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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY



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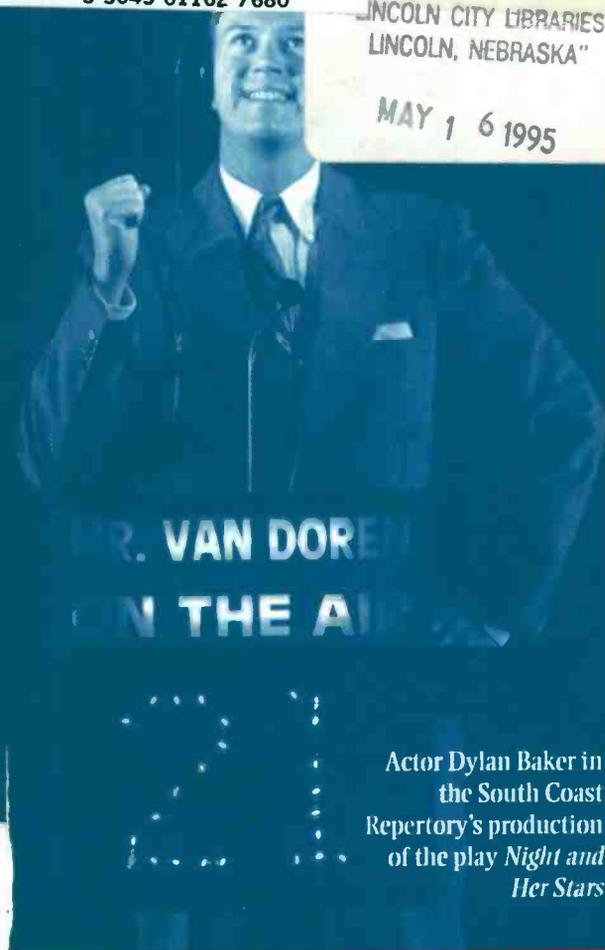
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MR. VAN DOREN  
ON THE AIR

Actor Dylan Baker in  
the South Coast  
Repertory's production  
of the play *Night and  
Her Stars*

<sup>PRC</sup>  
ETHICS YESTERDAY  
AND TODAY, AND  
THE '50s QUIZ  
SHOW SCANDAL

by Michael Real

IS THERE ROOM FOR  
TV ON THE INFOBAHN?

by Fritz Jacobi

DIRECTING DAYTIME

by Brian Rose

CLOSEUP: COURT TV'S  
STEVE BRILL

by Arthur Unger



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JOG

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# TELEVISION QUARTERLY

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# THE GREAT QUIZ SHOW SCANDAL:

WHY  
AMERICA  
REMAINS  
FASCINATED

**BY MICHAEL REAL**



*The real Charles Van Doren in the isolation booth on the set of Twenty-One. This essay deals with several "Van Dorens." The cover photo is actor Dylan Baker in the South Coast Repertory's 1994 stage production of the play Night and Her Stars. On page 14 there's the "Van Doren" and "Stempel" from the movie Quiz Show.*

Herb Stempel stands in the isolation booth sweating profusely. He wears the ill-fitting suit and sidewall crewcut ordered by the producers. He thinks loathingly of the privileged ivy leaguer in the challenger's booth. He knows the answer to the easy question, but the fix is on. Stempel must sacrifice himself as ordered and lose to Charles Van Doren in front of 50 million Americans. The producers, the sponsors, and huge television profits have deemed it must be so. The most notorious illusion in American television history is achieving its greatest success.

**F**rom 1958 to 1960, America's most notorious television scandal was investigated and publicly exposed. In the 1990s, more than thirty years later, interest in the quiz show scandal seems greater than ever. Why? The popular memory of the past is fed by many media representations; it may or may not resemble the actual history. Interest in specific historical events often reveals as much about the present as the past. Moreover, different media "genres" contain different degrees of historical truth, ranging from the precision of formal written history to the slippery reenactments of docudrama. What "meaning" does the quiz show scandal have today?

In the 1990s, a feature film, a book, a television documentary, a play, and other re-creations explored that embarrassing time in the middle 1950s

when quiz shows dominated network television and ratings, only to explode in a series of rumors, hearings, and eventual criminal prosecutions. Robert Redford (1994) directed and produced *Quiz Show*, a film on the scandal, Richard Greenberg (1994) wrote *Night and Her Stars*, a play on it, Julian Krainin (1992) produced *The Quiz Show Scandal*, a PBS historical documentary on the scandal and its aftermath, and Joseph Stone (1992) published an account of his four-year investigation of the scandal as Assistant District Attorney for Manhattan. Add in David Halberstam's (1993) chapter on the quiz show scandal in his book *The Fifties* and you have an amazing explosion of interest in a two year span over a scandal that had spawned only two major studies (Weinberg 1962; Anderson 1978) in the preceding three decades.

The depth of current popular concern over that dark chapter in media history suggests an infatuation bordering on obsession, an infatuation that ties the quiz shows to a variety of historical and cultural trends central to media culture in the 1990s. The bookends at the beginning and end of this new revival of interest are a chapter in Richard Goodwin's 1988 book, *Remembering America*, and Redford's 1994 film inspired by Goodwin's account.

Does the quiz show scandal reflect deeper, recurring problems in media culture's representation of "the truth"? Are there really multiple levels of truth in different media genres, and specifically, by what standards of truth should the docudrama of Redford's film or Greenberg's play be judged? Was the quiz show scandal a preview of postwar scandals to come? Does the ambition "to win," or the "merchant mentality" as Redford calls it, spiral out of control in personal and corporate life when little public regulation and no ethical constraints counter the hunger for profit? How deep is the ethical confusion in the

"postmodern" media culture as it enters the twenty-first century?

## **DECEPTION: QUIZ SHOW WINNING THROUGH RIGGING, RATINGS, AND PROFITS**

**A**ll the new versions of the quiz story cover the basic territory of the scandal, though with quite different emphases. In general, all agree with prosecutor Stone's characterization of the quiz shows as a scandal, "which, because it involved television, ranks only after the Watergate and the Iran-Contra affairs in terms of the furor and national soul-searching it would bring about."

Robert Redford says, "The quiz show scandal was the end of our innocence. ... Nowadays that kind of thing—deception, lying to the public—wouldn't even raise eyebrows... You can trace the decline in American morality to that event. . . and I think it led to the atmosphere that brought on bigger lies and scandals—Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra."

The conspiracy included celebrities and producers, contestants and staffers. Together they conspired successfully to captivate the American public and set television ratings records from 1955 to 1958 by rigging *The \$64,000 Question*, *Twenty-One*, *Dotto*, and other now infamous quiz shows.

Ordinary people became Warholian celebrities overnight with publicity tours, awards, endorsements, and meetings with dignitaries. And without question, the most famous and tragic victim, or villain, was a modest and attractive young Columbia University instructor, Charles Van Doren, son of poet and professor Mark Van Doren and novelist Dorothy Van Doren, member of an unusually prominent literary family and intellectual



*The real Charles Van Doren again. When Twenty-One was still a media event: Van Doren (left); host Jack Barry (center standing) and two other contestants: Harold Craig, an upstate New York dairy farmer (center seated) and Harry Bloomgarden, a New York writer (right). In this NBC publicity photo, Barry is holding an egg, apparently to identify Craig's vocation, or to make a bad pun on "eggheads."*

elite in America. Van Doren's defeat of Herb Stempel on *Twenty-One*, his subsequent fame and fall, are central dramas in the movie, the play, and Goodwin's and Halberstam's chapters. Converting this personal confrontation and the scandal in general into a docudrama form for film and theater has been attacked by some critics as deceptive.

The scandal, like the quiz shows themselves, was an emotion-filled American soap opera of the 1950s, wrenching people from rags to riches only to leave them in final ignominy. It was a time of affluence and empire-building for America, but the cozy

Norman Rockwell pictures were edged with the insecurities of anti-communism, the Cold War, and atomic threats. Narrow conformity and suppressed problems internal and external to the United States resided side-by-side with postwar self-confidence and ambition. The vicarious fantasy appeal of bigtime giveaways has never diminished in America. The last shall be first, the humble exalted, and the mighty shall be brought low—at least financially in this epic melodrama. Is it perhaps the temptations of excessive free market profiteering in our own time that has brought America's attention back to those thrilling days of the '50s when the

quiz scandal erupted?

The huge success of the quiz shows turned them into a "media event." The media event is a high holiday of media culture, a live event in the form of a contest or conquest or coronation that is widely televised and becomes almost mandatory viewing. From World Cups to royal weddings to political summits, it gives the public access to history in the making. The planned media event serves as ceremonial politics and achieves a domination of attention. People view in active, ritualized ways and experience vicarious excitement through the myth-laden media event.

Quiz shows emerged in a short period of time as among television's first major media events. Quiz programs competed with comedy hits, variety musicals, wrestling, serials, the World Series, and live drama for television audiences, ratings, and profits. The General MacArthur Day parade in Chicago in 1951 and the coronation of Queen Elizabeth and the American political conventions in 1952 were among the first televised media events.

The first major television quiz show, the *\$64,000 Question* came on the air on Tuesday, June 7, 1955, and by July was the top-rated program with an estimated one-third of the American populace viewing. Other quizzes soon followed. In the next two years, as many as five quiz and game shows topped the weekly television ratings. Sponsors and networks saw profits soar, making the payment of quiz prize money well worth the investment. Goodwin reports that when *The \$64,000 Question* was playing on Tuesday nights, it was difficult to get a taxi in New York and theater owners complained about the drop in Tuesday attendance. With its fifty million viewers, a successful quiz show could compete regularly with even *I Love Lucy*. Quiz programs like *The \$64,000 Question* and *Twenty-One* became dominant media events in the first

decade of mass television.

The mechanics of quiz show rigging were both simple and clever, according to all the re-creations of the debacle. Suspense was maximized and outcomes pre-arranged with a kind of mock innocence. To "control" began with picking contestants who were attractive and preferably, but not necessarily, competent. They would then be warmed up in "playback" sessions in which trial questions were asked them; if they answered wrongly, they would be given the correct answer. For contestants selected to defeat their rival on the air, these same questions would be used. The controllers would also teach contestants how to close their eyes and bite their lips as they pregnantly paused before exploding with the answer.

Suddenly, the lucrative arrangement began to unravel in August, 1958, when Edward Hilgemeier's proof caused the immediate cancellation of *Dotto* opening the scandal floodgates and sending everyone scurrying for cover.

## **LAW AND MEDIA: INVESTIGATIONS, COVER-UPS, AND THE FEAR OF LOSING**

**A**s in Watergate and so many other scandals, it was the cover-up more than the original misconduct that created the greatest damage. After all, quiz show rigging itself was not illegal at the time! As the story unfolded, the quiz show real-life melodrama moved from a first act of rags to riches into a final act of crime thriller complete with murky legal maneuverings, a sensational confession, and dubious results.

A few disgruntled losers, including Herb Stempel, went to the D.A. and the press in 1958. Amid charges of coercion and deception, a grand jury was

convened to see if larceny, extortion, or other crimes between producers and contestants had occurred. But, when witnesses denied the use of controls, they perjured themselves, an act which, unlike anything they may have done on the air, was against the law.

The tangible outcome of the investigations was minimal, despite extensive press coverage of investigations and hearings. The PBS documentary calls the consequences of the scandal "wide-ranging," but such consequences were more symbolic than tangible. Two grand jury investigations in New York resulted only in perjury charges against one producer and eighteen contestants, including Van Doren. Stone emphasizes the irony that only contestants who had finally recanted their earlier lies and told the truth were convicted, though only of misdemeanor and not felony perjury. As Stone notes, the legal and political context meant that "small fry were being prosecuted while the big shots, who had benefited most from quiz rigging—producers, advertising men, and sponsors—were getting off scot-free".

Never explained to this day is the story behind the sealing away of the first grand jury report ("quashing the presentment") by the presiding judge, although both Goodwin and Stone note that Judge Schweitzer was forced to resign in the early 1970s amid charges of corruption and Stone charges from indirect evidence "Schweitzer danced to Enright's tune".

The Congressional hearings in Washington that came between the two New York grand jury investigations resulted only in a 1960 law that made quiz show rigging illegal, a classic case of locking the barn after the horse is stolen. Dan Enright and Jack Barry were investigated by the FCC and, after some years, their Florida radio license was revoked only to be later restored with the agreement that they would immedi-

ately sell their station.

But, all in all, precious little policy change or punishment resulted from a scandal that fraudulently earned contestants hundreds of thousands of dollars, the networks and the producers millions of dollars, and the sponsors tens of millions of dollars while they flamboyantly deceived a nation. The law was important for breaking up the quiz show scheme, but not for punishing the true culprits. It is a classic case in which the political economy of vast profits made it possible to avoid, delay, and subvert true justice. The transcript of the Washington hearings (*U.S. Congress 1960*) contains considerable debate about remedies for television deception, but the broadcasters' demand for First Amendment free speech protection largely carried the day and stayed any broader legislative or regulatory action.

## **WHO KNEW AND WHEN DID THEY KNOW?**

**T**he 1959 Congressional hearings on the quiz show scandal foreshadowed later hearings in underscoring the question of how high up the chain of command the blame extends. As in Watergate and the Iran-Contra hearings, many asked "Did the president know?" Investigators Stone and Goodwin both conclude that network executives knew; the film version implicates the president of NBC Robert Kintner, and the transcripts of the Washington hearings provide tantalizing offerings on both sides of the question.

By most accounts, specific advertising executives played more overt roles than did network executives in the scandal. In the film *Quiz Show*, the head of Geritol, sponsor of *Twenty-One*, is played with suave menace by director Martin Scorsese. The head of Revlon cosmetics, Charles Revson, is focused on in the PBS documentary. It

features interviews with producers who report how Revson would duck in and out of meetings with demands that particular contestants be kept on or be "stuffed." He judged Dr. Joyce Brothers to be incompatible with Revlon's concept of cosmetics and demanded she lose, but she crossed up this strategy by knowing boxing so well that they failed to stump her.

**T**he profits for sponsors were enormous. In the first six months of *The \$64,000 Question* Revlon sales jumped 54% from \$33.6 million to \$51.6 million, and the next year to \$85.7 million, according to figures reported by Halberstam. The company's earnings jumped an incredible 250%-plus in the short heyday of the famous show. Geritol's profits were not so dramatic, but it is likewise clear in films and writings that Geritol made an excellent return on its television advertising. Who was not convinced in the 1950s that this glorified patent medicine "cures tired blood"—whatever that means. (Pharmaceuticals, Inc., the company which sponsored *Twenty-One*, no longer exists; a different company now makes Geritol.)

The rigging of quiz shows ran deeper and wider than we sometimes like to admit. The film and play are less explicit on this than are the written accounts and to some extent the PBS documentary of the quiz show scandal. Successful "control" techniques had been pioneered twenty years earlier with some of the first radio quiz programs.

By 1957, fully 47 network half-hour periods were filled with quiz shows of varying degrees of handling, coaching, and rigging. Dan Enright, producer of *Twenty-One* and the famous Stempel-Van Doren showdown, also produced three other quiz shows for NBC along with his partner Jack Barry. In Krainin's documentary, Enright recalls that, when the first



*Dan Enright and Jack Barry before Twenty-One was exposed. (Enright died in 1992 and Barry in 1984.)*

*Twenty-One* aired undoctored, it was a boring failure and was threatened with cancellation by the sponsor; but careful casting, control, playback, and stage direction—"rigging"—saved it and moved it up to challenge *I Love Lucy* in the ratings.

Enright, and his on-air sidekick and partner Jack Barry, came as close as anyone to being the masterminds behind the quiz show rigging and, as the scheme was exposed, the cover-up. But many others were also involved as "controllers" of quiz contestants, and still more knew of the many ways quiz shows were being influenced for maximum entertainment and ratings effect.

Did corporate executives know of the deceptions in quiz shows? No direct, first-hand, incontrovertible evidence was ever uncovered of such. But virtually all the knowledgeable producers and investigators point toward a wider circle of guilt reaching even to the top. The *Quiz Show* film makes this explicit with an early scene in which NBC President Robert

Kintner (who was not actually with NBC at the time of the incident in the film) supports the sponsors request to get rid of a contestant by telling Enright, "You're a producer, Dan. Produce." The actual Washington testimony by Enright, Al Freedman, and others associated with *Twenty-One* carefully protects the network. The feature film script by Paul Attanasio explains why these tarnished producers took the sole blame: the public has a short memory but corporations never forget, and these men wished to work again in television. The defense of employers by corrupted employees is a suspect defense.

**T**he Washington hearings, in parts of the transcripts that generally did not make it into the movie or other recent versions, provide at least three authoritative accounts by experienced quiz show handlers about the rigging. These are Enright's testimony, Freedman's testimony, and especially Shirley Bernstein's testimony. Leonard's sister was the de facto producer of *The \$64,000 Challenge* and affirms that the use of controls was generally known in the television industry. She also affirms that the use of bank vaults for storing questions was intended to create a "false impression" and the deceit was "deliberate."

The pious disclaimers of network presidents occur in hearings that were full of lawyer requests to discuss items "off the record" and executive claims that no direct orders were given to lie to investigators. Enright, in particular, sounds exactly like an

Oliver North—without the medals and the choir boy style—as he accepts responsibility and protects everyone above him as if the military "need to know" principle had been invoked to avoid recriminations. Yet even Enright admits, in his Congressional testimony, that anyone in the radio-television industry for 20 or 25 years would have to be "very naive not to understand that certain controls have to be exercised". Freedman testifies that it was not necessary to instruct him about controls when he took on the role of producer of *Twenty-One* "because when you assumed the role of producer of a show of this nature, you assumed that these are necessary controls that have to be done, and you are not told in black and white".

Dan Enright's son, Don, a Hollywood writer and producer, recently defended his father and reflected, "He certainly didn't set out to do this. The people (producing TV quiz shows) had been producing radio (where) quiz shows and game shows had been 'controlled,' as they called it, for years and years. The same guys did the big-money shows the same way they'd done all the shows." All these statements—by Enright and his son, by Freedman, by Bernstein—imply that it would have been virtually impossible for top network executives not to know about the rigging.

Another compelling issue in the hearing transcript is: When precisely did network executives become concerned?

NBC President Kintner defends the network's innocence by insisting "There is no question but National Broadcasting Co. was taken by Barry and Enright" (*Congress 1029*)\*. Robert Lishman, Chief Counsel of the committee, pursues the question. He has Kintner repeat his assertion that he had no reason to believe there was collusion prior to August, 1958, when *Dotto* was suddenly canceled by CBS because contestant Edward Hilgemeier showed to the press, the FCC,

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\* In a recent *New Yorker* article, Ken Auletta reports that Bud Rukeyser still maintains that NBC executives did not know of the quiz show fraud. At the time, Rukeyser was a junior PR aide, assigned by NBC to monitor the Washington hearings on the scene.

and investigators a registered letter proving that another contestants pre-show notes exactly matched her correct answers recorded on the kinescope of the May 20 telecast.

Counsel Lishman then points out a *Time* article dated April 22, 1957, more than a year earlier. That article was titled *The \$60 Million Question* and opened with the line, "Are the quiz shows rigged?" It named a large number of network shows suspected of rigging and concluded "the producers seem to be able to control virtually everything except their own fears of losing their audience." Lishman also cites an August 20, 1957 feature in *Look* magazine entitled *Are TV Quiz Shows Fixed?* Kintner baldly claims ignorance of those stories. Counsel Lishman and various committee members are understandably incredulous that NBC had never had reason to suspect the quiz shows might be fixed.

Congressman John Bennet of Michigan notes sarcastically that "NBC was something less than diligent in trying to get to the bottom of these rigged quiz shows" and finds it strange that a grand jury and a congressional committee could find out a truth about NBC that had eluded the network itself. Congressman Walter Rogers of Texas points out that some two years elapsed before the networks took an interest in the rigging and only then when it appeared "they were going to get caught anyway" (*Congress 1060*). Finally, it was Frank Stanton, president of CBS, whose disingenuous line is echoed in the film script. Asked about the *Time* article, Stanton replies, "I was on a trip out of the country" (*Congress 1054*).

The political economy of the quiz shows, the backdrop for the above, was based of course in a competition for ratings, and advertising sponsorship based on those ratings. At stake were millions of dollars in corporate profits. The drive to make all television programming profitable was already at this time becoming total

and was dominating most network decisions. The plutocracy of three commercial television networks commanding the attention of the American public created returns on investment in broadcasting that for several decades surpassed almost any other form of stable financial investment in the United States. This may be the heart of what Robert Redford calls "the eternal struggle between ethics and capitalism" that enticed him to make a film "parable" out of the quiz show scandal.

## **COMPARING CONFLICTING RECENT VERSIONS OF THE SCANDAL: GENRE CONVEN- TIONS AND MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF THE TRUTH.**

**T**he geneology of recent versions of the quiz show scandal is complex and interesting. By thirty years after the scandal, the whole sad episode had been relegated in most literature to passing references to a temporary spate of deceit of no great significance. Earlier, Meyer Weinberg's book *TV in America: The Morality of Hard Cash* (1962) had examined the scandal as one of a series of failures of public regulation, and Kent Anderson's book *Television Fraud: The History and Implications of the Quiz Show Scandals* (1978) had carefully recounted the events and studied America's self-perception through the case. But neither book generated great attention or altered the general sense that the quiz show scandal was relatively trivial.

Washington investigator Richard Goodwin (1988) was the first to prominently challenge this industry-serving

orthodoxy and revive interest in the scandal. His chapter on the quiz show investigation became the basis for Redford's film six years later (1994). In the meantime, Krainin's documentary (1992) arose independently as an outgrowth of Krainin's negotiations with Charles Van Doren on another project. Simultaneously, Halberstam (1993) chose to dedicate a chapter to the scandal in his book on the fifties, and prosecutor Stone (1992) developed his account of the entire investigation. Playwright Greenberg (1994) was interested in the subject by Krainin's documentary and, like others, used Kent Anderson's earlier book for background.

The abundant recent versions of the scandal are far from identical. They borrow from each other but also from the many magazine and newspaper articles from the time of the scandal. Despite what they share in common, these recent reconstructions of the scandal differ strikingly in what might be called "genre conventions." Why is America today so interested in the quiz show scandal? Before that can be answered, what is "the quiz show scandal" as it appears varyingly in the many recent versions?

Controversy generated by the differing versions, particularly by the Hollywood docudrama version of *Quiz Show*, charges "deception" in some presentations. Because the Redford feature film rearranged the chronology and reduced the number of people involved, Joseph Stone, author of the definitive legal and investigatory book on the scandal, condemns the film as "a tawdry hoax" in a report by Richard Bernstein in the *New York Times*. Al Freedman, Enright's assistant and the man dubbed the "fall guy" for the networks, accuses Redford's docudrama film of oversimplifying and making moral judgments a lot easier than they were in reality. He charges, according to Bernstein, "Ironically, the film is fixed. It is even more rigged than the show it

portrays". Can that be true?

That question suggests that in the unique "conventions"—or standards accepted by audience and producer alike—in particular "genres" or formats, not all media truths are created equal. "Genres" are those media products marked by an obvious similarity in form and content, such as westerns, science fiction, games, news, sitcoms, or sports. Are there sliding standards of objectivity, truth, and fairness that are proper to each of these "genres" of media representation?

Each of the accounts of the quiz show scandal is distinct in genre and its related standard of truth. Every version is selective. No account of history or news can be absolutely "objective" and "complete" without being also exhaustive, endless, and, as a consequence, boring. What kind of truth then do the necessarily less-than-complete actual accounts carry? What kind of truth is proper to each media genre?

**Actual Record: The Hearings Transcript.** The actual transcript of the Congressional hearings in 1960 on the quiz shows is an 1156 page printed and bound record of the actual words and documents presented by witnesses at that time. The standard of truth sought for and expected from such a record is very high. No summaries or omissions or deletions are expected, only the words spoken and the documents presented. Also no interpretive framework describes the setting or explains the background of any of the material. On American television today, C-SPAN attempts to parallel this standard by presenting Congressional debates in their entirety without comment.

**Scholarly History: Kent Anderson's Book.** In 1978, Greenwood Press published Anderson's well researched and documented book *Television Fraud: The History and Implications of*

*the Quiz Show Scandals*. Written in the third-person, it carefully footnotes all facts and quotes and carries a bibliography and index as well as appendices which contain transcriptions from the kinescopes of *Twenty-One* and *Dotto*. The standard of truth on those is absolute. But the book also does what a good history and analysis should do: it explains and interprets.

It places the entire episode in the context of television at the time and draws on David Potter's critique of advertising's effect on values. These interpretations appear honest and perceptive, but they move beyond the simplistic level of truth represented by a transcript of public proceedings. As a narrative account of what happened, Anderson's book stands the test of time well and earned him an acknowledgement at the end of the credits in Redford's film.

**Political History: Goodwin's chapter.**

Richard Goodwin's book, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (1988) describes his role in Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society as a young Harvard law graduate. Those heady years are prefaced by a chapter on his role as a Special Consultant to the House Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight, the body that held the quiz show hearings. Despite his inexperience, Goodwin was the one who found the item in the *New York Times* about the grand jury presentment being quashed and won permission to go to New York and request its unsealing. Goodwin's personal experience, which included a complicated friendship with Charles Van Doren whom he was investigating, became the basis for the Redford movie *Quiz Show*.

Goodwin's book is written in the first-person, recalling conversations and events in which he participated. He describes trips to New York to get the grand jury information and question participants. He describes how Stempel would arrange meetings, call

Goodwin, and even visit Goodwin's home unannounced. Stempel, according to Goodwin, was motivated by a fear that Van Doren, "his despised adversary might escape. And he was right to be apprehensive. Van Doren almost got away. I wanted him to."

Goodwin's friendship with Van Doren was curious for an investigator, to say the least. Goodwin was surprised to see that quiz show producers later returned to television and was convinced that ranking corporate executives knew. "I believed then, as I believe now, that they knew; must have known—from Stanton and Kintner and Revson down."

Clearly, we move a long way from the standard of accuracy in a transcript to the standards of truth in Goodwin's recollection and impressions. Goodwin's purposes in writing were political. He wanted to correct and revive the hopes of the Kennedy years. Yet, his account does not appear untrue, merely impressionistic. Other versions might seem quite different. Many of its details appear in Redford's film.

**Legal History: Stone's book.** In contrast to Goodwin's brief account, the more central investigator of the quiz show scandal, Joseph Stone, with co-author Tim Yohn, has written an elaborate and massively documented account of the legal progression of the investigation and prosecution.

Stone's book, *Prime Time and Misdemeanors: Investigating the 1950s T.V. Quiz Show Scandal—A D.A.'s Account*, is a sober but spellbinding behind-the-scenes account of the quiz show rigging scheme, the two grand jury probes, the circus-like U. S. Congressional hearings, and the eventual criminal prosecution of Charles Van Doren and a score of others for perjury.

Like Goodwin, Stone employs a first-person narrative at times, but he also includes all the other legal and public issues and events connected

with the case. Stone wants to set the record straight by getting as much as possible out in the open now about everything involved with the law, deception, events, and the participants. Stone draws from all previous accounts but goes well beyond them in tracing the investigative and legal evolution of the scandal.

Stone was motivated by the lack of serious, complete accounts of the scandal, accounts which would go beyond Goodwin's "breezy" recalling and would include the insider perspectives lacking in the 1962 account and the 1978 book on the scandal. In particular, Stone wanted to correct "the trivializing of the affair, perpetuating the myth that the quiz show rigging really hurt no one." He sees the quiz show scandal as part of ominous trends today. For example, the attraction of winning huge amounts of money with little effort has also spawned state-run gambling backed by television advertising; prosecutor Stone regards such poli-

cies as a recipe for disaster in an age when money-making is glorified and government regulation diminished. The 349 pages are culled from a manuscript three times that long and provide the most complete insider and legal view of the entire episode.

While Stone's account details developments in New York City, Goodwin's fills in the Washington context. Only the combined efforts of New York and Washington investigations working in tandem were able to crack the amazing block of silence protecting the quiz shows.

Prosecutor Stone was continuously amazed at the number of people who perjured themselves, even when they were explicitly warned in advance that confession of rigging would not subject them to criminal penalties but lying to the grand jury would. His decades of big-city prosecuting of hardbitten criminality paled against this. Stone writes, "Nothing in my experience prepared me for the mass perjury that took place."

Stone's boss Frank Hogan, the New York District Attorney, reported to the press that of the 150 people who testified, perhaps 50 told the truth. Contestants and quiz show employees were so tightly integrated into the closed circle of rigging that they repeatedly perjured themselves to protect their own reputation and the myth of honesty in quiz shows.

When compared, Goodwin's and Stone's accounts differ more in relative emphasis than in facts. Goodwin acknowledges the New York work directed by Stone and praises Stone personally, but focuses on Washington and his own experiences. Stone in turn found Goodwin bright, aggressive, and astute but ambitious and mercurial also. Stone's book seeks a higher standard of completeness and documentation than does Goodwin's account, but lacks Goodwin's political and personal liveliness. Its standard is similar to Kent Anderson's scholarly book on the subject.



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*Ralph Fiennes stars as professor Charles Van Doren in Redford's Quiz Show.*



*From the film Quiz Show, left to right: Ralph Fiennes as Charles Van Doren, Christopher McDonald as Jack Barry, and John Turturro as Herbert Stempel. A recreation of the set of Twenty-One with its isolation booths for the opposing contestants.*

As a consequence, Stone's book, not Goodwin's chapter, stands as the more authoritative legal and investigatory record of the quiz scandal. In fact, if there is one true injustice in the feature film re-enactment of the scandal story, it is the omission of Joseph Stone's painstaking investigative work in favor of Goodwin's brief, more glamorous role.

**Journalistic Documentary:** Krainin's Program and Halberstam's Chapter. The popularity and rigging of the shows is vividly documented in the one-hour 1992 PBS documentary *The Quiz Show Scandal*, written and produced by Julian Krainin in *The American Experience* series. Curiously, that historical documentary originated in Krainin's effort to have

Van Doren narrate a series on the history of philosophy. Because Van Doren had never spoken publicly of the scandal since his 1959 confession, PBS suggested to Krainin that, before creating the history of philosophy series with Van Doren, he first clear the air with a documentary on the quiz show scandal. Van Doren initially agreed to participate but later backed out. Ironically in the end, Van Doren was the only important living participant who refused to take part.

Despite his absence, the quiz show story is effectively told in what the narration calls a "morality play" on the "unprecedented potential for deception" in the new era of television and the violation of trust "in an age we still like to think of as innocent." (Playwright Greenberg was inspired to develop his theatrical presentation by accidentally viewing the last fifteen minutes of this documentary.)

Krainin's PBS documentary follows the conventional format and standards of historical documentary. Kinescopes of the programs are intercut with recent interviews with the principles. A voice-over narration emphasizes the trust and power of

television in that era. The selective emphasis is on the actual rigging, with first-hand accounts from producers, announcers, and contestants, with little attention to the investigation that preoccupied Goodwin and Stone. No re-staging of events is included; only actual audio-visual records and actual interviews are employed.

Krainin's version was the first to get many participants to speak in public about the affair. Stempel and other contestants, Enright and other producers, investigators Stone and Goodwin—all went on the record and reflected on the experience. The result, which intercuts historical footage with contemporary interviews, effectively surveys the national experience of the 1950s quiz scandal. The hoopla, the rigging systems, the behind-the-scenes manipulations, the public infatuation, and the collapse of the system are all present in Krainin's authoritative recounting. Scenes of the actual programs and recollections by the producers and the "quizlings," as Art Buchwald dubbed them, give a heightened sense of truth and reality to the scandal.

The 24-page summary of the quiz show story in David Halberstam's *The Fifties* (1993) quickly and authoritatively reviews what happened. The standards of journalistic truth are present in the use of documented sources and precise statement. It includes the story of Krainin's failed negotiations with Van Doren concerning his participation in the documentary. Halberstam employs many of the same details and witnesses and follows a standard of journalistic truth similar to Krainin's documentary, but Halberstam goes beyond what a television hour can do in verbal detail and interpretation. There is little that is unique in Halberstam's version but much that is important. It is the classic journalistic "first draft of history."

For Halberstam, the most powerful lesson of the scandal was how it showed "that television cast every-

thing it touched: politics, news shows, and sitcoms. The demands of entertainment and theater were at least as powerful as substance." This theme is picked up in Redford's film and Greenberg's play as the quiz show producers and sponsors are shown recruiting, selecting, and rehearsing the competitors to be put on the air.

Following on the written and documentary versions above, Greenberg's play was the first dramatic re-enactment to reach the public, while the Redford film, of course, as only Hollywood can do, was the first to bring mass attention to the story.

**Theater Drama: Greenberg's Play.** Dramatic representations have always been understood to be free of the literal constraints of historical research and documentary presentation. Shakespeare's historical plays are imagined, at times whimsical, revisions of actual historical personages and events. *Camelot* is hardly drawn from eyewitness accounts of life at King Arthur's court. Shaw imagines the life, events, and dialog of the life of the maid of Orleans in *Saint Joan* as probably no historian could justify; the voice of spirits reflecting after death can happen only in fictionalized drama. The fictionalized dramatization, of course, in return lends an added power of visualization and the sensation of being present. It seeks to go beyond the facts and to seek deeper meaning in the historical events thus fictionalized.

But how much license is permitted in dramatizing the past? Attacks on Redford's film apply as aptly, or as erroneously, to Richard Greenberg's theatrical version of the quiz show scandal. The case against historical docudrama license, for example, was made by Don Enright, the son of *Twenty-One* producer Dan Enright. Changing time sequence, creating composite characters, and putting imagined dialog into the mouths of characters are standard in docud-

rama, but Enright in a statement in the *Hollywood Reporter* disapproves of such dramatizations of the quiz show scandal: "When one does those kinds of things, one changes names; one puts disclaimers on saying that this is based on a true story; one puts a fair amount of small print at the end of the movie, if nothing else, saying this is based on real events, but there are fictional elements." In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, Enright further charged that, because the Redford film names names and has minimal disclaimers, "the movie is rigged. Fixed. Just like its television counterpart." He would isolate versions into either unadorned documentary recountings or fictionalized, non-explicit *roman à clefs*. How does Greenberg's play combine fact and fiction?

**T**he play, *Night and Her Stars*, premiered at the South Coast Repertory Theater in Costa Mesa in Southern California in 1994 and was well received by Los Angeles and other local critics, and by audiences. It will open in a revised version at the Off Broadway Manhattan Theater Club in March of 1995. It

shares with Redford's film the license and burden of dramatic or docudrama invention, in contrast to the limiting literalism of the documentary representation of the above accounts. In approaching a new version of the quiz scandal, Greenberg argues, "The facts of history are less expressive of underlying truth than the drama you can make of it." Rejections of this license are to Greenberg a new kind of scruple in the world, a new coyness, that is counterproductive to truth.

Both Redford and Greenberg appear to have had available all the historical sources. Both docudramas are evocative of the times and center on a triangle connected to the personal dramas of Van Doren and Stempel. But, while Redford completes the triangle with Goodwin the investigator, Greenberg matches those two with Enright, the mastermind who drew them into it and left them victimized.

The characters and the period, rather than the investigation, are what captured Greenberg's imagination. Greenberg was less interested in finding a detective story in the scandal, as Redford's film was, than in exploring the characters and the spirit of the times. Intrigued by the final moments

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*In a scene from the movie Quiz Show, Van Doren (Ralph Fiennes, right) and Twenty-One's producer Al Freedman (Hank Azaria) are delighted with the fan mail. At the height of the program's popularity, it received thousands of letters each week.*

of Krainin's documentary, Greenberg went back to original sources and immersed himself in the world of the fifties, the world in which he had been born, the world that could still remember "before television." His play highlights the themes of opportunism, seduction, identity, and betrayal in the surreal highstakes world of 1950s television.

Greenberg uses Enright as what he calls "the fulcrum" of his play. For Greenberg, the dramatic attraction of the events resided not only in the period atmosphere, the mass deception, and the high level-soap opera. There was also the challenge of casting and scripting "reality-based" media.

In a society that feeds on the titillation of winners and losers blown up into larger-than-life heroes and villains, the thirty-six year-old playwright says he was attracted "because of the way people were enlisted to act out a pre-existing scenario." The innocent were seduced into collusion with appeals to idealism as well as greed. For Stempel, making \$25,000 was argument enough, but for Van Doren idealistic appeals were necessary to convince him that his appearance would boost the world of education and the teachers of America.

Twenty-One's producer and packager Dan Enright admits in the PBS documentary, "And frankly, we induced him to do it by convincing him that. . .it would help glamorize intellectualism."

Enright's "genius" captivated Greenberg, who says, "He was incredibly insightful about the time he was living in, sensitive to the popular myths of the day. He was gifted at his work, a visionary, and I try to suppress this note of admiration that creeps in. But television was new and undefined at the time; it had no prohibitions. Enright was able to put a spin on anything to achieve his end. I was attracted by his bravado and daring.

Enright transformed Herb Stempel into a villain. He was later eaten up with remorse apparently, but he brilliantly manipulated people. He had tremendous psychological insight."

The plotline of *Night and Her Stars* resembles the Redford film in portraying the events culminating in the Washington hearing. But instead of beginning with Goodwin the investigator, Greenberg opens with a Whitmanesque soliloquy by Enright on radio, television, quizzes, advertising, and giving people a hero. Compared to the film, the play's tone is darker and more reflective. It centers even more on seduction, temptation, compromise, guilt. It has a sharper edged humor. Characters ponder their plight in classic, timeless, even poetic language amid a sense of evil and commerce. Where the film builds around a single crime investigation narrative, the play offers snapshots, vignettes of interaction among the main characters. It calls in telling period details, including the pop Freudianism of the period.

Several times the play asks: What was life like before television? To Greenberg, television didn't cause the fifties but it certainly characterized the era. He is concerned with television in what he calls the McLuhanesque sense: "It is the central nervous system of society. What was its early formation like?" Himself born in 1958, Greenberg at some point realized "I was born into all this."

Situated in a quaintly modernistic '50s, *Night and Her Stars* conveys a sense of the timelessness of human venality and opportunism, where Redford's film instead points toward recent political and corporate scandal. The play is a stylized and impressionistic tour de force, a portrait of captains of the new mass entertainment industry and their enthusiastic, if compromised, loyal subjects, both contestants and viewers.

Rather than clearly compressing time as Redford's film does, Green-

berg's play proceeds more along the actual chronology of rise and fall from 1956 to 1960. Revised for New York from three acts to two, *Night and Her Stars* presents the rise to fame, the peak, and then the backlash of investigation, attacks, confessions, and reconciliation. Stemple becomes a humorous foil, even constantly complaining about the woman's hat blocking his view during Van Doren's famous confession. The final reconciliation between the chastened, guilt-ridden Charles Van Doren and his remarkable father offers a touching ending.

Much more so than Greenberg in the theatrical version, Redford, with his screenwriter Paul Attanasio, in his film version seeks to create and maintain a charged dramatic tension. To do so, the film takes specific dramatic license.

**Film Docudrama: Redford's film.** *Quiz Show*, produced and directed by Robert Redford for Disney's Hollywood Pictures, was not a big box office winner, but did receive laudatory reviews throughout the country. The New York Film Critics Circle voted it the best motion picture of 1994. It also received three Oscar nominations, one for Best Picture of 1994, another for Redford's direction, and one for Paul Scofield, as Best Supporting Actor in the role of Mark Van Doren.

In some reviews and in newspaper and magazine features, the movie also generated a great deal of criticism about docudrama accuracy.

"Docudrama," the retelling of history through dramatic re-enactment, has a rich and controversial history in films. D. W. Griffith's racist tract *Birth of a Nation* in 1915 wrapped its distortions in moving copies of historic photos and source citations and was lauded by Washington legislators, justices, and even a president who was alleged to have said, "It is like writing history with lightning."

*Citizen Kane* in 1941 was cautious enough to employ fictitious names in its roman à clef on the life of William Randolph Hearst.

The classic docudrama on television or film revisits history through the experience of imagined individuals: *Winds of War*, *The Holocaust*, *Shogun*, *Platoon*, *Gone with the Wind*. More exacting is the portrayal of real individuals in history: *Gandhi*, *Patton*, *Malcolm X*, *Franklin and Eleanor*. *Roots*, arguably the most influential of American docudramas, was presented as the latter, —the story of real individuals in the person of Kunta Kinte and his descendants,—but was accused of being the former, a fine yarn of imagined individuals.

Redford's *Quiz Show*, like Greenberg's play or *All the President's Men*, places itself in the most exacting category of docudrama, one in which real names, places, and incidents are portrayed. It reduces a drawn-out, convoluted historical episode to classic docudrama, distilling and personalizing the complex events into the story of three people—the investigator from Washington, Richard Goodwin; the flawed hero, Van Doren; and the disgruntled commoner, Stempel. Is the film itself deceptive, as charged by some?

Criticisms of *Quiz Show* usually revolve around charges the film "dissects the scandal by taking great pains with small details but great liberties with large facts" according to Jan Herman in the *Los Angeles Times*. Richard Bernstein in the *New York Times* worries, "Because they pay such scrupulous attention to getting the small details right, the question is this: Will moviegoers be left with the impression that the larger issues are right as well." Howard Rosenberg in the *Los Angeles Times* writes: "How ironic that a movie so judgmental about the TV industry's dishonesty in the 1950s should itself play so fast and loose with the truth for the sake of putting on a good show." The line



*Rob Morrow in the movie (right), plays Richard Goodwin, the Congressional investigator.*

producer of *Twenty-One*, Al Freedman, even charges, "Ironically, the film is fixed. It is even more rigged than the show it portrays."

The standard of truth proper to a docudrama—not that of a documentary or a scholarly report—provides the norm for assessing the accuracy of Redford's film. Screenwriter Paul Attanasio, investigator Goodwin, and director Redford all have explained at length why incidents were modified for dramatic impact. For example, Dave Garroway did not walk onto the *Twenty-One* set to hire Charles Van Doren, but, soon after his quiz appearances, Van Doren did sign a contract to do the *Today* show. Likewise, Goodwin was actually told that he was being overly squeamish about subpoenaing Van Doren with the words "Not having Van Doren testify is like doing Hamlet without Hamlet," although the words were spoken to him by Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, for whom Goodman had been a clerk, and not by Goodwin's wife as the film shows it.

Attanasio summarizes by saying, "My responsibility is not to make a documentary; my responsibility is to remain true to the characters and the events, while making a dramatic story

out of it."

The Redford film uses dramatic license in two obvious ways. First, chronologically, the film makes the quiz show run of Van Doren and the investigation by Goodwin appear to occur simultaneously. In fact, Goodwin first became involved only several years after Van Doren's appearance on *Twenty-One*.

The second license the movie takes is in creating "composite characters" who stand in for several actual people. In particular, the film makes Richard Goodwin the investigator of the quiz shows when the historical record is unmistakable that Joseph Stone, the New York Assistant District Attorney, played a much more major role in the overall investigative activities.

By eliminating Stone and expanding Goodwin's part, Goodwin becomes a composite of all investigators, while Stempel and Van Doren and a few others become a composite of all the contestants on the shows. *The Twenty-One* show becomes a composite of all the rigged quiz shows, just as it was to a large extent in the actual Washington hearings. In addition, the network executives are made into a composite represented by

NBC President Robert Kintner who was not even with NBC at the beginning of Stempel and Van Doren's historic duel; he joined NBC in January, 1957, and became its president in July, 1958.

Is the film wrong to distort the chronology and create composite characters, as some have charged? This question brings to mind the standard of truth proper to the docudrama genre and issues of ethics, deception, and the merchant mentality behind media production in America.

In response to Freedman's charge that the film is more rigged than the show it portrays, it is especially noteworthy that the movie producers readily explain the departures from history which they have made. This is in marked contrast to the quiz producers who publicly claimed their shows were not rigged when that was a palpable lie. The makers of *Quiz Show* the film go to great lengths in many press interviews to explain exactly what standards of truth and drama they are employing.

If time sequence is "adjusted" and characters "combined" in the Redford film, the locations, casting, characterizations, and plot details make every effort to compensate by seeking historical accuracy. The "feel" of New York City in the 1950s is one of the film's achievements, just as the South Coast Repertory staging of Greenberg's play offered the visual style of the fifties and early television. The film cast creates credible, nuanced performances. Fiennes gives Van Doren a charming, subtle ambivalence mixing innocence and guilt; Fiennes' previous success as the Nazi commandant in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* adds to the subtle sense of mistrust in Van Doren's seeming admirableness. The portrayals of Enright and Stempel in the film make understandable what Enright admitted many years later in the Krainin documentary, "I bear tremendous guilt to Herb Stempel."

Ken Auletta in the *New Yorker*, after examining the many charges against the film, concludes, "In fairness, Redford's movie does stick to the essential truth of what happened."

To some extent, the charges of alleged distortion in the film *Quiz Show* sound a bit like a continuation of the original cover-up, particularly as they are stated by Al Freedman and Don Enright. Guilt was shared by many, many people in the quiz show scandal, but that does not mean that Freedman and Dan Enright, among others, should not have been shown as culprits in the movie or play. In the genre of docudrama, changes are permissible unless they distort the essential truth. A few of the attacks on *Quiz Show* seem underneath to be bothered by the film's critical stance toward television, corporate greed, and capitalism. That concern may be worth debating head-on, but it certainly does not make the story of that corruption necessarily false docudrama.

## **THE DRAMATIC CENTER: VAN DOREN VERSUS STEMPEL**

**T**he personal drama and conflict of supposedly ordinary people give the quiz show story a dimension attractive to the dramatist. Both the Redford film and the Greenberg drama reduce five years of quiz shows and investigations into the dramatic contrast between long-time *Twenty-One* winner Herbert Stempel and his challenger, Charles Van Doren. The versions by Krainin, Halberstam, and Goodwin likewise make the Van Doren-Stempel confrontation a centerpiece. Their contest obviously makes for good storytelling and understandably propels the central drama for stage and screen.

Stempel is the common man, a self-taught working-class Jewish New Yorker with phenomenal recall, doggedly accurate but lacking in any charm or charisma. After first making him something of a GI blue-collar folk hero, Enright then recast Stempel as a contestant you love to hate, with his unflattering haircut and ill-fitting clothes.

At the opposite extreme, Van Doren is superman and the boy next door, an intellectual's hero, an ivy leaguer with graduate study in astrophysics, mathematics, and literature at Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and Columbia, but also a charming and self-effacing nice guy. Greenberg describes Van Doren as "graceful, brilliant, virile, and deserving." He was proper America's answer to both the controversial Elvis and the soon-to-come Sputnik. He was the genuine goods from a quality background. The tall, thoughtful, diffident, good-humored Van Doren contrasted sharply with the short, ill-dressed Stempel, the perfect match-up for the Enright production team—and for writers of plays or films.

The Redford film, like the Greenberg play, uses the match-up of Stempel and Van Doren to examine issues of ethnicity and class in America: the Jewish Stempel against the Gentile Van Doren with the Jewish but elitist Goodwin as mediator and foil. The America of melting pot egalitarianism and populism runs aground on the shoals of privilege and breeding: Van Doren's attractiveness snuffs out Stempel's rise.

**O**n the air, the conflict between Van Doren and Stempel builds across the nation as they play to ties for a few weeks until Stempel is forced to miss a question about the film *Marty*, particularly galling to him since it was one of his favorites. Then Van Doren wins and goes on for a total of fifteen weeks to win \$129,000 by the end. (Draconian taxes at the

time let him take home only about \$28,000, according to Halberstam.) He makes the cover of *Time* and receives 2,000 letters a week and 500 marriage proposals. His Columbia students put up signs directing visitors to "the smartest man in the world." When his quiz show run ends, NBC within weeks signs him to a three-year contract at \$50,000 per year as a "cultural correspondent" to do five minutes of poetry or, whatever, daily on Dave Garroway's program *Today*. In both film and play, Van Doren plays a knowing Faust to Enright's seductive Mephistopheles.

Van Doren himself, in a striking after-the-fact letter to his investigator and friend Goodwin, refers to the fable that "the stag loved the hunter who killed it." These fellow Ivy Leaguers seemed genuinely to like and respect each other as they warily circled. *Quiz Show*, the film, builds its story line around this hunter/hunted relationship between Goodwin, the investigator, and Van Doren, the suspect. Parallel story lines in the film simultaneously trace Goodwin's progress as the hunter with Van Doren's progress as America's brilliant posterboy, product of a gifted and loving family of geniuses.

If the movie had instead stuck to history and followed the strung out chronology of competition and prizes... charges in the press... grand jury... Washington investigation... confession..., it would clearly have scored dramatically far lower than Attanasio's clever parallel action script. What the Goodwin/Van Doren time-shifted parallel storylines provide is classic suspense around the hunter-hunted theme.

The dramatic public culmination of the quiz debacle came on November 2, 1959, in a crowded hearing room in Washington, when Van Doren read his now famous confession: "I would give almost anything I have to reverse the course of my life in the last three years. . . . I was involved, deeply



*The stage from the South Coast Repertory production of Richard Greenberg's Night and Her Stars.*

involved, in a deception." Although frequently taken as cheap melodrama, Van Doren's confession has qualities of classic Greek tragedy with the tragically flawed hero unrelentingly moving toward the denouement of his sad fall, confrontation, and self-realization. The Redford film captures this in Ralph Fiennes' emotional re-enactment; the words are close to verbatim from Van Doren's actual text, though like much of the film, re-ordered and abbreviated, incorporating elements of his post-hearing press conference as well as his actual famous testimony. The film's adjusted time frame forces Van Doren (Fiennes) to say "in the last year" instead of in the last three years. The Greenberg play builds with the same sad confession, but culminates in the reconciliation between Charles and his famous and

sensitive father. In a touching finale, Charlie speaks of shame and even of hating the sound of his own voice. He hesitantly opens himself up a crack and his father hugs him tightly.

The film's final on-screen statements, the chapter by Halberstam, and especially the broadcast documentary make clear the sad long-term legacy for Van Doren and Stempel: Van Doren as a virtual recluse and Stempel as a minor city employee. In contrast, Jack Barry and Dan Enright resumed successful careers in television including, by 1978, producing *New Tic Tac Dough* for CBS with Barry back as host. They also built a very successful TV syndication business. Al Freedman, after fleeing to Mexico and then testifying before Congress, spent a long professional career with *Penthouse* publications.

John Updike once described the quiz show scandal in his *Assorted Prose* (1965):

"The appeal of the programs, with the rising challenge of Soviet brain power as a backdrop, was ultimately patriotic; the contestants were selected to be a cross-section of our nation just as deliberately as G.I.s in war movies are.

"There we bravely sat in our living rooms, sweating it out with this or that Shakespeare-reading poultry farmer or chemistry-minded chorus girl, and there they were on the other side of the blurred little screen, patting (not wiping) their brows with handkerchiefs, biting their tongues as instructed, stammering out rehearsed answers, gasping with relief at the expected cry of congratulation.

"And we sat there, a nation of suckers, for years. . ."

## THE QUIZ SHOWS AND THE SEARCH FOR ETHICS IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

"Are we a nation of liars and cheats?" -  
Christian Century, Nov. 18, 1959.

**A**nd, now, for the \$64,000 question. . . Where does the quiz show scandal fit in the popular consciousness today and what are its lessons?

Most of the recent versions of the quiz scandal associate it with other events of the time in the America of the 1950s. The plugola scandal had revealed that popular radio disc jockeys were given generous kickbacks to feature certain records. Wrestling, with its campy spoof of honest competition, was television's first big sports success. Anti-Communism justified anything, suburbia thrived, fast food

was born, cigarette advertising paid for much of television; and American know-how would lead the world forward in growth and progress.

The sixties were not the '50s, and the '90s are not the '80s, but what are they? It may be that the '90s, nostalgic for the quiz show '50s, are an initial confrontation with the postmodern dilemma: that the "modern" belief in permanent progress rooted in reason, science, and efficiency is giving way to the "postmodern" condition of superficiality, consumption, irony, and normlessness.

The staging and art of the South Coast Repertory version of Greenberg's play captures the high "modern" exterior of slick skyscrapers, consumer goods, and pop stars that surround the "postmodern" core of a loss of values, ethics, and standards. In centerstage, sits an isolated turquoise '50s TV set. By focusing on Enright, instead of Goodwin as the film does, *Night and Her Stars* has a more opportunistic, cynical tone, a more Faustian explicitness, and a touch of sharp-edged humor. Today, in the nineties, it may be this sense of having it all and discovering it is nothing echoes the postmodern charges of a culture made up of "simulacra," copies of which there is no original; pastiches of different styles with no core of unity. The smooth-talking Enright saw that America needs heroes and heroes must be manufactured. Postmodern depthlessness leaves no roots to generate meaning and ethics.

Perhaps in looking at the quiz show scandal today we are looking for something of ourselves that we fear we lost when we turned over popular consciousness to television entertainment and commerce.

Quiz contestants, producers, networks, and sponsors all wanted to win big whatever it took. Winning can be difficult to keep in perspective, especially amid postmodern confusion. For many, it becomes a substi-

tute for deeper meaning and purpose rather than a supplement. It then exists in a Tonya Harding-Mike Tyson vacuum of winning for its own sake. It is an excuse to cut corners, to ignore principles of honesty and fairness. To the unbalanced, winning becomes not a goal but an obsession. Into this black hole, the actual record of the quiz show scandal sends a loud and clear wake up call: what is legally allowable and commercially successful may, despite that, still be unethical.

In virtually every interview about *Quiz Show*, Redford emphasized two points: a loss of innocence in the form of ethical consensus, and the replacement of ethics by a merchant mentality.

**T**he quiz scandal was a turning point for Americans, in Redford's judgment. To *Rolling Stone* he said, "What the film tries to illustrate is simply that this was the beginning of a loss of innocence. . . . The effect was shattering. Then, historically, we go right down the line with the deaths of J.F.K., Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King and then Watergate, Irangate, BCCI and S&L, and then [Sen. Robert] Packwood and O.J. Simpson. . . . The quiz-show scandal of the '50s, that's not what this is about. It's about that scandal being the genesis of where we are now. That's the scandal. So that would be a hope, that we just look at where we are now. I couldn't ask for more than that."

There may be a bit of baby boomer over-generalization in Redford's oft-repeated theme of the quiz shows as the beginning of the American loss of innocence. As a struggling young actor living in New York at the time, Redford may have brought an innocence to the late '50s that was not universal. Others, slightly older, likely lost their innocence with the Depression, World War II, blacklisting, or McCarthyism. Lest the projected "innocence" of the '50s become

overblown, it should be recalled that commentators at the time were shocked that Americans weren't more shocked with the rigging. Yes, there was some outrage, but there were also cynical yawns even then.

Playwright Greenberg, in fact, considers the aura of innocence associated with the '50s to be "a terrific piece of advertising." It covers the experience of suppression, repression, terror, and gloom, with a belief in prosperity that overcomes the fear. His play seeks a "cultural diagnostic" for the era and the types being created by television. The innocence and its loss he sees as a typically American transition from "absolute credulity to absolute cynicism" instead of a more stable and appropriate skepticism.

These are themes that Redford says he "...had been wanting to touch for quite a while: greed, the manipulation of truth and the fact that our lives are controlled by merchants. The merchant mentality dominates my industry, and I've wanted for some time to get at something that would illustrate that."

He wants the film to be provocative in raising questions about the way we live in our society: "Is this moral ambiguity that we're in going to lead to no morality at all? Is the issue of ethics going out of our culture?"

The film offers a moral center in the character of Goodwin; it addresses and counters "the decline in American morality" begun with the quiz scandal. In fact, Goodwin himself disagrees with writers who argue that the quiz shows mark the beginning of America's loss of innocence. To Goodwin, it was the presence of a sense of innocence, the ability to feel indignation and outrage, that fueled the '60s. The innocence was injured but not destroyed or there would have been no sit-ins, no marches, no sixties.

Underlying all the recent versions of the quiz show scandal is the fact of wrongness, of standards violated. It is not only a story of greed and seedy



*Peter Frechette, (standing) portrays Twenty-One producer Dan Enright and Patrick Breen is Herb Stempel in Night and Her Stars, the South Coast Repertory production.*

exploitation but also of investigation, confession, and the re-assertion of accepted standards of truth and morality. *Quiz Show* features the violation of ethics, and it emphasizes being caught and punished. It examines wrongdoing and rightdoing; the hunted and the hunter; violation of ethics and reassertion of ethics. It is, in Redford's descriptions, a morality play for our time. And a realistic morality play may be just what the postmodern '90s are hungry for.

The confusion over agreed-upon central values today may be what the phrase "loss of innocence" refers to and may be a reason for re-examining the quiz show scandal. The quiz show investigation shows that deceptive cultural production violates real standards. We are not normlessly lost in an empty chase to win; we are part of a social fabric held together by principles detectable historically, intellectually, and humanly. Winning isn't everything. It isn't the only thing. It's not even the most important thing. Ask Charles Van Doren.

The quiz show scandal was in danger of being remembered as a victimless crime, prosecutor Stone reminds us. No villains were locked

up or voted out of office. But, he insists, the victims were "the television audience" as well as certain permanently scarred contestants. Underscoring the effectiveness of advertising on the quiz shows, Stone reminds us that "in fact, scores of millions of dollars flowed. . . (away from) fifty million people as a result of their watching the shows, thereby enriching manufacturers, broadcasters, advertising agencies, as well as program packagers and a score or more of contestants." Stone, a Republican, argues vigorously for public oversight and regulation.

The renewal in the discussion of ethics in business schools and other forums may mark an admission of a loss of ethical assumptions as much as a desire to return to ethical standards. But the revival fits nicely with a re-examination of the quiz shows of the 1950s. Not just personal but business decisions, especially media decisions, can be made with explicit consideration of issues beyond legal and economic outcomes; lying and misrepresentation are impermissible even when lawful and profitable.

Goodwin in *Quiz Show* laments in the end that they caught small-fry but did not "get television" itself as the culprit; didn't expose its money lust and improve its programming. But the movie "gets" television and film in a broader sense; both have social consequences and deserve the harshest criticism when they fail to live up to their responsibility. We are interested in the quiz shows because we fear we may be reliving them at any time.

**D**igging into the quiz scandal and its re-presentations has proved far more interesting than I might have expected. Despite teaching and writing about media for several decades, like many others I had never really sensed the drama and issues buried in it. The books, the

play, the film, and my conversations with those who worked in television in New York in the '50s made the whole episode real and challenging.

Re-entry into the world of the 1950s scandal for me has been stimulating but also unsettling; unsettling because it is all too familiar. But, in addition to the familiarity of the cant rationalizations, the re-examination is unsettling because the situation now appears demonstrably so much worse—the explosion of tabloid television, the reduction of news to ratings scrambles, the bastardization of political dialog in sound bites, attack ads, and talk radio scapegoating.

Van Doren's long life of hiding out in apparent shame and ignominy appears quaint today. As John Leo notes (1994), "Nowadays he would be instantly refurbished on *Geraldo*, perhaps emerging as a logical Senate candidate like Ollie North." We'd likely see a bidding war for his true story by *Hard Copy*, *A Current Affair*, and *20/20*. His agent would get him a big tell-all book contract, and would keep him before the public until he became a respected Nixonian elder statesman. Shameless behavior today is too profitable to resist.

Looking back, I doubt that television executives today would acknowledge, as they readily did then before Congress, that providing national television programming is a "sacred national trust?" As Newton Minow has recently noted, his speech, "Vast Wasteland" was actually intended to raise the issue of "public service." Does the "sacred trust" concern public service or only the bottom line, especially today in the age of 500 channels? These television performance questions are not liberal or conservative issues; they are human and public anxieties today.

The ethical questions of the quiz show rigging might be reduced to simplistic levels: a small group of production personnel devised a system of cheating to increase

dramatic appeal and ratings. They sucked contestants into the plot. They were caught. Case closed? Not at all.

There are much broader implications to the ethical questions raised by the quiz shows. The quiz scandal and debates over representing it take us down into the heart of central questions facing television today.

These include:

- truth versus deception - fact and fiction in media representation
- media events - their nature, power, and meaning
- political economy - competition for ratings and profit
- genre conventions - accepted standards of truth
- law and media - how society regulates and polices representations
- competition - America's obsession with winning
- postmodernism and the relativity of values
- ethics and media - right and wrong in media practice

The many recent versions of the scandal give us unique insights into what happened and who was responsible. The books, documentary, film, and play can help us understand what America was then and hint at what we have become since in our hunt for shared truth, meaning, and purpose.

Let us hope that the renewed interest in the quiz show scandals of the 1950s becomes a sign of a maturing interest in responsible approaches to games, winning, television, business, and life in America in the 1990s. ■

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*Robert Redford was nominated for an Oscar for Directing Quiz Show.*

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# WILL THERE BE A LANE FOR TELEVISION ON THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY?

**BY FRITZ JACOBI**

**T**elelevision is a tool of tyrants," says George Gilder. "Its overthrow will be a major force for freedom and individuality. The overthrow is at hand."

Author of the best-selling *Wealth and Poverty* and a frequent panelist on television programs about the American future, Gilder claims that the personal computer, linked by fiber optics to a rapidly growing network of information and entertainment, will

soon replace television in the American home.

We are entering the age of the "teleputer," he writes in a recently revised edition of his book *Life After Television* (W. W. Norton, 1994). The teleputer "will enrich and strengthen democracy and capitalism throughout the world ... We can reclaim our culture from the centralized influence of mass media. We can liberate our imaginations from programs regulated by bureaucrats, chosen by a small elite of broadcasting professionals, and governed by the need to target the lowest common denominators of

public interests.”

He adds that “TV was a superb technology for its time. Indeed, its presence and properties defined the time. But now its time is over. The television age is giving way to the much richer, interactive technologies of the computer age.”

As an individual who has been devoted for nearly 60 years to a 1936 portable typewriter, I find Gilder’s pronouncements positively chilling. I do have a computer but I keep it at—you should pardon the expression—arm’s length, because its power and potential are daunting. My son-in-law the doctor, who learned all about computers as an undergraduate at M.I.T., discovered a game of solitaire, in color, in my computer’s programmatic infrastructure. If I knew what I was doing I could probably publish the equivalent of the *Sunday New York Times* on my computer; however, I use it only as a word processor and I find it not the least little bit entertaining.

My television set, on the other hand, is an old friend, and when I say old I mean old. Since the early 1950s I have owned just three sets. The first was, of course, black-and-white. It gave me Eisenhower, Sid Caesar, the demise of Senator McCarthy, Howdy Doody and *Victory at Sea*, among other marvels of the day. In 1969 we bought a color set because my wife needed to see what happened to Julia Child’s sauces over the flame. I know my TV’s talents and its limitations. It does what I tell it to.

So it was with a sense of trepidation and dark foreboding that I began to investigate the future role of television in what is called the information superhighway, recently nicknamed the “infobahn.”\* Is TV indeed doomed? Will the rusted ruins of TV sets line the electronic roadside like the burned-out hulks of Egyptian tanks after Israel’s 1967 desert victory?

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\*Please see the glossary at the end of this article.

## The Infobahn: What Is It?

**T**o be able to peer over the horizon it is first essential to find out what we are talking about. “The ‘Information Superhighway’ has been under construction for a very long time and has progressed wonderfully well, in part because it has had relatively little interference from Washington,” writes George Melloan in *The Wall Street Journal*. “It isn’t really very much like a superhighway, but in reality an infinitely complex network assisted by and connecting computers of all shapes and sizes, mobile phones, faxes, earth stations, space stations, TV and telephones.”

Michael Nelson of the U.S. Commerce Department’s Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), describes the information superhighway as “a system to deliver to all Americans the information they need when they want it and where they want it—at an affordable price. The National Information Infrastructure (NII), which is what the Government calls the infobahn, doesn’t mention what technology will be used. It doesn’t mention who will build it. It doesn’t mention what kind of services will be provided. It simply focuses on the goal of getting information to people who want it.

Vice-President Al Gore, who is hoping to shepherd the NII into law (Congress scuttled a telecommunications reform bill last year), points to the Internet as a viable model. He sees the Internet as a technological and policy testbed. Today Internet is a network of networks, over 30,000 of them, all interoperable and interconnected, involving mostly text and computers. Tomorrow’s Internet will encompass full multi-media, voice, text, music and video. “And it won’t be just computers,” says OSTP’s Mike Nelson. “It will be whatever information appliance you want to hook into it, such as computers, TV’s, phones,

faxes, radio."

So is over-the-air broadcasting really doomed, as futurists like George Gilder are predicting? Experienced broadcasters and other communications veterans don't think so. It won't be just computers. In fact, broadcast television will, in the opinion of these experts, travel the fast lane on the infobahn because it creates and delivers to a vast audience a key product: popular programming.

"When you get into the realm of fictional programming like drama, sitcoms and soap operas, one can argue that the reach is huge and the cost is relatively low," says Alan Bell, President of the broadcasting division of Freedom Communications, which owns four television stations, cable systems, newspapers and magazines. "Even cable households watch mainly over-the-air television. Big-time entertainment is what people want."

And there are other economic factors which insure the future of broadcasting, Bell notes. "We have recently been making station acquisitions and the prices are going out of sight. The fundamental product of information will continue to be over-the-air broadcasting."

Bill Ryan, president and CEO of the six Post-Newsweek stations, concurs. "Five or six years ago people were predicting the end of over-the-air broadcasting. Even the networks thought they were dying. But the new owners, like the Tisches, and several of us local broadcasters knew that we weren't dead. In fact 1994 was our best year in nearly twenty years. The advertisers—national, local and spot—are coming back. It's a real vote of confidence."

"Over-the-air broadcasting continues to be the prime generator of original TV programming," says George Back, chairman of All American Television Distribution, a producer and syndicator of such popular shows as *Baywatch*, *Family Feud* and *Sirens*. "In sheer bulk and quantity it domi-

nates audience delivery as compared to any other form and generates the largest revenue returns."

Not everybody is in agreement about the existence of the information superhighway. "It suffers from over-hype and overexpectation," says Freedom's Bell.

It already exists, says Amy McCombs, president and CEO of Chronicle Broadcasting (San Francisco's KRON and four other TV stations). "I look at it from the standpoint of the local broadcaster. We are software providers, we know our local markets, we have been engaged in this activity for 50 years, so I'm very optimistic about the future of broadcasting. We are not going to be disenfranchised as we go into spectrum allocation."

Until recently all local television looked alike, Ms. McCombs says. "But from now on you're going to see different types of strategies. For example, we've started a 24-hour cable-news program. Three year ago we launched a zoning news service to different zones in the Bay area, also on cable." She explains: during CNN's hour-long Headline News service KRON beams separate five-minute regional reports on the half-hour respectively to metropolitan San Francisco, the East Bay and the South Bay areas. One of the station's most popular shows—*The Next Step*, about cutting-edge technology—is also carried nationally by the Discovery channel. Ms. McCombs adds that regulation changes enabled her to broaden the scope of her activities and that everything is program-driven.

## N.A.B.: Wireless Will Survive

**T**he National Association of Broadcasters has advanced a number of cogent arguments for the survival of wireless radio and television broadcasting; it provides

universal coverage, is mobile and inexpensive. Ed Reilly, president of McGraw-Hill's four-station broadcasting division and chairman of the Association for Maximum Service Television (MSTV), says that local over-the-air broadcasting provides the linkage between TV and the information superhighway.

"We are free and we are universal," he says. "All the wired people have a problem with those two concepts. We have found a way to provide information and entertainment, without basic cost, to the entire society, even to its poorest segments. We argue for free and open access for broadcasters to the superhighway."

Not long ago Reilly told the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, "When you talk about the nation's information infrastructure over the past 60-plus years, you are talking about my business—broadcasting. Broadcasters have been the NII for decades."

And NAB executive vice-president John D. Abel exhorted his colleagues: "I want broadcasters to think about your roots. That is over-the-air, wireless broadcasting. In many ways we have allowed the cable industry to diminish and detract from the very essence of our distribution system ... We need to redevelop our own distribution system."

Nowhere is the commitment to over-the-air broadcasting more dramatically illustrated than in the current developments on the high-definition television front. Even though great technological strides have been made in HDTV in the past year, there appears to be a growing skepticism on the part of some practitioners about the economics of HDTV and on the part of some technologists about its stand-alone viability. For the optimists, the new buzzword is "flexibility," while the pessimists wonder if the game is worth the candle.

In one area, however, there is agreement: a new system that

suddenly renders current TV receivers obsolete is unacceptable. So to avoid obsolescence of the millions of conventional (NTSC) receivers now in use, the FCC has stated its preference for a simulcast system, which simultaneously transmits NTSC and HDTV signals from each station. This two-pronged approach means that each television station could have two channels, one that will transmit an NTSC signal and one for HDTV.

"Broadcasters are beginning to talk about flexibility in connection with the use of the second channel, which could be used not only for HDTV but also for multichannel purposes," says Richard Wiley, a former FCC chairman who heads the FCC's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service. "For example, you could broadcast a football game on HDTV, then use the channel for four simultaneous programs—news, soap opera, sports, weather." Wiley believes that if the FCC makes its decision in 1996 on which HDTV system to adopt, sets capable of receiving the signal will be available to the public the following year.

## Interactivity: How Important?

**T**he NAB's Abel notes that over-the-air broadcasting can be interactive, contrary to the opinion of some technologists. But how important is interactivity in the general scheme of things? Opinions differ widely.

"I believe that we must, and we will, offer many creative, interactive, local and nationally based services," McGraw-Hill's Ed Reilly said to a group of broadcasters recently. "My own belief is that the so-called superhighway—the fiber-based, digitally powered distribution system—is not mainly about highly efficient point-to-multipoint distribution. It's not about

access to all the world's libraries. It's not even about video on demand. It's about a whole new world of personal interactivity—about the ability of people to satisfy their very human urge to communicate, almost in person, anywhere in the world."

Not all broadcasters agree.

"Interactivity will not have the broad appeal it's currently cracked up to have in some circles," says Post-Newsweek's Bill Ryan. We're not going to become recluses by ordering everything via television. Interactive movies aren't going to replace video stores. For games and kids interactivity may work, but it's a specialized market, not a universal one."

"No one knows about interactivity or home shopping," says Alan Bell of Freedom Communications. "The audiences for that sort of thing are enormously tiny. Besides, the new supplements the old, it doesn't supplant it. Radio didn't destroy newspapers, television didn't destroy radio. Change will be glacially slow."

KRON's Amy McCombs adds that "interactivity is a buzzword. We have it now with the telephone. A viewer can respond that way. We need to learn a lot more about what the consumer is interested in. And we need to jump over some major technology hurdles, because people don't want to punch up a lot of numbers."

Edward D. Horowitz, senior VP of Viacom and CEO of that organization's new media and interactive television activities, adds that by the turn of the century five million households will be equipped for interactivity. "That is a narrow focus," he says, providing "a low ability to take a lot of risks."

Syndication expert George Back is more sanguine. "There is a tremendous potential in interactivity—the ability to turn the switch—and in pay-per-view," he says. "As new channels open up, the majority will be in these two categories."

## The Social Compact

**W**hile the consensus seems to be that the importance of broadcast television's future role in the information superhighway is assured, that assurance, in the opinion of several elder statesmen, does not come without its responsibilities to society.

"The future of television lies in its role in the community, its importance as a public service," says veteran TV critic and journalist Les Brown. "Broadcast TV is going to be preserved and protected by the government because of its importance as a force that unites the country. There will always be lanes on the information superhighway for broadcast television."

Brown warns, however, that "television must not blow this opportunity by ignoring its responsibility. Whether or not broadcasters get involved in such technological advances as digital and compression, they will always be part of the information superhighway because their service is unique."

This argument is enthusiastically supported by Lawrence K. Grossman, former president of NBC News and PBS. "There is a public-service commitment from broadcast TV," he says. "The area where it will have its greatest effect is in governance, in the democratic system. What is now driving the highway—entertainment, game shows, shopping services—represents a narrow spectrum of human aspiration. Our system of governance is being transformed into an electronic republic by television."

Grossman notes that in 1992 "the people retrieved the election debate from the professionals," citing the effects of the *Today* show and Larry King, among other programs on which candidates appeared. "Direct public response directly influences policy. All this is generating an epochal change in the nature of politics."

Before the Republican landslide last fall there appeared to be a new sense of responsibility in Washington. For example, the then House Telecommunications Subcommittee Chairman Ed Markey said that broadcasters "must renew their commitment to serve the public interest." That commitment, he said, must include more children's TV programming. He also wanted broadcasters to respond to the issue of TV violence and make sure that minorities are "not left out of the social compact."

At the same time FCC Chairman Reed Hundt expressed his belief that the compact includes a commitment to women and minorities, to children, to localism and to diversity of programming. That was a far cry from the laissez-faire attitude of the Reagan-era FCC. But now that the Republicans have swept the country and taken over the House and Senate in an off-year election, one can only hope that the new climate of social responsibility will not end in 1996.

Immediate prospects are dim: the new chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, whose first order of business will be telecommunications reform, is South Dakota Republican Larry Pressler. In a recent in-depth interview with *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine Pressler expressed his admiration for Rush Limbaugh, his contempt for public broadcasting and his belief that government has no business regulating violence or the amount of children's programming on television.

Public-interest organizations will be busier than ever. Some of the current consciousness raising can be attributed to a Washington-based group called the Center for Media Education (CME). Spiritual heirs to the redoubtable Peggy Charren's Action for Children's Television, CME is headed by an activist husband-and-wife team, Kathryn Montgomery and Jeff Chester. With foundation support the Center is

striving to establish a "highway patrol" designed to insure that the information superhighway does not bypass the underprivileged. Like other gadflies, Montgomery and Chester have raised hackles in the broadcasting establishment.

**I**f television can be counted on to continue to serve as the nation's mass purveyor of entertainment and information into the foreseeable future, the question is whether over-the-air stations may one day cease to be economically viable in the face of competition from other media. For all the dinosaur comparisons, broadcasting continues to possess an inherent economic advantage by virtue of its being the only truly universal advertising medium—so far.

Cable is experiencing difficulty in going much beyond a 60 percent national penetration. This is a particularly significant factor in meeting the advertising needs of the major (top 10) markets, where cable penetration, according to the latest Nielsen figures, averages 63.1 percent. DBS, of course, is just beginning; the absence of the local stations from its first offerings points to an inherent weakness. Still, the ubiquitous nature of its signal and the brilliant quality of its transmitted picture suggest the potential for a powerful national impact as it moves into the programming mainstream.

Just how the much-heralded entry of the telephone companies into the cable business will affect media relationships is anybody's guess. The thrust of that industry may well be toward universal service, and it is not unreasonable to anticipate a future in which virtually every home is connected to the information superhighway through the telephone network. The cable industry has, of course, similar ambitions. Already there is cable movement into the world of telephone service.

The current interest of the telephone

companies, as well as cable, in joining forces with major programming entities suggests at least the possibility of significant shifts in the entertainment balance. What remains to be seen is whether the financial muscle of the telephone, cable and satellite industries can ultimately translate into major-league programming able to take enough audience away from broadcasting to really matter.

**"P**eople like George Gilder often mistake their own hopes for the reality of society," says Alfred C. Sikes, a former FCC chairman who now heads the Hearst Corporation's new media and technology activities. "The reality is that at the end of the day people want to enjoy themselves in a relatively inert manner, and television will remain their means to do so." He notes that the computer will play a role with television, with its capability for searching and conducting transactions, in shopping, in playing electronic games. He further notes that multimedia computers are rapidly being reduced in size and price, but that is not going to hurt television. On the contrary, "Television is going to be as important as, if not more important than it is today," he concludes.

In all fairness to Gilder, it must be said that some of his predictions have already come true. For example, last fall CNN and Intel unveiled CNN at Work, a subscription service designed to deliver *Headline News* or CNN live over personal computer networks. At the same time NBC was preparing to distribute NBC Desktop Video, a video-on-demand service available to the financial-services industry. In an effort to parlay its programming assets into interactive services, Capital Cities/ABC and NTN Communications announced that they will develop interactive games that will allow consumers to play along with ABC sports, daytime, news and other

network and cable programming. In November Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones performed on millions of computers linked by the Internet (picture and sound quality were uniformly lousy). Not a week goes by without a story in one of the broadcasting trade papers about some new interactive electronic marvel.

But the last word really belongs to William Small, another former NBC News president. Now the head of a media-studies program at the Fordham University business school, Small is convinced that broadcast television will continue to serve a very large audience.

Noting that among the greatest inventions of the 20th Century are the computer and the satellite, he adds that "not every new device will produce a winner in terms of public acceptance. There are times when invention becomes the mother of necessity: inventors often must convince the world that it needs the new tools they have invented. Television is still one of the world's most convenient media. No matter how user-friendly a computer may become, the vast majority of the people don't find it either friendly or familiar. I believe the systems will live side-by-side."

Amen. ■

Fritz Jacobi worked for NBC when Sid Caesar and Howdy Doody ruled the non-interconnected airwaves, for National Educational Television when the "network" was air-lifted film cans and for Columbia Business School, where he confronted his first computer.



What's the difference between "cyberspace" and "virtual reality?" See the glossary for the information superhighway which follows.

# GLOSSARY

## A Few Choice Words for The Information Superhighway

*Hampered by techno-phobia? Feeling lost in cyberspace? Here is some help in the form of brief explanations of a few of the acronyms, buzzwords and other terminology you may encounter as you travel along the information superhighway and its side roads.*

**ASCII.** The American Standard Code for Information and Interchange (pronounced "ask-ee") is an internationally used set of computer codes representing all of the letters of the alphabet, numbers 0-9 and often-used punctuation and keyboard functions. ASCII files are text only; they can be read by most computers and programs.

**Baud Rate.** A measure of the speed at which data is transmitted, usually by modem. The higher the number, the faster the speed.

**Bit.** A unit in digital technology; one digit in the binary language "spoken" by computers.

**Bulletin Board System.** An electronic version of public bulletin boards, this computer entity enables users to communicate with other users; access is through a computer, modem and telephone line; users can read and leave messages and files.

**CD-ROM.** Information—text, graphics, sound and video—stored on a compact disk. ROM stands for "read only memory;" unlike floppy disks, information on CD-ROMs can be retrieved but not changed.

**Chat.** A "live" conversation between computer users. You type in your

message and send it; the other person reads it and responds immediately. (Differs from e-mail, where you send a message but the response is not usually instantaneous.)

**Coaxial cable.** Wire with the capacity to carry large amounts of information. Used in cable television systems. Other types of wires are copper—carries telephone signals into the home—and fiber optics (see below).

**Cyberspace.** The "universe" in which computer users travel.

**DBS.** Direct Broadcast Satellite, an emerging television delivery system where programs are sent from high-powered satellites directly to home satellite receivers or dishes.

**Digital.** A technology representing information as binary pulses, or bits. Digitized technology converts all information—voice, data, video—into bits. Digitization is spurring the convergence of telephones, computers, television and other media.

**Download.** Process of transferring files from another computer to your computer.

**E-mail.** Electronic mail—consists of messages you send to or receive from another computer user.

**Fiber Optics.** Advanced transmission system using "wires" made of glass to carry digitized information as pulses of light. Fiber optics transmit messages at high speeds and have more capacity for sending information (including high quality video and sound) than any other wire. As the nation is wired with fiber optics, Americans will have more channels and more interactive, or two-way,

transmissions.

**Forum.** Name given to individual discussion groups or bulletin boards on computers. Also called news-groups.

**Free-Net.** A community computer network providing access to Internet through computers in libraries and sometimes users' homes. Many free-nets also provide local computer services.

**Hard copy.** Information printed on a piece of paper.

**Hardware.** The computer's equipment—the console, the printer, the monitor, floppy disks—the things you can touch. Hardware needs software to tell it what to do.

**HDTV.** High definition television, an advanced form of TV broadcasting using digital transmission to enhance picture quality.

**Interactive.** Two-way communications; also, in computers and electronics, products giving users a great range of options or responses.

**Internet.** A global network of computer networks that started out serving the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the National Science Foundation and universities and research centers. In recent years, use by commercial users and individuals has been growing rapidly.

**Modem.** Short for modulator-demodulator, it's a device that lets computers send information—in the form of audio signals—over telephone lines to other modem-equipped computers.

**Mouse.** A hand-held control device that allows users to direct computer functions by moving the mouse around on a surface to control the actions of the

cursor on the computer screen.

**Multimedia.** Product or service using two or more media, including video, still pictures, sound, text or graphics.

**NII.** National Information Infrastructure, the name the Clinton administration uses for the information superhighway. The NII will consist of networks of electronic networks providing all Americans with access to information (voice, data and images) and enabling them to communicate with each other at anytime, from anywhere.

**On-line.** Connected, as when your computer is linked, usually over a telephone line with another computer.

**PC.** Personal computer, introduced by IBM in 1981.

**PCS.** Personal communications services, a new group of digital, wireless services, similar to cellular phones, that will offer seamless communications to subscribers as they move around.

**Peripherals.** Accessories or auxiliary equipment you buy to expand the features of your computer. Peripherals can include scanners and modems.

**Protocol.** Set of rules defining how computers communicate with each other.

**RAM.** Random Access Memory, temporary memory that stays in the computer until it is turned off.

**RBOCs.** Regional Bell Operating Companies (pronounced "are-box") are the seven companies providing local telephone service created by the 1984 divestiture of AT&T. Also known as the "Baby Bells."

**Real time.** Immediate; not delayed,

as when you receive an electronic message and respond right away.

**Spectrum.** The electromagnetic spectrum of frequencies; one small part of the spectrum is the radio band, used by radio, television, shortwave and satellite communications. Frequency is expressed in "megahertz," abbreviated as MHz.

**Software.** The programming that makes computer hardware function.

**Switching.** A system of moving information along different routes; switching is necessary for two-way communication. Telephone companies use advanced switching technology to route information in any direction the user wishes; contrasted with most cable television systems that are non-switched. The flow of information is restricted to one direction, from the cable system's head end, or beginning point, to cable subscribers' homes.

**Telecommuting.** using computers, modems, faxes and other technology to communicate from a home or remote office.

**Universal Service.** Concept that telephone service should be available to all Americans at an affordable cost. The Communications Act of 1934 sets universal service as a national public policy goal.

**Uplink.** Facility sending a signal up to a satellite.

**Video compression.** Method of squeezing large amounts of digital data so it can be sent through wires that lack the transmission capacity, or bandwidth, of fiber optics.

**Video-dialtone.** Two-way video networks to be constructed by telephone companies. The phone company builds and manages the equipment, and it is legally required

to sell access to others on a nondiscriminatory basis.

**Virtual Reality.** Computer-controlled simulation that seems so real it gives the user the impression of actually being involved in an event or activity.

**Wireless.** Transmission technologies where the sender and the receiver do not have to be physically linked by wires or cables. Broadcasting—radio and television—is a wireless technology that has been around for a long time. Newer wireless technologies include satellite and microwave communications. ■

This helpful guide appeared in the September/October 1994 issue of *The National Voter*, the magazine of the League of Women Voters. © 1994 League of Women Voters. Used with permission.

• PS •

"Much more effort is needed to understand consumer adaptations of new technologies— why, for example, the VCR and PC have achieved such remarkable penetration when the experts doubted that this would happen for decades, if ever. I am not sure that we have the research tools to do the kind of forecasting that will be critical to decision-making on the information superhighway. Indeed, it is likely we do not."

—Everette E. Dennis  
*Mapping and Understanding the Information Superhighway, 1994.*

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# STEVEN BRILL OF COURT TV: LIGHTS... CAMERA... JUSTICE?



Only three years old, COURT TV has proven to be essential viewing for anyone who wants to understand the American justice system...and around 18 million people now have access to this cable phenomenon. Behind it all is CEO Steven Brill—lawyer, writer, editor, journalist...and the ultimate new age entrepreneur. Here he talks to TVQ's special correspondent about his dedication to showing the public how the justice system really works.

**BY ARTHUR UNGER**

*Steven Brill*

**I** examined the wall decorations as I waited for Steven Brill on the blue velvet sofa in the outer offices of COURT TV on Third Ave. There were several framed print reviews: "If watching COURT TV were more addictive, it would be illegal.", "COURT TV—Watching the real life drama of justice," "Great drama . . . no scripts." There were photos of trial personalities from COURT TV's coverage—the Menendez brothers, Reginald Denny, Woody Allen etc. And a Columbia Press Association award.

It was startling to walk into COURT TV's sparsely decorated inner office. In the waiting room I had been watching the flow of blue-jeaned, tee-shirted young employees parade through, chatting away, their casual dress one wrinkle short of grunge. It was a generation shock to find Brill sitting

for the interview. I said an emphatic NO! since much more time had been originally scheduled. When he realized I was on the verge of cancelling the whole thing, he suggested that we might continue on the phone. Reluctantly, I agreed.

I must admit that in the back of my mind I was glad not to have to look into his eyes when I planned to ask him to comment on some of the negative things written about him . . . especially a rather harsh personal designation in *GQ*.

Brill seems to be a man with a mission. And, as with many mission-oriented people, he seems to take pains to erase humor from his persona, almost as if that might somehow denigrate the overall mission. He is dead serious about everything we talk about.

When I question him about drawing



formally at his desk in a crisp striped shirt with stiff white collar and cuffs, a big black cigar in his mouth, a rubber-ball worry-bead in his hand, his hair slicked back . . . a vision of '70s man inhabiting a '90s world.

He waved me into a cotton-ticking upholstered chair and proceeded to confirm what his assistant had told me on the way in . . . that the interview would have to be cut short since he had just returned from vacation and had many appointments scheduled. I proceeded since I had done many interviews in the past which were extended long past their scheduled end. But, when his secretary interrupted us to announce that his next appointment was waiting, he changed mode and asked me if I had enough

the line between entertainment and enlightenment, he looks angrily at me: "I'm bothered by people who try to draw a line between entertainment and news. I think news can be entertaining, depending on who you are. I mean, I am more entertained by watching *Nightline* than I am by watching Jay Leno. That's just who I am and that's what my taste is.

"On the other hand, I think at the end of the day that there's a basic difference between news and entertainment. The purpose of doing news is to inform people and to make a judgment about what's important. The purpose of entertainment often is simply to put on something that will be the most entertaining to the most people. So, when Ted Koppel does a

special *Nightline* from Rwanda, he's making a news judgment and he may not be making an entertainment judgment ... and that's what he ought to be doing and what he does very well.

"And that's what I like to think we do. On the other hand, Ted Koppel has to be cognizant of the fact that none of that does him any good if he doesn't get people to watch the show. Then, he's just talking to himself. So, he's got to make it appealing and enticing and intriguing. But, at the end of the day his mission is to enlighten people, not simply to entertain them."

When I suggest that the same is true of Steve Brill as well, he agrees.

"Absolutely. We don't do trials simply to entertain people. If that's all they do, then we probably won't do them."

When I ask which were the most popular trials on COURT TV, he refuses to answer, insisting questionably that "we don't do rating-by-rating analysis of trials for precisely the reason that I don't want our editorial staff to know the answer to that question."

"If we could maximize profits by doing mutilation trials, we still wouldn't do it. Or if we could maximize profits by doing prostitution trials, we wouldn't do them. We want to do a mix of trials that cover the news of what's going on in the legal system around the country."

Then, he goes on to say, inconsistent with his previous remark: "But the encouraging fact is that trials that I think are quite enlightening and quite important in terms of social issues have also been the trials that get our highest viewership."

He doesn't explain how, without rating analysis, he came to that conclusion.

I try to engage Brill in the adjective game which I often use in interviews to induce reactions from interviewees to printed descriptions of themselves. It is often a kind of verbal Rorschach test.

Here are his reactions ... or non-

reactions:

*The inspiration, brains and straw boss of COURT TV?*

"I don't want to respond."

*Confident and demanding?*

"I don't have any comment on that."

*Strong opinions about everything and not afraid to vent them in public?*

"I am just not going to react."

*Exploits human tragedy?*

"I'm not going to react."

*Not even to "tenacious and driven?" Remember these are all adjectives I gathered from news clippings.*

"No. I try to read everything but not let it bother me."

*Here's one you might want to react to. It's from Gentleman's Quarterly. "A brilliant asshole."*

"I am certainly not going to react to that."

Because of the exigencies of quarterly publication, after the Brill interview I try to update it as much as possible close to deadline time. So, I attend a panel discussion about TV and justice at the Museum of Television and Radio in which Brill appears as a participant. To my amazement, I see another side of Steven Brill— he is candid, forthcoming, poised, charming, dressed in stylish '90s mode. And he exhibits a finely-honed sense of humor. It is another Steven Brill.

So I call him again to check some facts and to update the interview directly. He is apologetic for our timing difficulties, warm and forthcoming. He makes no excuses for the glitch which got COURT TV in trouble at the Simpson trial. In the panel discussion he said that he could live with a one-hour delay instead of the seven and ten second delays that were then in existence. Is that still a possibility?

"A one-hour delay wouldn't make it any easier," he says. "In fact harder. It would not have prevented the mistake because there is the problem of rewinding. It's hard to look at the problem and say that there is just a systemic thing we need to do differ-

ently. It was a kind of Murphy's Law thing—everything that could go wrong, went wrong."

Does he feel that Judge Ito has been fair to COURT TV?

Brill doesn't hesitate a moment. "The judge has been more than fair to COURT TV. After all, we promised to give him a camera that wouldn't show any jurors. And then, through our own error, we showed an alternate juror for 8/10s of a second. The judge has been fairer to COURT TV than I would have been if I were him."

Following is the interview with Steven Brill in which he reacted with seeming dead-serious sincerity to questions about his mission and the mission of COURT TV. The phone conversations have been integrated into the overall interview and all answers are essentially verbatim although some change in chronology has been made in order to clarify statements.

**UNGER:** *COURT TV has been called the "13th juror." Is that the role you see COURT TV playing?*

**BRILL:** Not at all. It's to explain the process everybody else is watching and give them the sense of what's going on and whether it is fair or unfair, and how well the system works or doesn't work. And at the same time, trials tell people a story. It shows them a conflict and it shows them the resolution of a conflict. But it's a serious conflict. People are in serious trouble and they're in danger of losing money or their freedom. And it's the most significant kind of decision which our Government or our processes of Government makes every day. COURT TV shows that the system works, or causes a lot of confusion and a lot of misunderstanding. What COURT TV does is by showing it and explaining it, we help clear up some of that confusion and misunderstanding

**UNGER:** *So, how do you react to the difference of opinions about COURT*

*TV? Some people think it's great education about the justice system. But there are some who call it trivialization of the justice system. Dershowitz, for instance.*

**BRILL:** Dershowitz is simply someone who wants to be on COURT TV as a commentator. He has proposed that there should be cameras in the courts, but it ought to be done by government.

**UNGER:** *How do you react to that?*

**BRILL:** Well, if government is going to become our information service on how the government works, is government going to choose the trials that are covered? Is government going to choose the commentators to explain the trials and talk about whether the system is working or not? He's the guy who has spent most of his life doing very significant work—and good work—challenging the government in the form of challenging prosecutors when they want to take people's freedom away. And now he wants to put in the hands of the government the role of covering the courts in the United States? I don't think he really means that. What he really wants to do, is take it out of my hands because he doesn't like it in my hands. Or in anybody else's.

**UNGER:** *How do you feel about him?*

**BRILL:** I think he's a terrific guy, a good lawyer. And it's not totally in my hands. We have a channel that does this, but anybody else can have a channel that does this, too.

**UNGER:** *Along those lines, there is a romantic story of how COURT TV started. You were sitting in a taxi and ...?*

**BRILL:** Yeah, I was listening to a radio news report and heard a little confusing sound bite about a trial. We had by then, our legal publications which were quite successful and we were looking for ways to do other things and the notion of starting a legal magazine for people who aren't

lawyers—the lay people—was something I thought about a lot and rejected because I wasn't sure it would work. I suddenly got the idea that the way to reach non-lawyers about how the system really works would be television because you can now televise trials. And now, enough states allow channel coverage. With the advent of cable, there was a way to start that kind of a network that had that kind of single-purpose dedication.

**UNGER:** *Can we go a little bit into your background? What is your educational background, etc.? You were born in New York.*

**BRILL:** Born in Queens, New York. Went to college at Yale and law school at Yale.

**UNGER:** *Did you go through the New York City school system?*

**BRILL:** Through junior high school and then I got a scholarship to go to Deerfield Academy.

Then, when I was in my senior year in college, I volunteered in John Lindsay's campaign. Later I was one of eight or nine assistants to Mayor Lindsay in City Hall of New York, working almost full time in my senior year in college and the first half of my first year at law school. Then Lindsay retired from office and I went to work as a columnist—feature articles writer—for *New York Magazine*—my second and third year at Yale Law School. And when I was writing magazine articles, I got an idea to write a book about the Teamster's Union which I did and it was quite successful.

**UNGER:** *You were also at Esquire?*

**BRILL:** And then, the editor of *New York Magazine* left and became the editor of *Esquire* magazine and there was about a one or two year transition during which I wrote about the Teamsters, and then I started a law column in *Esquire* about lawyers, not about law per se. It was seen as being very

successful. In essence, I turned the column into the *American Lawyer Magazine* and raised money, started and expanded from that into regional legal newspapers around the country.

**UNGER:** *When you had the idea of COURT TV, you went to Steve Ross of Warner?*

**BRILL:** Right. He was someone I knew. I wouldn't say I knew him very well; I wouldn't call him a close friend—but I knew him fairly well and I knew he was very heavily involved in cable television and I knew he would be receptive to an idea like this and I guess he was.

**UNGER:** *And he found other partners, or did you find the others?*

**BRILL:** He and I did.

**UNGER:** *And the other partners are?*

**BRILL:** TCI, Cablevision and NBC.

**UNGER:** *Does NBC still take an active part?*

**BRILL:** NBC never took an active part in it.

**UNGER:** *Haven't I seen people from COURT TV on NBC News?*

**BRILL:** Yeah, oh yeah. No, I'm sorry. In that sense, we have an arrangement with *Dateline* where we co-produce shows with *Dateline* and some of our people appear on their shows. And we've had a close working relationship with NBC, but corporately, that's the NBC News Division and us. Corporately, at least NBC's a partner.

**UNGER:** *What is your title now?*

**BRILL:** I am president and CEO of American Lawyer Media and COURT TV. American Lawyer Media manages COURT TV and is a partner with COURT TV.

**UNGER:** *How active a role do you play in COURT TV's day-to-day operations?*

**BRILL:** Quite active in the sense that I have the final decision on all the trials we cover, which ones we cover, and I read the scripts of any prime-time shows that we do. I read the scripts of the syndicated show we do on broadcast TV and I edit it. I don't just read it, I edit it. We have a daily programming meeting that I preside over. I read and edit the scripts for any promotional, any on-air promos we do. I write most of the advertising we do, too.

**UNGER:** Are you still doing outside writing?

**BRILL:** Yeah. I was just working on an article when you walked in.

**UNGER:** Now, where is COURT TV allowed to cover?

**BRILL:** There are 47 states that allow cameras. There are a bunch of countries which also allow cameras. Of those 47 states, there are some of them that have very narrow rules. For example, there are cameras allowed for some Appeals Court arguments, but not for trials. In Philadelphia, you can cover some civil trials—out of Pennsylvania. In Florida, on the other hand, you can cover anything. In California, you can cover pretty much anything. In Texas, you can cover pretty much anything. In Michigan, anything. Ohio, anything.

**UNGER:** Have you done foreign trials?

**BRILL:** We've done a war crimes trial in Sarajevo. We did the trial of the colonels who murdered those Jesuit priests in San Salvador. We've done one murder trial in Moscow. We did a few days before they called it off. We've done either one or two hearings at the International World Court at The Hague. Now, we have prospects to do some other stuff.

**UNGER:** Usually, is it one camera? Is it somehow hidden?

**BRILL:** It's usually one camera. It's

usually in the open, but in the back of the courtroom. And the camera itself is really no bigger than the kind of camera that people use at home. It's on a tripod obviously, but there are not lights. We have microphones in various places: the witness box, the judge's desk. In the case of the Simpson trial, the camera was almost completely hidden and operated by remote control.

**UNGER:** Is there some limit on control when the mike is on or off?

**BRILL:** It varies from courtroom to courtroom, but we exercise the control, so that we don't hear anything or televise anything that is not meant for public record. So, we keep our sound system off so you can't overhear anything. We also operate on a time-delay device, and we have people manning it, so that if anything slips through, we will block it. For example, there are a lot of things that are in the public record that we block of our own initiative. If a witness is being sworn in with his address, we'll bleep it out.

We have two different 10-second delay devices. If you're watching COURT TV and if something is on CNN and something is on COURT TV, COURT TV has it 20 seconds later. This may change as the trial progresses.

**UNGER:** Are you in the Federal courts at all?

**BRILL:** Yeah, we're in—there are six districts in the Federal courts in the United States that allow cameras in civil trials under what has been a very successful experiment and we're looking on those courts all the time. New decisions on court cameras are due soon.

**UNGER:** How about the Supreme Court?

**BRILL:** No.

**UNGER:** Are you working on that?

**BRILL:** Yeah, but there's a limit on

what the work is that you can do. They are nine people who have the ability—appropriately so—to make their own rules.

**UNGER:** *How about beyond the courts? Do you do any coverage of Congressional hearings?*

**BRILL:** Only if they're judicial hearings. We did the confirmation hearing for Justice Steven Breyer, for example. We had announced that we were going to drop out of the O.J. Simpson hearing to cover Breyer, then the Breyer hearing ended before the O.J. Simpson hearing started. Obviously, Breyer is a lot more important.

**UNGER:** *And you would have done it despite the fact that Simpson was getting the numbers?*

**BRILL:** Oh, yes it was obviously more important. Well, how can you not? I mean, you're a news organization! We've covered other Supreme Court confirmation hearings. The first one was Thomas. That's how it all started. We've done all of those and if there was something like that, we would do it. But we cover the judicial branch and related legal issues. If we're not allowed in a trial and we think the trial is important enough, we'll even have a reporter there and we'll do bits from outside the courthouse the way normal television does. We did that with the World Trade Center bombing case.

**UNGER:** *How do you feel about C-SPAN. Do you feel they're competition in a way? Do they overlap what you do or you overlap what they do?*

**BRILL:** No. I think they may sometimes cover the Supreme Court's hearings, for example, but I don't think they really cover anything we cover or vice versa. And they do it differently. They operate in a different way. They basically put a camera there and don't try, as we do, to explain it to people. We have two full-time people writing that stuff all the time. They just watch

the cases, what the issues are, why it's important, who's testifying, what the role of that witness is in the grand scheme of the case, and in general, why you should watch it. And that changes all the time. And that takes a lot of work. There are lawyers writing that stuff. And then our anchor desk and our commentators. It makes for a different kind of television than C-SPAN.

**UNGER:** *It seems to me that there's some question whether C-SPAN can continue indefinitely without further funding.*

**BRILL:** Well, it loses money.

**UNGER:** *Will the cable systems keep it up?*

**BRILL:** Well, it's the cable companies that pay. They pay C-SPAN's deficits and C-SPAN gets a fee from the cable system, but the cable companies support it. It's a nonprofit organization. It's a public service by the cable companies.

**UNGER:** *How about the new York court situation? There's a trial period now, isn't there?*

**BRILL:** Oh, it's always on trial. This is now their third experiment. The legislators just like the idea of making the media come to beg.

**UNGER:** *I saw your COURT TV ad in The New York Times the other day and I was curious about the reference to a Citizens for COURT TV organization. Is that your own organization?*

**BRILL:** Yeah, We started it. We supply the staffing for it. It's an attempt to channel all the energy and good will we have from people watching to make sure they can keep watching it. They can watch it in more places by writing legislators and telling them that they think that open courtrooms are an important thing.

**UNGER:** *Is the greatest challenge now the legislators or cable systems?*

# COURT TV Programming Schedule

ET/PT	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	ET/PT
AM 6:00 / 3:00 AM	The System	Instant Justice	Trial Story	In Context with Arthur Miller	Verdicts	In Practice	In Practice	AM 6:00 / 3:00 AM
6:30 / 3:30	<b>Yesterday in Court</b> Highlights of the previous weekday's trial coverage					In Practice	In Practice	6:30 / 3:30
7:00 / 4:00								7:00 / 4:00
7:30 / 4:30	<b>Live Courtroom Trial Coverage</b> (Live or taped trials, Newsbreaks, Docket Reports, Open Line)					Washington Watch	In Context with Arthur Miller	7:30 / 4:30
8:00 / 5:00						Instant Justice	Instant Justice	8:00 / 5:00
8:30 / 5:30						Lock & Key	Lock & Key	8:30 / 5:30
9:00 / 6:00						Trial Week	Trial Week	9:00 / 6:00
9:30 / 6:30								9:30 / 6:30
10:00 / 7:00								10:00 / 7:00
10:30 / 7:30								10:30 / 7:30
11:00 / 8:00						Instant Justice	Verdicts	11:00 / 8:00
11:30 / 8:30						Lock & Key	Lock & Key	11:30 / 8:30
PM 12:00 / 9:00 AM						<b>Prime Time Justice</b>		
12:30 / 9:30	Lock & Key	Lock & Key	12:30 / 9:30					
1:00 / 10:00	The System	The System	1:00 / 10:00					
1:30 / 10:30	Trial Story	Trial Story	1:30 / 10:30					
2:00 / 11:00	Trial Story	Trial Story	2:00 / 11:00					
2:30 / 11:30			2:30 / 11:30					
PM 3:00 / 12:00 PM	Instant Justice	Verdicts	PM 3:00 / 12:00 PM					
3:30 / 12:30	Lock & Key	Lock & Key	3:30 / 12:30					
4:00 / 1:00	The System	The System	4:00 / 1:00					
4:30 / 1:30	Trial Story	Trial Story	4:30 / 1:30					
5:00 / 2:00	Trial Story	Trial Story	5:00 / 2:00					
5:30 / 2:30			5:30 / 2:30					
6:00 / 3:00	Instant Justice	Verdicts	6:00 / 3:00					
6:30 / 3:30	Lock & Key	Lock & Key	6:30 / 3:30					
7:00 / 4:00	The System	The System	7:00 / 4:00					
7:30 / 4:30	Trial Story	Trial Story	7:30 / 4:30					
8:00 / 5:00	Trial Story	Trial Story	8:00 / 5:00					
8:30 / 5:30			8:30 / 5:30					
9:00 / 6:00	Instant Justice	Verdicts	9:00 / 6:00					
9:30 / 6:30	Lock & Key	Lock & Key	9:30 / 6:30					
10:00 / 7:00	The System	The System	10:00 / 7:00					
10:30 / 7:30	Trial Story	Trial Story	10:30 / 7:30					
11:00 / 8:00	Trial Story	Trial Story	11:00 / 8:00					
11:30 / 8:30			11:30 / 8:30					
AM 12:00 / 9:00 PM	Instant Justice	Verdicts	AM 12:00 / 9:00 PM					
12:30 / 9:30	Lock & Key	Lock & Key	12:30 / 9:30					
1:00 / 10:00	The System	The System	1:00 / 10:00					
1:30 / 10:30	Trial Story	Trial Story	1:30 / 10:30					
2:00 / 11:00	Trial Story	Trial Story	2:00 / 11:00					
2:30 / 11:30			2:30 / 11:30					
AM 3:00 / 12:00 AM	<b>Prime Time Justice</b>					Instant Justice	Verdicts	AM 3:00 / 12:00 AM
3:30 / 12:30						Lock & Key	Lock & Key	3:30 / 12:30
4:00 / 1:00						The System	The System	4:00 / 1:00
4:30 / 1:30						Trial Story	Trial Story	4:30 / 1:30
5:00 / 2:00						Trial Story	Trial Story	5:00 / 2:00
5:30 / 2:30								5:30 / 2:30

*Prime Time Justice features highlights of the day's coverage.*

Are you having trouble getting into the cable systems?

**BRILL:** We're having trouble getting into the cable systems, but only because of capacity problems. We're the new kids on the block, relatively speaking. So, if you've got all your channels occupied and you have built up to where you have 64 channels or 48 channels, or whatever it is, there may not be room for us. As soon as there's room, we get on. It's hard to complain about it because we've been growing very rapidly. It's frustrating

that we're not on everywhere, but we're not supposed to be on everywhere. We're only three years old. It takes a while to penetrate. As for legislatures, the trend is that there are more and more places opening up. When we started, I think there were 43 states and now there are 47.

**UNGER:** Do you find on the whole that defense attorneys are more apt to want coverage than prosecutors?

**BRILL:** No. On the whole, the defense—at least, when we started—

defense lawyers were instinctively against COURT TV—against cameras in the courts—more publicity for their defendant. Not a good thing. Now, I think they've done a real change. They like COURT TV, especially defense lawyers who have been in trials where we have been there. So, where the defense bar was probably the one place in the legal community where you would find significant opposition to cameras, I think that's changed a lot.

**UNGER:** *How about pool coverage?*

**BRILL:** We are the pool coverage all the time. I mean, we have never not been.

**UNGER:** *Do you refuse anybody who wants that coverage?*

**BRILL:** Oh, no, not at all. We pay for it and we give it to everybody else.

**UNGER:** *How about your viewers? Who do you think are your main viewers right now and who are you aiming for?*

**BRILL:** You know, it a terrible admission, but I don't think I know. The majority of our viewers are people who watch daytime television, because our ratings are pretty consistently higher in daytime than in prime time. And then you have to ask, who watches daytime television? It skews a little bit female. In our case, it skews a little bit female and it skews a little bit upscale, higher—the typical COURT TV viewer is a relatively highly educated female.

**UNGER:** *In a way, you're competing with both the soap operas and the talk shows.*

**BRILL:** Yeah. Which I think is great! I like competing with that because if I get a viewer, what I'm doing is I'm taking someone away from stuff that is either fluff and not terribly beneficial, or stuff—in the case of some of the tabloid shows—that I think is just downright odious, and giving them something I think is intelligent televi-

sion.

**UNGER:** *How about your advertising? I know, at the beginning you were getting a lot of 800 number ads.*

**BRILL:** Yeah, but now we're slowly—and not even so slowly anymore—getting significant types of standard consumer advertising like American Home Products. That part's going very well. Our ad revenue will more than double this year from last year, and will more than double next year from this year.

**UNGER:** *How close to being in the black are you?*

**BRILL:** Suspiciously close at this point. We weren't supposed to be in the black until sometime in '96, but we'll probably get there a little bit sooner.

**UNGER:** *How much of a staff is there, just on COURT TV.*

**BRILL:** About 100 people.

**UNGER:** *How about the anchors? Are they moving away?*

**BRILL:** We've had very good fortune with that because all our anchors have done very well. They've stayed with us until their contracts were up. Or, if they haven't stayed with us, they've been hired away at much bigger salaries to go to what—at least for today—are bigger positions in broadcast networks. Cynthia MacFadden is ABC's legal correspondent. Jack Ford is now NBC's legal correspondent. We'll probably lose someone to CBS sooner or later. But Fred Graham is still with us.

**UNGER:** *You don't demand exclusivity?*

**BRILL:** Oh, sure, we do. While they're working for us. But when their contracts are up, they're free to move on.

**UNGER:** *From where do you cull your experts?*

**BRILL:** From the legal community.

What we insist on is that whoever our experts are they must have specific experience in the kind of trial that we do, who can explain the law and the procedure of that kind of trial.

**UNGER:** *Do you ever appear on camera yourself?*

**BRILL:** Yeah. Once in a while I do something called *Ask The Editor* where people just ask questions, challenge stuff about what we're doing. And I also get on at least three times a day with a taped message and ask people to call in if we've done anything wrong or factually wrong, or just made a bad judgment. And we run our corrections. We're the only network I know about that regularly runs corrections. And we run them always as prominently as the mistakes.

**UNGER:** *Have you made major errors?*

**BRILL:** No, but we might spell a name wrong, or we say someone was sentenced to six years when it was 16 years, something like that. Put it on the air and make a correction.

**UNGER:** *Wasn't there a situation in which a mistrial was called because a COURT TV reporter questioned the jury?*

**BRILL:** Yes. But not only was that not an on-air mistake, it had nothing to do with the camera. It had to do with a reporter, who was actually a reporter for, I think—a Texas paper—who did something really stupid. And as soon as we knew about it, we told the judge. No one would have ever known if we hadn't told the judge. And second, we broke into COURT TV with a news story about it. And third, we made sure that the newspaper in Texas did a major article about it. Which is the only reason the world knows about it. And the judge and the lawyers on both sides invited us to continue doing the case. I think that's actually a proud moment for us. I know we're going to

make mistakes. I know that occasionally people are going to screw up. But the real test is what you do once that happens.

**UNGER:** *Are you syndicating special things?*

**BRILL:** We've had a syndicated show for a year that's on FOX in New York at 11:30 on Sunday nights—a half hour weekly show that's sort of a summary of what's going on in the courts. That is the most successful, new weekly show launched last season.

**UNGER:** *And what's the title of the show?*

**BRILL:** It's called *COURT TV's Inside America's Courts*.

**UNGER:** *Will we see more of that kind of thing?*

**BRILL:** Yes. We may take that daily.

**UNGER:** *How many markets is COURT TV in now?*

**BRILL:** We're on about 700 cable systems in 49 states with more joining everyday. And I don't know that state that we're not on, actually.

**UNGER:** *How many people does COURT TV reach?*

**BRILL:** We now reach 18 million.

**UNGER:** *How about the costs to the cable systems or to the consumer?*

**BRILL:** *The consumer doesn't have a cost. The system pays us about 10 cents a month per subscriber.*

**UNGER:** *Does that vary with the size of the system?*

**BRILL:** Yeah. Or historically, if they came in sooner, the cost would have been less.

**UNGER:** *You could be described professionally several ways—writer, editor, entrepreneur, lawyer. Which one would you prefer?*

**BRILL:** I don't practice law. I never have.

**UNGER:** Which identification would you place as Number One? Writer, editor, entrepreneur?

**BRILL:** Journalist, which is writer and editor.

**UNGER:** How about the possibility of doing regional versions of *COURT TV*. Is that something in the works already or something possibly in the future?

**BRILL:** It's in the works.

**UNGER:** Do you have any specific areas that you're working on first?

**BRILL:** Not that I want to talk about.

**UNGER:** Must you get releases from everybody who appears on camera?

**BRILL:** Oh, no, not at all. Do you think we'd be able to get them?

**UNGER:** No, I don't. So, once you get the court okay, you can just go right ahead. What if someone like O.J. Simpson objects? What if the defendant objects?

**BRILL:** It depends on the state. In a couple of states, if the defendant objects, we can't be there. That basically means that we don't get into the trial because if the state has that rule, most defendants will object.

**UNGER:** Have you had many cases where you have not covered because of objections?

**BRILL:** Well, in states like Maryland—if the state says the defendant can object, we basically are shut out. And I think it's wrong. I don't think the defendant should own the right to his trial. It's almost as if you pay the defendant for the right to cover his trial. It's not the defendant's trial, it's the people's trial.

**UNGER:** You have said that you thought that the job of a journalist is not only to inform, but also lead. Do you still feel that way?

**BRILL:** Oh, yes. I think that the job of an editor is not simply to inform, but to lead. I think I meant editor more than

journalist. And what I mean by that is, an editor is supposed to decide not simply what people want to read, but what he or she thinks is important that they should read. Or in the case of television, see. And then figure out a way to present that in an interesting enough way so that they'll actually watch it. It's not simply doing focus groups and finding out that people want to see more fires on the 11 o'clock news, so let's show 'em fires. If lead poisoning is an important issue in a community, if you're running the 11 o'clock news, you ought to be able to figure out a way to make lead poisoning interesting.

**UNGER:** Is there a possibility of getting the Supreme Court on *COURT TV*?

**BRILL:** Oh, I think there very much is. I think that it is something that is likely to happen in the next few years.

**UNGER:** What are your hopes for the near future as against your hopes for the long-range future?

**BRILL:** Well, the near future is that we continue to do trials including the O.J. Simpson trial in a way that informs and leaves people with some kind of learning experience as opposed to simply taking advantage of the kind of surface high-profile interest that those trials generate.

**UNGER:** You did not cover the Heidi Fleiss trial. Why?

**BRILL:** Because I think that falls into the category of something that might be entertaining and titillating, but I don't think it's at all enlightening and it just ain't news.

**UNGER:** Some of the reports I've read say that *COURT TV* is now worth about \$500 million. How do you react to that number?

**BRILL:** I'm flattered. It would make my day if I could read the same report. It wouldn't surprise me. I think that we've in a relatively short time estab-

lished a brand name as being a way for non-lawyers to see and understand the legal process and be informed by it, entertained by it, intrigued by it, better able to understand and deal with all the headlines everywhere else.

**UNGER:** *There are three things that I have written down here as possible directions for COURT TV to go. I wonder if you would react to them? First of all, mock trials. How do you feel about mock trials?*

**BRILL:** Don't do it. We've done a couple of them in conjunction with the American Bar Association under very controlled circumstances, but I think it just dilutes the essence of who we are, which is we show people the real thing. And mock trials just aren't real.

**UNGER:** *How about the use of phone-ins—of the public phoning in?*

**BRILL:** You mean voting on a verdict?

**UNGER:** *Well, yes, that and then, just ordinary phone ins I've been watching today and there were a lot of phone-ins today.*

**BRILL:** Lots of phone-ins are for people to make comments and ask questions, because I think that's real good. I think that's part of a participatory education process that makes a lot of sense. We have walked away from any number of offers from phone companies and marketeers and everybody else to do, you know, vote—1-900 guilty or not guilty. You know, fry 'em or free 'em. And we're just not going to do that.

**UNGER:** *How about the use of dramatization?*

**BRILL:** Never would do it.

**UNGER:** *How do you feel about the overall court system in this country. Do you feel that overall it's fair in the long run?*

**BRILL:** I think our justice system is

the least unfair system anybody ever developed, but it has a lot of misfires. But by and large, it works a lot better than most people assume because most people are educated in other forms of mass media that don't show them the real process. They show them exaggerations or simplifications of the real process. You know, a cop show where the cops work real hard and catch the horrible guy and some judge lets them off. Or it's the tabloid headline that oversimplifies what's at stake or what the issue is, or even who won and who lost. I think it's by far the most misunderstood branch of our government, in part because it is probably the most complicated branch of our government—the hardest to understand.

**UNGER:** *What's the next big thing to happen for COURT TV? I mean, what would you like to see happen.*

**BRILL:** Well, we're going to be launching a whole variety of education products for school systems and on the various on-line services. I think that's going to have a broad impact where we basically use the credibility that I hope we've earned and the footage that I know we've recorded and attempt to use it really to let people sort of step back and think about this process and understand it better. We have a CD-ROM product using the Rodney King case that is now being used in a 7th-grade class at a private school in New York and was used in the evidence class at Harvard Law School—the exact same product. And we're very excited about that kind of stuff. We're doing a lot of that.

**UNGER:** *Now, I would like to name some names and have you react to them with a word or a line. Okay? Judge Wapner.*

**BRILL:** I've only see him once or twice on television. I don't really know much about him, except that it is a little appalling that more people recognize his name than recognize the

name of the Chief Justice. Not his fault, though.

**UNGER:** *How lawyers are portrayed in fiction television like L.A. Law and Law And Order.*

**BRILL:** There's too much black and white. There are the heroes and the villains, and as with most things in life, life is more complicated than that.

**UNGER:** *Robert Shapiro and Marcia Clark?*

**BRILL:** Well, they just seem to be two very effective lawyers.

**UNGER:** *How about the O.J. Simpson trial coverage by CNN and the networks.*

**BRILL:** I think the networks' coverage of the hearing was quite good.

**UNGER:** *How do you feel about tabloid TV? Like Hard Copy, Special Edition and Current Affair. What do you think of these shows?*

**BRILL:** I think they are the kinds of programs that test our devotion to free speech. The people that do them very often should be ashamed of themselves.

**UNGER:** *How about talk shows like Oprah, Geraldo and Donahue?*

**BRILL:** Don't watch them enough to comment.

**UNGER:** *But you would put them in a different category than tabloid TV?*

**BRILL:** It depends on what they're talking about.

**UNGER:** *How about Larry King?*

**BRILL:** I like Larry King.

**UNGER:** *And how about the network news anchors—Rather, Jennings and Brokaw?*

**BRILL:** They're all really good.

**UNGER:** *Are you married? Do you have a family?*

**BRILL:** Married and I have three children.

**UNGER:** *Would you say that you're married to your work? Do you have a private life?*

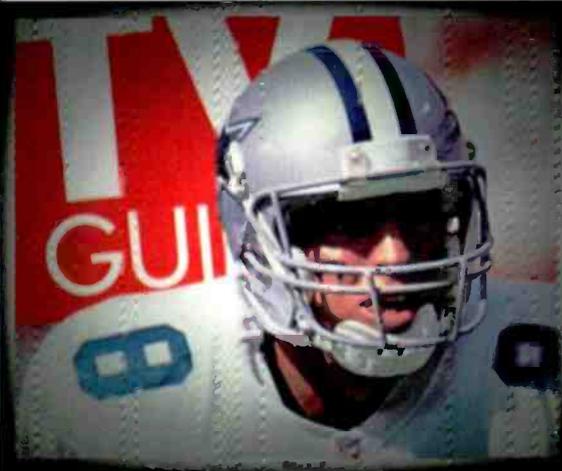
**BRILL:** Yes. Very much so, which is why I am hurrying through this conversation.

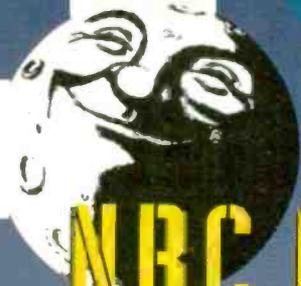
**UNGER:** *Okay, that was a very strong hint. Just one more. Are you a reasonably content person these days?*

**BRILL:** Yes. For reasons that have 20% to do with my work and 80% to do with my family. ■

In 17 years of covering television for *The Christian Science Monitor* Arthur Unger has won national recognition as one of the medium's most influential critics. He is also known for his revealing interviews with TV, stage and movie personalities. In addition to functioning now as TVQ's Special Correspondent, he is preparing a book of memoirs and organizing more than 1200 audio tapes of interviews for eventual donation to an academic archive.

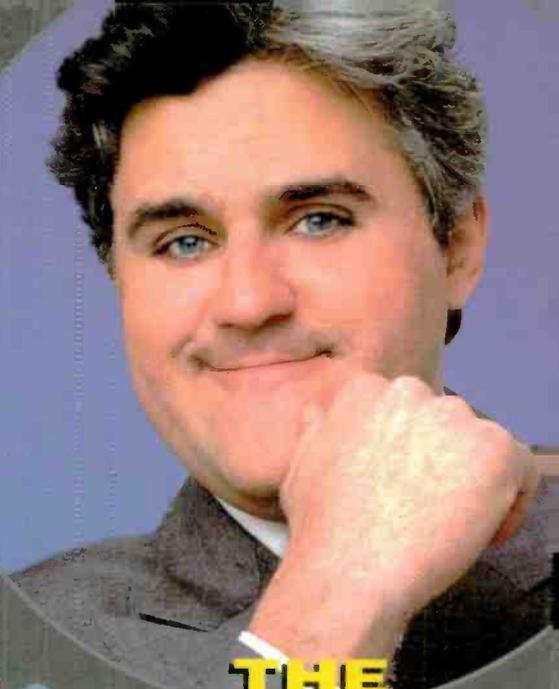
# STAY TUNED



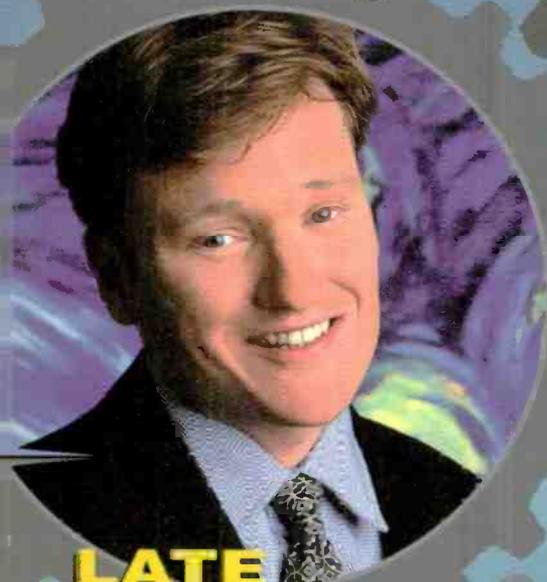


# NBC NIGHT SHIFT

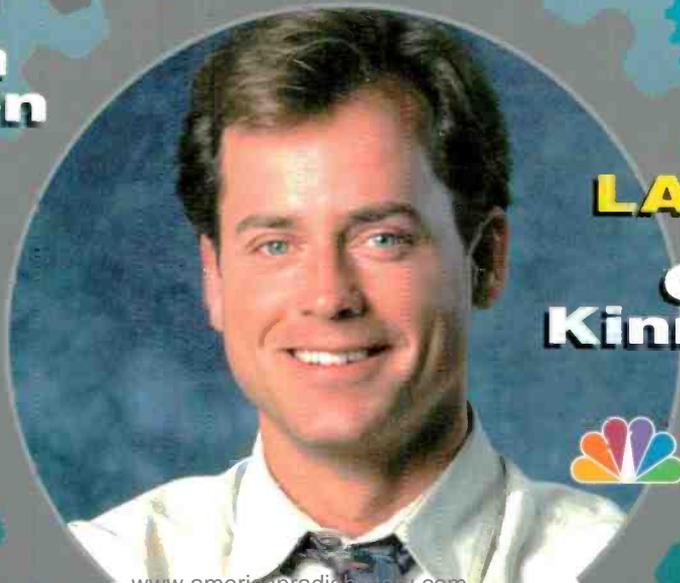
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**LATE  
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**LATER**  
With  
**Greg  
Kinnear**



# THE DIVERSITY CHALLENGE

In 1968, the Kerner Commission Report criticized TV, radio and newspapers for the lack of minorities in their newsrooms. How much progress has been made over the years, on the air and off? ...How is television doing in news, and in prime time shows?

**BY DAVID LOUIE**

**W**hether you use the term *diversity* or *multiculturalism* or some other buzzword, the issue of America's changing demographics has become an important work place reality. Many companies have turned to professional diversity training to help employers and employees adjust to the growing presence of minorities—Hispanic, African American, Asian American and Native American.

However, some 30 years after the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, there are signs that many segments of American society are undecided how to respond to the growing presence of minorities. In educational circles, a major California university has been criticized by some faculty members and students for not offering courses in Asian American studies. A local school district is reviewing the titles on its library shelves, concerned that it may not include a sufficient number of books written by or about minorities.

How is television doing in this multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic environment? Is television keeping

pace as demographics change, or is it lagging behind? Should the television industry even be concerned with diversity, on-air and off?

The answer to the last question is, of course, yes. The jury is still out on the first two questions.

Media watchdog groups point out, even in this era of "political correctness" or "P.C.," that network entertainment shows have demonstrated little sensitivity or progress in the portrayal of minorities. The Center for Media and Public Affairs recently issued a study indicating a drop in Latinos among performers on prime-time TV from three percent to one percent during the period spanning 1955 to the early 1990's. Other media critics point out that Asian Americans have suffered for decades from stereotypes. During the 1950's and continuing into the 1980's, for example, there was a string of Asian houseboys on such highly rated programs as *Bonanza* (Hop Sing), *Bachelor Father*, and *Dynasty*. Now as we approach the mid-90's, the ABC situation comedy, *All-American Girl*, is providing an opportunity for a predominantly Asian American cast and a writing staff that includes two Asian Americans either to break the cycle of stereotypes or to

perpetuate them. Like all programs of this type, the show's producers and writers must walk a fine line between having the audience laugh *at*, or laugh *with* the main characters.

However, let's examine another prominent feature of the television landscape—television news.

More than six thousand journalists converged on Atlanta last summer for a much heralded gathering of minority journalists, combining the annual conventions of the Asian American Journalists Association, the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Native American Journalists Association. The four organizations decided nearly seven years ago to hold a joint gathering, under the umbrella name of "Unity '94," to demonstrate their collective commitment to diversifying the nation's print and broadcast newsrooms.

**T**he gathering was a great success, demonstrating solidarity and common resolve, while erasing the mistaken notion that minorities are rivals and cannot work together as they vie for the same coveted jobs.

It was a remarkable gathering of minority pioneers—seasoned reporters and anchors now in their 30's to 50's, along with recent graduates seeking their first jobs, and a group of in-between journalists in pursuit of better jobs in larger markets. Major group owners, cable companies, stations and the network news divisions interviewed thousands of prospective employees at the convention's job fair.

"Unity '94" sent a loud, clear message to the communications industry that more must be done to hire, train and promote persons of color so that the news media reflect the growing diversity of the population. Four days of workshops, panel discussions and plenary sessions

hammered away at why society—and why journalism—would benefit from diversity. At one particularly stirring session, ABC News senior correspondent Carole Simpson had minority journalists pouring out their anger, their frustration and their hopes. Other panels focused on the low number of minority managers in the nation's newsrooms, and how today's coverage of minorities on TV perpetuates stereotypes.

Television management across the U.S. is not radically different from the executive ranks of other major industries. It is overwhelmingly white. With only a handful of African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics at the department head level, some "Unity '94" attendees maintained that the so-called glass ceiling has become brick.

Although many media employers embrace the goals and benefits of diversity, a common complaint among employees is that their careers suffer if they become too vocal, too critical or too supportive of organizations urging change and opportunities for more minorities. A similar concern existed at the genesis of the civil rights movement; but nearly 30 years later, the fear of reprisal persists among the first and second generation of minorities who have gotten through the door. A consistent worry is the perception that they bring with them a social agenda which might cloud their contributions to the newsroom.

The television and newspaper industries still don't seem to agree on how to embrace diversity.

In 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (now the Newspaper Association of America) set a goal that print newsroom staffing should be on par with the ethnic and racial composition of the nation by the year 2000. There is no corresponding goal by the electronic media.

Many television news directors in large markets, such as New York and San Francisco, recognize the value of hiring minority journalists because of

the multiracial composition of their audiences. Some have become major forces in their communities, not only as journalists but also as community leaders. Rigo Chacon, South Bay Bureau Chief for KGO-TV, is nothing short of a respected "legend" in San Jose where he raises money for scholarships and other important causes. The same can be said about Paul Berry, news anchor at WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C.

However, young journalists don't start out in Chicago or Philadelphia. They need a break—that first job—in places like Wichita and Jonesboro and Madison where there may not be the social, political or demographic pressure to hire minorities.

The role of minority journalists has been a long-standing debate. Are they the voice of the minority community within the newsroom? Do they pigeon-hole themselves if they only cover stories about the minority community? Can they be objective in their work while serving as advocates for minority news coverage?

There is no doubt that minority journalists bring to the editorial decision-making process a sensitivity to the issues facing a growing segment of the community. Minority journalists also possess cultural awareness and, in certain situations, unique language skills that help to break down communications barriers. Minority communities need advocates so that their voices are heard in the larger debate over local issues. Minority journalists are more likely to integrate those viewpoints into their coverage.

Initially, television was not a willing participant in the diversity arena. Stations in San Francisco, for example, did not begin to hire Asian American news reporters until the early 1970's and only after a civil rights organization, Chinese for Affirmative Action, threatened to file license challenges. That is why I was hired at KGO-TV in San Francisco in 1972, fresh out of Northwestern University's

Medill School of Journalism—the station's first on-air Asian American. For a short time, my name was supered in Chinese characters during stories to underscore my racial/ethnic heritage.

Only four years earlier, in the summer of 1968, Cleveland's Carl B. Stokes, the first major city African American mayor and currently a U.S. Ambassador, faced a civil disturbance—several nights of rioting in the racially mixed Glenville neighborhood. As mayor, he issued an order, banning all white police officers and all white re-

porters, in an effort to defuse the tension. Local news operations were hard-pressed to deploy black reporters to cover the disturbances.

Working as an intern at NBC-owned WKYC-TV that summer, I accompanied reporter Norma Quarles to the scene. Police were in a quandary at the checkpoint whether I should be allowed in or not. After a brief debate, I was permitted into the riot zone. Score one for diversity at a time when Asian Americans in TV newsrooms were a rarity.

The news media, however, had come under sharp attack in the 1968 report by the Kerner Commission,

*Young journalists don't start out in Chicago or Philadelphia. They need a break—that first job—in places like Wichita and Jonesboro and Madison where there may not be the social, political or demographic pressure to hire minorities.*

which was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in response to inner-city rioting in Watts and other areas. The report pointed out the shortcomings of television, radio and newspapers in covering the reasons for urban discontent—and for their hiring practices. In criticizing the near-absence of minority news coverage, the Kerner Commission pointed out the lack of minorities in the newsroom. "The journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes," the report said.

Just how much progress has been made over the years? In 1994, the Federal Communications Commission surprised the broadcast industry by setting new equal employment opportunity rules and then hitting the stations with \$800,000 in fines for alleged lapses in documenting their minority outreach efforts. The FCC later backed off. The National Commission

on Civil Rights, meantime, heard public testimony from women and minorities about obstacles impeding their careers and upward mobility. Statistically, the broadcast work force today is about 13 % minority, but by the turn of the century, the U.S. population will be about 30 % minority. The gap is significant.

The call for diversity becomes particularly important as demographics change because predominantly white

newsrooms will be programming to increasingly non-white audiences, especially in states such as Florida, New York, Texas and California, largely because of immigration from Asia and Latin America. TV networks, stations and cable need to reach out and attract

their growing audience segments if they are to succeed. It becomes a savvy marketing decision to have anchors and other on-air personnel with whom the viewers can identify and relate.

However, just having a minority journalist working as a reporter, anchor, producer or photographer doesn't guarantee success. There can be danger in assuming the act of inclusiveness will generate universal praise.

Diversity requires managing. Just as affirmative action 25 years ago created resentment because of quotas, today there can be similar resentment, along with misunderstanding, among existing staff when more minorities are hired.

Stations have formed committees to address racial conflict internally and to discuss coverage of racial issues, although sometimes as a response to community pressure or government agencies.

Last year, for example, when several Los Angeles TV stations became the subject of a federal investigation into alleged racism and sexism in the newsroom, a minority advisory panel was created among

*The call for diversity becomes particularly important as demographics change because predominantly white newsrooms will be programming to increasingly non-white audiences—especially in states such as Florida, New York, Texas and California, largely because of immigration from Asia and Latin America. TV Networks, stations and cable need to reach out and attract these growing audience segments.*

news personnel at one station. On the other hand, the news staff at a San Francisco TV station created a similar committee, but with a different purpose: to improve its coverage. Sensitizing editorial decision-makers can be an important role of minority staff members. Even the most experienced news manager can be guilty of narrow vision after following the same, well-worn path day after day, year after year.

**A**s the number of white males in the work force shrinks, there can be a lingering resentment that diversity remains a quota-driven process. Instead of it being "Us vs. Them," Dinah Eng, national president of the Asian American Journalists Association, believes diversity is about meeting human needs.

"The need to be valued and accepted for who we are stays with us no matter where we go in life," she wrote in her column for the Gannett News Service recently. "But unless we decide to leave our fears, regrets and unforgiven anger behind, that baggage comes with us, too." Animosity and resentment eat away at any efforts to build teamwork within the organization.

Similarly, the consumers of television must be prepared for change as well.

It wasn't that many years ago that a news executive warned me that pairing a black man with a white woman as news anchors was inadvisable for fear of the reaction from viewers. Yet, some of the most successful anchor teams today feature just such a combination.

Taking that first step once took courage for some station executives. When Larry Israel joined Post-Newsweek Stations as president in 1969, he had their Washington, D.C. station WTOP-TV promote reporter Max Robinson to co-anchor the

station's evening newscasts with a white. Putting an African American into such a highly visible position did evoke a response. For weeks, Israel, who had a listed home telephone number, received a flood of obscene and threatening phone calls to himself and his family. But after a few months, the hostilities subsided, and Robinson in the anchor chair was a success.

The makeup of broadcast newsrooms is changing. According to over 20 years of tracking by Professor Vernon Stone at the University of Missouri, 55% of today's TV news work force is composed of white men—down from 77% in 1972. Minorities numbered nearly 21% at that time. Today, that figure stands at 18.6%. Minorities lost ground to white women, who made up 10.7% of the work force 20 years ago, compared to 27% today.

Picture, if you will, any meeting of television producers, anywhere. In a diverse work setting, there should be a place at the table for a broad range of people with wide-ranging backgrounds, experiences and talents. That's all anyone can ask. Reaching out to find those individuals, making them welcome, fostering their participation, and valuing their contributions are the hallmark of diversity. ■

David Louis, NATAS Chairman of the Board, began his on-air career at age five with weekly appearances on a public affairs program on Cleveland's WKYC-TV. He has worked 23 years for the ABC-owned Television Stations: Assignment editor/writer at WLS-TV, Chicago. Assistant News Director at WXYZ-TV, Detroit, and currently, business reporter and fill-in anchor at KGO-TV, San Francisco. When named Assistant News Director at WXYZ-TV in 1977, he became the first Asian American to break into TV news management.

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 CATHEDRAL PKWY BROOME ST BROOKSIDE AVE W 59 ST LEROY ST W 34 ST  
 HOUSTON ST E 14 ST CLINTON ST DEY ST E 9 ST E 31 ST W THAMES ST  
 PEARL ST LENOX AVE ELK ST W 22 ST RIVERDALE AVE E 57 ST BANK ST  
 MADISON AVE WHITEHALL ST W 26 ST ALLEN ST STORY AVE RAILROAD AV  
 W 104 ST W 13 ST E 61 ST WASHINGTON ST E 10 ST PERRY ST E 64 ST  
 KINGS HWY WOOSTER ST E 72 ST E 55 ST VANDERBILT AVE PELHAM PKWY  
 BEDFORD ST 3 AVE WALL ST ASTOR PL ST JAMES PL MOTT ST W 43 ST  
 E 11 ST GREAT JONES ST MULBERRY ST E 49 ST AMSTERDAM AVE SUTTON PL  
 LEXINGTON AVE E 70 ST 11 AVE GRAND ST DELANCEY ST 8 AVE E 29 ST  
 W 63 ST FORDHAM RD LAGUARDIA PL UTOPIA PKWY E 90 ST QUEENS BLVD  
 FORSYTH ST MACDOUGAL ST E 78 ST DUANE ST W 100 ST WADSWORTH AVE  
 BLEECKER ST E 102 ST CROSBY ST E 19 ST W 91 ST SPRING ST 12 AVE  
 W 10 ST 1 AVE E 52 ST W 69 ST LAFAYETTE ST 9 AVE GANSEVOORT ST  
 WEST ST W 86 ST E 84 ST GROVE ST 2 AVE E 68 ST W 42 ST AVE A  
 FLATBUSH AVE KENMARE ST CHRISTOPHER ST E 97 ST E 125 ST VARICK ST  
 PARK AVE E 48 ST PRINCE ST W 97 ST RIVERSIDE DR E 50 ST E 25 ST  
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# STAGING THE SOAPS

Two veteran Soap Opera directors Larry Auerbach and David Pressman look back on four decades of directing daytime drama. They say sitcom and Movie directors still have an elitist attitude about daytime.

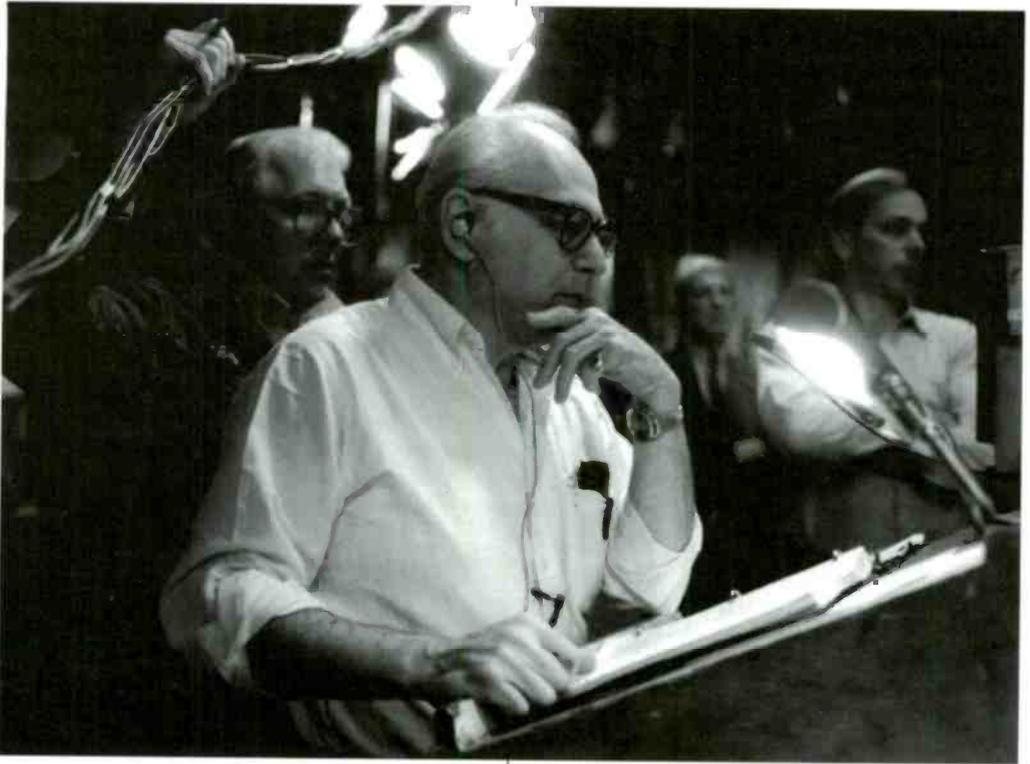
**BY BRIAN ROSE**

**D**irectors of TV soap operas may be the hardest working directors in the entertainment industry. Unlike their counterparts in film or theater, their activities are not limited to one or two projects a year, with lots of long planning and down time in between. Even the directors of prime-time television, whom they most closely resemble, still lead a life of comparative ease, with a schedule measured by, at most, a little more than a dozen hours of actual on-air production per season, mixed with repeats and months off for summer vacation.

Until recently, soap opera directors rarely heard of long vacations or extended periods for reflection. They were simply too busy, staging up to a dozen hours per month of programs

that never take off for the summer or end up as repeats half the year. Their working schedule alone, with days often running from 7 a.m. to late at night, in addition to extensive preproduction meetings and hours of preparatory script-reading and blocking, would be enough to defeat all but the heartiest veterans of stage or screen.

Yet, for all the demands of directing daytime drama, its practitioners are probably accorded the least respect of any comparable directors in New York or Hollywood. Part of this undoubtedly has to do with the genre they serve. Disparaged for decades as the respite of bored housewives, soap operas continue to be regarded as the low-rent district of television drama. Despite the format's increase in production values, its growing prominence and appeal (witness the large prime-time viewership for the annual Daytime Emmy Awards), and the



*Larry Auerbach in the control room directing One Life To Live.*

renewed interest in academics (who now hold the genre in surprisingly high esteem), those who toil behind the scenes still tend to be viewed, in the words of Larry Auerbach, as "hacks."

Directors of daytime drama are also relegated to a lower level of consideration because of the sheer quantity and profusion of their work. By being part of the regular daily TV schedule, new installments of their programs must be produced Monday through Friday, fifty-two weeks a year—a feat of abundance unequaled by any other dramatic format in history. As a result, the often factory-like methods required of soap opera production make it difficult to look at daytime directors in the same way we evaluate the individualistic efforts of "auteurs" in film or some prime-time TV.

Still, there is an artistry to direction of daytime serials that merits serious

attention. As this interview with Larry Auerbach and David Pressman reveals, staging daytime drama calls for a tremendous variety of skills and talents. The primary qualification is the ability to shape and guide performances under the fiercest of time constraints. Because of the genre's extended storylines and long-term character relationships, soap opera directors play a vital role in helping the actors understand and develop their roles while maintaining an essential character stability that is often forgotten by ever-changing regimes of writers and producers.

**D**aytime directors must also be well-schooled in all the technical aspects of television production, since so much of the program is filtered through their eyes. Soap operas have no director of photography; instead the lighting and camera work are guided by the direc-

tor's feelings about the scene. So too is the editing and blocking, which is usually fashioned by the director as he reads the script for a given episode a few weeks in advance.

Though it is true that these directors are rarely distinguished by a unique style or visual approach—keeping the show uniform from day-to-day and director-to-director generally precludes such overt “signatures”—their craftsmanship comes across more in creating dynamic performances and sustaining a high level of dramatic energy. It is here, in the struggle to produce an hour of lively and compelling new drama every weekday, that skilled daytime directors can truly make a difference.

With a combined seventy years of soap opera experience between them, the two men interviewed for this article have helped define the standards of resourceful daytime directing. Both Larry Auerbach and David Pressman came to soap operas with backgrounds in theater and live television, two environments which provided invaluable training for their work in daytime TV.

Larry Auerbach studied drama at Northwestern University and after graduation moved to directing positions at NBC's network radio operations in Chicago. In 1949, he switched to television, where he worked on a number of the innovative live shows originating from Chicago. A few years later he moved to New York and quickly found a job as the first director of one of the earliest television soap operas, CBS's *Love of Life*. Originally broadcast live for fifteen minutes a day, Auerbach was the program's sole

director for more than fifteen years, and he remained with the show until it went off the air in 1980. After directing *All My Children* from 1980-1983, he spent the next nine years at *One Life to Live*. Since 1991, he has directed episodes of *As the World Turns* and *Another World*, as well as a new soap opera, *Family Passions*, produced in Toronto and scheduled for broadcast in both Germany and Canada.



David Pressman

David Pressman started out an actor, graduating from the Neighborhood Playhouse before directing plays in Toronto from 1936-38. After serving in World War II, he became a charter member of the Actors Studio in 1947, and one of the directors of their live TV program, in addition to directing several other New York-based live dramatic shows. Unable to work in television for more than a decade because of blacklisting, he directed several plays on Broadway as well as serving as Chairman of the Acting Department at Boston University and heading the Neighborhood Playhouse.

He returned to television in 1964, directing cultural programs for David Susskind. *The Nurses* was his first soap opera, which he began directing in 1966. After the show's cancellation in 1967, he spent two years on *Another World*, before moving to *One Life to Live*, where he has been a staff director since 1969. He has also directed prime-time episodes of *The Defenders*, *The Nurses*, *NYPD*, and *The Hallmark Hall of Fame*, as well as continuing his theatrical work in New York and regional theater.

Here, Larry Auerbach and David Pressman discuss the changes in soap opera production over the last four

decades and the challenges in directing daytime drama.

**BRIAN ROSE:** Larry, you started out directing radio programs in Chicago and then made the switch to TV directing. What were some of the changes you encountered?

**LARRY AUERBACH:** It was certainly a learning experience. You had to think about the visual elements, rather than just the oral. I think it was certainly very helpful to have had the radio experience, because now when I go into a television control room—I'm very much aware of the audio and sound effects. The audio guys I work with are grateful, since unlike a lot of directors I pay attention to them and don't find them a nuisance.

Obviously, TV directing was much more complicated and difficult, with many more things to consider. I learned all about timing from radio which was so important in the early days of television because you couldn't cut; there was no editing. You had to get on and get off.

**ROSE:** What was it like to learn to direct three cameras live?

**AUERBACH:** The first couple of months I was in the control room I didn't see anything. It was just panic time. It was either sink or swim. They just threw you in, and nobody knew any better, thank God. I didn't see any boom shadows back then, though today sometimes they call me "eagle eye."

Working in live television was tremendous preparation for working with taped television. Directors who started with live TV like David and I did, do all the editing in our heads before we ever get in the control room.

Of course, back then you didn't have the kind of supervision that you have today. You didn't have people sitting in the control room behind you.

**ROSE:** So directors back then had much more creative power?

**AUERBACH:** Much more power and much more creative power. There was never a producer in the control room in TV back in the days of live TV in Chicago.

**ROSE:** How did you move to directing TV soap operas?

**AUERBACH:** I came to New York in the summer of 1951, taking a leave of absence to look after my father, who was very ill. I began looking for work in the city without much success. After about six weeks, Chicago called and said either you have to come back or quit. At that time, Dan Petrie suggested that I contact a guy I had worked with back in Chicago, Roy Winsor, who was now head of radio and TV for the Biow advertising agency.

**ROSE:** What was your knowledge of soap operas at this point?

**AUERBACH:** Except for sitting in the control room on the radio side and listening to all those soaps, zilch. There weren't any on TV to be found, or if there were, they were ill-fated and weren't really soap operas, but more continuing family stories. Not what I call soap operas.

I went to see Roy and he thought maybe I could do the pilot on his new CBS show *Love of Life*. The producer Carl Green interviewed me, but decided not to use me. They went though two more directors, but Roy still wasn't satisfied. Finally he called me up and said "can you start Monday?", and this was Thursday. I said sure. I went back to Chicago, closed up my apartment, got my car shipped here, and was ready to start.

I reported to the Biow Company at 51st and Madison, which at that time was a very important advertising

agency, with accounts from Procter & Gamble, Seagrams, and American Home Products. Biow was producing *Love of Life* for American Home, which owned the show, and was its sole sponsor at first—a situation which doesn't exist any more except for Procter and Gamble. I met my associate director, who sat there with a feather boa around her neck and a pile of cigarettes in the ashtray in front of her—and it was Glory Monty. She worked with me for three years, until Roy got *The Secret Storm* started, and he hired her to direct it.

**ROSE:** What were your first impressions of this completely new environment?

**AUERBACH:** The casting had already been done for the most part, but in those days directors used to do the casting, along with the executive producer, who was Roy Winsor. We had a line producer, but there were not producers in the control room. The producers stayed, for the most part, in the office and watched the show on the air. We were live, for fifteen minutes a day, in black and white. The producer's job was to work with the writer, primarily on continuity issues, and watch the budget.

**ROSE:** What was your day like?

**AUERBACH:** In the morning, starting about 7:30, we had an hour of dry rehearsal, in a rehearsal hall. Then at 9:30 we brought the cameras in to follow what we had created with the actors. A dress rehearsal followed, and then a take. After the show went off the air at 12:30, we would go have lunch for an hour. We then had three hours of rehearsal in the afternoon, which allowed us to block organically, directly from what the actors were saying and doing. It was in a rehearsal hall, with chairs marking out the sets. You maybe had a P.A. there, though I usually didn't since I

timed everything myself. Then I would go to the office for an hour or so. Next, I would go home and block my script for the next day. I directed all five episodes a week for a long time.

The three hours of rehearsal in the afternoon was a luxury, giving us almost as much time to plan next day's half-hour show as we're now given to do a one-hour program.

**ROSE:** What new challenges did you face as a director doing life daytime drama?

**AUERBACH:** They weren't really that dramatic. It was somewhat different in having to work with the same group of actors day after day and establish the relationships with them that were required, but that's a situation that continues even up to this day.

Like live TV and radio, there was no editing back then on *Love of Life*. If there was an error, you had to live with the error.

**ROSE:** And were there any?

**AUERBACH:** Oh, sure, and plenty of close calls. American Home Products was the penny-pinching outfit of all time. We had a very low budget and we were limited to twenty-five appearances a week, which included principals and extras and everything else. So, for example, if you had six people on today, you could only have four people on tomorrow, and so forth.

One day I was doing a show with Petty MacKay, Dick Coogan, Hildy Parks, and one other actor whose name I forgot. Hildy was single at the time and she said to me after rehearsal one afternoon "I'm going down to Washington to have dinner with Justice Douglas." She was quite the lady about town., I said to her, for God's sake, if the weather's bad, take the last train back, will you please.

Well, in the evening, the weather was fine, but next morning when she got up, it was terrible fog. A friend of

hers called me from Washington and said "the golden girl will not be there on time. She'll be there in time for dress." Then I got another call, "she won't be there for dress, but she'll be there for air." She never showed up on time, so we just had to take it. There was nothing else I could do.

So I sat the cast down at a coffee table, and we wrote new lines to explain what she was going to be talking about. There were no teleprompters back then, so the script was written on little cards hidden by plates on a coffee table.

**ROSE:** What was it like to direct a soap under the time pressure of live TV? Were you monitoring the time or was it an associate director?

**AUERBACH:** No, we had a script girl, now called a P.A., who would tell me, and then I would send word out to the stage manager to signal to the cast to either speed up or slow down. Plus you had credits at the end so that you had a little flexibility.

And you've got to remember that we had four live commercials to do, two-thirty second spots and two one minute, which I also had to direct. Plus I was the only director on staff for years, up until the time they started shooting *Love of Life* in color.

Roy Winsor, who was producing the show, wanted to give me a raise, but American Home wouldn't go for it, so he went to them saying color was much more difficult to do, and he'd need to hire an additional director. They agreed to let someone come in to work one day a week, but they refused to give me an increase. So I began doing a four-day, a week schedule. A few years later, after CBS had taken over the show, I went down to three-a-week schedule, which I continued until the show went off the air in 1980.

When I switched to *All My Children*, there were three directors on staff, and we averaged about one-and-a-half shows a week. Now on *As the World*

*Turns*, there are five directors on a regular basis.

**ROSE:** Since you were the sole director on *Love of Life* for close to fifteen years, did you try to develop a distinctive style so that when someone turned on the program they would say, "That's definitely Auerbach's work"?

**AUERBACH:** The medium itself, for the most part, required a certain way of doing things, particularly in terms of soap operas. It's show with a lot of close-ups, at least it was back then because the home sets were so much smaller. We wanted to concentrate attention on the characters, plus the fact we didn't have a lot of scenery in those days. We were limited in the amount of movement we could do, the equipment wasn't as flexible, the studios were smaller.

**ROSE:** So technical factors have as much to do with shaping what you did as a director as anything else?

**AUERBACH:** They had a lot to do with it, and they still do.

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**ROSE:** David, you'd been a director of live primetime drama for a decade before you moved to soaps. What lessons were you able to bring from the experience?

**DAVID PRESSMAN:** I never worked with live soap operas, but my first soap opera *The Nurses* in 1966, was done very much like a live show. We were given access to the video tape recorders at the network's engineering center at 2 or 3 p.m. and were given only a half hour. That was it. We did the show directly to tape, with no edits or retakes.

Sometimes, for special occasions, like a dream sequence, we would have pre-tapes. We would get the

machines at a special time at twelve noon, say, and that would be rolled into the show.

**ROSE:** What special challenges did soaps present to you as a director?

**PRESSMAN:** There was the pressure of having to do it rapidly and get it done in one day. It was a hard adaptation for me at the beginning, especially since I was directing all five episodes a week. There was also the challenge of getting the acting up to par.

**ROSE:** Did you find there was a difference in directing soap opera actors compared to actors in other formats and media?

**PRESSMAN:** Most of the actors working on soaps came from the theater or from film. The technologies might be different, but acting is acting. There's no such thing as special soap opera actors.

**ROSE:** For both of you . . . was acting always your priority as a director?

**AUERBACH:** It always was and always should be.

**PRESSMAN:** What's missing now is that you really should be able to do a show with only two or three very good performers, a good script, and just black velour for the backdrop.

**AUERBACH:** Which was exactly the way we originally did it back in the 1950s. We had black velour and wainscoting about two feet high to delineate one area from another. We would put a desk or couch in front of it, and we would hang pictures from the air on trick line.

**PRESSMAN:** And it would look exactly like it was walls. Sets for a long time were minimal. Sam Leve, a wonderful stage designer was on the

CBS staff for many years, and he designed a circular cyc that went around the entire studio.

**AUERBACH:** We didn't use a cyc; we used actual black velour flats. The basic reason was they didn't want to spend the money for sets. We put up grey wainscoting to help hide the floor, and a black flat, and then all you needed was set decoration.

**PRESSMAN:** One of the things that needs to be mentioned is the demanding technical nature of soap opera directing. During camera blocking, which followed the dry rehearsal in the morning, and usually took about an hour-and-a-half or two hours, we would have to concentrate all of our energies on the technical side. You have to solve all the problems of where the camera goes—is it a one-shot, a two-shot, a dolly or a pan? The cameras have to be placed to avoid the boom microphones and their shadows. The actors are there only to verify their position, as they run their lines.

After the taping, we went over to the Hotel Empire to rehearse next day's show from about 3 to 5 p.m. We would stage and block everything, then I would mark my camera shots on the script. I would have my script for my associate director, Kenny Rockefeller, and he would come in early the next morning to get to work lining up the shots. The cast also had time for another rehearsal the day of the taping.

**ROSE:** In essence, your job was split in two. You had to work creatively with the actors, and then suddenly shift gears to work with the cameras.

**PRESSMAN:** You're staging in relation to the camera, and how the actor fits in. As you're blocking the show at home, you look at each scene in terms of its emotion and what you're going to do with the actors. Will you have them go to the phone or walk to the door?

When will she act upset or happy?  
This is usually all our invention.

**AUERBACH:** Then you have an actor come in to rehearsal and say, "but I don't think I should sit down here." So then you have to figure out how are you going to deal with that mechanically, technically, or what reason can I give him or her for sitting at that point.

**PRESSMAN:** If it's an emotional reason, they'll generally accept it. Or you'll explain that you'll have to change all the shots. You are staging, you are acting teacher, you are acting coach, and you are an editor. When the show is being taped, the director has edited 98% of the show in his or her head, usually on paper the day before. Of course, you make changes as you go along, as you see the set in the morning and discover that something just may not work, the furniture has to be moved and so on.

**ROSE:** What did you feel your reputation was like as a director of soap operas? Were you regarded as low director on the totem pole?

**AUERBACH:** Absolutely. No question about it, and it still exists. It's still an elitist thing in the way other directors and people in the industry look down on us.

**PRESSMAN:** When I think of the way sitcom directors work and the hours they work and the salaries they're paid, and compare it to ours, it's ridiculous.

**ROSE:** And this was true right from the beginning—you were slighted because you were working in daytime.

**AUERBACH:** Yes, we were seen as hacks.

**PRESSMAN:** I've always felt that any daytime director who has been on

a show at least a year can go and do a film tomorrow. Any guy who's only been doing film could not come in and do a soap.

**ROSE:** What skills did you have to have as a soap opera director that are different than directing other formats?

**AUERBACH:** The ability to deal with problems without bull. Just get it done!

**PRESSMAN:** Plus the special relationship one has with actors.

**ROSE:** How do you approach acting for soap operas?

**AUERBACH:** That depends on the actor. With some, you have to approach everything as organic and as part of the method. With others you have just to tell them where to stand and what to say and which way to turn. You can't generalize about it. The generalization is you have to know who you're dealing with.

**PRESSMAN:** I come mainly from the theater, and was a teacher of acting for years. It's my primary emphasis. Forget the special effects, and fires and floods they ask us to do now. Acting is the focus.

**ROSE:** Do you think you're given enough time to shape performances?

**PRESSMAN:** Never enough time, and we often have to deal with actors cruelly.

**AUERBACH:** And somewhere there are line producers who don't understand the first thing about acting, so all of their emphasis goes to the mechanics of things, or they ask for performance aspects that simply can't be done.

**ROSE:** Such as?

**AUERBACH:** They want emotional transitions that aren't possible for a performer to achieve without just doing it arbitrarily. That's not the way you deal with most actors. Or you can't go to an actor after a dress rehearsal and say "No, that's not what we want. THAT 's what we want." Acting is a tapestry and if you pull one thread out, the whole thing goes to pieces.

**ROSE:** In what ways do these conditions force you to treat actors "cruelly?"

**PRESSMAN:** One of the problems is that producers often cast improperly, because they look for the body and not necessarily for the talent. Very often, we'll do the auditions as requested by the producer, and we'll have four or five people. We'll select one, and say "There's your actor." And they'll respond, "yeah, but we want the hunk." And they'll get the hunk, and a month into the show, they'll find out the guy can't act.

One time we hired an actress, and she was forced to do an incredibly amount of emotional stuff, discovering she wasn't dead and so forth. Scene after scene she had to be crying, but she just wasn't up to it. I had to go out and say, "it's your job on the line, come on and do it." And I scared her, using the tactics of my position, to almost force it out of her. She was now crying all the time, scared of her job—but now the performance came out very well.

Then the producer watched the take and said, "Why didn't you do it like you did the first day?" They simply don't understand. They think a performance is just something an actor can crank out because it's their job. An actor is not a machine. You don't know how much the actors depend on the director to help them out in terms of creative guidance.

**ROSE:** What happened to your sched-

ule when soaps went from a half-hour to an hour?

**PRESSMAN:** To me it was like working nine times harder.

**AUERBACH:** Our day now basically goes as follows. Usually you go in and block the actors in a dry rehearsal. On one show I worked on recently, though, you come in in the morning and your dry rehearsals and camera blocking are on the set at the same time. The actors go on the set and the cameramen are there, and the actors are acting, and the cameras are moving. And this is what I hate—you don't have enough time to sit down and work with the actors.

**ROSE:** What do producers now expect to happen in terms of the quality of performances?

**AUERBACH:** They want topnotch performances, but quicker, they just want it quicker. You've got to follow a much tighter schedule.

**PRESSMAN:** The schedule for us actually begins much earlier than just coming in in the morning. I get the script for a show two weeks before. Blocking it out takes about six hours. There's production meeting the following Wednesday. We talk over the floor plans for the six or seven sets in our large studio, and I might ask for a little bit more room here or there. Then I keep the floor plan, and get a mimeographed script. Then I sit down at home and block the show, which will usually be about 500 shots. Everything is there in the script—two shots, close-ups, etc. Then a few days before the show I stop at the studio and talk to the lighting director. I show him the floor plan, where everything goes, where it will be moved, what the sets will look like, where the booms will go.

On the say of taping, I get in at 6:30 in the morning, look over the sets and

the props, tell the prop guys what else I need, where the furniture should be moved (we change the position of furniture a lot to accommodate action we've invented that can't quite fit in to the design of the sets).

At 7:15 I start rehearsing with the actors till about 9:30 or 9:45. Then I take a short break. From 10 to 12:30, we block actors and the cameras—we need that much time since I have a full one-hour show to do, plus usually a few extra scenes. Then it's time to break for lunch. I bring mine with me, go to the director's room and take a twenty-minute nap. At one o'clock we used to have a full dress rehearsal and then tape.

No more. Now we dress/tape. Before, we would take a bunch of scenes, dress them, there are notes from the producer, discussion, fights. I deal with the actors and the crew, then we would tape. It's now a combined process, and we shoot a little bit out of sequence, doing all the scenes that take place in one set together, then move to the next set.

**AUERBACH:** It's a little bit different on *As the World Turns*. The director on that show is on his feet all day long, from the time you come in in the morning till sometimes late at night. During the blocking, for example, you go on the floor and block, let's say, three scenes. Then because they don't have to use floor monitors, you run from camera to camera to check the shots. Then you run into the control room and dress them, talk to the producer, then go out and talk to the actors, then back to the control room to tape the three or four scenes.

After that, you do the next group of scenes, and so on. This goes on all day long, since they have a morning and an afternoon session. The morning session has to be done by 2:15, then you immediately go into dry rehearsal for the afternoon session. The director usually doesn't get a lunch break—they bring you a sandwich. Then you

go off to the other studio and do the same thing, until, 7, 8 or even 11 o'clock at night.

**PRESSMAN:** I would really not like to lose the morning dry rehearsal, because that's where you really lay out how the scene is to be played. Plus you get a chance then to check your shots.

**ROSE:** Do you think performances have suffered as a result of this incredibly pressured schedule?

**AUERBACH:** It depends on the actors. They're adaptable too, just as we have to be.

**PRESSMAN:** The people who come from the theater are the most disciplined and the best to work with. They come in, they know their lines, they're there ahead of time.

**AUERBACH:** The older actors also are frequently much better.

**ROSE:** Soap opera actors must memorize an enormous quantity of material, far more than actors in any other field. What problems does this present for them and for you?

**PRESSMAN:** Some actors, particularly the veterans like Erika Slezak, Susan Lucci, and Robin Strasser are magnificent at it. They may not have all their lines memorized before they get in, but they're so expert they can pick them up during the day.

**AUERBACH:** For actors who are on four or five times a week, line memorization is a big issue, but as David said, they're experienced enough to pick up their lines in the morning, perhaps hold the script in their hands during dry rehearsal, and by the time we go to camera blocking, they know it. The ones who aren't so experienced may continue to hold the script during camera blocking, but then they've got

it down.

**ROSE:** There was a period during the early 1980s when many soap operas began to use teleprompters to help the actors with their lines. How did you feel this worked out?

**PRESSMAN:** Unfortunately, actors began to depend on them. They wouldn't really know the words comfortably, and very few how to use the prompters without making it look obvious. I remember one of the actors was nearsighted as she was constantly squinting to make out her lines.

**AUERBACH:** They eventually got magnifiers for them, but it didn't help. We only used the prompters up until about the mid-1980s.

**PRESSMAN:** I would love it, too, particularly for the actors. Some of the young actors we work with today come in and don't even have their lines down. I'd say to them "come on, you make \$600, \$700 a day to learn your craft. How dare you come into work and not know your lines cold?"

**AUERBACH:** It's a discipline problem. If we had to do it live, they'd have to know their parts. I hate it when an actor, right in the middle of taping, says "can I do it over again?" What can you do? So you have to do it over.

**ROSE:** You mentioned that in the past when a mistake occurred during taping, it was very difficult to do anything about it because you only had the network's VTR's for a very limited, set period of time. What happens now?

**PRESSMAN:** You stop and do a pick-up, since the editing and technology permits you to do it.

**AUERBACH:** The terrible problem with that is if you have a very

emotional scene, and one of the actors makes a mistake and you have to do a pick-up, you have to stop and find the place to do the pick-up—well, by then, all of the emotion goes out of the scene. You're better off to just to go back to the start of the scene and let them play it from there.

**ROSE:** A dramatic change occurred in daytime drama when you were able to get out of the studio and shoot a few scenes or even an entire show on location. How did this come about?

**PRESSMAN:** The technology permitted it. Smaller cameras, simplified editing—all of these things made it much more feasible to leave the studio.

**ROSE:** What was it like for you as a director shooting remotes, where previously you were confined to the studio.

**PRESSMAN:** It was fun. We were shooting with two cameras, sometimes three, unlike film production. In 1980, I did a week in Southampton, Long Island, where we rented a villa, all the major characters came out. We used two hand-held cameras, plus a Steadicam. There were fifty extras, as well as an elaborate horse race. The sequences were ultimately used in the next twenty shows.

**AUERBACH:** Even at that, you had to take the sequence of the remote and break it down, much like a film continuity script. You had to keep in mind what followed what, where the characters were at the end of the closing shot, even if the scenes were shot with a few days in between. It could get very complicated.

**PRESSMAN:** I think if a strictly movie guy came in to do these remote shots, with a single camera, it would have taken two weeks at least. We had to keep in mind how the scenes

were built, how the conflicts developed.

**ROSE:** So in essence you were shooting multi-camera, studio-style, while on location?

**AUERBACH:** Yes, I did a big remote on *All My Children* up in Canada for ten days. We shot two-camera material, for the most part, but with each camera on a separate tape machine. Then we had to go into the editing room, to put together what we shot on the isolated cameras. But you still had to do the editing in your head, so you knew that when this piece came up, and you might have done two or three takes, you wanted, for example, the second take only.

**PRESSMAN:** I was talking to my son Michael Pressman, who's a director on *Picket Fences*, and they're now starting to use two-cameras more on prime-time film production. They find that it's better for editing. They can do the show quicker. But working in film, as opposed to video, is so different anyway.

**AUERBACH:** Take lighting for instance. In film, they've got a director of photography to help in so many areas.'

Our lighting director is hardly the same thing. We've got to place the cameras, worry where the booms are, watch for shadows. We've got to be our own director of photography.'

The lighting director in television works for you. I go in to meet with him the day before with the floor plan and I say "here's where the actors are, here's where the cameras are, here's what angle I'm shooting from, here's where the boom's going to be." And he lights from what I tell him. He doesn't tell me where the lights are going to go.

**PRESSMAN:** In the daytime situation, if the director is not prepared

when he comes in the early morning for the first rehearsal with the actors, if he's not 102% prepared, it's a disaster. You can't come in, like a film director can, and say, I'm going to try this, and the we'll do a master shot, and then we'll cover, and put it all together in the editing room.

**AUERBACH:** Plus, they'll do six takes.

• • • • •

**ROSE:** When did you first begin to encounter the problem of soap opera producers making the kind of creative decisions formerly reserved for the director?

**AUERBACH:** For me it was when CBS took over *Love of Life* from Roy Windsor. There it was primarily network interference. They began a very active presence in the control room. They would come in and talk about the performance, without understanding that the performers can't be told to develop a particular emotional response just because the producers want them to have it at that point. They never comprehended that responses need to be organic and develop from the material and the emotional situation at the time.

This started a precedent for us, and after that point, producers then routinely came into the control room, and a great deal of interference with the director's job began.

Producers, who weren't at that time very good, would attempt to impose their desires on a framework which is very tightly constructed. The minute you attempt to do something like that, the whole thing begins to unravel. Far too often in the old days, you had producers come in who felt that anything the director chose to do should be changed, or else they weren't earning their salary. You had a lot of second guessing, just because they were there.

Good producers understand what's going on, realize how it works, and can give succinct notes that deal with the overall emotional level and the overall shooting scheme of a particular show.

**PRESSMAN:** I think the hardest part of daytime is the writing, because that's where it falls down very often, where you have writers who don't know what happened three weeks ago, or suddenly change characterization.

**ROSE:** Will you be there when lines are changed to correct these problems?

**AUERBACH:** We may change them ourselves, or the actors may change them.

**ROSE:** Is the producer involved?

**AUERBACH:** To some extent. We have to turn in a script the day before, and the producer usually looks at the revised script. I always note my changes on the cover, primarily for the sake of my production assistant. I'm always very careful not to change the author's intent, but I might change the way it's said to fit a particular performer's style. Normally, since the changes are not substantive, they're approved. If I have a major problem, I raise the question as soon as I've read the script.

**ROSE:** You've both been associated with numerous daytime dramas in your career; did you find it difficult to move from one soap opera to another?

**AUERBACH:** There are differences in the way some shows are shot. Some shows demand a lot more physical action, some demand that the pace be faster. As new man on the totem pole, I want to fit in, unlike some directors who go to a new show and try to impose their way of working on the control room, for instance.

As a matter of fact, when I come in to a new soap, I'll go into the studio and spend at least several days there just to get the feel of the studio and the feel of the crew—see what cameramen are doing what kind of work, see how the A.D. works—how the show gets put together and what the intangible feeling is around the studio and around the control room.

**ROSE:** Over the last ten years, what other changes have you seen in soaps, other than the stronger role of post-production?

**AUERBACH:** The casts have gotten bigger, the stories have become more complicated, and I think there's been a growth in the medium.

**ROSE:** And that's presented new directorial challenges?

**AUERBACH:** Any time you're dealing with fifteen people instead of eight, you have more challenges. When you're dealing with a story that's more complicated, it requires more of you in terms of what you know about what's going on and what the show's emotional structure is.

**ROSE:** After working in soap operas for decades, did the work ever become routine? Do you ever get bored?

**AUERBACH:** No, because every day presents a different problem. You have a different mix of actors, you may have a different mix of crew, and certainly a different script. The days may be generally the same, but specifically different.

On the whole, it's a challenging, demanding type of job that requires something different every day.

**ROSE:** Where do you see soap opera production moving in the future?

**PRESSMAN:** The only thing I can

see is that maybe we'll shoot more and more out of sequence. Technology permits you to do extraordinarily sophisticated editing in assembling pieces together—more pre-editing, more preparation.

**ROSE:** So you feel it might move more to a style of film shooting, with everything out of sequence?

**PRESSMAN:** We do everything out of sequence now. We shoot everything that takes place on one set for each show, then move to another set. All this requires a high degree of preparation, including more pre-editing.

**AUERBACH:** You may even do Friday's show before you do Wednesday's show, depending on the availability of actors. Still, I think the overriding issue will always be the need to save money, and soaps are going to have to be made cheaper.

**ROSE:** How can that be achieved?

**AUERBACH:** You can have fewer actors, you can have fewer extravaganzas, you can have fewer remotes and fewer sets.

**PRESSMAN:** I'd like to see them move back to half-hour soaps. You can tell a better story. With an hour you sometimes feel they're filling in. It's a lot to do to create that much drama every day, five days a week. I should note that I've always really enjoyed doing daytime, because you're dealing with your profession—actors—which is really what's it's all about. The technology works hand-in-hand with this.

**AUERBACH:** Beginning directors get more concerned with the mechanics of directing than the performance, but the performance is the heart of the matter. I can tell somebody about how to shoot a show, where the cameras have to go,

etc., but that's just mechanics.

**PRESSMAN:** Anybody can learn that.

**AUERBACH:** But you either know how to deal with actors or you don't.

**ROSE:** And that can't be taught.

**PRESSMAN:** Yes and no, but certainly by example. I've taught directing workshops up in Maine, and I tend to take the directors and break them up into groups and make them direct each other. Turn them into actors.

Technical mistakes just aren't important. Technology does permit us to do anything if we want to, but that's not the heart of the matter. You can do the show without it. All you need is a good story. ■

Brian Rose teaches in the Media Studies Program at Fordham College at Lincoln Center. He is the author of *Televising the Performing Arts, Television and the Performing Arts* and the editor of *TV Genres*, all published by Greenwood Press.

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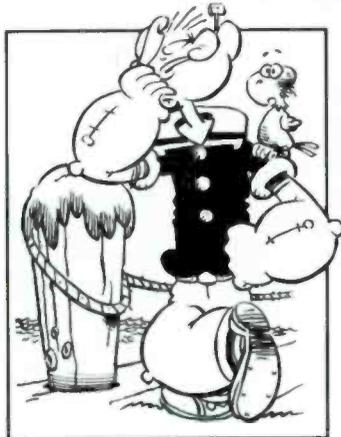


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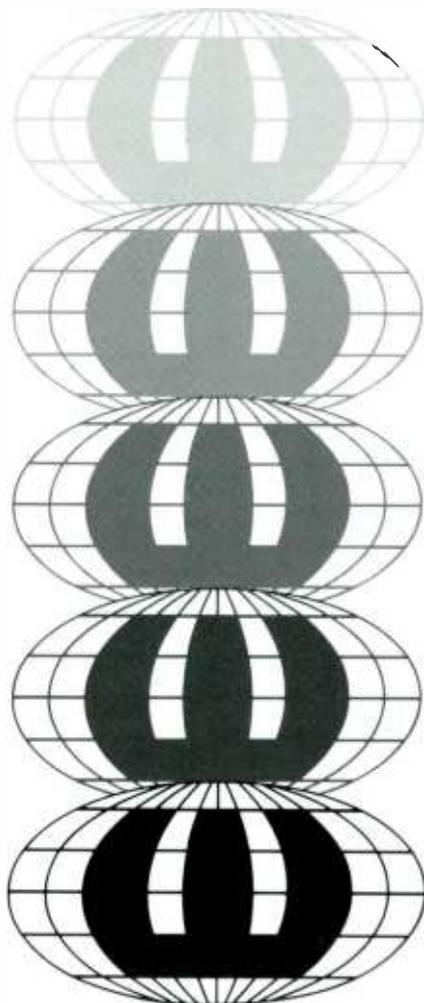


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# THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY— OR ELECTRONIC REVOLUTION #4?

Beware of hype and fantasy warns a critical observer.  
He sees ruts and detours along the route.

**BY DAVE BERKMAN**

**T**he coming of the "information superhighway" is actually the fourth variation on what have been promised for the past 30 years, as inevitable electronic revolutions. But there's no more reason to believe this one will become any more a reality than did the previous three. For the problem is that the "inevitability" of the "information superhighway," rests on the same basic and faulty set of assumptions as did its predecessors: that because something can be achieved electronically, people will need it, will want it—and will be willing to pay for it.

Such assumptions proved just as erroneous as the much-touted electronic transformation of American education which gave rise to the so-called "learning industry" in the '60s; what then promised would be the immediate "wiring of America" in the early '70s; and the "video-revolution"

of a dozen years back.

I was intimately involved with the learning industry—the failed series of corporate acquisitions resulting from the first of these promised electronic transformations; more than casually involved with Revolution number two while employed by the Federal agency that funded various demonstration projects designed to promote its viability, and finally as an academic, a close observer of the third and fourth revolutions. Let's look at some of the mistaken predictions made in these aborted attempts to achieve an electronic revolution—and then let's examine what might be the similarities this time around. (Perhaps the foremost lesson to be learned is, beware of anything hyped as a "revolution!")

The belief that an electronic revolution would inevitably transform American education into a more cost and leaner efficient enterprise can be traced to a single *Wall Street Journal* 1965 article.

As was TV to the '50's, the *Journal* predicted, so education—on which \$100 billion in public funds was then being spent—would be the growth industry to the '70's.

Just as American industry was purchasing such technologies as the computer and xerography because of the efficiencies they brought to business, so the schools would prove equally eager to adopt TV and computer-based instructional technologies which promised similar efficiencies in the classroom.

Two errors were made at the outset of the attempt to create an electronic revolution within education. First, no one noticed that while \$100 billion was being spent on America's public elementary and secondary schools, 97 percent of those monies were dedicated to personnel expenses—teaching and administrative salaries—and to capital construction. Only three percent was left for discretionary expenditures. Those responsible for allocating those funds were accustomed to spending them on such "archaic" teaching materials as textbooks—not on TV and computers. Second, no one was talking to the teachers and administrators who would make the decisions about how education would be conducted, and who had a vested interest in perpetuating a low-efficiency, labor-intensive system of schooling. They had little incentive to hand over instruction to what—as many studies had demonstrated—were equally effective system of TV- and computer-aided teaching.

Executives of such corporate behemoths as Xerox (the company I worked for), IBM, Westinghouse, RCA, Raytheon, GE, Time-Life and McGraw-Hill (a) refused to see how little money was available for the purchase of the hardware and software necessary to achieve any electronic transformation of teaching and learning and (b) refused to sully themselves by consulting with the lowly school

people—especially the teachers—who could have given them a fix on the realities of the attitudes in the market they were trying to reach. Instead these corporations began aggressively acquiring a whole host of other companies to provide them with, as the buzz phrase of the moment would have it, "Hardware/Software Synergies." (A commonality of all these "revolutions" has been the way sexy terminology has substituted for substance.) Xerox Education, for example, became the second biggest player in American publishing through acquisition of American Education Publications, the largest educational periodical publisher and publisher of *My Weekly Reader*, Ginn & Co., the second largest textbook publisher, University Microfilms and Bowker, which specialized in library periodicals and book processing. Xerox has since divested itself of all these companies.

As anyone who has experienced public education since the '70s will affirm, American schooling has remained a system where talking teachers-cum-textbooks-cum-blackboards still prevail and instruction continues in the same tedious and plodding manner as it has since Gutenberg first set movable type to paper.

## Revolution #2

**I**n the early '70s we were promised an electronic revolution as a result of "The Wiring of America." According to that Rand Corporation report which resulted in an outpouring of Sunday supplement articles, the '70s would be the "Cable Decade." We'd all hook up to cable, we were told. Though not for the limited program choices the cable of that decade offered, since cable was then little more than CATV, a re-transmission service which provided those with poor off-air reception an opportunity to receive a quality picture.

America would wire itself, it was asserted, because we would be able to pay our debts via interactive cable (why that was an advantage to anyone but the banks, was never explained); because it would provide a monitoring system to increase home energy efficiency (something already accomplished by insulation and thermostats); because it would enable us to have our homes electronically monitored by local police, and because two-way interactive cable would provide us the opportunity to "instantaneously access electronic data bases" which, according to the cliché example most often cited, would enable us to find out what's playing tonight at the local movie theater (although we could already "instantaneously access" that information by turning to the entertainment pages of our local paper).

Much of the reporting which seemed to affirm this promise of its wiring of America focused on a primitive system of data-base accessing, which required an expensive, home hardware-intensive, frame-grabbing capability developed by the MITRE Corporation. You could hardly open a trade journal or read a Sunday supplement which didn't speak glowingly about the one house in America, located in the "new town" of Reston Va., which had been equipped with the hardware required. I lived in Reston throughout the '70s, and am certain that aside from the family who lived in the demonstration home and myself because I paid attention to such things—no one else in Reston knew that this "major breakthrough" was taking place in their own backyard.

The other hallmark of this heralded "wiring of America" was the universal acceptance of an estimate, based on the most tenuous assumptions, that the average American family would spend \$60 a month on these cable-delivered services. The revenues which that figure promised, led to a mad competition among cable MSOs

to wire the major cities of America. One of the commonalities of all these aborted revolutions is the "Emperor's New Clothes" phenomenon: something is asserted—such as a \$100 billion education market available for tapping—or a willingness of the American people to spend \$60 a month for ancillary and very peripheral cable-delivered services, and no one seems willing to challenge the assertion.

The '70s did not see the "wiring of America" and when cable penetration did increase, as it would in the next decade from about a quarter to over three-fifths of American homes, it was because of an increase in the choices cable provided. However, those choices are largely little more than a wider selection of the very traditional kinds of TV programming we've been viewing since the late '40s!

### Revolution #3

**T**he "Video Revolution" of the early '80s predicted as imminent, was the next variation of promised electronic cataclysm. As I pointed out in an article, "The Video Revolution: Some Counter-Revolutionary Ideas" in the spring of 1981 *Television Quarterly*, most of the claims that our living rooms would become home entertainment and information centers were pure hype.

Eventually we did subscribe to cable for the additional services cable of the '80s offered. Although Nielsen data has consistently shown that regardless of the number of services available, the average home watches no more than five in addition to their local, off-air stations. We also bought VCRs which enable us to view theatrical release films on our home TV screens. These developments did not add up to a "revolution" but if there was anything truly revolutionary about this third phase, we were told, it would lie in the promise of two-way, interactive cable!

Does anyone remember the

endlessly touted Warner Cable QUBE system? A few hundred homes in an upper-middle-class section of Columbus, Ohio, had been wired with capability to respond digitally to their cable system's head end. Warner used this capacity to convince city after city where intense cable-rights bidding wars were being waged that Warner was the leading edge MSO most worthy of receiving the franchise. Once the franchise bidding wars were over, Warner folded the demonstration system in Columbus and never launched it anywhere else!

Which brings us to this decade's trumpeting of ...

## Revolution #4 ... a.k.a. the "Information Superhighway."

**W**hat's new about this revolution is the promise of fiber-optic cable. It will now be possible to equip every American home with two-way electronic capability equal to the previously required only by medium-sized corporations. But just why would the average American home require bandwidth of such immensity? Because say superhighway proponents, it would enable our computer, our TV set and our telephone to be fed by one wire.

So?

Then there's that ability—as was also hearded in Revolutions numbers two and three—to access with our home computer, tens of thousands of databases. But since I'd have no occasion to access more than one such service at a time (and I can do that right now with a \$75 modem through my old-fashioned copper telephone wire), what's the big deal?

Then, of course, there's that mighty promise of 500 channels of full-bandwidth video. Except that, as noted above, ratings data have consistently shown we view, on average, no more than five cable services in addition to

the local station signals we now receive.

But there's also the question of whether there would actually be 500 discrete channels of TV programming. If so, how could we keep track of what's on—and where would the money come from to underwrite the production costs to provide the programming to fill 500 channels? Well, as it turns out, maybe it won't be 500 channels each devoted to a discrete programming schedule. A large number of these channels would be devoted to pay-service time-shifting. Start the movie on, say, six such services at 15-minute intervals over a three-hour period, and that takes care of 72 channels. Convenience for pay-channel subscribers? Yes. Revolutionary? Hardly.

A myriad of product-line or brand-name shopping channels is also how another large percentage of those channels might be filled. There'd be one for GM and one for Chrysler and one for Ford, and a dozen or more others each dedicated to an import line, and perhaps one for gun lovers and one for those into sports paraphernalia and one for cutlery and one for kitchen furniture and one for living-room furniture and ... well, you get the point. Forgetting that most of us who desire any of these things would probably not prefer to sit in front of a TV set as scores of items we're not interested in are pitched, and that we'd rather go to a store or dealer so we can head right for the kinds of product we want, it's coming to sound less and less like the cornucopia of an increased variety of programming the promise of 500 channels would seem to imply.

But what about the promise of two-way-interactivity? We could instantaneously talk back to Geraldo, to Frazer, and to Dan & Connie. However, does anyone think Geraldo, the producers of Frazer, or Dan & Connie, are going to read thousands of messages? They're already ignoring

the hundreds they currently receive by fax transmitted just as instantaneously over plain old telephone wires. But in questioning this, am I ignoring the potential, as Ross Perot has argued, that we could now each vote, with digital response pads, on the issues facing America? Would it be the triumph of direct over representative democracy, or the onset of fascism?

For who is it, we must ask, who would do this voting? Would the "electronic voters" approach in numbers, socio-economic diversity and diversity of opinion even that relatively small percentage of Americans who take the time and trouble to vote in most elections? When, after what is represented as some atrocity or act of disrespect against America, the question is asked, "Should we nuke 'em?"—or we're asked whether we should end welfare, or whether the automatic response of our criminal justice system should be to "lock 'em up and throw away the key," do you want the knee-jerk decisions on such matters to be rendered mostly by the very conservatively-skewed, older and wealthier segments of the population who would enter those responses? Watch C-SPAN sometime and note the disproportionate numbers of the ultra-conservative political junkies who are motivated to call its talk programs—that is, those representative of those most likely to vote in any electronic referendums.

Like one-third of Americans, I own a home computer. I've owned one for 10 years. I own one program. It's the one I'm using right now to type this manuscript. The device I'm typing on may be labeled a computer, but for me—as well as for that majority of that minority who ever make any use of their home computer beyond its capabilities to play games—it's a typewriter. Period. As one who teaches, writes and broadcasts about media, and especially TV, I'm one of those who do watch more than the average of five

cable channels over and above my local stations. But the number is closer to ten than it is to the 30-plus I now receive. And it's not going to go up exponentially, if and when I can receive 500.

**I**'m not alone to question the promises of the "electronic superhighway." As with the first three so-called revolutions, there is a significant minority who are cutting through the hype and expressing similar doubts about the economics, the nature, the needs and the dangers of the "electronic superhighway."

For example, Robert J. Samuelson wrote in *Newsweek*, if the estimate of \$1,000 to wire each of America's 96,000,000 homes is valid, we're talking about an investment of \$100 billion! Would Americans who are already spending an average of \$55 a month on phone service and \$31 for cable be willing to spend enough more for the ancillary services of the "information superhighway" to recover this investment? (In 1994, the generally accepted figure for those subscribing to on-line computer services which can adequately be tapped through the present phone system—totals just over 3 percent; and according to one recent *New York Times* article, even that small percentage may be grossly inflated!)

A study by SRI International of what *Los Angeles Times* reporter Amy Harmon terms "the oxymoronic idea of interacting with one's TV set" sees no more than 10 percent of American homes subscribing to digitally-based home video services before the turn of the century. She quotes SRI's Ed Christie, who directed the study, as categorically warning. "[D]on't believe the hype."

Lawrence Magid, a writer specializing in electronic high-technology, also writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, examined Vice President Al Gore's claims about the role electronic infor-

mation technologies can play in education. They sound good, Magid concedes—but he goes on to note that “my local school district doesn’t have enough money for pencils and paper, let alone Macs and PCs.”

George Gerbner, former dean of the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School of Communications, who is generally conceded to be academia’s top researcher on TV behaviors, was quoted in *Newsweek* as saying that those who believe the American viewing public is lusting for 500 channels are simply dead wrong: “The TV audience has never clamored for diversity.” (And hasn’t that awareness always been the Number 1 truism among those whose clone-programming has been the consistent hallmark of America’s TV schedules?)

But there are also some very real dangers to the “electronic superhighway.” I referred above to the threat to democracy that concepts such as Ross Perot’s “electronic town hall” may represent.

And then there’s also the danger that a fascination of a “get-with-it,” high-tech-focused Clinton administration can lead to some very false assumptions about the nature of a rapidly changing American economy, and a misreading of the opportunities electronic technologies will provide to those whom that economy is designed to serve.

As a “rustbowling America” loses what had been its near monopoly of labor-intensive, capital-goods-industries—e.g., steel mills, auto manufacturing—those caught up in the buzz rhetoric of “information superhighways” look to electronics industries as constituting the new labor market. But what such thinking ignores is that, by definition, the integration of multiple tasks which integrated-circuit technology makes possible, massively reduces jobs. Indeed, as Gary Chapman noted in a particularly incisive *New York Times* op-ed piece, the very technology companies with which the

Administration seems so enamored are themselves “laying off workers at record rates.” Therefore, what this fascination with electronic technology will lead to, warns Chapman, is not the opening up of new industries with rich employment potential, but an avoidance by the Federal government of “seriously addressing the issue of developing quality jobs at livable wages.” As a result, Chapman asserts, the Clinton administration has “turned its economic growth agenda over to high-technology executives determined to put their industries on the Federal gravy train ... [so that the] Commerce Department has been turned into a national Chamber of Commerce for high tech.”

Those in Washington who currently see the devices issuing forth from these less labor-intensive manufacturers, as providing a significant job market, are equally off-base, according to high-tech consultant Marcia Kaplan, in the *Chicago Tribune*. Young people who previously could drop out of school, or plod through with marginal academic skills, but who could then count on finding a high-paying, unionized job in a factory or mill, she warns, are those least likely to find themselves equipped for working in jobs requiring more than low-paid, rote-skills. “[T]he ability to play a game on a computer,” Kaplan states, “cannot be equated with the power to reason or synthesize information.”

In looking at any dangers posed by the alleged coming of an “information superhighway,” note should be taken of one which has received a fair amount of attention—that the poor will be left “information poor.”

To which I’d respond that what the poor are worried about is not a future clouded by inabilities to “instantaneously access databases.”

Their immediate need is to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their families. In an America ever more eager to punish

the poor for their poverty, I can think of few struggles more unproductive than one designed to assure that those in poverty or on welfare will receive government subsidies so that while they might be suffering from malnutrition, they can call up some database detailing the nutrients they are missing in their diets.

Is there any lesson to be learned from this fourth-time-around prediction of an "impending electronic revolution?"

If history teaches us anything, it should be that while cyberspace hyperbabble makes for interesting fantasy, it should not divert those of us involved with television and related technologies from the realities with which we can productively deal. ■

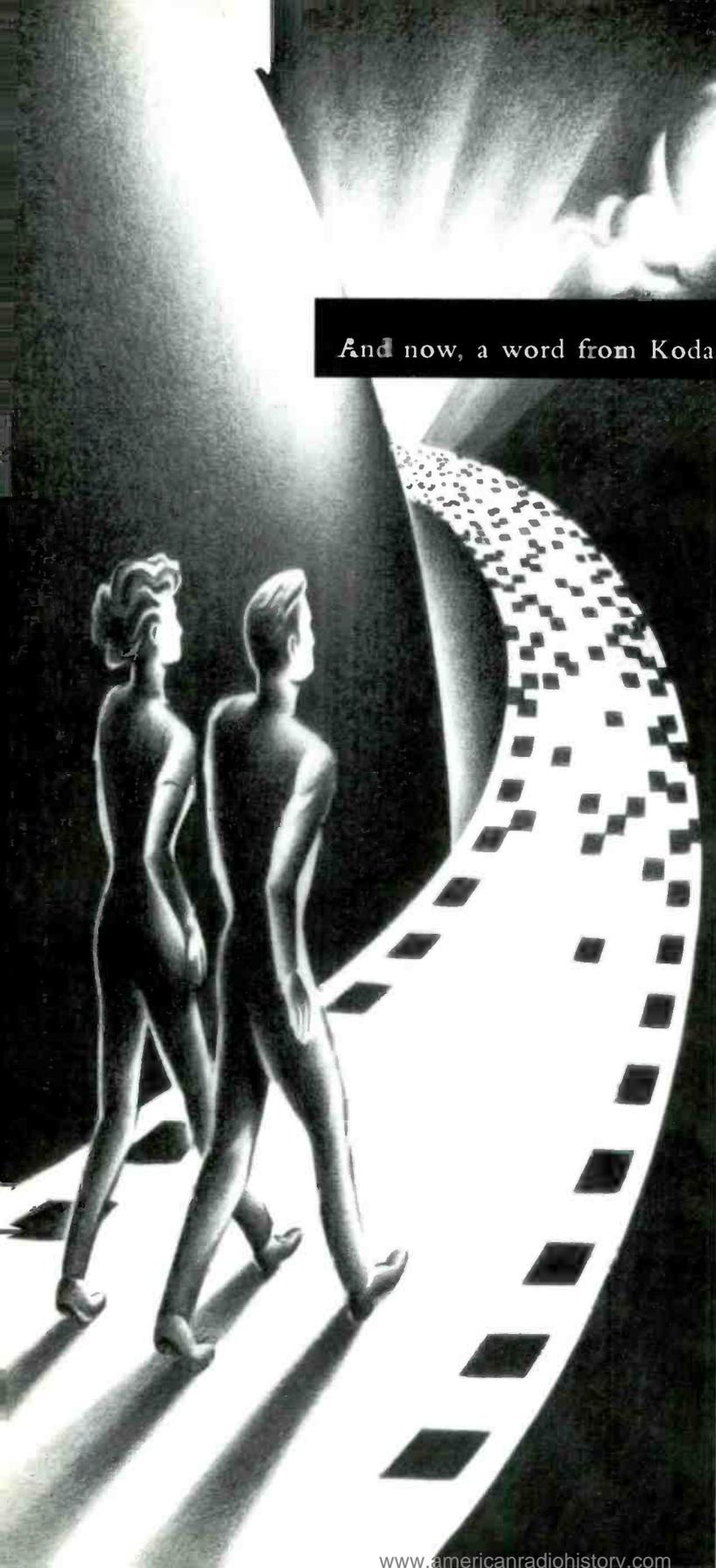
Dave Berkman, a frequent contributor to *Television Quarterly*, is professor of Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He is also media columnist for the *Milwaukee Alternative Weekly*, the *Shepherd Express*, and host of the Wisconsin Public Radio network's interview/call-in show, *Media Talk*.

## QUOTE UNQUOTE

*"In ancient Israel the people ceremonially cast all the many sins of the people on a goat. Bearing that burden, the goat was driven into the wilderness and the people were clean again, and safe. It was too much to deal with the whole multitude of sins; it was simpler to pool them and then put them all on the goat. Hence the rich English word 'scapegoat.'*

*"The press has become a scapegoat. The reasons seem obvious enough. Complex systems of mass communication are essential to a democratic state. In order to function in their many social roles, citizens are radically dependent, almost absolutely, upon the information the media provide. And we don't like the feelings of helplessness that go with complete dependency. These powerful psychological forces shape our perception of the press. We project many of our fears and failures onto the 'media' and drive 'it' into the wilderness."*

—Louis W. Hodges,  
*Media Ethics*, Spring, 1994



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# LOCALLY ORIGINATED TV PROGRAMMING: HEALTHIER THAN YOU MIGHT EXPECT

**BY MITCHELL E. SHAPIRO,  
AND PAUL STEINLE**

**I**n an era of booming off-network syndication, amidst the spiraling growth of first-run syndicated talk shows, a national survey conducted at the School of Communication, University of Miami, has discovered more activity in the production of local, original television programming than you might imagine. The concept of the "full-service" television station, producing public affairs, specials, local sports, and other features, along with a steady diet of local news, is not dead, although some of the nation's most successful local broadcasters have stepped away from local programming and replaced it with "more cost-efficient" syndicated programming.

More than 88% of television stations

questioned in our representative national sampling of commercial television stations reported they were engaged in producing programming "other than local news" in 1992-93. In fact, the survey results indicate that only about 77% of the sampled stations produced local newscasts in the same period.

In commercial television, the survey also indicates that local program production is not strictly a big city phenomenon. Although some of the active program-producing stations are located in top-ten markets, on average, stations in smaller markets—outside the top-ten—were more likely to be engaged in producing original programming than were the top-ten major market stations. About 79% of the top-ten market stations produce locally originated programming, while more than 90% of the stations in markets 11-100 and 81% of the stations

in markets 101+ produce original programs.

Specials comprise the largest single umbrella category for local program production. Just over 91% of the stations which reported being engaged in "local programming other than news" had produced local specials. About half the stations producing specials produced between 1-10 specials during the year.

Specials often are produced by a station's news department, and the largest category of these, about 70%, were public affairs specials. Sports was the second-most frequent category—nearly 50% of the stations that produce local specials produce sports specials. Fewer stations, about 12%, produce either children's specials or documentaries. About 11% of the stations producing specials said they were magazine specials.

**A**t WCVB-TV in Boston, Program Director Elizabeth Cheng says their guiding principle for producing a special is "community need." In 1994, WCVB produced 36 specials, but not all of them were hard news or public affairs subjects; two focused on the Boston Pops; another followed the Boston Marathon, and a fourth reported on the New England Air Show. WCVB also recently produced multi-part programs on immigration, *World of Difference*, and on the family, *Family Works*.

WCVB-TV co-produced its two annual Boston Pops specials with the Arts and Entertainment cable network. "There is no way we could produce such a high quality special without the up-front participation of A&E," says Liz Cheng. In addition to helping to cover costs, the A&E access gave the program a high profile that opened doors at the Boston Pops and eased access for the WCVB production team.

WCCO-TV in Minneapolis, another high-profile local station, produced

five specials in 1994, including the annual Twin Cities Christmas Parade. In Dayton, Ohio, WHIO-TV, puts most of its local programming energy into producing news, but it also produces "one or two local projects," each month, according to station manager Don Kemper.

The station's specials included an annual Christmas carolling program, a local "Festival of the Arts" and a number of medical information shows. WHIO-TV's major local production is the annual United States Air Show. This program takes five-six hours of live air time, and a taped, one-hour syndicated version is marketed nationally.

WHIO-TV is also producing news and some other local programming for a new local cable channel, The Miami Valley Channel, launched late in 1994.

In Tampa, WTVT has launched a locally produced special/magazine/infomercial hybrid called *Tampa Bay's Topic*, broadcast once a month, Saturday mornings from 9:30-10:30 a.m. *Topic* picks a monthly subject—like "pets, weddings, home improvement or cuisine"—then WTVT's sales department sells program segments to local advertisers who work with the station to develop the program content.

WTVT intersperses taped segments on *Topic* with locally hosted, live studio segments, backed up by a fully staffed phone-bank, with 18 phone lines. Viewers are encouraged to call up for "more information and free coupons," says *Topic's* producer, Kristi Neher Davison. WTVT is aiming to syndicate this local "infomercial concept.

**T**he purchase of off-network syndicated programming might appear to have sharply reduced the likelihood of local stations producing weekly programs, but locally originated weekly programming is still being produced

widely.

Nearly three-quarters of those stations that produce locally-originated programming are engaged in producing weekly series. By far the most popular weekly programming vehicle for local broadcasters is public affairs programming (which often winds up, especially in the larger markets, sequestered in the early hours of Sunday morning). About 72% of those stations producing weekly shows did public affairs programming.

The second most frequently produced genre of weekly programming is sports programming, which often focuses on local professional and college teams. About 24% of the stations that produce weekly local programming produce sports shows.

For example, WBBM-TV in Chicago produces two weekly programs based on the Chicago Bears: *Chicago Bears Weekly* and *The Dave Wannstedt Show*. These programs are also syndicated regionally by a local sales and marketing firm to half-a-dozen regional stations to earn extra income for WBBM.

The third most frequently produced form of weekly programming is children's programs. About 14% of the stations producing weekly programs offer children's programs. Fourth in frequency are magazine shows—on just over 9% of the stations. And the fifth largest category of local weekly programs is music programming—on just over 7% of the stations. Other less commonly produced local weekly program categories are religion, education, talk, comedy, medical/health, quiz, real estate, business, entertainment and self-help topics.

One ambitious local weekly program that has earned extra dollars for its station is *Almost Live*, a weekly half-hour comedy program produced by KING-TV, Seattle. The program began in 1984 and it runs at 11:30 p.m., Saturdays, delaying NBC's *Saturday Night Live* until midnight. The station

also produces 26 local comedy shows annually, and, in 1991, according to KING's Director of Programming and Business Affairs, Uli Haller, KING-TV sold 65 episodes of the program to the Comedy Central channel.

**D**aily local programming, other than news, is much rarer than local specials or weeklies. The burgeoning number of quasi-network-quality, syndicated talk shows seems to have had its greatest impact in reducing the number of locally produced daily programs: particularly "mom-and-pop"-style talk shows, which used to be a staple of many stations. Even local programming powerhouses, WCVB-TV in Boston and KING-TV in Seattle, have abandoned their once-successful locally-hosted talk and coffee-klatch formats.

Our sample indicated that only about 22% of local program-producing stations produce daily programs. Of that smaller segment, the daily series most likely to be produced are: magazine shows (34.4%), public affairs programs (31.4%), or talk shows (25.0%). Just over 9% of the stations producing daily local programs produce daily children's shows.

Two stations going in opposite directions with daily talk show programming are WUSA-TV in Washington, DC and KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul. WUSA-TV launched *Broadcast House Live*, a daily 10-11 a.m. talk show hosted by Robin Young and John Curley, in September 1993. According to Sandra Butler-Jones, the station's executive in charge of production, WUSA-TV initiated this program in order to "distinguish ourselves amid all the mush that's out there as really local TV." She says the program has been "competitive" against Geraldo, Leeza and Gordon Elliot.

Jones says *Broadcast House Live* is targeted at suburban women since "working women are not available"

during the morning hours the program airs. The program deals with life style issues—"coping, how to make your house a home, cooking and fashions"—but it also delves into more serious subjects "like teen suicide."

Steve Edelman thought *Good Company*, another 60-minute local talk show, which he executive produced (and co-hosted with his wife, Sharon Anderson), was also "competitive," but it became too pricey for KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul, despite its local popularity. *Good Company* ran on KSTP-TV week-day afternoons from 3-4 p.m., from June, 1982 until April, 1984.

With a staff of 14 full-time people and an annual budget "just in excess of a million dollars ...," says Edelman. "We were getting too expensive. I kept hearing 'There are so many shows available for practically nothing.'" Edelman recalls, "even though *Good Company* was getting about 20 share points."

"We held on to the program a couple of years longer than the economics said that we should," according to KSTP-TV vice president and assistant general manager, Larry Shrum. Now KSTP-TV is placing its local programming emphasis "exclusively" on news, says Shrum.

**O**ften the success of producing local programming reflects community expectations and local tradition. At WCVB-TV in Boston, general manager Paul LaCamera, gives credit to "WBZ-TV in its early years" for creating a "sophisticated" marketplace that knows how to distinguish local productions and support them. But even LaCamera concedes that ultimately "news defines the standing and personality of a TV station."

In the fall of 1993, local daily news programming was predominantly the domain of network affiliates. More than 98% of the network affiliates

offered local news. In comparison, just over 41% of the independent stations produced local newscasts, and only about 26% of the Fox affiliates were producing local news. But the switch of NFL football to the Fox Network and the rash of ownership, network and channel shifts that have subsequently occurred have shaken the industry.

Even before the NFL switch, significant change was underway at the Fox affiliates. Although they admittedly were starting from the smallest base of local programming, general managers at Fox stations were reporting plans for the largest percentage of growth in all categories of programs—specials, weekly, daily and local daily news programs—among all the station groupings polled.

Subsequently, stations like WJW-TV in Cleveland, that switched from CBS to Fox in the fall of 1994, began beefing up news. Louis Gattozzi, director of operations, reported that WJW-TV, added "three hours a day of local live news" after the switch. WJW added two hours of news from 7-9 a.m., expanded its noon news from 30 minutes to an hour, and its late news from 30 to 60 minutes after moving it up to 10 p.m.

**W**ith the rapid shifts in the industry and expanding cable growth, many local stations have begun probing the syndication business to develop more revenue. Not surprisingly, they usually start by marketing local programs from the largest pool identified in our survey: specials.

Just over 29% of the stations producing programs in our sample sold their specials to other stations. Weekly programming is also being marketed in syndication. About 12% of the locally produced weekly programs were aired by other stations. Placing daily programming in syndication was extremely rare—only one station in our sample reported doing this.

Group stations such as WCVB-TV have used their corporate partners to market their programs for them. Hearst Entertainment has marketed specials such as WCVB's *Family Works* and its immigration special, *World of Difference*.

The expanding world of cable television is also opening its doors slowly to entrepreneurial local programmers. WTAE-TV sold its *Capelli and Company* to Nickelodeon; the Discovery Channel co-produces *Next Step* with KRON-TV in San Francisco; and the Nashville Network broadcasts two locally produced programs—a talk show from WSMV-TV, Nashville, and *The Texas Connection* from KLRU-TV, Austin (a non-commercial station).

Hot topics can also be sold to schools and the institutional market. When KING-TV produced *Hostages at Home*, a 52-minute special on domestic violence hosted by long-time KING news anchor Jean Enersen, it was able to sell more than 400 copies of the program on videotape. Intermedia, a Seattle company that distributes videos on social issues to social agencies nationwide, sold the tapes via telemarketing.

"With all the energy that goes into a special, a single airing is not enough," says KING-TV's programming chief Uli Haller. Haller is a new breed in the programming department—a program manager/business manager. He has noticed that with the growth of cable, CD ROMs, and other multi-media businesses have come increasing inquiries seeking video. These new markets promise to generate more significant revenue streams for local, program-producing stations in the near future.

"We don't know what it all means yet," says Haller, "but if you believe in the 500-channel future, you expect there will be more and more after-markets."

Based on the results of this survey and recent discussions with local stations, we believe that the future of

local program production is healthy.

Fox affiliates and independent local stations are already experiencing growth in local programming. We also expect that ABC, CBS and NBC affiliates may increase local production in the next decade.

The after-broadcast market for program materials should also increase for those stations with high-quality production skills and sufficient entrepreneurial energy to seek outside partners in cable and elsewhere and to co-produce programs with them. Feeding the 50-, 100-, or 500-channel universe with station production will require programming vision, experience and expertise—skills that reside in large measure among many professional broadcasters in stations throughout the United States. Local stations that want a share of these new production dollars are well positioned to become players in this expanding programming business, if they are wise enough to exploit these new opportunities as they evolve. ■

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# REVIEW & COMMENT

## A PROGRAM EXECUTIVE'S CREDO

Tinker in Television:  
From General Sarnoff to  
General Electric

by Grant Tinker and Bud Rukeyser  
Simon and Schuster: New York, 1994

**BY LAWRENCE LAURENT**

**G**rant Tinker is among the most honored and best-liked executives in the brief history of network television. Movie star-handsome, laconically well-spoken and possessed of a strange notion that the persons who write scripts, direct films and produce programming are quite likely to know more about writing scripts, directing films and producing programs than a desk-bound businessman. This curious conviction has helped carry him to success as at NBC (twice, the second time as the savior-president), at major advertising agencies, at Universal and Fox Studios and as the head of MTM Productions. Grant Tinker is honored as a person who has paid his dues, has earned his stripes, has made his bones. In short, he under-

stands what is important in American broadcasting.

All, blessedly, while retaining a sense of humor and without being convinced—even once—that he was more important than the creative people on his payroll.

All of this comes across, along with his mistakes and a few failures, in a delightful autobiography, written by him and M.S. (Bud) Rukeyser, Jr. The result is an anecdotal, often amusing and highly readable history of network television's glory years. It will stand for decades as an invaluable account of an honest, honorable individual who often succeeded where others failed.

None of which means that Grant Tinker is a pushover. I learned that lesson the hard way back in the 1960s. I was moderating a panel discussion at a conference of Herb Jacobs' TV Stations, Inc., with Tinker as one of the panelists. I was then writing a nationally syndicated column of reviews, public policy analyses and news about the communications business. And I regret to remember, I had developed some standard evasions to respond to questions about the paid, professional TV critics. In response to a hostile question from a station owner in the audience, I pompously said, "Plainly, almost everyone in America expects too much from television." The applause started and stopped quickly when Tinker quietly asked: "Why don't you ever write

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that?" I did the only thing possible. I joined in the laughter and learned that the pleasant man also had a razor-sharp edge.

I should also confess to a great bias where Merryle Stanley Rukeyser, Jr. is concerned. This is one of four brothers, all highly successful in various forms of communication. Their father, M.S. Rukeyser, Sr., was a financial writer for the Hearst newspaper chain; a man with a long, successful career of explaining complex economics concepts without cant, economic gibberish, or bias. At home in New York's suburbs, he was a strict disciplinarian with much of the burden falling on Bud, the eldest son. I met Bud Rukeyser, right after he escaped by enrolling at the University of Virginia.

I was the sports editor of the student newspaper and was properly astonished at the sight of Bud and his newly purchased wardrobe. Male dress at U.Va. in those days ran to gray flannel suits, button-down shirts and black knit neckties. Bud showed up in purple shirts, neckties by the Museum of Modern Art and chalk-striped suits with outrageously wide lapels. Strangers used to follow him down West Main Street in Charlottesville before asking the source of his clothing. But he learned, enjoyed a good college and avoided daily journalism by finding a job as a publicist at Young and Rubicam advertising, and finally settled in as a junior publicist at NBC. He moved up rapidly at NBC; became a Vice President and served more than 30 years in the corporate ranks, part of that time with Tinker as his boss.

Together, they have produced a book that is also notable for its willingness to describe the faults of such persons as Fred Silverman, formerly of CBS, ABC and NBC and now producing TV series. Then, there's Jack Welch, the head of General Electric, who bought

RCA, partly because of NBC's profits under Tinker and who ignored Tinker's excellent advice. Tinker also has some unflattering words about Robert Wright, who succeeded Tinker as NBC President.

**Y**ou may ask, "So, what's unusually about that?" and the question will reveal that you haven't read many recent show business biographies. If you had been reading the flood of books about broadcasting, you would have discovered that almost no harsh words are ever printed about persons who are still alive. Criticism is reserved almost entirely for those who have died. The dead, as any libel specialist will tell you, cannot be libeled; neither are they likely to file a law suit. Tinker's tears and laughter are for the living.

Tinker is also quick to admit that almost no secrets exist in the business of programming a television network. I taught "Television Programming" for more than 20 years; such courses begin with an acknowledgement that two-thirds of all new programs fail. This is a failure rate without equal in the American economy. As a consequence, you may better understand my delight in finding a former network president who understands and can explain the reasons for the failure ratio. Tinker explains:

"What network executives who select and buy and schedule programs are paid to do—what should be at the top of their job descriptions—is to make crucial judgments about those programs after they're on the air. If a show is slow to attract sufficient audience, and virtually all new shows are, it is at that point that the hardest judgments must be made. Is it the show that was expected? Is it well made? If it is not what was bought, not as good as anticipated, and shows little or no promise of improvement,

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get rid of it. But if it is living up to its promise, bite the bullet and settle in for a long, disheartening wait. Many hugely successful television shows have been well into a second season before being discovered by an audience of appreciable size.

"Keeping the faith sounds easy, but it isn't. In reality, the toughest challenge for the network program executive is to make gutsy, sometimes lonely calls about keeping or canceling programs. Often that entails ignoring ratings, research, and the conventional wisdom of colleagues or even of superiors with the ability to terminate programmers who make bad calls. Trusting visceral reactions, following instincts, separates the men from the boys (and, now, the women from the girls). Throughout the history of television, there have been far too many boys."

**M**any of Tinker's most blessed memories came with the creation of MTM Productions, that he formed with Mary Tyler Moore, the second of his three wives. He began with a simple premise: "If you build a reputation as a place where creative people are encouraged to create, they will come." Those who came included Jim Brooks and Allan Burns to create and produce *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*; Gene Reynolds, who produce *Lou Grant*; Gary David Goldberg, writer and later producer of a string of solid sitcoms; Steven Bochco, producer of *Hill Street Blues* and many other gritty dramas; Charlotte Brown, producer of *Rhoda*, and Ed Weinberger, producer of *Newhart*.

Others included Glen and Les Charles, who later left MTM to create *Cheers* with another MTM alumnus, Jim Burrows; Jay Sandrich, who directed most of *The Mary Tyler Moore* episodes; Tom Patchett, and Jay Tarses (*The Tony Randall Show*) and

Hugh Wilson, producer of *Frank's Place*. There were many more, wearing blue jeans and tee-shirts, while driving Jaguars, who found the atmosphere to their creative liking at MTM.

The laid-back attitude and the relaxed, informal atmosphere stemmed from a conviction that Tinker had acquired soon after he joined NBC in 1949. He explains:

"Ever since my early radio days at NBC, I've always admired sometimes to the point of awe, the performers, directors and writers who made show business a different kind of business. I don't think of myself as a creative person, which is probably why I've been so star-struck about people who can do what I can't. In particular, I've always had enormous respect for good writers (a respect that's grown since I undertook this book). From my earliest days around and about television, it's been clear to me that good shows can be made only by good writers.

"What I didn't realize at the time was that I had found the ingredients that were to make MTM a *writer's company*. Before Mary's show had run its seven-year course, Brooks and Burns, through their work, would attract dozens of first-rate writing contributors, a number of whom would stay with MTM to produce other wonderful programs."

Tinker also developed a philosophy for dealing with meddling network executives. When someone at CBS decided that *Lou Grant* couldn't succeed, a meeting was called with Tinker and his producers. Tinker recalls the meeting like this:

"... We sat with relative patience while the networkers politely but firmly told us what they had perceived the creative problems to be, and made some suggestions about changes. My colleagues took a few minutes to articulate some token responses, but I knew them too well to let that go on

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for long.

" 'Guys,' I said as courteously as I could, 'let's cut through all the shit and save everyone some time. You're sitting here with three of the best producers in television. They are making the show you bought and the one they want to make. If you're that unhappy with it, then cancel it now and let them get on with other projects. Otherwise, have a little faith, as we do, that success will come.'"

"A guy in my production company role, facing down the network on behalf of such peerless creative partners could always get off on a scene like that. Officialdom wisely folded its useless cards, and we returned to the studio where for the next four years those peerless creative partners made a successful and acclaimed program called *Lou Grant*.

Tinker claims that his most expensive error was leaving MTM for NBC. Subsequently, contrary to promises made to him, he was required to sell his MTM stock to business partners for a fraction of what it brought later in the open market. It all started with Tinker having lunch with Thornton Bradshaw, the incoming board chairman of RCA. Tinker gave him sound advice on the care and cultivation of creative talent, something missing—and badly—under the frantic and frenetic NBC presidency of Fred Silverman.

Bradshaw liked the advice so much he offered the job to Tinker, who took it without a discussion of salary.

He took the job for five years. He pushed NBC from third place among the then three networks to first place, boosting profits and RCA stock and — after General Electric bought RCA— Tinker left 20 perfectly good suits in his New York apartment and went back to the California informality and casual clothes that he loved. From the airport, Tinker telephoned Bud Rukeyser and told him to find someone who fit the 20 suits and give them

to him. Rukeyser's "Cinderella Search" took time, but, "Eventually, the suits were awarded to a young San Francisco executive with only a peripheral NBC connection but exactly the right build."

General Electric wasn't so lucky. It bought a thriving, even dominant, television network and discovered that it was in a business that was changing so rapidly that no one could keep up. From the 1948 beginnings of commercial television until the mid-1970s, ABC, CBS and NBC combined to command well over 90% of the viewing audience. Then came the Independent stations, booming from fewer than 100 stations to more than 400 stations. Cable systems expanded and began providing "niche" programming to compete with the "general appeal" network programs.

Some of the audience went to non-commercial or public television. The Fox Television Network became a player. The video cassette recorder came into more than half of all television homes and before one could say "David Sarnoff!" the original three TV networks were left with about 60% of the audience. (To be fair, more and more viewers continue to watch an expanding amount of time. The value of network stocks remains high.)

Tinker tried to teach the guiding rules of mass media: People watch programs; not stations, not networks and not bean-counting, bottom-line oriented whizzes from the Harvard Business School. The lesson doesn't always take, apparently. Perhaps that lesson is just too simple. But those who will not learn it, are never going to lead the Nielsen ratings, nor the stock market. ■

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## IS JUDGE WOLPER FOR REAL?

### The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives

by Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis:  
Oxford University Press:  
New York/Oxford, 1993.

BY TOM COOPER

**A**t last, a paperback edition of *The Unreality Industry* by Ian Mitroff and Warren Bennis brings their penetrating probe to the public. The recent softcover copy adds a fresh preface by the authors. The book's subtitle, *The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What It Is Doing to Our Lives*, immediately acquaints us with the thesis that television is part of a vast UNREALITY which both surrounds and invades us. For Mitroff and Bennis, *the alarming consequence is that TV not only defines what is reality, but much more importantly and disturbingly, TV obliterates the very distinction, the very line, between reality and unreality.*

This "boundary warping" between the real and unreal manifests in numerous examples: audiences used to wonder whether Judge Wolper was scripted or live; John Hinkleys and Marc Chapmans stalk and hope to assassinate celebrities they know, but have never met; children frequently cannot distinguish between Saturday

morning programs and commercials; research shows that 50% of audiences watching *Rescue 911* think the re-enacted segments are real; news programs feed on staged pseudo-events from press conferences to promotions.

What excites the authors is not simply this unreality but our decreasing ability to detect its artificial components. Bennis and Mitroff describe two phenomena which make ubiquitous deception possible. What they call unreality ONE exudes from the electronic world in which all sounds and images may be doctored or altered. Unreality TWO is our widespread preference for entertainment, not reality, so that even news is sculpted, packaged and performed.

Not content to merely describe this unreality industry, the authors press on for the causes of its popularity. First, they feel that "reality" has become so ominous and complex since World War II that we prefer not to deal with it; we prefer more comfortable, simplified alternatives. Next, by invoking psychology they examine how unreal images, celebrities, stories, products and fantasies pander to our individual and collective needs. Finally, as experts in business, they remind us of the economic vectors in a materialist culture: unreality provides profits for the producer and commercial fulfillment (products, titillation, goods, false status) to the consumer.

**T**he notion that television is transforming, if not replacing, reality, is ubiquitous since the 1950's. Indeed the authors are wise to allude to McLuhan, Meyrowitz and Postman, whose transformation theory they extensively paraphrase, but they neglect to mention Innis, Giedion, White, Schwartz, Gerbner and many others who have developed and applied the thesis that technology

recreates or caricatures humanity.

The unique spin presented by *The Unreality Industry* is that, although it echoes the generic biases of the authors listed above, both Mitroff and Bennis bring the perspectives of professors of *Business*. As students of management, they are engaged with how managers can manage businesses more effectively. However, the case study of the unreality (media, advertising, PR) industry, reveals business which is *managing us*. To their credit, the authors offer concrete recommendations to reverse this out-of-control mismanagement. Solutions include the decommercializing of TV news, informed public moral outrage, and specific adjustments by the FCC. Whether these changes would prove practical and effective or not, there is evidence that much thinking has been generated and debated.

The authors help us see the cornucopia of changes occurring in the manufacturing of *simulation*. Initially, *Max Headroom* was a computer gimmick; later "he" is part of a simulated community of electronic talking heads we take for granted; initially, *Roger Rabbit* was a fascinating novelty which attracted us to the movies; but by the end of that film, we wondered why we were more attracted to Roger's animated girlfriend than to Bob Hoskins, a flesh and blood actor. We used to be told that an actress has changed her hair color or teeth for the cameras, but during the 1990's, we no longer know if she has also artificially altered her nose, breasts, stomach, brain, or even her "soul" to become a celebrity. It is no longer possible to tell what is real and what is artificial, nor do audiences seem to care.

It is the erosion of caring which distresses Bennis and Mitroff. The mass reproduction of unreality is harmless if, like the magician's tricks, the unreality is understood to be fun,

fantastic and separate from real life. Unlike the magician, however, the unreality industry overpopulates our consciousness. Just as there is a bio-engineering of the human embryo, the authors argue that there is a parallel genetic engineering of the mind.

In many ways, unreality is even an anesthetizing of the brain, as in the science fiction of Huxley, Bradbury, Orwell, and others—the independent intellectual is obsolesced; homogenized, trivialized entertain/thought creates an artificial social harmony. Ultimately, all of these tendencies feed America's "cocooning"—our isolated womb-like security with our VCR's, computers, headphones, and recycled images which hedge our bets against firsthand experience.

**C**an all this be true? All this can be thought-provoking, but without data to support each of their claims, Bennis and Mitroff are possibly generating some unreality of their own. Although the content of their argument is merely the next chapter in the giant book of techno-determinism being written by a parade of alarmists, who is to say where reality ultimately resides? Bennis and Mitroff provide a most valuable service by shocking us into deeper thinking about reality. If our consciousness is constantly being engineered by greater and more numerous technologies, would it not be to our benefit to inspect our own thought? Would it not also be valuable to scrutinize the *conduits* of thought and their electronic manipulation?

There is ultimately another exercise invited by *The Unreality Industry*. Mitroff and Bennis state that they have no problem with M.I.T. devoting an entire lab to new, enhanced and simulated imagery and to other media technologies. What concerns them is that M.I.T. has not hired even one

faculty member to consider the potential ethical and moral consequences of applying these new technologies. Ultimately, the authors seem to fear that such a laboratory has become a metaphor for society—to enhance our image, we are willing to let our ears be pierced, our noses be broken, our fat be surgically removed, and our faces be lifted. We substitute silicone for our souls and television for thinking . . . so we have not time nor capacity remaining to contemplate our ultimate nature or purpose, nor our moral responsibility.

*The Unreality Industry* is an engaging first step to contemplate anew the human condition, purpose and responsibility. It is effective as a probe to inspire more individual and independent evaluation of our heads and what fills them.

It is wise to contemplate the world of images we bequeath to our children. As we inhabit the age of tiny telescreens recycling retouched images within our own heads, it seems equally wise to understand our own reality and who creates it. ■

Tom Cooper, Professor of Mass Communication at Emerson College in Boston, is currently an exchange professor at the University of Hawaii. He is publisher of *Media Ethics Update*.

## REMEMBERING "MARTY'S" CREATOR

Mad as Hell:  
The Life and Work  
of Paddy Chayefsky

by Shawn Considine  
Random House: New York

**BY JACK KUNEY**

**A** recent biography of Paddy Chayefsky, probably the finest writer to ever emerge from television, should evoke a great deal of attention. The successes and failures of this contentious, garrulous, slightly mad genius, will interest everyone, both inside and outside the business, for his extraordinary talents and broad sweep of ideas reached and influenced a wide range of people. His early television plays, his work in the theatre, his much acclaimed movies—he is the only screenwriter to have won three Academy Awards—all had impact, no matter how they were reviewed, or received by audiences.

As Shawn Considine tells the story, Paddy honed his skills on the box, but "his singularity and restlessness impelled him to move on." Though his name became synonymous with the so-called "Golden Age of Television," he was never a great friend of the electronic medium which gave him his start.

Considine quotes Chayefsky, "TV totally desensitizes (us to) viciousness, brutality, murder, death, so we no longer feel the pains of the victim or suffer for their lives or feel their grief.

That is the basic problem of television. We've lost our shock, our sense of humanity." Strong stuff, written years before tabloid TV times, it ranks as one of the more prescient remarks made about our medium.

The title of the book, of course, is drawn from the scene in Chayefsky's 1976 movie, *Network*. If you saw the picture you will recall the striking images in which an anchorman called Howard Beale, fighting the pressures of his network's news department for higher ratings, slowly goes berserk. The resultant breakdown is a beaut, in which Beale departs from his journalistic standards and strikes out against the egregious owners of this fictional network by exhorting his television audience to open their windows, stick their heads out, and shout: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!"

The film won Chayefsky his second Oscar. (His first was for the movie version of his own TV show, *Marty*. The third was for *Hospital*, starring George C. Scott and Diana Rigg.) *Network* was a ground-breaking film, more relevant today than it was two decades ago. Chayefsky dramatically challenged the system to do what it is capable of—outstanding news and informational programming, without stooping to sensationalism in the race for ratings.

**B**orn in 1923 into a middle-class Jewish family in the Bronx, New York, young Sidney Chayefsky was earmarked very early as someone "gifted." At two-and-a-half, he could "speak intelligently" and by age three he was "discoursing." He obviously never stopped. He grew into a marathon talker, argumentative to the point of boredom. His saving grace: he was a voracious reader, absorbed by everything from patterns to human behavior to contemporary politics. Best

of all, he became a compulsive writer.

The Great Depression of the 30's impoverished the Chayefsky family, yet there was always money enough for piano lessons, for books, even an occasional Broadway show. He excelled at school, describing himself as: "... offensively precocious, one of those kids in the front row with his hands up all of the time." With his glibness, he kept his Irish and Italian neighbors at bay, storing them in memory, using them to people his early TV dramas.

**W**hen he started to write, young Sidney Chayefsky's insights shone through every character he created, even his own persona. By the time he was twenty, he had recreated himself as "Paddy" Chayefsky. As biographer Shaun Considine tells the story, Sidney's Irish baptism came one Sunday morning during World War II, when as a raw recruit during basic training he tried to get out of K.P. by claiming he was half Irish and had to go to Mass. "Okay, Paddy," said the bemused duty officer, and the name stuck.

This suited Chayefsky just fine. In fact, according to Considine, it became the key to his character: "Sidney was Chayefsky's earnest, sensitive, moral man; Paddy the glib, wise-cracking, worldly, public person . . . Sidney had the talent, the genius. He was the silent creator, the one who thrived on isolation . . . Paddy was the producer, the protector, the agent who wheeled and dealt to get the most money and the best creative terms for Sidney."

Sidney had graduated from City College in New York City right into the army. He landed in Normandy, fought with the infantry into Belgium. The first in his company to receive a Purple Heart, Paddy was still in the hospital in England when he met Garson Kanin, a Captain in the U.S. Army's

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Special Service Division.

Immediately responding to his "wit and delivery", he had him assigned to his unit, where he worked on *The True Glory*, the definitive documentary of the invasion of Europe. His role was a minimal one, but Kanin also discovered Chayefsky was a talented musician and writer, and encouraged him to write songs, lyrics and skits for the unit.

**T**elevision was still in the deep post-war freeze when Paddy tried to make his mark as an actor, playwright, comedian on Broadway. His prospective career slowed to a stop but he continued to write. He crossed the country several times trying to peddle his scripts in Hollywood, finally getting an original piece titled *M Is For Mother* optioned by Universal Pictures. As Considine tells the story, "The outlines Chayefsky turned into Universal in 1948 were not marketable. So, prematurely, after six weeks his employment at Universal was terminated."

A deeply sensitive man, already given to intense depression when stymied on a project, Chayefsky returned to Manhattan with the idea of giving up, settling for a "more normal career." But, by then, his creative impulses operating at full throttle, he was writing continuously. In that year, he wrote three plays for Broadway; a screen play was optioned by 20th-Century Fox, and he found himself back on the Coast again. But that script, too, "languished under the studio system" and Chayefsky once again returned to New York, storming the William Morris office, questioning why a writer of his considerable talents could not make it on Broadway or in Hollywood.

The turnaround for Chayefsky came in June of 1949 when he became part of an extraordinary group called New

Dramatists which had become a rallying place for young playwrights. Among its members were Robert Anderson, William Inge, (whose first play, *Come Back, Little Sheba*, was about to open on Broadway) William Gibson and Paddy Chayefsky. In *Mad As Hell*, Anderson describes those sessions, "Every two weeks we traipsed up to that small room at top of the Hudson Theatre, where you would sit and listen to people like Maxwell Anderson, Howard Lindsey, Elmer Rice, Elia Kazan and Josh Logan talk to you about the theatre." Chayefsky later recalled, "I learned the first rules of playwriting there."

During this period, Paddy found another staunch supporter in Robert Anderson's wife, Phyllis. As head of the play-reading department for the Theatre Guild, she encouraged him, tried to get the Guild to produce one of his early works, *The Man Who Made The Mountain Shake*. But that winter, almost broke, Chayefsky put his plays aside. Through the Andersons, he began adapting scripts for the *Theatre Guild on the Air*. As Considine writes, "The Guild would enable Chayefsky to examine the fine art of distilling a story to fit the concentrated span of broadcasting. You learned about structure, about dramatic essentials, and you pared your story down to those essentials."

When he finally broke into television in the early 50's, the freeze had been lifted and the number of homes with TV sets soared. To cater to this new audience, additional programming was needed. In New York, the call went out for writers to fill the slots being opened for dramatic shows. Paddy started writing for the CBS program *Danger*. But that, too, had its pitfalls for the contentious Chayefsky. Sidney Lumet, then the director of *Danger*, bared Paddy from the set, and Chayefsky vowed he would never do another television show in which he

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wasn't in attendance at all the rehearsals.

To ease Chayefsky's pique, his agent set up a meeting at NBC with a young producer fresh out of Yale Drama School named Fred Coe who was doing a Sunday night anthology series called *The Philco Television Playhouse* on NBC. The show was expanding, and a new sponsor had just come aboard—the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Coe began to assemble an extraordinary group of young playwrights to share the gargantuan task of putting on a new and original hour drama for television every week. Among those writers were: David Shaw, Robert Alan Aurthur, Sumner Locke Elliott, Reginald Rose, Horton Foote, Tad Mosel, and —Paddy Chayefsky. During Paddy's break-in period on Philco/Goodyear, Coe gave him free reign, allowing him to sit on story conferences and rehearsals. Paddy learned quickly.

Was there a "Golden Age of Television?" If the "age" did exist, it was embodied in the Philco/Goodyear hour, and Paddy Chayefsky was one of its shining lights. The show gave him his first assignment in the fall of 1952, a story Coe had gleaned from the *Reader's Digest*, called *It Happened on the Brooklyn Subway*. It was a simple tale about a photographer, who, on his way to work one day, reunited a man and his wife, each of whom believed the other had perished in a concentration camp.

Using the skills he had sharpened at New Dramatists, Chayefsky changed the whole story. The photographer becomes a middle-aged cantor, who, on the eve of Rosh Hashonah, the Jewish New York, decides he cannot sing in synagogue because he has lost his faith in God. With this conflict set, Chayefsky takes his protagonist through a series of bizarre, yet miraculous, subway rides, in which he meets

and re-unites two Dutch Jews, who had suffered the cruelties of Auschwitz. All this aided and abetted by a mysterious subway conductor, who seems to change trains and direct passengers at will.

**T**he show was renamed *Holiday Song* and marked Chayefsky's debut on Philco/Goodyear. It played on Sunday night, Sept. 14th, 1952, and was a tremendous hit.

Five months after *Holiday Song* was aired, a second Chayefsky play, *The Reluctant Citizen*, was telecast. By January, 1953, a third was completed called *Printer's Measure*. His next script would be lauded as, "the most highly acclaimed drama of the decade." A simple story, set in the Bronx, called *Marty*.

The finished play was a masterpiece of crisp, terse, dialogue; a sensitive, compassionate piece about two of society's rejects who fall in love. A young Rod Steiger played Marty. (Ernest Borgnine in the movie version.) The part of Clara was played by Nancy Marchand. Delbert Mann directed.

**B**efore he moved on to examine other venues for his great talent, Paddy Chayefsky had written nine totally unique and original dramas for Philco/Goodyear. The demand for so-called "closet" drama was in full swing. As many as twenty-five original plays per week were being televised live on the three networks. By 1955, the "Golden Age" started by Coe and Company had peaked and died a slow death. The great exodus to California had begun.

This review has only dealt with part of this splendid biography, concentrating on Chayefsky's early history in television. There's much more: his career in the theatre, his adventures in

Hollywood, his family, his friends. Fascinating reading for any number of people from Broadway to Hollywood; required reading for aspiring television or screen writers, students of broadcasting and film.

A heavy smoker most of his adult life, Paddy was fifty-eight years old when he died from complications from emphysema. On March 5, 1984, three years after his death, Chayefsky was inducted into the first Television Hall of Fame, along with Edward R. Murrow, William Paley, Norman Lear, and Lucille Ball.

Bob Fosse, his great friend, accepted the award for Chayefsky. As Considine tells the story, this is how Fosse quoted Paddy on his posthumous wishes, "Fosse, I would like to be remembered," he said. "The most modest of us aspire to that. But this is a very fickle business. I'll be lucky if they remember I'm the guy who wrote the lines: 'What are you doing tonight, Marty?' and 'I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore.'"

But Paddy Chayefsky has not been forgotten. A BBC/PBS co-production of his play, *The Good Mother* has recently aired, with the promise of more of the offing. Further, with Robert Redford's recent film *Quiz Show* now current, a whole new generation knows the answer to the question: What film won an Oscar in 1955? The reply Herb Stempel failed to give on the rigged *Twenty-one* game show—*Marty*. ■

Jack Kunej, who has been a director and producer at NBC, ABC, CBS and station groups, lives in Guerneville in Northern California. He and his wife are now back in their home after the floods.

## REVISITING ROBIN AND JIM

### The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour:

*Executive Editor, Robert MacNeil.*

*Associate Editor, Jim Lehrer.*

*Executive Producer, Lester M. Crystal.*

*A production of WNET/WETA and MacNeil Lehrer Productions,*

### BY JIM SNYDER

*In September, 1983, in its eighth year, the half hour MacNeil/Lehrer Report became the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. I was assigned by the Television Quarterly editor to watch the new program for a month and then write a critique. My report was stingy with praise. I thought the hour long program was rough, falling short of the commendable goals MacNeil and Lehrer had set. In recent months, again at TVQ's suggestion, I renewed my close scrutiny of the NewsHour.*

**I** have a friend, a fiftyish journalist who would be most welcome in a MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour focus group. When I asked him why he likes the program he said "I like the depth, I like MacNeil and Lehrer, they do good interviews, they are fair and impartial, they make sense out of some pretty tough subjects, I like the political coverage, I like the special reports although some are too long."

My friend and his fellow NewsHour fans see the program as an oasis in early evening news, a place where viewers can rest from the hyper pace of the 22-minute network broadcasts, where interview subjects are not rushed or bullied. In this oasis every-

one believes the audience is better served if you risk giving too much time to a story rather than too little. Those indepth interviews MacNeil and Lehrer do so well are treasured because they produce information not available anywhere else at that hour.

The *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* is a much better program now than at its debut in 1983. It has grown and prospered mainly because its management and philosophy have been consistent during a period when consistency was impossible in most other parts of the TV news landscape (see changes in network owners and turnover in news division presidents and nightly news executive producers).

**R**obert MacNeil, and Jim Lehrer and executive producer Les Crystal remain in power, fashioning each days' broadcast, making all personnel decisions and not wavering from their dedication to serious journalism and their role as provider of "a window on the Federal government." Any changes have been for the better, tighter production, faster, higher quality breaking news coverage, better booking of interviews, and steady upgrading of on-air personnel. In this era when the line between tabloid TV show tastes and those of local and network news gets more blurred by the day, the *NewsHour* remains staunchly immune to the tabloid trend.

Over the years there has been criticism of what one critic called "the unrelenting seriousness" of the *NewsHour*. In 1983 I mentioned the problem in my criticism. Fortunately a partial solution has been in place in recent years: Mark Shields, the political analyst and humorist who brightens up the show with his wit on practically every appearance. One hopes Mr. Shields and the *NewsHour* have a

long term agreement.

Another criticism I had in 1983 was inspired by the program's willingness to commit to ten or twelve minute interviews even when the guest was not worthy of that much time. I never saw an interview cut short because the guest was dull and/or not producing any worthwhile information. The show has not changed its policy, but thankfully the staff has increased its batting average on booking good guests. Year in and year out, the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* has presented hundreds of excellent interviews and discussions.

What with their admirable civility toward guests, MacNeil and Lehrer sometimes still are too tolerant of the foreign official who has not mastered the English language or the think-tanker who runs too long. For two or three minutes o.k., but please not for much more. The darkest night of all last Fall was an interview with a non-English speaking official of the Cuban government who was visiting the U.N. and insisted that his own translator be used on the air. Turned out the translator had a thick Cuban accent. It was the longest 10 minutes I had encountered in years.

A Roper Starch survey released last September showed the broadcast's audience had grown by more than one third since 1985, that five million viewers watch each night, 17 million watch each week and 35 million each month (NBC ranked third behind ABC and CBS reaches 76 million viewers each month). The *NewsHour* audience is a healthy mix of viewers from all ages and income brackets. But, the survey reports, "MacNeil Lehrer viewers are significantly more likely to have graduated from college and to have higher household incomes than viewers of other evening news shows".

Also heartening to MacNeil Lehrer was the study's findings on credibility. When people were asked which

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program they would believe if they received conflicting or different reports of the same news story, 42% chose the *NewsHour* over ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN. CBS scored 40%; but in head-to-head comparisons among viewers of the *NewsHour* and the *CBS Evening News*, 37% said they would believe the *NewsHour* versus 26% for CBS.

Jim Lehrer's reaction to all that research was "Our program has not changed, but the landscape on which we exist has. We have become increasingly unique through no fault of our own."

That is another way of saying there are viewers who are being driven to the *NewsHour*, if not as an alternative, then as a supplement to network news. The network evening news shows have not had the luxury of the management continuity, nor the consistency of product the *NewsHour* has enjoyed. The struggle to keep the evening network news programs contemporary and compelling has sometimes produced backward steps.

**S**omewhere in the 80's, network news producers, armed with the very latest electronic editing gear and a desire to battle the short attention span of all those viewers sitting with clickers in their hands developed the ridiculously short soundbite. So eyewitnesses, or elected officials or think-tank stars often pop up in TV news reports saying things like, "This could be trouble" or "I was frightened" or "I wonder about this bill but ..."

Sometimes the comment is edited out of the middle of a sentence when the newsmaker is in midthought. Critics have complained for years about political candidates confusing the public with quickie 30-second TV commercials. In a lot of network news programs public officials can go for

years without meriting a thirty-second sound bite. When the complete list of American broadcast journalism sins is enshrined somewhere, these whiz-by sound bites are certain to qualify. I believe the decline in the public's estimation of Washington politicians was hastened by the willingness of those politicians to submit to such treatment.

Also certain to make the broadcast journalism sin list is the ugly *standup close*. In the beginning of network TV news the standup close was mainly a device to establish that, by golly, a correspondent had been on the scene of the news event just reported. The standup close let the audience see the person who had been voicing over the pictures and enabled the correspondent to report some additional information in the final ten or fifteen seconds. But over the years over-aggressive correspondents who have gone beyond fact to commentary have made the standup close less of a service to the viewer and more of a promotional vehicle for the correspondent.

From locations all around the world, battle fields, airport runways, government buildings and hotel balconies of all sizes, shapes and nationalities, correspondents use the standup close to deliver mini-editorials and self serving statements. The White House lawn is often hip deep in such utterances. In the early days of the Bosnian war, for example, there were countless closes from network correspondents in Sarajevo and environs bemoaning the absence of American troops in the fighting. Some correspondents covering political campaigns use the opinionated close to issue an unscientific daily score card on which candidate is winning.

The Clinton administration having alienated the Washington press corps from day one, has had to listen to a lot of "you did well today but your future

## REVIEW & COMMENT

is not bright" kind of putdown from network reporters ... as in "Although the passage of NAFTA was a victory for President Clinton today it may be the last one he will get from this Congress" ... or "Things have gone smoothly in those early days of the Haiti operation... But, the situation could quickly turn into a nightmare for the president."

The ugly standup close by the White House correspondent is not a Clinton era creation, I remember them as far back as the Johnson administration. However the mean-spirited level began to rise during the Bush administration, and has reached new heights in the Clinton years.

The *NewsHour* is doing its bit to discourage standup closes. At the end of the news report either MacNeil or Lehrer, who are better writers than most correspondents, buttons up the report with a close from the anchor desk. Who knows how many friends the *NewsHour* has made with its enlightened views on sound bites and standup closes? I prefer to think of it as a major contribution in the fight against viewer agitation.

One of the burdens the *NewsHour* has not had to share with the nightly network shows is the cultural divide between executive producers in New York and the staffs of the largest bureau outside of New York, Washington. It has been the pattern in modern times for most executive producers of the network nightly news shows to be short on Washington experience which makes them wary of their colleagues in the Washington Bureau. They are alert for Washington folk trying to sell them stories which are "too inside the beltway" or contain too many "talking heads". (See root causes of the whiz-by sound bite phenomenon.) It is a conflict that never goes away. What

may haunt the network troops in Washington are thoughts of damage done when coverage of the government is so superficial it actually misleads the citizenry.

MacNeil and Lehrer endear themselves to their loyal viewers by allowing their guests to finish sentences and thoughts. They do not inject their personalities or their personal opinions into the interview. They would never do what one of my heroes, Ted Koppel, did during a *Nightline* interview with the chairman of the joint chiefs, General John Shalikashvili about the threat of a new Gulf War. After the General expressed an opinion on part of U.S. policy, Koppel replied "Well, I disagree—and we'll discuss it after the commercial break."

Giving guests time enough to speak occasionally creates an unexpected payoff for the *NewsHour*. For example, when Jimmy Carter, Colin Powell and Sam Nunn appeared with President Clinton at a news conference the day they returned from their peace mission to Haiti, each man said important things. That night the *NewsHour* devoted seven uninterrupted minutes to tape of the news conference and the comments of all four men. On one network news program that night, the usual 2:15 package on the story included only one small sound bite from Colin Powell, one third of one of his sentences!

The day Senator Robert Dole appeared with President Clinton before the news cameras at the White House to announce he would indeed back passage of GATT before the new Republican controlled Congress convened, one nightly network news show voiced over the video of Dole talking with the president at his side. Dole was reduced to producing "lip flap", the term used by film and tape editors when you do not let the viewer hear what the person in the picture is saying.

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**W**hen Robert MacNeil announced last October that he would retire in October, 1995, it was also announced a budget crunch would force the *NewsHour* to close its New York office and consolidate the New York and Washington staffs in Washington. That means some layoffs and belt tightening. But that may not mean a rocky financial future for the program. Underwriters Archer Daniels Midland and New York Life are committed for three more years and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has reaffirmed its support. The program's annual budget is paltry by network standards, 25.3 million, up 25% from the 1984 budget of 20 million. The budget grew less than the inflation rate for that period.

No changes in basic philosophy are contemplated, but after MacNeil's departure Lehrer will function as a single anchor but with lots of help from subanchors Margaret Warner, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Elizabeth Farnsworth and Kwame Holman and more frequent essays and special reports. And of course there will be all that coverage of the federal government at a time when it should be especially interesting and as important.

Last Fall when it was announced that staff cuts were coming to the *NewsHour*, MacNeil and Lehrer made statements to the staff. Lehrer's remarks included this summary of his view of the program and its purpose:

"We know who we are and what we are doing. We know what we believe. We believe the audience is at least as smart as we are, the news and the people who make it and analyze it are as important as we are. We believe it is possible and important to be fair. We believe the news is not just a product to be packaged, hyped and sold; it is also the vehicle on which an informed public keeps our democracy fired up and viable. Fortunately we do

not have to rethink what we believe every night ... Who knows? The best could even be yet to come." ■

Jim Snyder was Vice President for News of the Post-Newsweek Stations. He has also been a CBS correspondent and Washington Bureau chief for Westinghouse Broadcasting Co.

## VIEW POINT

### A MESSAGE FOR THE TV GENERATION

*"In the last 30 years, the television marketplace has become a severely distorting influence in at least four important public areas. We have failed (1) to use television for education; (2) to use television for children; (3) to finance public television properly; and (4) to use television properly in political campaigns.*

*"In these four areas, the television marketplace has not fulfilled our needs and will not do so in the next 30 years. These four needs can be met only if we—as a nation—make the decision that to aim only at the bottom line is to aim too low. If we still believe in the concept of the public interest, we can use television to educate, we can stop short-changing our children, we can fund public broadcasting properly, and we can provide free television time for our political candidates. My generation began these tasks, and the time has now come to pass the responsibility on to the next generation—the first generation to grow up with television."*

—Newton W. Minow  
"How Vast the Wasteland Now?"  
*Media Studies Journal*,  
Winter 1995.



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# **PHILIPS**

In the last issue, Dan Klugherz's provocative article contrasted the Spielberg film *Schindler's List* with Jon Blair's British documentary *Schindler*. Here is Mr. Blair's comment, and several others.

To the Editor:

I have just received a copy of the article you published comparing my documentary *Schindler* with Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. I was of course most flattered by the many favourable comments made by Dan Klugherz about my film so it seems a bit churlish to take issue with him on a few points.

First of all, I am not at all sure about the whole premise of comparing a dramatic fictionalized theatrical feature made for twenty three million dollars or so with a made-for-television documentary with a budget of less than half a million dollars in today's money, employing strict historical criteria of factual accuracy, and based on combining witness testimony with archive film, still photographs, and new footage of the locations. It is, with respect, a bit like the futile exercise of trying to determine which is the better fruit, apples or pears.

Then there is the "small" matter of the "minuscule" audience for my film. Curiously enough, it is probably that *Schindler's List* and *Schindler* have to date roughly been seen by the same number of people, at least until such time as Spielberg's film receives its television release when it will undoubtedly run away from my film. According to Amblin the current estimate for the audience for *Schindler's List* is approximately 50 million. Over the years, my documentary has been shown three times in the United Kingdom alone with a total audience of approximately twenty million. In addition it has been syndicated across the major markets in the United States in

1994, sold to most of the important television territories throughout the world, and is now available in home video in the US. Hardly a "relatively minuscule" audience by any standards.

Your reviewer's comment however, accurately reflects the common misperception about television documentary and theatrical audience figures, based I suspect more on the level of hype that the two media achieve. No one, least of all myself, would deny that *Schindler's List* has been a world-wide phenomenon in ever respect and that the only reason behind the renewed interest in my film has been as a result of the response to Spielberg's achievement.

Given my background, it is hardly surprising that many people have asked me for my reaction to *Schindler's List*. Apart from always refusing to get involved in the debate about which was "better," which I really do think is absolutely fruitless, I also always point to the fact that despite its fictional foundations, almost every *Schindler* survivor I have talked to approves of the "authenticity" of the Spielberg film. Many even go as far as to say that scenes like the liquidation of the ghetto seem to be almost more real than the event itself. They find it hard to believe that Spielberg, who far from being there, was not even born at the time, could have recreated the events so accurately. If there is one criticism, they (and I) have, it tends to involve the scene at the factory gates near the close of the film when the fictional *Schindler's* behaviour seems oddly out of character with both the real individual and his celluloid counterpart.

Incidentally, not many of your read-

ers may know that my film was awarded the Robert Flaherty Award for Best Documentary by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 1983.

—Jon Blair  
London

To the Editor:

**M**y copy of *TVQ* arrived two days after screening the Thames Television *Schindler* for my communications students at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia (Washington metro area). Dan Klugherz' comments are welcome, incisive and important.

He is certainly correct in concluding that there is an important place in society for both Spielberg's and Blair's projects, different as they are. Many are the people who will scorn a successful motion picture based on a serious subject. Many are the people who will dismiss serious documentary. The fact is we need both.

Most people need a "story." Historically, few watch documentaries. Some of those enraptured by a theatrical release will want to learn more and seek out Blair's project and books and magazines. Most will not. Fact: Documentaries have always had a minority of the audience. What was the last documentary any of us saw in a theater? For me, it was the 1960's production of *The True Story of the Civil War*, narrated by Raymond Massey. It won the Oscar that year for Best Documentary. But who saw it? More people saw Ken Burns' public television series. Every year, in fact, a documentary virtually no one sees wins an Oscar.

The first telling of the Oskar Schindler story was by Herbert Steinhouse in a Canadian publication, *Saturday Night*, in 1949. The author couldn't convince anyone to consider it further. Why? *Schindler's Ark*, the book on which the Spielberg film is based,

was written by an Australian, Thomas Keneally, in 1982. The author couldn't convince anyone to consider it further. Until Mr. Spielberg.

I think it all comes down to the "standard of the industry." Who can sell what to whom. No one in Canada made a documentary or a theatrical motion picture. No one in Australia made a documentary or theatrical film. No one in the United Kingdom made a documentary until 1983. No one in the United States ever made a documentary. Stephen Spielberg made a wonderful motion picture ... more than 40 years after the story in *Saturday Night*, the Canadian magazine.

I guess my only problem with the Klugherz essay and much of the dialog seen in newspapers and Sunday supplement in the last year is: Why does documentary and theatrical film invite comparison? They don't ... unless ... you've got a sensitive subject.

—Peter J. Restivo  
Herndon, Virginia

To the Editor:

**R**egarding Dan Klugherz's piece, *Schindler: the Movie and the Documentary*, I saw both versions and found Klugherz's article a little puzzling. I strongly disagree with him for praising the documentary at the film's expense. Furthermore, Klugherz is wrong to say that it's "hopeless for the enacted film to reflect the authenticity achieved in the documentary."

Eyewitnesses in the documentary talk about the horrors and do it effectively, but the film shows the atrocities graphically. Fictional films and documentaries are two different genres, and both have their place. In my opinion, both interpretations of Oskar Schindler are excellent and shouldn't be pitted against each other.

—Mark R. Day  
Vista, California





## V I E W P O I N T

*"One particularly egregious example of still and newsreel camera coverage of the courts occurred in 1925 in the infamous Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee. One of the greatest circuses in the annals of the American judicial process, the 'monkey trial' focused some attention on the excesses of the news media in the 1920s.*

*"The Scopes Trial not only brought the issue of evolution to the American public, it also introduced another technological innovation in trial coverage—radio broadcasting. It was the first trial to be broadcast over radio, allowing lawyers William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow to orate to large radio audiences. Judge John T. Raulston exaggerated only slightly when he stated, 'My gavel will be heard around the pm...'*

*"Telegraph wires were run into the courtroom, phone lines were installed in the corridor just outside, and newsreel cameras along with many news photographers were present in the court. The proceedings were punctuated with requests that were more apt for a movie director than an officer of the court: 'Put your face a little more this way, Judge.' 'Come a little more forward, Mr. Darrow.'"*

—Ruth Ann Strickland and Richter H. Moore Jr.,  
*Judicature,*  
November/December, 1994

## L O O K I N G B A C K

### THE HAUPTMANN TRIAL

*"Not until after the 1935 trial of Bruno Richard Hauptmann, who was charged with kidnapping and murdering the baby son of American hero Colonel Charles Lindbergh, were cameras in the courtroom and unprincipled news coverage substantially challenged. The trial was highly publicized with approximately 700 newsmen, including 120 cameramen, present. With messenger boys employed by the press running about and virtually uncontrollable, photographers climbing on counsel tables for better shots, blinding witnesses with their flash bulbs.*

*"Hauptmann appealed his conviction, claiming he could not get a fair trial. The New Jersey Court of Appeals held that despite some confusion, the public is entitled to reports on the court proceedings, and judges must afford reasonable access."*

—Ruth Ann Strickland and Richter H. Moore Jr.,  
*Judicature,*  
November/December, 1994

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# D I G I T A L L E A D E R S

*"At TCI's National Digital Television Center, we have adopted D-3 as our primary format for on-air playback. Sixty Panasonic AJ-D340 D-3 recorder/players are used for our Pay-Per-View services—PrimeStar and Request TV—that the Center distributes.*

*realizing with the 3000-6000 hours of head life the AJ-D340s are averaging.*

*"Many of the AJ-D340 VTRs are in use 15 hours a day, seven days a week. No AJ-D340 video heads have worn out since putting*

*"We had budgeted 2,000 hours of head life on the Panasonic*

*equipment; clearly it has performed well beyond that. Our head wear and general maintenance requirements with D-3 are virtually nil.*



## TCI SEES 6,000 PLUS HOURS OF HEAD LIFE WITH PANASONIC D-3.

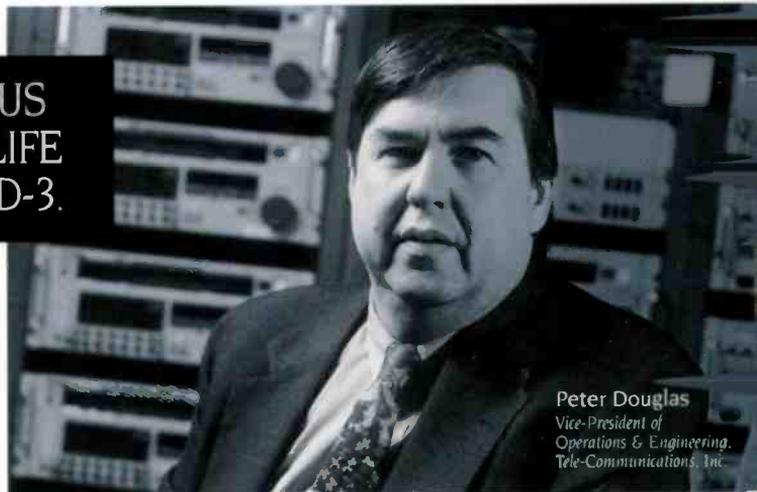
*Twenty-one AJ-D350 D-3 studio VTRs are used for editing and mastering all promotional/interstitial programming for Request TV.*

*"TCI purchased the D-3 VTRs for their digital video quality, serial digital interface and four-hour tape recording time to record movies more than three hours in length.*

*them into service more than 18 months ago. Several AJ-D340s have more than 6,000 hours of head life. One machine has more than 8,500 hours on its original head! While the AJ-D350s are not as forgiving as the -340s because of the different application, we're seeing terrific longevity with their heads as well.*

*"The AJ-D340 is simply a great movie-playing machine."*

**Panasonic engineered the D-3 format with a low tension tape path to enhance head life, a specification that is more than delivering on its promise at TCI. Just the sort of performance in critical applications that you can expect from Panasonic. First in Digital Video.**



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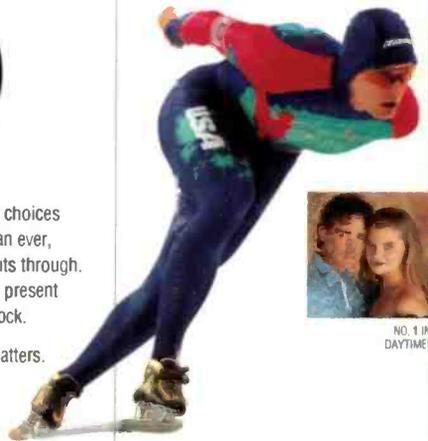
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