places in the universities and even in middle (high) schools are being denied thousands of qualified young people who often join the rolls of the unemployed because there is no room for them in the universities.

In Shanghai, a Television University opened in 1978 which eventually will be expanded into a national network. But Shanghai, with a population of over 10 million, has only about 250,000 TV sets. So 57 Guidance Stations have been established throughout the city, and working teachers are given leave to attend these centers. There, in turn, they are instructed in more efficient methods of teaching math, physics and chemistry. Each Guidance Center has several TV viewing areas where 15–30 student-teachers gather to watch the new course. They are assisted by a part-time teacher from an advanced Teachers College. Tuition is free. Diplomas are to be given after a three- or four-year program, concluded with an examination. The priority being given to this project is clear from the figures: Shanghai has two channels broadcasting ten hours a day, Monday through Saturday. Five of these hours are given over daily to the Television University.

\* \* \*

Late last January, while Lake Placid was praying to Olympus for snow, I received a letter from Chao Hsueh-jen, my young friend at Radio Peking. It was a jubilant letter. He had been selected to be a member of the Chinese TV-radio crew to cover the winter Olympics. Could I possibly



meet him at Kennedy Airport where he had a hour's layover before going on to Montreal? I could, and did. Amidst the tangle of TV gear and metal cases that emerged from the gate at Customs was a slight figure with a waving arm attached to it. Hseuh-jen rushed toward me and hugged me. "You said one of us would be coming," he shouted. "Well, you were right. And it's me. I'm the first."

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*James Aronson is a professor of communications at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He returned recently from China where he spent six months developing a curriculum for teaching journalism in English at the new postgraduate Institute of Journalism in Peking. He was the first American to receive such an invitation. The author of several books about the American media, he is a frequent contributor to journals of communication. For assistance in gathering the factual material in this article, acknowledgement is gratefully made to Xing Wenjun of the Journalism Institute in Peking.*

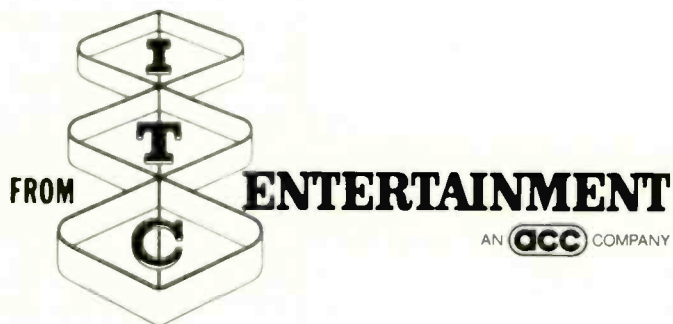
## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"As change accelerates in society it forces a parallel acceleration within us. New information reaches us and we are forced to revise our image file continuously at a faster and faster rate. . . .

"This speed-up of image processing inside us means that images grow more and more temporary. Throw-away art, one-shot sitcoms, Polaroid snapshots, Xerox copies, and disposable graphics pop up and vanish. Ideas, beliefs and attitudes skyrocket into consciousness, are challenged, defied and suddenly fade into nowhere. Scientific and psychological theories are overthrown and superseded daily. Ideologies crack. Celebrities pirouette fleetingly across our awareness. It is difficult to make sense of this swirling phantasmagoria, to understand exactly how the image-making process is changing."

—*The Third Wave* by Alvin Toffler (Morrow)

# Entertainment For The World



# The Business of 'Hype'

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By PHIL DONAHUE

**T**he play's not the thing: the hype is.

Promotion has actually become its own billion-dollar industry, and its influence is being felt in not-so-subtle ways on television and in the print media.

The union of America's expanding, well-financed promotion industry and the media is one of the more ominous developments of the communications era. The business of hype and the business of journalism shouldn't be married. In fact, they make no effort to hide their disdain for each other in public. Journalists complain that the P.R. people try to manipulate the news; P.R. people accuse the media of bias and "sensationalism" which unfairly damage the image of the big businessmen they are paid to protect.

Imagine their surprise, then, when the hype people and the journalism "virgins" suddenly found themselves in the same bed.

America's talk-variety-information shows, including *Today*, *Tonight*, *Tomorrow*, *The Merv Griffin Show*, the *Mike Douglas Show*, *Dinah*, *Good Morning America*, *Donahue* and scores of local programs have become not a forum for sharing ideas, but a platform for pitchmen. A "talking head" on any of these shows is usually a person who is trying to sell a book, an album or a movie ticket.

During 1978, *Donahue* presented a total of 236 hour-long programs, 122 of which had featured guests who were trying to sell something. Fifty-six per cent! The greedy hand of hype has extended so totally into television that today's talkshow viewers are dismayed to discover that what they're watching between "all those commercials" . . . is another commercial.

This is not to say that authors and movie stars have no business on talk shows: rather, that the system of "touring" them for sales promotion has become so high-powered that many talk-show producers have surrendered their programs to the publicity agents. All TV producers need do is wait for the phone to ring. And it surely will. Calling will be the representatives of famous and not-so-famous people who are under orders to get out and sell. In today's talk-show industry, the "parts supplier" is wagging the "factory."

We can only speculate about how many worthy folks with exciting new ideas are never exposed to television audiences because a publisher has succeeded in "booking" the authors of *How to Be Your Own Best Friend* ("It's now out in paperback!") and in the words of the grateful and

relieved talkshow producer, "We're all set for Tuesday." The pressure from publishers to feature authors is so intense that the decision about who gets on television is often made not by the people who work for *Today*, but by *Doubleday*.

Television is not the exclusive target of promoters. The friendly folks at the print media are also going to lunch with the hype people. Is *Superman* really worthy of a *Newsweek* cover? Anyone who paid \$3 to see the movie must have wondered if P. T. Barnum hadn't underestimated the population of suckers. Nevertheless, the decision is made to feature *Superman* on the cover, and the loyal *Newsweek* staffers (mortgage holders all) are obliged to write the story. And how much hard-hitting, irreverent journalism can we expect from the final product? Consider this paragraph from *Newsweek's* cover story:

Although "Superman" has flaws of pace, structure, and concept, Donner's [Richard, the director] shaping of the film amounts in its way to a major feat of filmmaking.

Which is like a television reviewer saying:

Although Donahue's guest gave long, rambling answers, the audience appeared listless and the host himself was unprepared, the program was one of the major achievements of the television talk show in America.

Add to this the gala Washington premiere of *Superman*, attended by President Jimmy Carter and his daughter, Amy, and you have some idea of the power of twentieth-century promotion. And if *Newsweek* will bend its copy so as not to condemn the subject of its own cover story, how much aggressive interviewing can we expect from nervous grateful talk-show hosts who succeed in "getting Sophia Loren first"? Will Donahue say the autobiography of the Italian actress is not that revealing? (I didn't.)

In short, America may not be reading an objective cover story, or watching a candid interview on television. What may be happening right before our eyes is a not so thinly disguised sales pitch.

The ever-present effort to use these public vehicles for promotion has reduced the space and time for originally developed ideas and diminished the energy of journalists and talk-show producers to innovate and search out that "woman-fights-city-hall" feature which might be a lot more enlightening than a *Superman* story and a lot more entertaining than the breathless actress who gushes to the host about "the incredible script, incredible cast and incredible director. I'm incredibly excited."

Another unbecoming feature of the relationship between marketing and media that bears watching is the increasing use of charity to sell

*(continued on page 36)*





goods and services. McDonald's has used television to announce a charity donation for every Big Mac sold, and Jerry Lewis stands in front of 7-Eleven urgently exhorting America to shop there—and to leave the change for “my kids.”

The enthusiasm that moves giant companies to push and shove in order to get a hold on the charity coattail is no more evident than on the *Jerry Lewis Telethon* tote board. The display, which automatically tallies the weekend receipts, is crowned by a huge clock surrounded by a logo informing viewers all over America that Helbros is the “Official Timekeeper” of the *Jerry Lewis Telethon*. What's a telethon without an “official” timekeeper, and how generous of Helbros to provide this indispensable service for free!

On one occasion I flew to Sacramento to take part in a fund-raiser for the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra. When I arrived, Ronald McDonald and several photographers met me at the airport. Ronald McDonald also met me at my hotel. Flashbulbs exploded and news cameras whirred as he shook my hand. (Ronald has also helped me answer phones on several local telethons.)

Antique cards carried the celebrities and the “Friends of Symphony” to a twenties style fashion show featuring merchandise available at a local Sacramento department store—artfully noted in the program—and then the whole V.I.P. entourage sputtered away in vintage vehicles to see the Sacramento premiere of *The Great Gatsby*. We all filed past a smiling theater owner as photographers blazed away.

The Sacramento Symphony was the “do-good” feature of the gala evening, and everybody—including me—was in on the sell. McDonald was selling French-fries, the department store was selling apparel, the movie guy was selling what he hoped would be a hot picture—and Donahue was selling himself to a Northern California city so the broadcasting industry wouldn't type him as “Midwest.”

Who was using whom?

The charity telethon is a study in disorganization and self-congratulation.

On the telethon phone (I have answered scores of them), a man with bad grammar and slurred speech is asking me if I'll announce that all the people at the Y'All Come Back Lounge want to challenge all the other taverns in the western part of the city to contribute to “your telethon there. . . . We collected twenty-eight dollars and we wanna challenge the other bars. . . .” He also wants to know if I'll “mention the tavern on TV.”

In another part of the television studio a local cowboy band is playing “Help Me Make It Through the Night” at half speed while the host, tie grandly loosened, drinks coffee out of a paper cup and moves about the room in a visual demonstration of perseverance, endurance, caring and hard work. In the lobby, the president of a local C.B. club, wearing a

bright red Eisenhower-style jacket that says BREAKER BREAKER, is trying to get into the studio so he can "challenge all the C.B.-er's in the city" to donate money to the telethon.

It is a zoo.

It is also unfair and inefficient, and divisive.

Nowhere are America's screwed-up priorities more evident than here. Meeting the needs of crippled children ought to be a part of citizenship and not dependent on the goodwill of a popular entertainer or the benevolence of a television-station operator, who may or may not hand over his facilities for one entire weekend. Money for research into catastrophic diseases ought to be provided out of the taxes that Americans pay. We don't have telethons or bike-a-thons or walk-a-thons for highways or airports; why must we resort to this loosely organized and often unsuccessful Roman circus to raise funds for our children?

The all-time vulgarity of misguided charity do-good-ism occurred in Peoria, Illinois, in early 1979—a "drink-a-thon" held to benefit the Peoria Association for Retarded Citizens. The report said, "About 20 people drank in the event which netted an estimated 15-hundred dollars for the association." Volunteers agreed to drink in every bar on Peoria's Adams Street from 10 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. One drinker said, "The hardest part was having only one drink in each bar." The story ran complete with a photo of a volunteer, unconsciously drunk along the roadway, and the lead, "The amount raised wasn't staggering . . ." What is not so funny is that the press plays into this kind of feature story without the slightest notice of how this absurdity blinds us to the importance of funding worthy projects responsibly.

The celebrity-telethon package comes complete with a producer who will direct the time and the amount of increase on the tote board, withholding fund totals until the maximum excitement is generated at just the right moment. He will also use audio tapes of phones ringing, creating the illusion of much viewer interest and excitement (like a laugh track). The host will say, "The phones are starting to ring. Reach into your pocket . . ."

The phones at telethons are staffed by chiefs of police, banking vice-presidents and judges, all busily talking on the phone behind large signs which identify not only the phone answerer but his company or position as well. Only occasionally will the volunteer glance up to see if he's on camera.

America's charity business places U.S. media moguls in the no-win position of having to decide who gets the use of their airwaves for telethons or money appeals of any kind. If the television general manager chooses to carry the *Jerry Lewis Telethon*, does this mean he can, without feelings of guilt, turn down the local Variety Club for the children's hospital? How many telethons is a television station obliged to carry in a year? How is the choice to be made? If television stations donate their

facilities for fund-raising efforts, why doesn't the telephone company donate its phones for pledge taking? Who makes these vital decisions that affect research into disease, hospitals, the sick? Should television executives and movie stars decide who gets our money? I don't think so.

The system is unfair because it relies on the goodwill of famous and powerful people for success. Whether or not your "favorite charity" (a curious choice of words) has fund-raising capability depends on whether you can encourage a celebrity to speak for it. The inequality of the system is also apparent in the promotional benefits of the "Poster Child." Spina bifida children will receive more research money than cystic fibrosis kids—because the latter have no visible handicap. C.F. victims may not live past 26 years of age, but you'd never know it to look at the poster.

The system is also inefficient, because the event by which the charity raises funds is often more cumbersome and expensive than the small net proceeds of the evening justify. On one such occasion I sat in one of Chicago's largest hotel ballrooms as hundreds of Chicago's finest and richest couples danced to the music of Peter Duchin and then sat back under the smoke of expensive cigars to sip champagne and watch Noriko present her latest fashion collection. An elegant evening indeed. And an expensive one.

I have no doubt that those in attendance were well motivated and wanted very much to ensure the continued vitality of the beneficiary—an institution for the retarded. My problem with this kind of "gala" is that by the time you pay for the ballroom, the caterer, the bartenders, the union models and the society orchestra, the amount left over for the charity is not all that impressive.

Moreover, when the doctor finally steps on the stage to receive the check from the ball chairperson, the amount is usually within reach of any one of a number of fat cats looking on from behind their long cigars. An elephant has given birth to a mouse.

Inefficiency is ensured in the voluntary charity game because events which attach themselves to a do-good fund-raising effort are often not asked to account for their proceeds publicly. Is a public audit on all these events in order? More simply: may we see the check, please?

Finally, the system of volunteerism is also divisive. It pits one charity against the others for the charity dollar, which is suffering from the double whammy of inflation and diminished philanthropic zeal on the part of those beleaguered American citizens who wonder more and more why they have to bear the cost of an Israeli-Egyptian peace settlement and the local Girl Scout troop as well.

Into this challenge step America's advertising agencies, which (often for a fee) will provide some of the most creative campaigns in history—all designed to squeeze another dollar out of the wallet of a reluctant and guilt-ridden giver. Thus, the "Neediest Children's Fund" campaign is intended to suggest that here, ladies and gentlemen, are not the needy kids,



but the *neediest*. Here is where your hard-earned charity dollar should go. (Worry about the just plain *needy* kids later?)

We have allowed the charity business to become as competitive as any marketing fight between Colgate and Procter and Gamble.

No wonder the Heart Fund has little good to say about the United Appeal, which used to suggest deceptively that your one gift covered everything. Today, while your "one gift works many wonders," those "wonders" do not express themselves at the Leukemia Society, or the Cancer Society, or Easter Seals, or countless other charities not a part of "the United Way." There is also evidence that "Mother Charity" is being used to nurse personal careers.

More than one radio program director has written a memo encouraging his disc jockeys, all of whom are in constant rating battles for their lives, to get involved in telethons, bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons (I once interviewed a D.J. who rocked in a rocker for fourteen hours to raise money for Easter Seals. A rock-a-thon?) or any other charity-thon that will draw crowds of people and TV cameras in search of a feature story for the 6-o'clock news.

Businessmen have also found the charity handle.

The July 1979 issue of *Fortune* magazine features a cover story titled "Repackaging the Executive," which details the work done by image-building companies in the highly paid business of "shaping" business executives for promotion. The article reported, without blanching, "Consultants channel their clients into public-service activities that will win kudos . . . and press coverage. They'll even ghostwrite the acceptance speech." Sort of "The Selling of the [Business] Vice-President."

My views of the charity game come from countless experiences wherein I was the celebrity at the fund-raising ball, banquet, softball game, shoeshine-in, tennis tournament, pro-am golf tournament or telethon. I have wiped saliva off the mouths of spastics straining against the straps of their wheelchairs to greet me, and I have met their parents, who refuse to surrender and who continue to give their love—without fanfare, or plaques, or dinners, or any of the other ways we honor athletes and "stars" and other high-visibility people who already get more attention than is good for them.

I have talked with the father of a spina bifida child, and he looked as though he wasn't sure what had hit him. I have counted my blessings, and I have been encouraged to worry about the *important* things. I have been reminded that all of us—in parenthood—are one chromosome away from a brain-damaged child or an offspring with a disfigured body.

The awareness makes the "business" of speaking to the needs of these children and their parents more urgent. I believe that the "business" is in desperate need of critical examination. What we have now is *not* better than nothing. What we have is a badly constructed system that is at the

same time struggling to keep up with growing needs and lulling Americans into thinking it is doing a good job—and that contributions and “celebrity appearances” can solve the problems of human misery.

As long as we continue to congratulate ourselves for working on the “gala” charity dinner, or the telethon, or the celebrity auction, as long as we applaud people who sit in rockers in furniture-store windows or sleep on flagpoles for charity, as long as we allow popular entertainers to determine the recipient of our philanthropy, we delay the time when we finally face up to the painful fact that this country’s priorities are wrong. The health of our children—all of our children—should come first. Sick children ought to receive as large a piece of our public-money pie as municipal stadia, super-highways and swing-wing bombers.

Perhaps our tax money should go toward the solving of children’s health problems, and the Pentagon should be allowed to have a telethon for war!

In far too many instances, charity has become something for rich people to do, with focus on the stars, not on the charity itself—or its purpose. Show business should be out of *this* business, and parents who have to deal with the emotional blow of caring for a special child should know that the money is there for research and special institutional care, not because an entertainer consented to speak for them, but because this country has reordered its priorities so that public money is allocated *first* for the sick child, and *second* for the businessman who wants to fly in a faster airplane that needs a longer runway.

America should not tolerate companies that create merchandising campaigns in conjunction with charities. No box tops for the retarded, no coupons, no summer camp for kids based on used-car sales. Or any sales.

We should not use crippled children to sell hamburgers. Ever.

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*Phil Donahue, who presides over the leading syndicated TV talk in the nation, was born in Cleveland and attended Notre Dame University. He began his TV career as a newsman in Dayton, Ohio.*

\* \* \*

*The preceding article is drawn from the new book, “Donahue: My Own Story” by Phil Donahue & Co. It is reprinted here by permission of the publisher, Simon and Schuster. Copyright © 1979 by Phil Donahue.*

\*Hosts on local telethons are sometimes paid for their participation. I have been offered (and refused) \$5,000 to host a local telethon for a children’s hospital.

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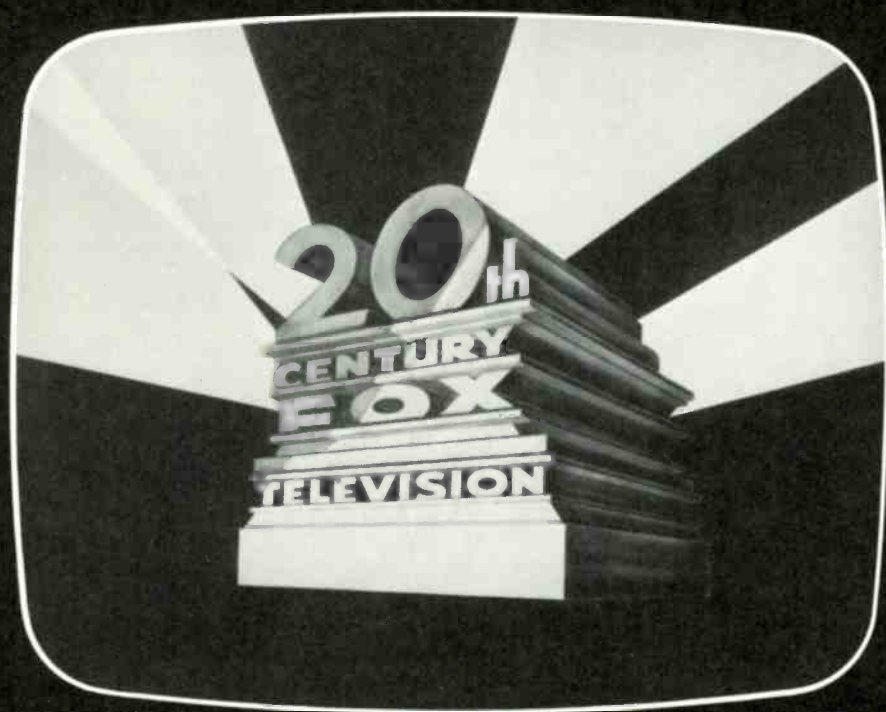
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# A New Look At Television Critics

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By JEROME AUMENTE

**I**t was early evening and the television critics had just arrived from various parts of the United States for several intensive days of looking, not at the tube, but the trends in their own field, and what the benchmarks for the future might be.

As invited guests of the Journalism Resources Institute (JRI) of Rutgers University, they gathered at the university conference center in New Brunswick, N.J. to share experiences, confer with key broadcast and government representatives, and frame their own suggestions for improving criticism and reporting about broadcasting and the communications field.

Les Brown, broadcasting reporter and critic for *The New York Times*, former TV-Radio Editor at *Variety*, author of numerous books, and one of the most prolific journalists in the field, said in the opening keynote address:

"There is one thing I hope to prove in the remainder of my career, and that is television—telecommunications—is a big story in our times and that this lowly beat of ours should be elevated to one of the major beats of any self-respecting paper."

To outsiders, it might seem extraordinary that he had to talk about elevating a "lowly" beat on newspapers.

After all, in a few short decades, television evolved from a new technological toy with rabbit ears and fuzzy images into the central component of a complex communications vehicle on which our entire society today rides.

Broadcasting to mass audiences via radio and television, and now propelled and diversified with home video recorders, cable television, and high technology satellite transmission, computer storage and retrieval of electronic signals makes this a major story of the century.

It has transformed our culture, values, language, educational assumptions, uses of mass media for news and information, politics and government. No part of the world is immune from the electronic tidal pull. Post-industrial nations today call themselves information societies and ride the third and fourth waves of the new communication technology, while newly-developing nations feel the effects of the first and second waves.

News and commentary about television are among the best read items in newspapers, and most of the citizenry depend upon the 60 million newspapers brought home each day for their primary information about television and the other aspects of broadcasting and communications policy.

Yet, to provide the copy, there are probably no more than 150 daily journalists who devote primary responsibility to reporting and criticism in the television field. There is high turnover among the critics, and a distinct feeling, true or not, that they often lack the usual medals of journalistic accomplishment—prominent space and play in the papers; adequate resources and support personnel, and the understanding and full respect of their journalistic colleagues.

True, there is additional coverage of television and radio broadcasting, communications policy and technology. But those sources reach a relatively small percentage of society in the form of specialized journals, research findings, the publications of public interest groups, the trade press, governmental publications and some films, videotapes and audio recordings.

There is a trend toward a few general circulation magazines for those interested in television, radio, video recording and the higher technology communications hardware. But only the 1980s will tell the extent of this trend.

The Journalism Resources Institute of Rutgers University, with assistance from The John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, initiated a project to look more carefully at the role of television critics in daily newspapers, wire services and magazines.

The project began last November when the JRI assembled a group of television critics at the Rutgers University Conference Center in New Brunswick, N.J. for three intensive days of meetings with representatives from all segments of television, broadcasting and communications.

The sessions were also an opportunity for the critics to examine their own working environment, the pressures they face, and the ardent desire they have as good journalists to make better sense of the story they are covering, and bring it to the position of importance they feel it deserves within their own news organization.

Les Brown, along with Ron Powers, Pulitzer Prize-winning television critic and author; Professor Horace Newcomb of the University of Texas at Austin, joined Professor Richard Heffner of Rutgers University and myself to guide the seminar.

Jean Firstenberg, program officer at Markle Foundation until she was named executive director of the American Film Institute, and her successor at Markle, Mary Milton, also played key roles in the seminar project and followup.

"Television is being reinvented," Brown told about a dozen critics invited to the seminar. "A revolution is underway in communications."

*(continued on page 46)*



## How a 3-minute medical report saved 1,000 lives.

In early June, 1974, Dr. Henry Heimlich, an Ohio surgeon, developed a simple technique that could save people who were choking.

Later that year, Dr. Frank Field of WNBC-TV New York—an NBC Owned Television Station—demonstrated the Heimlich Maneuver on the air. The response was immediate—and overwhelming.

30,000 people wrote asking for details.

Police departments started including it in their training programs.

An insurance company mailed over a million reprints to its policy holders.

And hundreds of people wrote to thank us for saving their lives.

The Heimlich Maneuver was demonstrated and re-demonstrated on all five NBC Owned Television Stations. And throughout the nation, news media reported the phenomenal story of this lifesaving demonstration.

Any television station can cover the news. But we believe our responsibility goes beyond merely reporting the day's events. That is why we take the time to broadcast information vital to our viewers' needs—and, in this case, their lives.

**We'd rather do more than not enough**  **NBC Owned Television Stations**

**WNBC-TV New York/WRC-TV Washington, D.C./WKYC-TV Cleveland/WMAQ-TV Chicago/KNBC Los Angeles**



Public broadcasting is being revised, satellite distribution, the new-found prosperity of UHF stations, the development of a "fourth network"; the emergence of citizens actions groups, a more activist Federal Communications Commission and a Congress looking closely at the Communications Act were some of the signs Brown saw as significant.

"There is a hell of a lot to write about besides whether *Mork and Mindy* will be moved out of competition with 'Archie Bunker's Place' and whether Freddie Silverman is earning his million bucks a year."

A main task in accomplishing this, Brown and the other television critics agreed, is to change the attitudes of editors and publishers about the television beat.

"We have to make them see how television is a fulcrum for business and politics, how it interfaces with practically every other beat on the paper, how it is a major force in society, in government itself," said Brown.

This is not an easy task. Brown has watched a tremendous turnover in television critics of newspapers around the country in the last several decades.

Some age, some die, some are fired. But Brown said, "an extraordinary number packed it in voluntarily, in disgust or despair, or out of boredom—anxious to get on with real journalism and tired of belonging to one of the lower castes in newspaperdom."

"They left the field, sad to say, without ever having made a ripple of difference—without having been shapers of the art, moral watchdogs, or even instruments of the people's right to know. Without ever having the power over hits and flops.

"They found the beat frustrating and humiliating," he said, "They found they could not face yet another September premiere week, could not endure one more interview with the latest overnight star. After all the parties on the Coast, it was not fun being a journalistic eunuch."

Brown described his own tactics for longevity: Never despise the medium that can reach into every household with the power and effectiveness of television. Watch not only what happens on television, but what happens around it—"the process of television, the policymaking, the business of television, the people who make it run."

In tracing the earlier history of the television critic, Brown found newspapers hostile toward television, and earlier critics on some papers who were stylish, acerbic and equally hostile to the medium, determined to make readers feel guilty about watching television, even if they could not stop them from doing so.

This hostility costs the American public dearly, he said, with broadcasting covered not as a serious story, but as fluff: "Complex and troublesome issues swirl about the medium with no examination by the consumer press because they make for heavy stories. Where television is concerned, the newspapers are more interested in attracting readers than informing them."



"I don't think it's extreme to say that the television system developed as it has in this country because the press wasn't paying attention to the ways in which the Communications Act was subverted and circumvented by the industry. In concentrating on what was taking place on the screen, we took our eyes off the ball.

"Imagine how our government would have evolved in a period of 30 years if the press had given up its careful scrutiny of the processes and confined itself to personality interviews with government officials and handouts from their press offices," Brown said.

Brown cited the "new breed" of television critics who see themselves as independent of the television industry, paying their own way on the press tours to Hollywood and "putatively more skeptical—though not necessarily less gullible—than the traditional TV critics, better educated and probably more intelligent overall."

He said these are positive stirrings but the "new breed" faces the same problems as the old:

Editors who see the broadcast-television beat as a reader service, wrapped in glamour pieces and lacking in the potential of major news stories.

High demand for copy with the grind of six to seven "reader-pleasing" columns weekly and no time for investigative and in-depth coverage of the serious issues.

Over-dependence on network handouts in order to meet the high volume copy demand.

The distance of most of the daily newspapers from the primary broadcast centers in New York and Hollywood, hindering coverage.

The unwillingness of the newspapers to pay expenses of critics for more than network press tours of New York and Hollywood, while the affiliates, stockholder, and industry association meetings go uncovered.

Assumptions that one individual can do reviews, reporting, analysis, investigative and feature work.

Even with two full-time people at the *Times*, one reporting and one reviewing, Brown said, he often finds himself overwhelmed by the need to keep up with "network television, local television, public television, cable television, radio, the production industry, syndication, satellites, audience research, behavioral research, legal cases, regulatory actions, public interest groups, technology, economics and people."

Another aspect of the problem, he said, was translating the complex stories into readable, general interest articles without debasing the field with rumor and gossip. He is also disturbed by some of the "new breed" reporting and criticism, he said, which seems to proceed from the notion, "that the networks, being evil, answer all the questions with lies. Therefore, when the networks deny a rumor, they are confirming it."

"We give the American public a nickel's worth of information—and write out our personal check for information we don't have and never tried to get." he asserted.

"We do that every time we report rumors and gossip, every time we report our assumptions as facts, every time we take sides in issues we've never investigated, every time we attack a network executive, and every time we indulge in anti-television cant of hurling insults at the medium as a way of showing our distaste for the 'Gong Show' and its ilk."

This was far from a ceremonial opening address, and one or two present resented the sweeping brush and the blanket indictment of the practitioners in the field. Yet it was clear that Brown was talking of the field as a whole, and not those at the seminar who had been thoughtfully chosen because they were among the most articulate and the most progressive in their field, and things settled down.

Over the course of the next several days, in fact, there seemed general agreement that many of Brown's concerns were shared by his colleagues.

Representatives from the broadcast industry, from the creative side, from the public interest groups, from the regulatory sector, and from the academic world, seemed to reinforce the sweep of concerns that Brown had laid down in his opening framework.

One critic said: "Like many other critics in this room, I do find myself playing a balancing game, getting substantive writing about TV and satisfying editors who see the beat as a reader-attracting, rather than reader-informing operation. I think this is the dilemma we have to face in television criticisms. I think educating our own superiors is vital to this beat."

Another critic remembered an editor's promises of full support when he entered his job, only to find the resources nonexistent and the promises forgotten. "So you begin to become colder, and what the bottom line is—we're not really involved in journalism. that's the editor's problem. We're really involved in marketing."

The television critics at the Rutgers conference included some of the top leadership and founders of the Television Critics Association. TCA, with assistance from the Markle Foundation, is but one manifestation of the current effort among television critics and broadcasting reporters to strengthen the professionalism and respect for their field, and reinforce their role in journalism.

The core participants who were there by invitation included: Lee Winfrey, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and Knight-Ridder newspapers; Arthur Unger, *The Christian Science Monitor*; Barbara Holsopple, *The Pittsburgh Press*; William Henry, *The Boston Globe*; Dan Lewis, *The Record*; Ann Hodges, *The Houston Chronicle*; Ben Brown, *The Detroit News*; Ron Aldridge, *The Charlotte Observer*; Doug Hill, *Panorama Magazine*; Frank Swertlow, then of the *Chicago Sun-Times*; Joan Hanauer, *United Press International*; and, William Carter, *The Baltimore Sun*.

Television criticism and broadcast reporting in the daily and periodical press carries heavy baggage. Journalism has its own ephemeral quality, and television copy in it comes out of older assumptions of what the

(continued on page 50)

# PRIME TIME PRO- TECTION

You're in the prime of life now. You have a promising career in the television industry and your future looks bright.

As a professional, you are dedicated to meeting the needs of your broadcast audience and also to providing the best lifestyle possible for your family. But what assurance do you have that a sickness or accident won't jeopardize all this?

The only time you can protect your future is now — while your health is still good. That's why the **National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences** has endorsed

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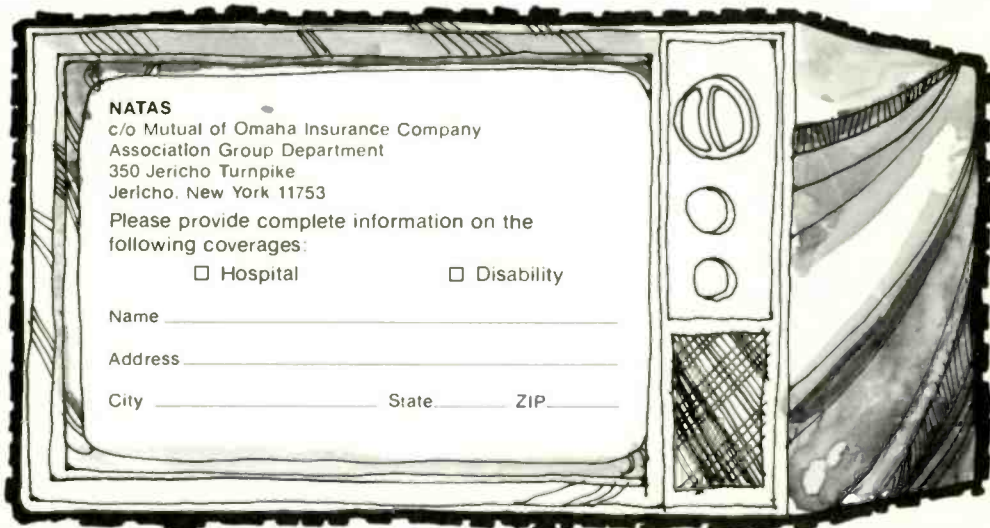
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reader "wants" on the entertainment pages. Then, too, television's brash beginnings as a popular art form, with pie-in-the-face vaudevillian skits, shaky technology, hurried scripts and superficial "sitcoms" still lingers. Television criticism does not carry the respect of literary and dramatic criticism, or political commentary, even though the subject matter is often as important, if not more so.

The print media, and the intelligentsia of which newspaper editors and journalists generally like to see themselves a part, often downgrade the television medium as thin, unimportant, and never deserving the serious respect of other creative art and information media.

Despite all this, television and the complicated array of broadcasting and communications stories take up an increasing amount of newspaper and magazine space, albeit, often incohesive, scattered, and not fully appreciated by the editors of the daily press.

Charles Ferris, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, attended the seminar's opening session on the future of broadcasting, and came the previous evening to meet informally with the critics. He said the decisions affecting the nation for decades required more reporting and commentary by the daily newspaper critics, and not just the trade press.

"I think everyone can agree from the standpoint of hardware technology, the future is yesterday," he said, urging more attention to the public interest and public policy aspects of the Commission's work.

Barbara Holsopple, television editor-critic for the *Pittsburgh Press* and president of the Television Critics Association told the FCC representatives that it is difficult, sometimes even impossible, getting timely information from the Commission.

"I call the FCC and I get transferred eight times." She said she can't wait three days for responses, and her requests for more coverage from the wire services based in Washington are also unheeded.

After the conference, Ferris wrote back to me that he had called together staff to see if the access to FCC information and press relations could be beefed up to television critics as a result of the conference.

Ferris said that he also knows his attempts to open up the FCC to the daily press, and not just the trade press, have displeased trade press reporters. But, he added, there are public interest elements that must reach the general public, although he admits penetrating the layers of FCC information is not easy. He described one wire service reporter who, in frustration, called the commission activities something that "makes the Chinese bureaucracy look simple."

A distinguished Washington communications attorney, Marcus Cohn, who is a former president of the FCC Bar Association said he began reading more of the television critics to prepare for the seminar as panelist.

"I was appalled by the fact that basically, they're critics of what one sees on the television screen. Basically, all they do is provide information



and tell what is coming up on the TV screen, or what you missed the night before."

"It may have been alright for the critic merely to comment on the television menu in the fifties and sixties, but that's no longer adequate. That was a time before the technological and social telecommunications revolution through which we are going."

He said the daily television critics and the press, for instance, miss important stories appearing before the United States Court of Appeals which reviews FCC decisions and which becomes, in effect, a super-FCC. Even the FCC commission meetings are largely ignored, he said.

Ron Powers said the television column was grafted into the newspaper in the 1950's and 1960's and management doesn't really know what to do with it. He is convinced that readers are interested in the industry and the story of television, not just what the many program reviews offer. But too many columns, in a slipshod way imitate previous drama and film columns, he said, and lack of "systematic definition, or really an ideology" of their own.

But a critic pointed to the dangers of the wrong kind of industry reporting: "TV critics are as susceptible to trends as the 'Boys on the Bus' (of presidential political reporting). I think there has been a stampede in this country toward industry reporting—it boils down to 'Freddie Silverman reporting.' What network honchos are performing midseason surgery behind closed doors on what sitcom."

Horace Newcomb believes careful academic criticism of television will offer more help to critics, and the denigration of television by newspaper editors parallels the earlier putdown of film by the academic world. He cited the need for more critics who "honor" the television medium rather than hate it.

But a critic said: "I will not. I've been writing about it for five years, and maybe might write about it for another five, but I'm not going to hug it."

"You're thinking about the industry and not the medium. The medium is the box," was his response.

Television may be the equivalent of our national literature today, Newcomb said, and people who are contemptuous of it as are many academics and even a fair number of daily television critics, should take themselves out of criticism.

The seminar was the beginning, not the end of the process to identify the needs of current television critics in newspapers and news wire services and magazines.

There was a clear agreement on the need for more followup, more sharing of writing and ideas, seminars that could enlarge the focus on the craft of the criticism, the regulatory process, and an inside look and feel for television production. The need to sensitize editors and publishers to the importance of the television and broadcasting beat, and to give it the

support and recognition as a major story of our time, was the dominant theme.

"I think we have to understand our own history to really improve on our future," one critic added.

"There was a redundancy here," one critic said, "But I think it was because of a kind of cry that the critics have felt for the past three or four years that I've been on the beat—not a cry, but a need to cry out and say, 'hey, you know, here's what we're trying to do.'"

"The most exciting part of the television professionalization is that we are now getting to the educational level," one critic said. "We are now getting to the point where we're starting to educate ourselves, our colleagues, and equally important, I hope we're getting to the point where we educate those editors and publishers."

In writing this now, my thoughts go back to Les Brown's admonition the first evening: armed with knowledge and the power of the press, television critics and broadcast reporters could undertake broader areas of concern in broadcasting and communications and collectively be a force to spur the broadcast industry toward higher aspirations.

"The alternative is to continue to produce what we are now producing—the din of hundreds of shrill voices going at once, going largely unheard and getting nowhere."

And Marcus Cohn had suggested the direction to go in: "You have to lead, you have to guide, you have to direct, you have to inspire, you have to get them—the public—more and more involved."

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*Jerome Aumente is chairman of the Department of Journalism, Livingston College, Rutgers University. He holds a Masters Degree from Columbia University and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 1967-68.*



**ABC Television Network**





# Disingenuousness and TV News Reports

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By BRIAN WINSTON

Here is a paradox. Television newsmen who would go to the block defending their high purpose and take on great office holders in the name of integrity are seemingly happy to confess to any chicanery (short of outright faking) when discussing the *visual* presentation of the news.

This visual imperative, the overriding need to make the news beguiling to the eye, seems absolute. How else account for the comment of ABC News vice-president Av Westin in a recent issue of *The New York Times*?

Said Mr. Westin: "The TV commercial will impose a product's name or the high point of a sponsor's message. I think presentation on *World News Tonight* has taken advantage of that fact."

*The Times* writer, properly alerted, took the point. "In other words, Arledge has applied to the news the same commercial techniques that *Sesame Street* successfully adopted years ago for children's programming."

Presumably, Mr. Westin knew that acknowledging the influence of commercials would cover neither him nor his organization in journalistic glory. That he nevertheless made the claim is an example of disingenuousness in the name of the visual imperative. This rhetorical phenomenon is not limited to American television executives. BBC news producers, giving evidence before a government committee of inquiry in 1976 claimed that "the pictures available certainly influences our choice of news."

But when it comes to the major evening news program, both here and in Britain, the visual imperative is more honored in the breach than the observance. It is safe to claim to be debasing the norms of serious (print) journalism for the sake of visual titillation because such claims are largely untrue. Rather, the serious journalistic agenda, which basically puts domestic politics and economics first, is subjected to various attempts at illustration. The more incorporeal the story the more tangential these illustrations often are (the inflation story, for instance); but the difficulty of illustration will not of itself prevent coverage.

Is this law then not true of *World News Tonight*? Let us start with story counts. Mr. Westin said in the *New York Times*: "I'm not sure our story count is any higher (than that of the other networks), but the pace

and variety and the way the show is put together might give the impression that it is."

On the 10 weekday nights between February 25 and March 10 of this year *World News Tonight* carried 68 stories; NBC carried 69 and CBS 65. I assume that Mr. Westin's uncertainty is for the benefit of the newspaper readership who, lacking three receivers and two video cassette recorders, are presumably less able to do a story count than he is. All three programs are of similar length and the average story length is about the same.

Is it possible then that the greater "pace and variety" is a result of a different set of editorial preferences? In looking at these ten editions one finds that the 202 different stories were to a large extent *shared*. In fact only 105 news topics were covered, 39% of them on all three networks and a further 14.3% on two of the three—mainly ABC and CBS. Of the rest 21% appeared exclusively on NBC, 15.2% on ABC and 10.5% on CBS.

Not only did ABC agree with the editorial judgment of its competitors three-fourths of the time, but it also agreed with either one or both of them as to the lead story on nine out of the ten nights. On the night it differed—February 25—it began with a political story from New Hampshire while its competitors were frolicking at Lake Placid.

This measure of agreement (which might be called a measure of obedience to the norms of serious network journalism) extends beyond the body of the program and the choice of lead story to the final payoff story each evening as well. On seven nights out of ten ABC finished with a story that was also the finale of a competing program.

Perhaps, then, it's ABC's "exclusives" that make the suggested difference? On four nights ABC exclusively covered the Rhodesian election. It ran stories on, among other things, the budget, the strategic importance of Turkey, the Ford Pinto trial, an outbreak of influenza. Also mentioned were a bombing of the USSR embassy in Berlin and Senator Javits' decision to run.

In my judgment the NBC "exclusives" in this period (two reports on illegal immigrants, lasting nearly 4 minutes each; six minutes and twenty seconds in two further reports on confrontation therapy; three minutes on bootleg records; the new M.C. for the Miss America pageant) all bespeak a softer notion of the proper content of the major news program than does ABC's list.

The "impression" of greater "pace and variety" is not given by what stories ABC covers, nor, overall, by the length at which they are covered, the order of coverage or the choices of exclusives. ABC's editorial judgment matches the judgment of the competition. It follows, then, that even major differences in presentation do not affect the heart of the matter—the account given of the way things are day by day, which is the main business of any major news bulletin.

We read further that:

"Unlike the CBS and NBC newscasts, on which Cronkite and Chancellor will read up to six or seven minutes of "tell" stories—news unaccompanied by visuals—*World News Tonight* holds such stories to a minimum, choosing instead the excitement of the lead-in voice to mobilise the passion of the audience."

This is not to suggest that ABC actually believes this statement in detail. But it is equally clear they are not averse to being thought of as the leaders in presentation techniques, however little of those techniques might actually affect the substance of the news. The most obvious distinction that ABC has is its three anchormen. Since these reported on about twice as many stories directly from the studio as did their competitors, the result is ABC overall deploys a rather greater number of on-camera people per story—1.7 on NBC's and CBS's 1.5.

Here is *World News Tonight* on Friday, March 28. In the first segment the anchormen addressed the lens directly for one of the six minutes. In the second segment they, and correspondents' paying-off stories, took nearly one-third of the time—1 minute and 50 seconds. In this segment also the President and Senator Kennedy had 1 minute and 15 seconds. Total time for talking heads—3 minutes 5 seconds. Add to this 1 minute 15 seconds of slow, not to say stately, computer graphics explaining the President's complaint against Mobil and his proposed Budget cuts. This leaves wide shots of three meetings, two indoor and one outdoor, and three shots of a pile (albeit a large pile) of potatoes. My passions remained unstirred.

In the first segment of this edition there was indeed a big visual story—the North Sea oil-rig disaster. However it had broken the night before when only a still photograph was available for illustration. so, print journalism norms exercising their usual sway, a breaking story was used to lead the results of the Shah's operation in Egypt. That this was covered by a voice-only report over a file shot from the previous Monday and three stills (one of the correspondent) did not deter ABC's supposedly visually crazed producers. They followed this with 20 seconds from Reynolds (on the oil rig) who handed over for 30 seconds to Jennings before we were handed over to Anderson—who "voiced-over" his on-site report.

Looking at *World News Tonight* one sees about as much of Messrs. Reynolds, Robinson and Jennings as one would see of Cronkite or Rather and Chancellor and Brinkley on the other channels.

Obviously it is ABC's greater willingness, supposedly, to play more with the character generator and computer graphics device that makes all the difference. But to then allow it to be known that the values of Madison Avenue have seized the newsroom is disingenuous. Using old shots of politicians or quick or graphics to avoid 10 seconds of on-camera introduction by a reporter, or clipping the corner of the screen with some fancy

fancy graphic device does not in essence alter the time honored values of the news. For all the electronic fancy footwork, when it comes to real trivialisation ABC is nowhere-compared to a real master, such as publisher Rupert Murdoch. Roone Arledge can stand accused of offering a news service just as good and serious (or as bad and frivolous) as the competing services. Claiming otherwise might be good for business but it is, as Damon Runyon would say, "Nothing but the old ackermerakus".

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*Brian Winston is a professor of film and television at New York University. He was research director of the Glasgow University media group whose study of British television news is published as "Bad News" and "More Bad News".*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"The trouble with television criticism, and perhaps all criticism, is that it gives the impression that things are under control when clearly they are not. Everything gets boiled down to its journalistic essence of a few paragraphs, which are often far more coherent than the programme (cq) they are discussing. Last week a nationally famous sports commentator complained to me that the attacks of my profession on his are unfair because while the critic sits at home re-writing his jeers eight or ten times till he gets them right, the commentator has to go out there and get them right the first time.

"The upshot was that I gave him my word that in the future whenever I called him a booby I would not rewrite the sentence in which I did so."

—*Benny Green, TV Critic Column in Punch*

\* \* \*

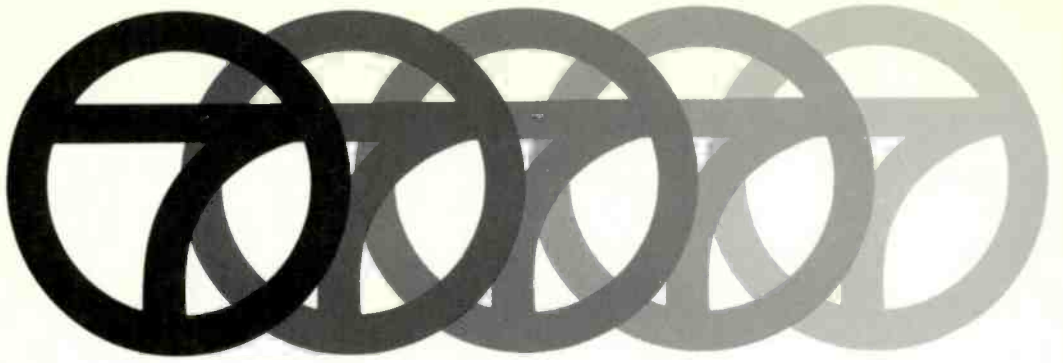
"About 95 per cent of Americans watch at least one television show on an average day, according to the latest NORC surveys. . . . The average amount of time a television set stays on in American homes is now about six hours and ten minutes. The median time is about three hours. In both instances, the figures are slightly down from the 1977 figures, but the networks do not appear to be panicking."

—*The 'Average American' Book*  
By Harry Tarshis (Atheneum)



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# Revolution in the Home— New TV Technologies

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By DAN WELLS

**N**ew technology has become a critical element of change which is affecting both the broadcaster and viewer of television. As a result, the decade of the '80s will see new influences on broadcasting. However, one aspect will not change and that is the need for good programming.

The television receiver now found in more than 98 percent of U.S. homes has become the focal point of a growing list of new ways to present entertainment and information.

Many of these new and alternative applications for use of the television receiver will depend in whole or in part on the existence of a viable and healthy national broadcast program service. Some, such as the videodisc, the home computer and the proposed direct-to-the-home satellite program service will not. Today the leading alternative to broadcasting is cable television, followed by home videotape machines. Yet both presently depend in very large part on the existence of programming provided by broadcasting. Proposed teletext and facsimile services will also depend heavily on the transmission provided by broadcasting.

With the growing impact of new technology, the prospects for television broadcasting during the next decade as a continued source of nationally available programming highly desired by viewers appear to be very strong. There are now 1,008 commercial and public television stations in operation and 276 construction permits have been applied for.

Operating as an extension of the national broadcasting system, more than 4,000 cable TV systems now serve about 15 million homes, bringing to them additional television broadcast channels for home viewing. The American public has shown that it wants even more programming than is available by direct or cable relayed broadcast. In recent years, subscription programming offered on pay channels has steadily grown. By the close of 1980, it is estimated that well over five million homes will be subscribing to cable-provided pay television programs.

With the provision of broadcast programmed channels as an established basic service, cable systems are now bringing to their viewers a growing number of special programs as well as utility services not otherwise available from broadcast stations. These new services range from the two-way capability offered by the Columbus, Ohio, QUBE cable system to special news, children's, sports, senior citizen's and religious programming channels.

The videotape recorder has been used by the broadcaster for over 20 years to produce and schedule programs to be seen by the viewer. In recent years, some versions of the videotape machine have become dramatically smaller, less expensive, and simpler to operate.

The new generation of one-inch machines now gives the broadcast producer more portability, greater production and post-production control, and better economy. Some of the same technological advances have also become available to the television viewer.

In the short space of just four years, well over one million one-half inch home videotape machines have been sold in the U.S. This means that in the aggregate, more money has been invested in videotape equipment by television viewers than by television broadcasters. It is predicted that toward the end of the '80s, between 15 and 20 million television homes will be equipped with small format videotape machines.

At the present time, the use of home videotape machines heavily depends on the availability of programming provided by broadcasters. Used as a time-shifting device, the videotape machines permit the viewer to separate the time of viewing from the time of transmission. In effect the same technology which has permitted the broadcaster to create and maintain a nationally scheduled program transmission service is now being used by television viewers to rearrange that schedule.

The latest models of home videotape machines now come equipped with a sophisticated capability to automatically off-air record and thereby accumulate sequences of programs from any station at any time of the day or night over a period of one week or longer. A single one-half inch videotape cassette for these purposes can contain up to six hours of programming.

The same kind of portability in videotape and camera equipment which has been developed and refined for the broadcaster is now becoming available to the viewer. Battery-powered, shoulder-carry color camera/recorder combinations are now available for home users in the one-half inch videotape cassette formats with total carry weights of less than 20 pounds and offering continuous operating capacities of up to 60 minutes.

As the videotape machine starts to take its place beside the home television receiver, it also offers the opportunity for the television viewer to playback pre-recorded programming. Almost without exception, every leading motion picture producer has now moved to establish national modes of pre-recorded sale and rental distribution on video-cassette, which are separate from and unrelated to the releasing of their motion pictures over network and independent broadcast stations.

Classic and recently-produced motion pictures are now being sold on home videotape cassette formats for prices ranging from forty dollars to eighty dollars and rented for up to seven days for prices ranging from eight dollars to sixteen dollars. While mail order has been the main avenue of distribution, retail outlets such as radio-TV, record and music,



and photographic stores are now handling pre-recorded motion pictures as well as other kinds of program materials. Sales and rentals of videocassette motion pictures and other kinds of pre-recorded programs from 1979 are expected to reach from 1.5 to 2 million units.

The growing direct distribution of pre-recorded video programs into the home, independent of either television broadcast or cable TV transmission, has continued to encourage the developers of various kinds of videodisc technologies. Because the current generation of videodisc technology is non-recording, its success as a consumer product will depend on the willingness of television viewers to in effect pay for their television viewing on a program-by-program basis. The growing success of pay-programming distribution has shown that television viewers will pay on a "channel" basis. The smaller and more recent success thus far of the sale and rental of pre-recorded videotape cassette programs indicates that television viewers will also be willing to pay for their programs on a "per program" basis. Accordingly, we can expect a determined effort on the part of several videodisc system developers to offer players and catalogs of motion pictures and other programs.

The test during 1979 of the Philips/MCA (Magnavox/Magnavision) videodisc system in Atlanta, Seattle-Tacoma, and Dallas has provided the developers of both the players and the videodisc programs with considerable marketing information. During the first part of 1980, the Magnavision videodisc system is scheduled to become available nationally throughout the U.S. RCA has also announced that it, too, is preparing its own player and videodiscs to become nationally available during the first part of 1981. The Magnavision and the RCA SelectoVision formats are not interchangeable. As the populations of both kinds of videodisc systems grow in number, greater quantities and more diverse programming will become available from which the television viewer may choose. Special versions of players in both the Magnavox and RCA systems will be designed to playback recorded material for information, instruction, and training.

Publishers and distributors of information in the form of newspapers, books, and periodicals look upon the growing list of electronic paths into the home as important new avenues of distribution. The presentation by teletext or viewdata callup of alphanumeric information and graphics on the viewer's television screen and the facsimile reproduction on paper by means of a printer associated with the television receiver alone or in conjunction with the telephone are among the ways now being investigated.

In early 1980, Sears will begin marketing the captioning for the deaf decoders for the closed captioning system developed by the Public Broadcasting Service. The captions are not seen on television sets without a decoder which means that many television programs can be captioned without distractions to the general public. Units initially available will be the "adapter units" which can be attached to existing television sets

(at a price of \$250). By the fall of 1980, Sears will also market television sets with captioning decoders built in (at an add-on price of about \$100).

Fifteen hours of prime time programs from commercial and public broadcasters will be available in the closed-caption format initially, building to over 20 hours by the end of 1980.

These new technologies can be expected to have an important impact on the television receiver and the way it is used. According to some manufacturers, we will see an integrated home video terminal emerge as an entertainment/information utility by the mid-80's. It will take many forms as it is adapted to special uses and applications by families as well as by individuals.

Today—the emphasis is on “homes using television.” During the decade of the '80s, the emphasis may shift to “people using television,” and television broadcasting will become a highly developed means of providing a wide range of specifically desired entertainment and information programming.

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*Daniel R. Wells is senior vice-president in charge of engineering and operations for the Public Broadcasting Service. He joined PBS in 1970 as the network was being established. He began his career as a broadcasting engineer with CBS in 1950. Mr. Wells, a native of Salt Lake City, received a B.S. degree from the University of Utah in 1949.*

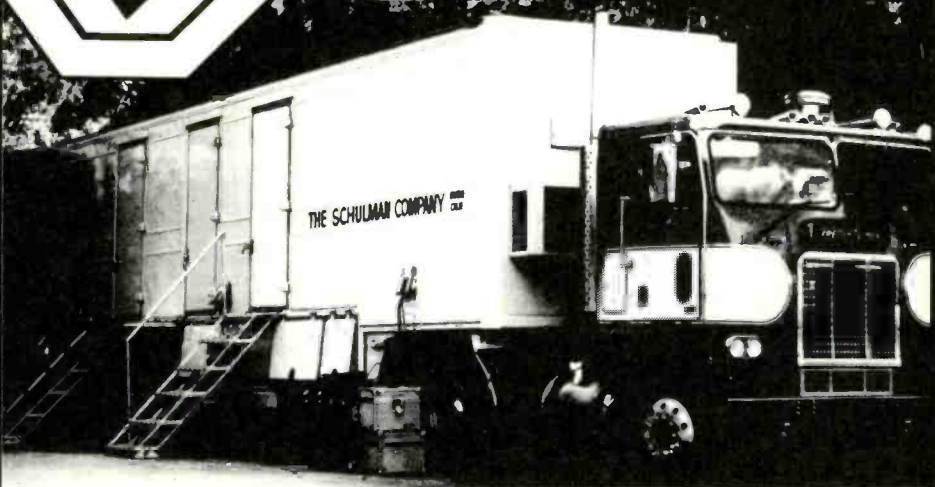
## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

“There is mounting evidence that the composition of the Public Broadcasting audience is broad and diversified. . . . Recent audience measurements indicate that between November 1975 and 1979, the percentage of non-white households viewing Public Television increased by 77 per cent. Penetration among households headed by a person who did not graduate from high school has jumped 42 per cent. Public Television viewing by blue collar families has increased by about 50 per cent.”

—Robben W. Fleming, *President of CPB*  
(*Address to New York Chapter, NATAS*)



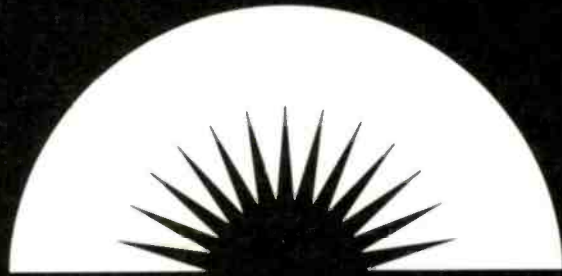
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# TV and Reading—Making New Friends

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By FRANCIS X. BRADY

It could be Los Angeles, where, after reading the television script of a drama dealing with emotionally disturbed children, one group of high school students devised a series of games and activities for autistic children. Or Milwaukee, where thousands of 7th grade school students learned about the tragedy that struck Pearl Harbor in 1941 by reading a television script of an episode of *The Walton's*. Or Des Moines, where students were able to add twenty new words, words like "communique" and "pallet," to their vocabulary by reading the script of *All Quiet On The Western Front*.

Whatever the city, more and more students are getting involved in a new alliance between television and reading called the CBS Television Reading Program, a project designed to utilize students enthusiasm for television to help improve their reading skills as well as their motivation for further reading, learning and creative thinking. Since March of 1977 more than 6,000,000 elementary and secondary school students in cities across the country have already participated in the Program.

Working through CBS affiliated stations around the country, the Reading Program furnishes students with matched-to-broadcast scripts of selected CBS presentations several weeks prior to the actual broadcast. The students work with the scripts in the classroom, often taking turns reading the various roles out loud. Their teachers also receive comprehensive Enrichment Guides which are used to initiate classroom discussions and involve the students in a variety of additional reading, writing and creative projects stemming from their intensive work with the script. Prepared by educational consultants, the Guides provide a wide range of teaching suggestions for a variety of age, grade, and ability levels.

While it is not expected that any one teacher will use all of the ideas, the Guides are prepared in such a way that each teacher is able to find a substantial number of suggestions that will work well for his or her particular students. An in-depth "Comprehension" section in each Guide is designed to insure the students' understanding of the script as a structured piece of literature. An "Enrichment" section in the Teacher's Guide not only provides for student evaluation of the program (i.e., students are asked to place themselves in the role of a television critic and write a review of the telecast), but also provides teachers with a vast array of suggestions designed to build students' interest in story, and to lead students into a discussion of personal values. In the recent script-reading

of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for instance, students were asked to consider the qualities of the heroes and villains portrayed in this animated adaptation of the first book of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and to find parallels with real life individuals. In addition, each of the Guides contains an extensive listing of books, articles and films that can further enhance the students' reading/viewing experience.

In coordinating the CBS Television Reading Program, individual CBS affiliated stations work with local educators, newspapers and community-minded corporations in printing and distributing the scripts to the students. The scripts are also reproduced in the regular run of a number of major newspapers around the country in an effort to extend the script-reading program to the entire community.

Joining television and the local newspaper as a tool to encourage young people to read was an idea that developed in the early 70's in the Philadelphia school system. When CBS learned about the Philadelphia project, the Network recognized the tremendous educational opportunity inherent in the concept and felt it was well worth exporting to other cities around the country.

In the fall of 1976, CBS brought together educators and broadcasters from several major cities to discuss using television as a learning tool. That successful meeting recommended a test of the project. Several months later, a pilot reading program was set up at the CBS owned television stations in St. Louis and Los Angeles, and at CBS Boston affiliate WNAC-TV. The broadcast involved was *A Circle of Children*, a dramatization based on a book about a housewife's work at a school for emotionally disturbed children.

In each of the three cities, the scripts were printed by a newspaper for distribution to the schools. Local corporate underwriting took care of the printing costs in St. Louis and Los Angeles. The Boston Herald-American itself printed 15,000 special supplements of the scripts for use in the schools. More than 170,000 students participated in the three cities.

In Philadelphia, where WCAU-TV used another program, *The Deadliest Season*, which dealt with hockey violence, 200,000 students participated and 900,000 scripts were printed and distributed by *The Sunday Bulletin*—with corporate underwriting.

The experimental collaboration of television stations, educators, newspapers and corporations proved so successful that the same pattern has been followed ever since.

Since the establishment of the CBS Television Reading Program office in June of 1977, over 70 cities have participated in the project, and the list of participating cities is still growing. CBS has been expanding its educational efforts and, in 1979, hired veteran educator and author, Jack Blessington, to direct an Educational Relations Department. The Television Reading Program is now a project by that Department.

The programming selections within the Reading Program currently vary from *The Corn Is Green*, the story of a determined English lady,

played by Katherine Hepburn, who brings schooling to young Welsh miners at the turn of the century, to a *30 Minutes* episode that reported on the subjects of teenage runaways and high school driver education training. More recently, the Reading Program has featured *All Quiet on the Western Front*, an adaptation of the classic Erich Maria Remarque novel depicting the terrifying events of World War I as seen through the eyes of a young, sensitive German soldier; *Mayflower: the Pilgrims' Adventure*, a dramatic recounting of the ordeals and conflicts faced by the crew and passengers of the *Mayflower* in their historic journey to the new world; *Aunt Mary*, starring Jean Stapleton as the remarkable Mary Dobkin, a physically handicapped woman who forms and coaches a baseball team of young neighborhood toughs; and *The Boy Who Drank Too Much*, a perceptive study of teenage alcoholism and adolescent friendship. Presently there are also plans to use a *White Shadow* episode together with other series of interest to students. In addition, CBS is also expanding the potential uses of the Reading Program.

And is the Reading Program working? A recent independent survey, commissioned by CBS, was conducted in 11 metropolitan areas. The results indicated that an overwhelming majority of teachers, students and parents who participated in the project were enthusiastic about the Reading Program and were interested in future use. Said one teacher, "My students became hams for acting. When the bell sounded for the next period, the kids didn't hear it. So I got permission from the supervisor to continue with them. When it was time to go they were all saying, "Who's going to read tomorrow?"

Among the parents interviewed, one mother stated, "I enjoyed watching the play with my daughter and seeing her really 'get into it' by quoting entire sections of the play. I think she appreciated my being interested in her work and being able to actually take part in it."

But perhaps the clearest indication that the Reading Program is working is the hundreds of letters that pour into the Network office following each of the script-reading broadcasts. Recent letters from a teacher and a fourth grade youngster may best sum up the exuberance that the Reading Program seems to engender. "My class and I recently participated in the script-reading of *Aunt Mary*," wrote the teacher, "and in my 27 years of teaching, I have never seen a whole class become so motivated in reading." The fourth grader's letter was addressed to Mary Dobkin, the courageous lady upon whose exploits the drama *Aunt Mary* was based, and read:

Dear Aunt Mary:

I hope it's okay for me to call you Aunt Mary. My class and I read your true life script and watched the show. You really take things good and never give up. If you ever run out of friends, remember I'll always be your friend.

As the CBS Television Reading Program continues its nationwide growth, the hope is that, much like Aunt Mary, it too will acquire many new friends.

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*Francis X. Brady is manager of the CBS Reading Program. Prior to joining CBS in 1978 he was a free-lance writer. His articles have appeared in The New York Times and the Soho Weekly News. Mr. Brady was graduated from St. Peters College in Jersey City and later attended Boston University's Graduate School of Communications.*

### QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"I see no reason to get blown away by the blue sky promise of the telecommunications revolution. It is now the conventional wisdom in Washington that the coming of multiple channels of distribution will automatically lead to a flowering of quality programs. We have seen precious little of such programs so far.

"I suggest that we let the decade of the '80's be the era of the telecommunications revolution for everyone else. Public television got ready for that revolution before this decade began. Let others now struggle over whether to get into cable, pay TV, subscription TV, cassettes, discs, direct-to-home transmission. . . . It is the revolution in *quality* programming that the American people need most from us."

—Address by Lawrence K. Grossman, President PBS  
(PBS Program Fair, San Francisco, January 1980)

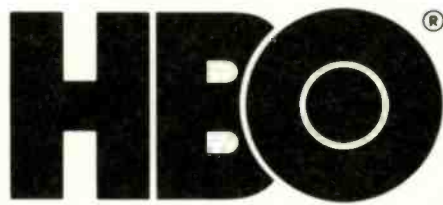
\* \* \*

"If the most we ask of live television is entertainment within the limits set by commercial sponsorship, then [Johnny] Carson, week in, week out, is the very best we shall get. If, on the other hand, we ask to be challenged, disturbed or provoked at the same time we are entertained, Carson must inevitably disappoint us. But to blame him for that would be to accuse him of breaking a promise he never made."

—"Show People" by Kenneth Tynan  
(Simon and Schuster)



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# Kids and Science: Making Contact at Last

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By FRANK KENDIG

**N**inety percent of the scientists and engineers who ever lived are alive today. The lion's share reside here in the United States and, of those, more than 90 percent are white males.

This is a particularly distressing statistic here in the so-called melting pot, a nation totally dependent on the fruits of science and technology. Somewhere along the way, it seems, the children of large segments of our society are being turned off science.

In response to this alarming situation, Children's Television Workshop, the creators of *Sesame Street*, have produced 65 half-hour episodes of *3-2-1 CONTACT*, a new television series now being aired Monday through Friday by 280 stations in the Public Broadcasting Service. The series' avowed purpose is to make science and technology more palatable to the nation's nearly 14 million 8–12 year olds.

"We want to build an appetite for science," said Joan Ganz Cooney, president of CTW. "Our goal is to make science more accessible to children, particularly girls and minority youngsters."

The title of the series—the image of countdown to contact—accurately reflects CTW's strategy for turning kids back on to science. "When you ask a kid where milk comes from and he tells you it comes from a refrigerator, you begin to be concerned about processes," said Kathy Mendoza, executive producer of *3-2-1 CONTACT*. "That's what the series is about," she continued. "Processes, connections, making contact, seeing things that relate to you, bringing a child and an idea together."

Science is a method of inquiry and children, so the theory goes, are born with an inclination toward it—modern day versions of the noble savage. We adults are left to smother the flames of curiosity.

"Studies indicate that kids come into grade school excited about science, or at least about things that other people call science," said Keith Mielke, a former professor at Indiana University and now executive director of the new CTW series. "But by the time they reach junior high, many of them are turned off, especially girls and minority students. It's a domino effect. In junior high, they tend not to elect science and math courses, and this closes out certain majors in college that have these courses as prerequisites. This, in turn, closes out certain careers. It is a

sequence of events that we think starts in the elementary grades as an attitude toward science."

To find out what this attitude was and what part television played in shaping it, CTW conducted some 50 studies involving more than 10,000 children across the country. *3-2-1 CONTACT*, said Milton Chen, the series' research director, "will reflect more pre-production research of its target audience than any other television series in history."

The researchers discovered much of what one would expect: 8- to 12-year-olds watch an average of 28 hours of television each week during the winter, most of it adult fare; *Happy Days* and *Charley's Angels* are their favorite shows; the girls look for "warm human relationships and strong, attractive female leads"; the boys want "action, competition and physical endurance"; minority youngsters prefer shows with strong minority leads—so long as the leads belong to their own minority group. More curious was the response within this age group to science programming. Science-related offerings ranked near the bottom in popularity. *Wild Kingdom* was most popular of these; *Nova*, the least.

Armed with this picture of its potential audience, CTW has produced a series of what might be called *pre-science*. "We tried to make the shows entertaining enough that you could watch them and never really know they were about science," said Boyce Rensberger, head writer for the series. "This is a series for kids who are *not* interested in science, or don't know that they are. Of course, the kids who already like science will eat it up."

Each week *3-2-1 CONTACT* examines a specific theme, usually a set of popular opposites—fast and slow, noisy and quiet, big and little, growth and decay. The Monday-through-Thursday shows present the basic information; the Friday show, also designed for use in schools, serves as a recapitulation.

"This series is unique in trying to serve both the school and home audience with the same programming," said Mr. Mielke. *The Electric Company* was an exception to this, but it was only later accepted into the schools. This one is designed from square one for both audiences, and that has influenced the way we have structured the content."

The series utilizes a "magazine format" and employs the full range of television techniques—documentary film, scripted dramatic spots, studio material, animation, computer graphics, stock footage. There are guest appearances by such notables as Arthur Ashe, Gene Wilder, Rita Moreno, the rock group Kiss and New York Jets' pass receiver Jerome Barkham.

The Monday-through-Thursday episodes all contain a mini-series called *The Adventures of the Bloodhound Gang*, in which three young detectives solve baffling crimes using logical (read scientific) thinking—without the help of grownups. The mini-series was clearly modeled after



*Charley's Angels*. One of the young detectives answers the phone: "Bloodhound Detective Agency. Mr. Bloodhound is not here. Can I help you?"

The members of the Bloodhound appear to be about the same age as the series' target audience (the youngest is 10-years-old). The series' three hosts, however, are "big kids," i.e., teen-agers, and thus role models for the target audience. The hosts—Marc (Leon W. Grant), Lisa (Liz Moses) and Trini (Ginny Ortiz)—are professional actors. They are black, white and Hispanic respectively. ("Oh, you noticed," said Miss Mendoza.)

"We spent weeks with the writers trying to determine how much background to build into the characters of the three cast members," she continued. "Would Lisa be the daughter of a vet? Would Marc be the son of a grocer? How about having one a jock, one a comic and one the brainy kid? We looked at that approach. But what we found, really, was a dynamic—three kids who knew different things, had different strengths."

Marc, Lisa and Trini act as junior Mike Wallaces on *3-2-1 CONTACT*. To examine the subject of one episode, "Forces," Marc travels to San Jose, Calif., to ride a corkscrew rollercoaster and interview a rollercoaster designer. Trini climbs a mountain in Montana to display how temperature changes with altitude. Lisa soars with a female glider pilot to discover the power of wind and gravity. The three young actors traveled more than 30,000 miles to film more than 70 short documentaries for the series.

When they are not on location discovering how things work, the three hosts gather on a studio set, a kind of never-never land that seems a cross between a factory, a school, a social club and an apartment. There are lockers and hanging plants and skylights and a kitchen; bean-bag chairs are everywhere. Exactly what sort of place it is is never defined. As Miss Mendoza explained: "We considered a room in a museum with a suit of armor and a stuffed polar bear and a crazy curator harrumphing around, but again that locked us in. This is sort of hi-tech made comfortable, in warm primary colors that appeal to a younger audience. It's whatever works for you." When CTW tested the series, they discovered that many youngsters thought that Marc, Trini and Lisa lived together, just like the characters on *Three's Company*.

In an unprecedented move, CTW has granted free taping rights to the series to all the schools in the country over a three year period. The Friday show, the wrapup of the weekly theme, will be rebroadcast during school hours for classroom viewing. CTW will provide teacher's guides to the series to those teachers who want them. (After a CTW mailing 50,000 guides were ordered in a single week.) There is also a magazine geared to the series that is now available on some newsstands and now has more than 100,000 subscribers.

CTW, after ten years of success with *Sesame Street*, is confident about its new series. *3-2-1 CONTACT* is funded by the National Science Foun-

dation, the U.S. Office of Education, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, United Technologies Corporation and CTW itself. (CTW is one of the few—if not the only non-profit educational organizations to earn much of its own support.) CTW's own contribution to 3-2-1 CONTACT accounts for nearly 30 percent of the series' \$11.8 million budget.

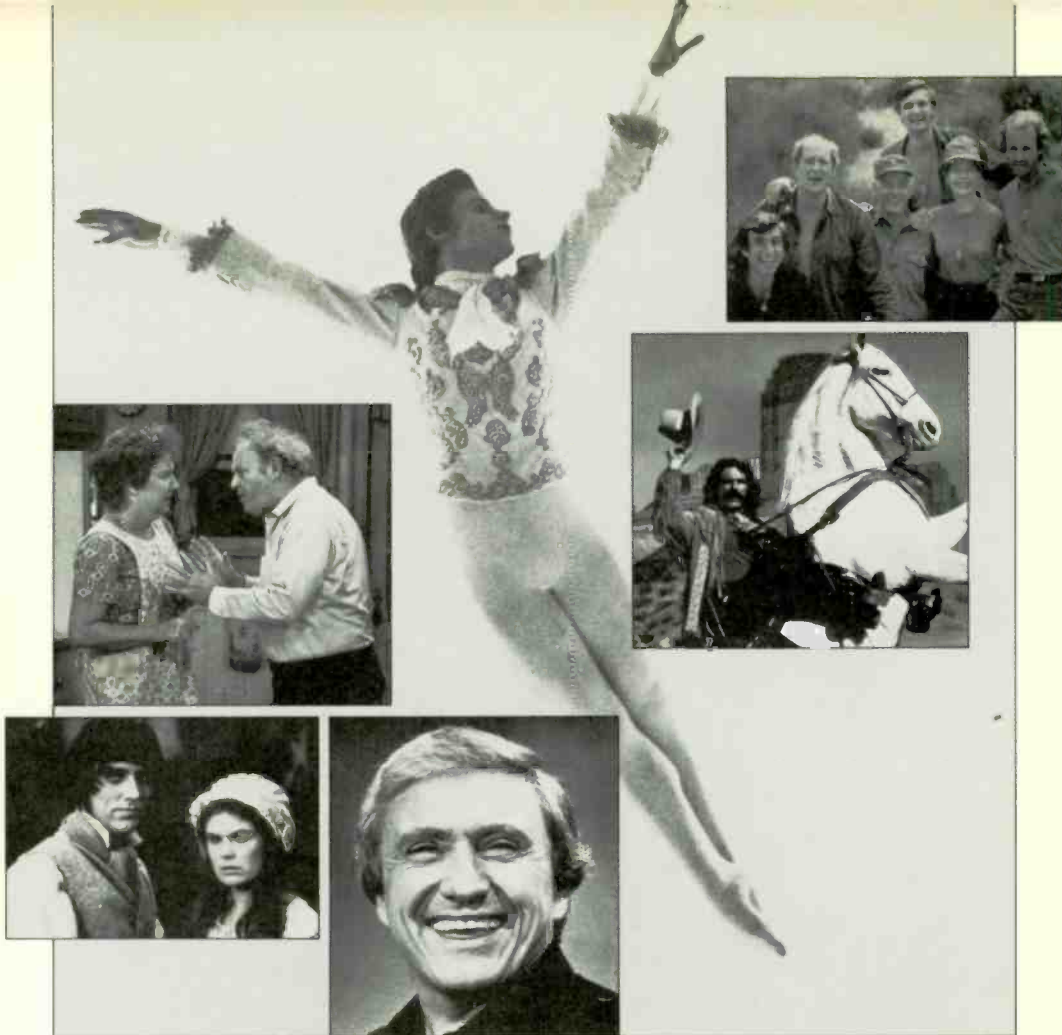
Early reports suggest that the show is well received—both by children and adults. Whether or not the series has any impact on the career choices of the children who view it remains to be seen.

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*Frank Kendig is a free-lance writer and editor who has written more than one hundred articles on various aspects of science. He was formerly executive editor of Science Digest, OMNI Magazine and Saturday Review of Science. His latest book, "LIFE-SPANS or How Long Things Last" will be published this spring by Holt, Rinehart and Winston.*

\* \* \*

*An earlier and shorter draft of the preceding article appeared in the Sunday Arts and Leisure Section of the New York Times.*



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# And What About the Children?

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By FRED SILVERMAN

The Federal Communications Commission is now saying that it will consider adopting rules that would require the broadcast of very specific kinds and quantities of children's programs. A special staff appointed by the FCC recently recommended that each broadcast licensee be compelled to program educational or instructional children's programming on weekdays. The suggestion is that the government should decide what children should see, and when they should see it. The implication is that commercial broadcasting has failed in its job of serving the nation's young people, that it is bankrupt of ideas and unable to provide a meaningful service for children. As a broadcaster and as a parent, I am appalled by this conclusion. It's untrue and the record proves it.

People simply do not realize how much has been happening in the world of children's programming, and how much progress has been made. We are a long way from being perfect. We can certainly do a lot better. But no one who looks at the total picture of television's service to children could possibly believe that this effort cries out for government intervention.

Let's look at what's going on. Just a few years ago, there was nothing on television like CBS's *30 Minutes*, ABC's *Afterschool Specials* or NBC's *Special Treat* series. News reports for young viewers and health messages are now carried by all three networks. And fine quality regularly scheduled programming ranges from *Captain Kangaroo*, the granddaddy of them all, now in its 25th year on CBS, to *Hot Hero Sandwich*, which NBC started this season.

It's important to recognize that programming for children consists of much more than the Saturday morning schedule of the three networks. There are 15 network-owned stations, and all are doing an outstanding job for young viewers.

The CBS stations, for instance, ran about 100 hours of children's programs in 1979, including 35 hours of specials, wonderful shows like *When I Grow Up* from KMOX-TV, St. Louis, and *The Great Metric Mystery* from WCAU-TV, Philadelphia.

At ABC, the award-winning program *Hot Fudge*, produced by WXYZ-TV, Detroit, has not only spread to other ABC owned stations, but is syndicated to nearly 60 local stations serving approximately 70 percent of all United States television homes.

At NBC in 1979, each of our five owned stations carried an average of 120 hours of children's programming. Some productions, such as the *Go!* show, were previously shown on the NBC Network, some are developed by the NBC Television Stations Division and some programs come from syndicators. And of course our stations originate many of their own productions, such as *Whitney and the Robot* from KNBC, Los Angeles. This is a live-action program which opens the way for discussions of contemporary issues, including the environment and conservation. *Whitney* is also syndicated to local stations.

Last month NBC's stations carried *The Electric Fuzz*, produced by WRC-TV, Washington, an animated half-hour which helps children learn a sense of social awareness.

Now that's just skimming the top of the children's programming activity going on in a few large cities. At scores of other local stations, the concern of management is at least as great, and the programming record at least as bright. Back at the networks, the efforts don't stop with what we put on the air. There's plenty of auxiliary support for the children's programming effort.

For example, four years ago NBC established a Social Science Advisory Panel to assist us in developing and analyzing programs for children. That panel, composed of child development specialists, educators and social scientists, works with NBC's Social Research, Broadcast Standards and Program Departments from the beginning. They advise us about possible social problems, and also suggest positive themes and role models. They provide suggestions for improvement and are also involved in reviewing the educational inserts in our network schedule. ABC and CBS use similar professional aid.

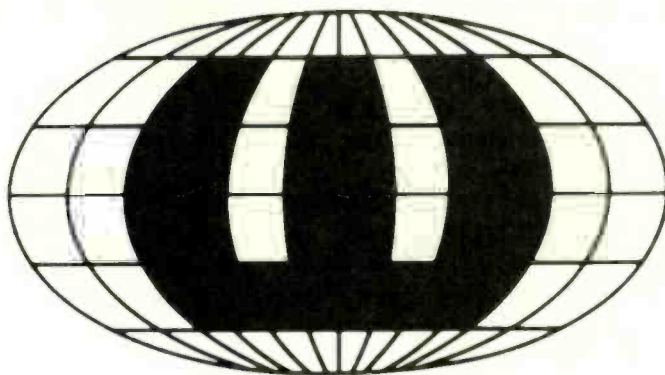
Another phase of network efforts involves extending the educational aspects of various broadcasts so that young people can get more out of them.

For instance, the CBS Reading Program involves classroom distribution of advance scripts of selected CBS programs. Special Teachers Guides are sent out, alerting educators to broadcasts which may be particularly worthwhile to students. Classroom activities and lessons based on those broadcasts are suggested. This reading program, which began as a three-city project in 1977, is now operated through some 70 stations around the country and reaches more than five million students.

ABC has underwritten a major study by Dorothy and Jerome Singer, professors of psychology and co-directors of Yale's Family Television Research and Consultation Center. The Singer study seeks to develop a scientific method of teaching children to become more intelligent and discriminating viewers.

One of the NBC approaches has been to open more parental involvement in what children watch. Our Parent Participation TV Workshop project, funded by NBC and run by Teachers Guides to Television, has in a few short years grown into a major, nationwide program. Using NBC

*(continued on page 83)*



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programs and trained educators, the Workshops teach an important lesson to parents—that television can become a springboard for an exchange of values and attitudes between the generations.

Let's look at what the FCC considers "children's programming."

The Commission defines such programming as originally produced and broadcast primarily for a child audience 12 years and under. This is the criterion on which broadcasters are judged and on which the FCC Children's Television Task Force has found us lacking. They say we lack "diversity" of children's programming, and that we fail to provide enough educational and instructional programming for preschoolers and school-age children throughout the week.

Let me relate to you just some of the more glaring oversights of this study. First of all, the Task Force relied on the opinion of five experts they selected who—unbelievably—were asked to decide whether children's programs were educational *solely on the basis of their titles*. With majority opinion prevailing, any program which did not get at least three votes was summarily excluded. The result of this strange kind of research was what you might have expected. Among the programs not counted as being "instructional" were the award-winning *Hot Fudge* and *Kidsworld*. In addition, all programs on the non-commercial stations were excluded, as was every single locally produced program. The FCC was forced to admit that there was no way for its experts—using titles alone—to know which of these programs were "instructional," and which weren't.

Then, as a result of studying just one composite week—and they didn't even use the same week—during each of the 1973–74 and 1977–78 seasons, the FCC Task Force concluded that children's specials had decreased about 50 percent. Had they looked at both entire seasons instead of a different week in each, they would have learned that specials on the networks in 1977–78 represented a 70 percent *increase* over 1973–74. And interestingly, the composite week, especially selected by the staff, did not even include *Special Treat*, NBC's award-winning afternoon children's specials.

Above all, I find it shocking that there is no evidence of anyone actually having watched the programs summarily judged and categorized in the FCC report. And it is on the basis of that report that the FCC is proposing far-reaching rules.

We are never going to get better television from a government mandate. Better television starts with a commitment by broadcasters and requires the dedication and creative skills of a wide range of creative talent. The process takes a great deal of time, but the results are worth it.

NBC is trying hard to develop a group of prime-time projects that will represent this kind of "better television," that will make our service truly distinctive. Recently we saw the fruition of one of our dreams, the premiere of *Live from Studio 8H*. It was one of the most exciting evenings

I've ever spent in television. As *The Washington Post* pointed out, more people watched Zubin Mehta, Leontyne Price and Itzhak Perlman that night than could fill Kennedy Center in 13 years.

In order to make *Live from Studio 8H* as meaningful as possible for young people, NBC sent Viewers Guides on the program to almost 80,000 music teachers in junior and senior high schools and to private music schools and educators around the country. We will do the same thing in April, when we launch a special series of contemporary American plays performed at regional theaters across the United States.

Two two-hour plays will be presented in prime time this year and three or four will be produced every year thereafter. We will do these plays live whenever possible to bring the theatrical experience more directly into the home. And we are tremendously pleased to have award-winning writer-producer David Rintels as executive producer of the entire project.

We will support these major efforts with appropriate educational materials because we know that many children will be watching them. Television's prime-time audience consists of 26 percent children—aged 2 to 11. That doesn't include the 8 million 12 to 17 year olds, who don't come under the FCC definition of "children."

It's obvious that a lot of young people do a lot of their television viewing during the evening hours. That's why NBC has now decided that our next major prime-time project will be devoted entirely to children.

Starting a year from now—and marking a first in television history—NBC is going to present a regular series of 20 prime-time children's specials.

These programs, with the kind of production budgets associated with important network specials, will be scheduled every other week on various nights during the regular television season. Their length will range from 60 minutes to two hours, depending on what the material requires. They will each be a major addition to NBC's overall children's programming effort, and will provide a continuing prime-time component to our service to young people.

The series, which we're calling *Project Peacock*, will include literature, the arts, music, science and nature. Some will focus on a single outstanding artist. Some will be produced by NBC News. Others may deal with travel and adventure, and real-life occupations and pursuits.

With every show in *Project Peacock*, I want to stress the word "entertaining," because many critics of children's programming reject the premise of entertainment in the things they consider "worthwhile."

Fortunately, not every expert on children and learning sees it that way. Professor Gerald Lesser of Harvard's Graduate School of Education—and a consultant to the Children's Television Workshop—recently said this about entertainment and instruction on *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*: "It is perfectly obvious to me that you cannot do one without

doing the other. Certainly, using television, it is impossible to instruct without entertaining; children simply do not watch."

And two psychological consultants, Norman and Margaret Silberg, also put it well. They said: "It appears that for something to be 'educational,' it must be in documentary form and be dull enough to turn off all but the perverse. Is the idea that people can learn and be *entertained* at the same time too radical for our culture to handle?"

It is not too radical. Entertaining and educating is exactly what NBC intends to do. We are not going to have prime-time versions of *Sunrise Semester*, or repeated editions of *Black Beauty*. We are not going to sacrifice the majority of our prime-time audience for blackboard instruction or for remakes of kiddy classics. What we want to do is present shows that are right for the more than 10 million viewers under the age of 12 who tune in to prime-time television each night, and that can be enjoyed by their elders as well.

In light of our continuing efforts to improve our service and find new ways to reach and interest children, we consider it particularly unfortunate that the government is taking it upon itself to intercede. The structure of broadcasting in this country was very carefully designed to keep government out of the programming and scheduling business, but the FCC's staff proposals on children's programming crash through that barrier. We all should have learned years ago from the government's Prime Time Access Rule that programming recipes concocted in Washington turn out to taste like witches' brew.

The very sad thing is that the FCC's Children's Television Task Force itself acknowledges that the mandatory programming they seek "will not insure high quality programming." What could be more obvious? High quality programming is never going to come out of a hearing room in Washington. It must come from talented creative people who are given the time and the resources necessary for them to do their best work.

Each broadcaster must have individual responsibility for his own programming, and must decide the mix of programming that serves his public best. Striking the right balance is a complex job, and I believe responsibility should be left where Congress put it—to the professionalism and initiative of the individual broadcaster. We've tried to show that kind of initiative throughout our children's programming effort—most recently with the pioneering efforts of *Hot Hero Sandwich*. Anyone who still thinks Saturday morning television is nothing but cartoon characters falling off cliffs should have seen Henry Fonda, with tears in his eyes, describing his inability to tell his son, Peter, that he loved him.

Carl Sandburg once asked: "Who shall speak for the people? Who has the answers? Where is the sure interpreter? Who knows what to say?"

No one entity speaks for all the people. It is the broadcaster's responsibility to entertain, to illuminate, to inform. In fulfilling these functions,

we speak to the people. But it is the people who speak for themselves. And those of us who spend our lives working in broadcasting learn to listen to them.

In this new decade, NBC has no intention of resting on past accomplishments. And it is our hope that regulatory agencies will continue to trust to broadcaster's initiative rather than to government fiat. It is a trust we have earned, and we welcome the challenge it implies.

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*Fred Silverman is chief executive officer of NBC and a noted program innovator. He has served as Vice-president of both CBS and ABC.*

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*The preceding article is based on an address delivered by Mr. Silverman to the International Radio and Television Society in New York.*

## QUOTE . . . UNQUOTE

"Television does not tell you anything you could not learn more fully and in context from the newspapers and the best magazines. What, then, does television add? In a word, *impact*. To watch television news is to submit to wallops in the solar plexus. The moving pictures on the news are not pruned from reels of tape for the sake of calmness and objectivity. They are chosen for power. A 'good visual' conveys every drop of emotion possible. . . .

"Television is not faithful, either, to human presence. Wholly admirable persons are not attractive on television. Certain qualities of intelligence one loves face-to-face seem ugly on television. The camera does not permit every quality of human presence to show through. Some persons are telegenic, some are not. The camera—heaven forbid!—*discriminates.*"

—Michael Novak in *The National Review*



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