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Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 92, Folder 7, Television, 1981-1986.





The 19-Inch Neighborhood

MY TURN/JOSHUA MEYROWITZ

I live in a small New Hampshire town, but in the last few weeks I met the Lebanese leader of Amal and I was shouted at by militant Shiite hijackers. I sat beside the families of hostages as they anxiously watched their loved ones at a news conference in Beirut and as they later rejoiced when the hostages were released.

I weighed the somber questions and comments of anchorman Dan Rather as he "negotiated" with Lebanese minister Nabih Berri. I evaluated firsthand the demeanor of the hostages, the behavior of the news reporters, the facial expressions of the hijackers and the public comments of President Reagan and his spokesmen.

And I participated in this drama of international scope without ever leaving New Hampshire; indeed, I shared in it fully when sitting isolated in my living room in front of my television, watching the 525-line screen of flickering specks of light and color that my brain translates into pictures of people, objects and motions. The visual liveliness—like a conglomeration of thousands of flashing neon lights—and the intensity of the drama itself kept me riveted to the screen.

In contrast, the images through my window of trees, dogs and neighbors' houses are crisp and clear—tangible, real. Yet when I think of "keeping in touch" with things each day, I, along with a hundred million others, turn to the blurry television set. Recently a house in my town was destroyed by fire, and I vaguely recall reading the story in my local paper. Was anyone hurt? Is the family that lived there homeless now? Have they, too, suddenly been taken hostage by a swirl of events not of their making? I don't know. I could find out, I suppose, but I probably won't.

Reality: For I, and most of my neighbors, no longer simply live in this town; we don't live "with" each other in quite the same way our grandparents did. We, like the 98 percent of American families who own a TV, have granted it the power to redefine our place and our social reality. We pay more attention to, and talk more about, fires in California, starvation in Africa and sensational trials in Rhode Island than the troubles of nearly anyone except perhaps a handful of close family, friends and colleagues.

Our widespread adoption of television and other electronic media has subtly but significantly reshaped our world. For the first time in human civilization we no longer live in physical places. And the more we rely on our video window, the less relation there is between where we are and what we know and experience, the less there's a relationship between where we are and who we are.

Such changes affect our sense of identification with our community—and role relationships within our family. Isolated at home or school, young children were once sheltered from political debates, murder trials, famines and hostage crises. Now, via

The more we stare out the video window, the less relation there is between where we are and what we know.

TV, they are taken across the globe before we give them permission to cross the street.

Similarly, our society was once based on the assumption that there were two worlds: the public male sphere of "rational accomplishments" and brutal competitions, and the private female sphere of child rearing, of emotion and intuition. But just as public events have become dramas played out in the privacy of our living rooms and kitchens, TV close-ups reveal the emotional side of public figures. Television has exposed women to parts of the culture that were once considered exclusively male and forced men to face the emotional dimensions and consequences of public actions.

For both better and worse, TV has smashed through the old barriers between the worlds of men and women, children and adults, people of different classes, regions and levels of education. It has given us a broader but also a shallower sense of community. With its wide reach, it has made it difficult to isolate oneself from the informational arena it creates.

To watch TV now is to enter the new American neighborhood. The average household keeps a TV set on for 50 hours a

week. One may watch popular programs not merely to see the program, but to see what others are watching. One can watch not necessarily to stare into the eyes of America, but to look over the shoulders of its citizens and see what they see.

Television has become our largest shared arena where the most important things happen. When a friend sings exquisitely, we no longer say, "You should sing in our church," but rather, "You should be on television." Our funniest friends are wished an appearance on "The Tonight Show," not a performance at the town hall. The early presidents of this country were seen by few of the voters of their day; now it is impossible to imagine a candidate who has not visited us all, on television.

Weather: Television has replaced the local street corner and market as an important place to monitor—but, as with a marketplace, we do not always identify personally with what goes on inside. We may avidly watch what is on the news and on the entertainment and talk shows even as we exclaim, "I can't believe people watch this!" or, "What's the world coming to?"

Regardless of its specific content, then, television today has a social function similar to the local weather. No one takes responsibility for it, often it is bad, but nearly everyone pays attention to it and sees it as a basis of common experience and as a source of conversation. Indeed, television has given insularity of place a bad name; it now seems bizarre to be completely unaware or cut off. The TV set is a fixture in the recreation rooms of convents; it is even something that is sometimes watched in the formerly silent halls of Trappist monks.

Paradoxically, TV is both a hijacker and a liberator, hostage and hostage taker. It frees us from the constraints of our isolated physical locations, but flies us to a place that is no place at all. And our attention is most easily held hostage when television itself becomes a hostage of terrorists, demonstrators, politicians and other self-conscious social actors who vie for the chance to become—at least for a while—our closest video neighbor.

Meyrowitz is the author of "No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior."



by Amitai Etzioni

Nice Guys Finish First: Today's Television Heroes

Recently an old movie and TV formula has been reversed—with considerable success. The bad guys have become the good guys, and the good guys are almost too good to be true. The reversal parallels a trend in American society, and therein lies a tale about the media's purported tendency to play up negative or anti-establishment news and views.

In the familiar but fading formula one good guy is cast as the underdog. He runs up against his boss (or his boss's boss), the institution, often the whole world. The world—which may be as small as a police department, city hall, hospital, or a corporation—or as large as the military—is depicted as corrupt, bureaucratic, crazy, or some combination of the above. The underdog is threatened and beaten, but he perseveres. He wins out against all odds and the system.

While the formula may be old and tired, it is far from abandoned. Two recent movies follow it closely. *War Games* pictures a teen-ager against the U.S. military-government establishment. The youngster is a bit of an odd ball; he spends endless hours in a darkened room futzing around with his computer. One day he penetrates an Air Force super-computer. As a result, the computer believes that the U.S. is under nuclear attack and triggers a preprogrammed response in kind. The establishment suspects the kid is a Communist agent and puts its trust in the super-machine. The computer the establishment made takes over, in a nuclear version of Chaplin's *Modern Times*. The youngster, with the help of a computer-wizard hermit and one old general, saves mankind.

In *Blue Thunder*, a group of Fascist-like government officials are planning to introduce into the Los Angeles police force a 1984-style helicopter. It and they can violate one's civil rights by using its surveillance equipment to eavesdrop on conversations and visualize movements inside private homes and offices. The hero,

a maverick police helicopter pilot with Vietnam scars, stops them against all odds. (The movie spawned a TV series with the same name and tenor.)

The theme of these movies is, in sociologists' terminology, alienation. Modern man is said to have been "depersonalized" by a system geared to the needs of the market, technology, and national security. The system ignores the true needs of "the people" in the name of affluence, science, or deterrence. The system is depicted as run by power elites who benefit from it. Lost in the system are the traditional values of small-town America, of community, family, and individuality. From Karl Marx to Max Weber to Ernest Schumacher ("small is beautiful"), giants of social science have advanced the thesis that rationality and modernity and bigness are deeply dehumanizing.

One reason tales of alienation play to full houses is that many Americans feel alienated. In 1984, for instance, more than 74 percent believed that in the U.S. "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer"; 57 percent felt that "most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself," and so on. Most relevant, only 25 percent believed that you can put a great deal of trust in the people who lead our typical institutions, from the military to churches to corporations.

Newly Lovable Leaders

Now comes "Hill Street Blues," a much acclaimed and popular TV series, as well as the successful series "Hotel," to turn the formula on its head. "Hill Street" almost completely—"Hotel" completely.

The hero of "Hill Street," precinct commander Frank Furillo, is a rather unusual police captain. Forget about gruff, authoritarian, macho Kojaks. Furillo is a sensitive person, like someone who has been successfully psychoanalyzed, or who did not need it in the first place. He is aware of his own feelings and knows how

to work them out constructively. When Furillo reacts to his ex-wife's making out with another cop, he is charged with jealously giving her suitor poor assignments. Furillo neither frowns nor growls; he quickly promises to make amends.

He responds to his underlings' needs, proclivities, and moods—without violating their privacy, sense of autonomy, or dignity. Furillo frequently changes their assignments, taking into account personal differences. When Lieutenant Howard Hunter attempts suicide, Furillo discreetly suggests counselling. When Hunter resists, the captain prods gently but knows when to stop.

Furillo is quite ready to risk his career to fight corruption. But he is not self-righteous when colleagues are caught; he is more distressed than indignant. He is not macho at all, preferring negotiations with a hostage-holding criminal to a shootout. However, when all other options are exhausted, he acts decisively. He also vigilantly observes the civil rights of those in custody; the ACLU could hardly lay a glove on him.

He knows no prejudice. In his command there are women, blacks, Hispanics, all treated equally and as individuals. He deals with gays and gang leaders in the community without paternalism; they are fellow human beings—but without a license to violate the law.

To crown it all, Furillo is married to a beautiful, powerful woman who also works—often in opposition to him. Their relationship, full of sex wrapped in love, is open and durable. Though the season ended with the threat of a separation, it's difficult to believe that their maturity and communications skills won't carry them through. If the rift proves permanent, the situation will be incompatible with the show's theme thus far.

The "Hill Street" leadership is not without blemishes. A touch of the old formula is preserved. The police chief to whom Furillo reports has few of his merits and many of the antagonizing features the alienation formula calls for. He is an arbitrary, manipulative publicity hound. He is, however, a rather minor figure; at the center of the action are Furillo, who brooks little interference from the outside, and his station, a somewhat disorderly but effective world, a bit confused but stocked full of humanity.

"Hotel" is to "Hill Street" what saccharin is to sugar: sweetened *ad nauseum*. The reversed formula is pushed here to extremes. The institution is a fancy hotel, and the authority figure is manager Peter McDermott. He acts as a loving father to the mostly young staff. He never directs them; he suggests gently that they go about their paces. When they err, McDermott does not grow angry or sanctimonious: he takes them for counselling sessions at the bar. He is mindful of the employees' needs. When one of his aides provides a free room to a stranded singer he falls for, McDermott understands. He stands up for an employee accused of child molesting—unfairly it turns out—and for his assistant, said to have bedded a hotel guest. When he ruffles his assistant's feathers by asking her for a date

when a preferred companion stands him up, he is quick to admit his insensitivity and make amends. His security chief in the ritzy hotel is black and an ex-con, Billy Griffin. When he encounters a former prison-mate, who claims Griffin should allow him to rob the hotel, McDermott risks the hotel's reputation to provide Griffin with a chance to prove his mettle. He does.

When a Fascist group organizes a conference in the hotel, McDermott fights for freedom of assembly and then gets the group out without resorting to police or violence.

"Hotel" exceeds "Hill Street" in that the ultimate authority figure, the hotel owner, is also drawn in glowing colors. If McDermott is a father figure, Victoria Cabot is distinctly grandmotherly. Supportive of one and all and never ceasing to smile affectionately, she intervenes in the hotel management rarely, and then only to sweet talk her manager into more good deeds and acts of principle. A young married couple, a bellboy and a desk clerk on different shifts, cannot make it to their home often enough; they avail themselves of an empty hotel room. When they are caught, Cabot asks them not to borrow rooms in the future—but offers them her penthouse while she is on vacation.

The Us Generation

Touches of the new positive formula are found in other places. In "St. Elsewhere," Dr. Donald Westfall, chief administrator of the hospital, provides quiet, thoughtful, sensitive leadership in what is otherwise a disoriented world, more akin to Paddy Chayefsky's *Hospital*. Moreover, as a single parent, he sets a model of how to combine work with good fathering for his teenage daughter and autistic son. When things get out of hand, Westfall first talks them over with his daughter, then with a therapist—right out of some mental health textbook. (A touch of the old is invested in a high-strung, publicity minded surgeon, Dr. Craig. But when push comes to shove, he also turns out to have a heart of gold.)

"Trapper John, MD" once played off a hippie, non-establishment young physician against an uptight head of the emergency room and an establishmentarian administration, with Trapper himself acting as the balancing wheel. In recent seasons, however, the hippie doctor has matured and mellowed, and the men at the top have grown more approachable.

The new formula reaches even such a cliché-ridden low-brow show as "Emerald Point N.A.S." The central figure here is Rear Admiral Tom Mallory, who combines fathering his men with sweetly raising three daughters. Gone are the days when Ben Stein, who studied more TV shows than most, found that on the tube "military men are either irrelevant or bad" (in his *The View from Sunset Boulevard*). Mallory cares about his men at least as much as he does about his daughters. Sample: He knocks himself out to help a subordinate deal with the loss of a man in a training exercise. The series does,

though, succeed in having its cake and eating it. The second most prominent character is Harlan Adams, the head of a "conglomerate," who can alienate the socks off a viewer, even after he has exhausted his six-pack.

In "Something About Amelia," a 1984 TV film about incest, there were three "treating professionals" (a psychologist, a social worker, and a psychiatrist) all sensitive and sensible, effective and gentle. This is a long way from the days when therapists were depicted as masters of vacuous talk, detached from reality, unable to handle their own problems—much less their kids.

Also to the point is that anti-everything "M*A*S*H" retreated from the front lines to the re-runs. Launched during the war in Vietnam, "M*A*S*H" expressed its anti-war theme vociferously. War was presented as evil (its victims were frequently innocent villagers—often children) and as absurd ("We patch people up, only to send them back to the war"). In a telling episode, the surgeons removed American shrapnel from Korean villagers on our side of the line. When the surgeons reported the incident, they ran into an orchestrated coverup, censorship of their personal mail, and threats to send them to the front if they didn't withdraw the report.

Flouting Army regulations, medical proprieties, and the rules of etiquette, the series reveled in thumbing its nose at the establishment. In its early years, the main line of confrontation was with Dr. Frank Burns. Burns was everything despicable about the military establishment: insufferably pompous, insensitive, rigid, and unthinkingly pro-war. "M*A*S*H" grew more subdued over the years. Burns was replaced by a subtler, more likable character, and everyone else became less acerbic. But as the age grew less "anti", even a defanged "M*A*S*H" couldn't hold onto its massive appeal.

Revolt against Radicalism

None of this suggests that there was *never* a positive authority figure on TV before—nor that all shows have become lovey-dovey. There were some good guys in charge in times past, but most were—like the unforgettable Marcus Welby, MD—in private practice. Only rarely did we see likable people leading *institutions*. Most important, what constitutes positive authority has changed: how they are much more liberated; sensitive to minorities, women, and civil rights; warm and open; neither macho nor paternalistic.

Meanwhile, out there in the great American society, the memories of Vietnam have been gradually receding, followed by a new wave of more conservative and establishment perspectives. Now, people yearn for less anti-ism, for more positive affirmation. It sometimes takes the form of nostalgia or turning the clock back to an authoritarian, macho world. This is one explanation for the recent call for law-and-order, back-to-basics in education, and the world according to the Moral Majority. At the same time, the quest is also on

Berry's World



"What is it we always say — 'reality distorts TV' — or is it the other way around?"

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for a synthesis between the stability and structure of the old and the boundless permissiveness and withdrawal from commitments of the counterculture and anti-establishment years. While divorce declined in the early 1980s for the first time in twenty years, the marriages that remained were not all traditional; most women now married continue to work outside the home, for example. Religious revival is part traditional, part innovative—there are even female rabbis. In corporations there is a movement to involve workers in management decision making, à la Japan. In short, the new conservatism is oddly liberated.

The media, it seems, are beginning to reflect and contribute to the development of these reconstruction themes. Development of new leadership styles thrives on role models. No social engineer could do much better than the creators of Captain Furillo. And while McDermott's feather-light mode of management may work only in luxury hotels, his style seems less bizarre in today's evolving management world than it would have in, say, the fifties.

Leaders serve as embodiments of institutions. In an anti-age, antagonizing elites added fuel to the alienation generated by institutions. The new breed, should it multiply, may contribute to the rehabilitation of American institutions and how we feel about them. ▮

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LOOKING AT HISTORY, we can hardly be surprised that parents, educators, and our other moral overseers are greatly worried about the damage television is doing to all of us, and particularly to our children. Moralists, by nature, have a tendency to worry about and decry the newest dominant form of popular entertainment. In Plato's ideal state, all imaginative literature was to be banned because of the bad influence it supposedly exercised, although this same literature has been admired ever since its creation as one of the proudest achievements of man.

Smoking, congregating in coffeehouses, dancing—each in its turn was thought to corrupt the young. Neither operas nor music halls escaped severe censure. Even such masterpieces as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* were blamed for having caused a wave of suicides (although in 18th-century Germany no records were kept from which one could have ascertained whether suicides had indeed increased).

Any new form of mass entertainment is viewed with considerable suspicion until it has been around for some time. It usually becomes accepted once people realize that life goes on in the same haphazard way as before. Then a newer entertainment medium becomes the focus of the same concerns. When I was a child, all kinds of evil influences were ascribed to the movies; today these influences are ascribed to television. When I was a young man, the comics were denounced because they supposedly incited the innocents to violence.

Even then, however, it was acknowledged that children were not all that innocent. It was known that they harbor angry, violent, destructive, and even sexual fantasies that are far from innocent. Today as well, those who evaluate the impact of television on children ought to understand truly what children are all about, and not maintain Victorian images of how perfect children would be if only they were not exposed to bad influences, or condemn as evil anything that children greatly enjoy.

Despite all the concern and the innumerable articles about what television does to our children, hard facts are few and difficult to come by. We know as little about the topic as my parents' generation knew about what movies did to us. My

Bruno Bettelheim is a professor of child psychology and the author of The Uses of Enchantment. His next book, Child-rearing, will be published next year by Knopf.

parents worried about children spending so much time in the dark movie palaces—castles where we lost ourselves in dreams as often as our meager finances permitted. At least television does not require the child to leave home or spend most of his allowance on tickets.

One of the movies' attractions, though we were unaware of it, was that they helped us escape from our parents' watchful eyes at home, and from other

prevents them from watching over and over again what is essentially the same program. They are neither bored nor stultified; all of us need to dream the same daydream until we have had our fill of it. In the public debate on the effects of television on children, the fact that TV programs provide material for daydreams is so much taken for granted that it is hardly discussed. There seems little doubt that most of us need to engage in day-

A Child's Garden of Fantasy

BY BRUNO BETTELHEIM

Children have a greater need for daydreams than adults do, and TV provides them abundantly. But the child's healthy escape from reality could be hazardous without a parent's guidance.

children's competition at play. Watching a film, we daydreamed of being as successful in life and love as its hero or heroine. We participated in exciting fantasies that made our humdrum (if not outright unpleasant) existence that much more bearable. We returned to everyday life restored by having seen the movie—often not just once, but a second or even third time, when ushers permitted it.

Our children manage to do the same thing, right in their homes, and no usher

dreams—the more frustrating reality is for us, the greater is our need.

Although we wish to see young children's lives free of troubles, they are in fact filled with disappointment and frustration. Children wish for so much but can arrange so little of their own lives, which are so often dominated by adults unsympathetic to their priorities. That is why children have a much greater need for daydreams than adults do. And because their lives have been relatively lim-

ited they have a greater need for material from which to form daydreams.

In the past, children saturated their imaginations with folk tales, myths, and Bible stories. There was plenty of violence and crime in Old Testament stories and fairy tales. There is a lot of cruelty, enmity within the family, homicide, even patricide and incest in Greek drama and Shakespeare's plays. This suggests that people have always needed a fare of vio-

they restrained their desire to exploit it. But I cannot deny that as long as it is not vicious or cruel—which it very often is—it holds a certain fascination.

Many children not only enjoy aggressive fantasies, but also need them. They need material for aggressive and retaliatory daydreams in which they can vicariously act out their hostile feelings without hurting close relatives. While the very young child may beat up a doll (thinking

ful animals.

For a 1976 study on television violence, violent cartoons were shown to both normal and emotionally impaired children. The latter, being unstable, were expected to be more vulnerable to the cartoons' influence. But after watching the violent scenes, most children in both groups were less chaotic and expressed their aggression, if at all, in a less random fashion than they had displayed before the viewing. Having acted out aggressive feelings vicariously, in fantasy, as they watched, most of these children had less need to act aggressively in reality.

On the other hand, some of the seriously disturbed children became more violent after watching the cartoons. Some youngsters do get ideas about how to act aggressively from what they see on the screen, which they then may attempt in reality. The decisive factors are not the types of events shown on the screen but the child's own personality (which is formed in the home under the parents' influence), and to a much smaller degree the child's present situation.

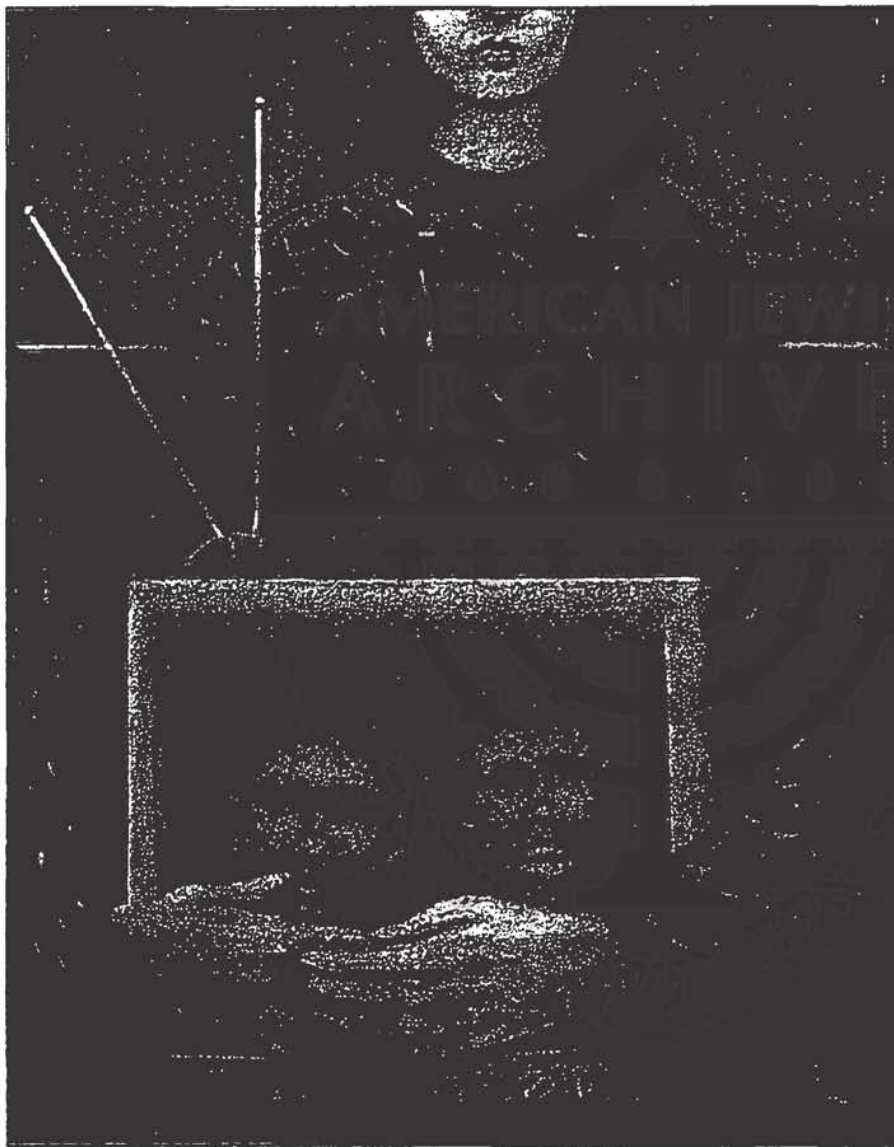
For normal children as well, television offers a wide variety of models to fantasize about and try out, as if for size. Children tend to dress, walk, and talk like the TV characters they admire. Whether this helps or hurts a particular youngster seems to depend on which television figure he emulates. And this is determined much more by his personality and the problems he faces at the moment than by what is shown on the screen.

As Wilbur Schramm and other researchers recognized more than two decades ago, "The chief part television plays in the lives of children depends at least as much on what the child brings to television as on what television brings to the child." And the younger the child is, the more this is so.

In an experiment reported in 1978 in *Child Development* magazine, second graders viewed a program and then were asked to retell its story so that "someone who has not seen it would know what happened." In response the children strung together random occurrences, showing no recall of relationships among the events they had observed. But children several years older were able to recall fairly well what they had seen. Thus, the younger the child, the less responsive he is to the actual content of the program; he responds to it in terms of his inner life.

Only the child whose emotional life is barren, or whose conditions of life are extremely destructive, will "live" in the world of TV programs. Doing so may be preferable to facing his actual life, which could lead him to give up all hope, or to explode into violence against those who

Warren Gebert



lent fantasies as an integral part of popular entertainment.

AMONG THE CONCERNS about television's effects on our children, none is greater than that it may induce them to violence. Probably none has been more thoroughly investigated. I personally dislike watching violence on the screen, and would be favorably impressed with broadcasters if

all the while of the new baby who stands in his way), or lash out at a parent, the slightly older child can no longer afford to express his aggression so directly. In healthy development, the child soon moves to daydreams in which not he, but some imaginary stand-in, discharges his anger against another distant and imaginary figure. That is why it is so gratifying to children when a cartoon shows a helpless little animal, such as a mouse, making a fool of much bigger and more power-

make his life miserable.

In fact, most children seek refuge at times in television-fed fantasy, although they do not permit it to engulf more than a very limited part of their lives. Television is truly an ideal medium for the purpose of fantasizing because it permits the child to return immediately from the fantasy world to real life, and also to escape as quickly into the television world when reality becomes too much to handle. All it takes is turning a switch.

We ought to remember how restricted children's lives have become. It used to be possible to let children roam all by themselves for much of the day, or in the chance company of other children. They used to play somewhere in the neighborhood, in an empty shack, or wander the woods and fields. There they could dream their own daydreams, without parents nearby demanding that they use their

remain predictably the same.

Even such an exceptional program as *All in the Family* was centered around main characters who never changed and never learned, no matter how obvious the lessons of past episodes. In this, as in many other programs of less merit, the good guys learn as little from their experiences as do the bad guys. Even after the most incredible events, characters remain the same as before. But growth and development, and images of such growth, are what the child needs if he is to believe that he himself can grow. He needs to fantasize about how he will change, learn, and become a better person because of what life has taught him.

Not only do television characters fail to learn from their experiences, but no matter how severe their difficulties, their creators always provide them with simple, easy, instantaneous solutions, as simple

knowledge. Some programs do *tell* how slow and difficult progress is, but hearing that said makes little impression on the child when characters on the same program can usually solve the greatest difficulties in 30 or 60 minutes.

Television is, after all, a medium best suited for entertainment; it does not readily lend itself to the balanced judgment, to the consideration of all the pros and cons of an issue. We should not expect of this medium what is contrary to its nature. The information received from television programs will always tend to be one-sided, slanted, and simplified. This is why a young child will not truly learn by watching even the best programs—even those designed for his age. His life experience is too limited. Adults or older adolescents can bring their accumulated life experience to watching television, which permits them to adopt the proper perspective. The child needs adult help to do so.

There is hardly a program from which a child could not learn a great deal, provided some responsible adult does the necessary teaching. Even violent programs are no exception, provided the child is not so anxious or angry that he is completely overwhelmed by what he watches. It is very important for children to develop the right attitudes toward violence, and closing one's eyes to its existence can hardly be considered the most constructive attitude. Every child needs to learn what is wrong with violence, why violence occurs, and how he ought to deal with it in himself and others.

What is necessary is for parents to explore with the child what he, all on his own, made of what he saw and heard. We must let the child tell us what he got from the program, and start from there in helping him sort out which impressions came from within himself and which from the program, which were good and which were not, and why.

This requires, of course, that the adult watch along with the child. Doing so, the parent can no longer use television as an excuse for not spending time with his child. That, I believe, is the real danger of television—a human limitation, not one inherent in the medium. We should blame neither our children nor television if the reason they watch it is that we, their parents, are not very interested in spending time with them. We ought to consider that the more time we spend with them, the less time they will be watching. The more time we devote to talking with them about what they have watched, the more intelligent and discriminating viewers our children will become. The fact remains that our personalities and values will have much more effect than television in shaping our children and their outlook on life. ■

AMERICAN JEW

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time more constructively.

Today, for our children's security, we cannot permit them to fend for themselves in that way. Yet, to grow up well, every child needs time and space to be himself. Watching television gives him this chance. Being able to choose the program that will spark and feed his dream has become a way for the modern child to exercise his self-determination, an important experience in growing up.

ODDLY ENOUGH, in the dizzyingly active world of TV fiction, one kind of movement is in short supply: personal growth. The child needs to learn from his experiences and to grow because of them. This is why the child is best served by programs that show how characters' experiences change them—in personality, in outlook on life, in relationships with others, in the ability to cope better with future events. Not only children's programs but also adult programs watched by children should avoid using stock characters who

as those promised by commercials. Using a particular brand of hair spray guarantees success in life and love; ingesting a pill does away with all our worries. Programs and commercials alike mislead the child by making it appear there is, or ought to be, an easy solution to every problem he encounters, and that there must be something wrong with him, his parents, and society, if these so readily available answers are withheld from him.

In this respect even public television's educational programs are misleading. Whether *Sesame Street* or *Nova*, they create the illusion that one will easily and immediately become well educated. And whether the child is promised popularity by toothpaste commercials or knowledge by PBS, he is encouraged to believe that he will succeed effortlessly. He doesn't, of course, and becomes dissatisfied with himself and society.

A large part of the problem is inherent in the medium. To hold viewers' attention, television programs have to simplify matters and cannot follow the arduous process required for a person to gain



Before discussion, Marc,
please reiterate that
this period welcomes
comments from leaders
concerning their group's
concerns on TV and:

- ① Please be brief as
more time in discussion groups
- ② Make only 1 comment

JAN 13 1986

2/5-7/86

NBC

National Broadcasting Company, Inc.

Thirty Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10020 212-664-2003

Betty King Hoffmann
Vice President
Program Information Resources

January 7, 1985

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022

Dear Marc:

Arrangements for the February 5-7 conference at Innisbrook in Tarpon Springs, Florida, are nearly complete. Leaders from thirty-five national organizations will be participating in the meeting with NBC management. We anticipate that the session will be lively, interesting, and productive.

The purpose of this letter is to bring you up to date and to answer some questions you may have.

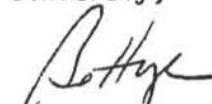
1. Copies of our Working Agenda and a Statement of Purpose are attached. As you can see, this is a "roll-up-your-sleeves" working conference with a good deal of opportunity for discussion, and we hope to have the full participation of all persons throughout the program.
2. You should plan to arrive sometime Wednesday, February 5. NBC will host a reception and buffet supper at 7:00 PM that evening. A continental breakfast will be available Thursday 7:00-8:00 AM, and the meeting will start promptly at 8:00 AM.
3. Getting to Innisbrook. Two forms of ground transportation for the 25-minute drive to Innisbrook are available through Innisbrook: limousine shuttle service, or car rental. Please complete and send one copy of the enclosed form to Innisbrook at the address shown in the upper left-hand corner. The duplicate is to be returned to me in the enclosed envelope.
4. Expenses. You will be NBC's guest during the conference. Your meals and lodging will be paid for directly by NBC. We would however appreciate your paying for long distance calls and other personal charges on your hotel bill before checking out.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
January 7, 1986
Page 2

5. Thursday morning, at the start of the conference, the participants will be asked to introduce themselves (in 30 seconds or less) -- name, title, organization, plus a little something about themselves.
6. Dress will be informal. Recreational facilities at Innisbrook include golf, tennis, racquet ball, swimming, and a fully equipped gym.
7. Background reading. Enclosed is a packet of material for your review. Some of the issues addressed in the articles have been widely debated. We send them to you not because the articles necessarily represent NBC's point of view, but because we thought you might find them interesting and thought-provoking.
8. Post-conference report. A summary of the proceedings will be supplied the conference participants for whatever use they wish to make of it.

We are pleased that you accepted our conference invitation and look forward to seeing you on February 5. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,



Bettye King Hoffmann

P.S. Arrangements have been made for you to be served vegetarian dishes at the Thursday and Friday lunches, and a fish fillet at dinner Thursday evening. All you need to do is identify yourself to the waiter at your table. The Wednesday evening buffet supper will include some non-meat dishes.

1/7/86

"The Public Interest and an Interested Public"
NBC Management Conference with Community Organization Leaders
February 5-7, 1986, Innisbrook, Tarpon Springs, Florida

Working Agenda*

Wednesday, February 5

5:00-7:00 PM Registration.
7:00 PM Reception and Buffet Supper

Thursday, February 6

7:00-8:00 AM Continental Breakfast

8:00-11:45 AM The meeting will open with welcoming remarks by Ray Timothy, NBC Group Executive Vice President, and a video TV retrospective. Following conferee introductions and review of the agenda, two speakers will address aspects of the conference theme:

- "Programming for an Interested Public" -- Steve White, NBC Entertainment Division Senior Vice President
- "Viewer Expectations: Tuned in or Turned Off" -- Dr. William Helmreich, Chairman, Department of Sociology, City College of New York.

We will then go into a question and discussion period.

Before breaking for lunch, the conferees will view and judge some program segments that involved "close calls" for NBC Broadcast Standards.

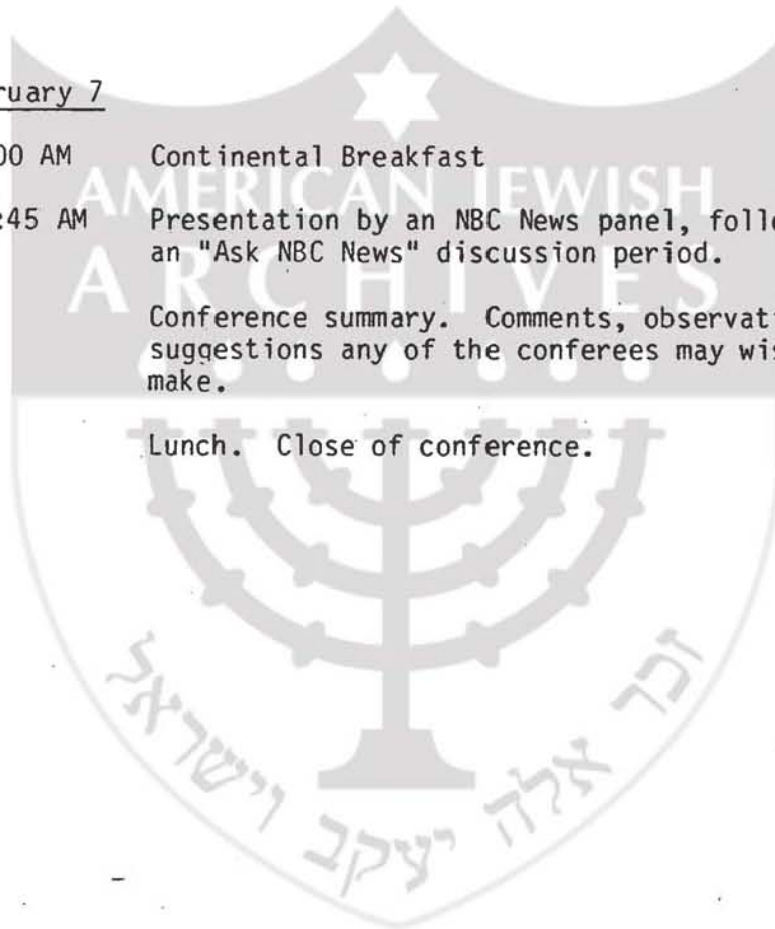
12:00-1:30 PM Lunch. Speaker: Jeff Greenfield, TV Critic

*We want input from the conferees, and if the consensus is that the discussion periods need to be extended, they will be.

- 1:45-3:15 PM "The Public Interest and an Interested Public"
-- symposium conducted by Arthur R. Miller,
Professor of Law, Harvard Law School, using
case studies involving controversial story
lines in a hypothetical TV series. (Panel of
18 participants from the conference group.)
- 3:15-5:00 PM Plenary session. Open discussion.
- 7:30 PM Dinner. Speaker: David Milch, Co-Executive
Producer of "Hill Street Blues."

Friday, February 7

- 8:00-9:00 AM Continental Breakfast
- 9:00-11:45 AM Presentation by an NBC News panel, followed by
an "Ask NBC News" discussion period.
Conference summary. Comments, observations, or
suggestions any of the conferees may wish to
make.
- 12:00 Lunch. Close of conference.



THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND AN INTERESTED PUBLIC

NBC Management Conference with Organization Leaders
2/6-7/86, Innisbrook Hotel, Tarpon Springs, Florida

PURPOSE OF THE CONFERENCE

1. To continue and enhance the dialogue and interchange between organization leaders and network executives in a forum which provides free and open opportunity for the expression of positive and negative feelings about television and its role in American life.
2. To challenge all parties with guest speakers.
3. To address the concerns that came out of previous conferences regarding such questions as "Who speaks for the public?" and "Who should set the values for television?"
4. To address the conference theme -- What interests the public, and what is the public interest?

WHAT THE CONFERENCE IS NOT:

1. It is not a public event. It is a conference by invitation, part of the continuing dialogue NBC has had over the years with groups and organizations who have an interest in television.
2. It is not a one-way informational event by NBC executives for group leaders. It is a seminar in which NBC executives will learn what the invited conferees have to say about their individual agenda for America and the implications for television, and the group leaders in turn will learn what NBC executives have to say about serving a mass audience in a pluralistic society.

NEWS

FROM THE

COMMITTEE

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations

FOR RELEASE AFTER 11 A.M.

THURSDAY, JAN. 12, 1984

NEW YORK, Jan. 12....A newly formed coalition of ethnic organizations today joined Congressman Mario Biaggi (Dem., N.Y.) in calling for the creation of a Federal office concerned with distorted TV and radio portrayals of ethnic groups to stem a recently recorded increase in offensive treatment. Mr. Biaggi recently introduced a bill proposing such an office.

Addressing a news conference at American Jewish Committee headquarters, Congressman Biaggi said:

"Official FCC records point to a dramatic increase in the number of complaints directed against radio and television stations based on racial and ethnic ridicule and stereotyping. In the final nine months of 1983, there were 595 complaints -- more than twice as many as were registered in all of fiscal year 1981, the last year when FCC compiled such data."

"These figures," continued Mr. Biaggi, "combined with the fact that more than 12 different ethnic and racial groups have joined in a coalition to support my bill, graphically illustrate the need for its passage."

Mr. Biaggi and the coalition leaders stressed that the Congressman's bill did not aim to censor the media, but to focus public attention on the dangers of stereotypes.

Mr. Biaggi's bill proposes that an Office of Ethnic Affairs be set up within the Federal Communications Commission. This office, states the bill, would serve as a clearinghouse for complaints about the depiction of ethnic groups on

...more

Howard I. Friedman, President; Theodore Ellenoff, Chairman, Board of Governors; Alfred H. Moses, Chairman, National Executive Council; Robert S. Jacobs, Chairman, Board of Trustees.
William S. Trosten, Acting Director

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CSAE 1707

radio and TV; collect and analyze information from public and private agencies regarding media portrayal of ethnic groups; conduct educational programs "encouraging the positive portrayal of ethnic groups," and hold annual conferences designed to "focus public attention on the images of ethnic groups depicted by broadcast programming."

Members of the new coalition, whose formation was announced at today's news conference, in addition to the American Jewish Committee, are Commission for Social Justice--Order of the Sons of Italy, Cuban National Planning Council, Japanese American Citizens League, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Italian American Foundation, National Urban League, Polish American Congress, Polish-American Jewish-American Task Force, Ukrainian National Association, UNICO-National, and United Hellenic American Congress.

Irving M. Levine, Director of National Affairs for the American Jewish Committee and the head of the AJC's Institute for American Pluralism, said:

"We have tried the path of polite discussions with TV executives many times and with disappointing results. Admittedly, there has been some progress in increased sensitivity, and a few quality programs have been aired for which we are grateful, but there is also a constant slipping back into old habits in the use of ethnic insult. Without the monitoring and the educating that the Biaggi Bill will give us, we're not sure that the short attention span of the media is enough to sustain their much needed responsibility to our country's pluralistic society."

Turning to the effects of the media on personality, Joseph Giordano, coordinator of the coalition and director of AJC's Center on Ethnicity, Human Behavior and Communication, declared that "TV and films are important in shaping the self-image of young people."

"Studies undertaken by the Center," continued Mr. Giordano, "reveal that it is crucial to a person's mental health that he feel at home with his ethnic identity--and that, conversely, distorted and negative images of ethnic identity from the media or other parts of society can lead to self-hatred or to discrimination and aggression against other groups."

"The media should stop relying on old stereotypes," urged Mr. Giordano, "and should discover that in the rich diversity of America's ethnic groups lie unlimited human stories that are authentic, entertaining, and universally appealing."

Also on the press conference panel were Ronald Quartararo, Order of the Sons of Italy, Arnaldo Torres, League of United Latin American Citizens, Leonard Walentyowicz, Polish American Congress, and Jim Williams, National Urban League.

In its "Statement of Purpose," the new coalition pledged to:

1. Engage in an ongoing dialogue with mass media professionals to improve the way ethnic life is portrayed on radio and TV, and to reduce negative stereotyping. "In particular, we will attempt to educate and sensitize the media to the meaning of ethnic heritage in American society and alert them to the realities of group life today";
2. Develop a strategy for influencing the media to present fuller and more positive portrayals of our groups and organize audience support for such efforts;
3. Formulate a code of standards on the media's mistreatment of ethnic groups;
4. Stimulate research on the mass media's impact on ethnic identity and intergroup relations.

The complete text of the "Statement of Purpose" is attached.

The American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. Founded in 1906, it combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of people here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people everywhere.

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